

**A WAR FOR THE SOUL OF A NATION:
RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND RADICAL RIGHT
MOBILIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY CROATIA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis elucidates the role of religion and the Catholic Church in Croatia in the mobilization of a radical right social movement which has been growing steadily in the last decade. In the center of the movement's activities in different countries is the mobilization against 'gender ideology' as a civilizational threat attacking traditional societies. The thesis employs critical discourse analysis to trace the discourse on 'gender ideology' from the Catholic doctrines to the new movement as well as the political mainstream. It demonstrates how nationalism, Euroscepticism and grievances concerning democracy and sovereignty crystallize around the baseline nodal point of 'gender ideology' which serves as a symbolic glue. The Catholic Church is thus shown to have initiated and supported a radical movement in order to increase its social and political influence and battle secularizing tendencies in society.

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INTRODUCTION

On Christmas Eve of 2014, in the streets of Zagreb, a popular student chaplain of the Catholic Church had arrived to hold a Midnight Mass in a tent of protesting war veterans stationed in front of the Ministry of Croatian Veterans. A couple of thousand veterans and believers had gathered. While addressing the crowd, he delivered the following words in his sermon:

'The war isn't over, it's still going on. We have secured our borders, but now we're in the midst of a war for the soul of our nation. I heard the other day that we are ready to pay doctors from the neighboring country to cross the Danube and come kill our children. We have to stand on the side of life, because this war which has no borders any more is for the soul, it is being fought on three levels – for life, for marriage and for the rights of parents to raise their children according to their beliefs.' (Stojić in Lijović and Pavičić, 2014)

His speech represents the voice of a new, radical force in Croatian society – a network of NGO's, lay Catholics, lawyers, theologians and members of Catholic clergy – who have started a new radical right movement with the goal of reorganizing society in line with a religious, nationalist conception of traditional life. This thesis reveals the role of the Catholic church and other religious actors in mobilizing the radical right in Croatia for its own political goals. It explains how the notion of 'gender ideology' became to function as the central nodal point of a discourse expressing nationalist, sovereigntist, Eurosceptic, xenophobic and homophobic sentiments and dividing society between a majority of Catholic Croats and Others. The thesis employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to reveal the links between the Catholic church and the new political movement; to explain how and why 'gender ideology' became the defining signifier of radical right thought and action; as well as to map the functions and discursive links of 'gender ideology' with macro-topics like religion, nation and democracy. CDA is used on different documents, speeches, articles and video materials of actors within or related to the

movement, with a special focus on the cycle of contention surrounding the mobilization against the ratification of the 'Istanbul Convention' which aims to combat violence against women.

Existing research of the European radical right focuses primarily on the anti-immigrant and nativist character of their ideology, while religion and, especially gender issues are mostly mentioned as secondary sources for legitimizing exclusion. Furthermore, the theory of a 'vaccine effect' which makes religious (Christian) individuals less prone to voting for the populist radical right, as well as the literature on the positive role played by the Catholic church in democratization, dominate studies of the links between religion and the radical right. This thesis contributes to several fields: causes of the growth of a populist radical right; the role of religious actors in radical politics within liberal democracies; and the conservative backlash against gender equality as part of the radical right phenomenon. The broader relevance of this work is in understanding how mobilizing around issues of gender can become a salient element of radical right politics, especially since the 'anti-gender movements' are an international phenomenon, principally present in Catholic countries of Eastern and Western Europe as well as the Americas.

The first chapter of the thesis reviews the relevant literature from social sciences and history on the relationship between religion and nationalism, as well as radical right politics, but also draws from studies of gender and nationalism and social movement theory. It points to an underresearched area of the field – the role of religious elites and communities in mobilizing, providing opportunity structures and fostering radical right politics. The second chapter introduces the important historical aspects of the intertwining of nationalism, religion and gender in the Balkans, with a focus on the war-time fascist Independent State of Croatia, Yugoslavia and the post-communist Republic of Croatia. It maps the sociopolitical context from which the new movement's ideology, activities and actors stem from. The third chapter traces the development of the RNR movement in Croatia, its actors, organizations and

international networks, while the fourth chapter traces the political activities and positions of the Catholic Church in Croatia, putting it in the theoretical context of church-state relations. The fifth chapter introduces the hypotheses and research methodology with a research design mapping out the main aims and phases of analysis, procedures of employing critical discourse analysis, explaining the sampling procedure as well as the selection of units of analysis. The remaining chapters employ critical discourse analysis through a series of steps, namely contextualizing, recognizing discursive topics and genres of text, analyzing argumentation strategies and linguistic means of their realization and relating the findings to existing theoretical models. The final chapter of the thesis summarizes the findings and aims at generalizing the implications and relevance of the conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion in Democracies

Debates on the most accurate ways of conceptualizing and understanding the role of religion in contemporary democracies are still centered around secularization theory. According to prominent authors like José Casanova and Peter Berger, a process or trend of desecularization or deprivatization has been taking place in the last decades in different contexts (Casanova 1996; Berger 2008). This trend is characterized by a rejection of the privatized role of religion, which has been championed by both liberal and socialist theories and politics, from religious leaders and communities all over the world. While the first phenomenon that comes to mind might be religious fundamentalism in its Islamic, Jewish Orthodox or Evangelical forms, it is also evident in the mobilization of the post-Second Council Catholic Church and its acceptance of democracy, human rights, and ideological

competition over values within the sphere of civil society (Casanova 1996). Furthermore, state promotion of secularism or a strict understanding of the separation of church and state are not found as necessary normative or factual conditions for liberal democracy by scholars. (Casanova 1994; Fox 2012; Stepan 2000).

Whether or not the phenomenon of deprivatization has actually challenged or changed the advance of secularization and (post)modernization has become the central question. Some defenders of the secularization thesis like Ronald Inglehart reject the religious fundamentalist backlash as a 'rear-guard action of a dwindling segment of the population, not the wave of the future' (Inglehart 1997, 72). In any case, it is clear that complex and contradictory forces are at play when it comes to measuring the levels and the changes of different aspects of religion in democracies – from religiosity as religious beliefs and practices, to politicized religious action and institutional arrangements of church-state relations. Different trends might be at work on different dimensions of the religious phenomenon. To point out one example, a study by Halman and Peterson found that, contrary to the deprivatization theory, people in democracies predominantly reject religious influence in politics (Halman and Pettersson 2004).

One region in which religion has without any doubt seen a significant rise is the post-communist region of Central, Eastern and especially Southeastern Europe. Not surprisingly, the new democratizing parties that emerged as victorious from the regime change were mostly willing to open up the public sphere for religion and reduce the restrictive regulations concerning religious communities (Sarkissian 2009, 24). Both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches in different countries were ready to side with the nationalist parties in order to exact a privileged position in the new democratic societies. With the abandonment of the repressive state atheism, religion was revitalized on the level of individual religiosity, not only religious affiliation but belief and practice as well (Zrinščak 2011). Furthermore, according to Inglehart

and Norris, societies of low existential security and those whose historical and cultural tradition are dominated by religion are more inclined to accentuate the importance of religion in all areas of social life (Inglehart and Norris in Nikodem 2011, 7). Finally, theories on the function of religion as an ethnic marker show how national identity is constructed, and identify the role of religious institutions in preserving national identity, myths and collective memories, which was specifically relevant in the post-Yugoslav context (Perica 2002). According to Brubaker, such theories identify religion as an important element of nationalism and nationhood in cases where there is a 'doubling of religious and ethnonational identities', and the (post)Yugoslav societies are notorious examples of such 'intertwinning' of religion and nation (Brubaker 2012, 12).

Whether or not the political activities of the clergy and the religious nationalist movement it is supporting in Croatia today is a sign of deprivatization of religion or not is a question beyond the scope of this thesis, since one should be able to point out to an increasingly responsive and politicized feedback from the population as well in order to claim deprivatization. However, the increased political activity of the Church in Croatia, its attempt at issue ownership and pressure aimed towards the main center-right party could be taken as important case study pointing to an underresearched field – the role of Catholic clergy in contemporary (radical right) politics. Recognizing the clergy as political actors with agency, resources and as engaging in producing political divisions and discourses points out that religion is not relevant for the radical right phenomenon only as an available ideology missused by radical right actors and parties.

Right-Wing Radicalism

Radical right-wing parties and movement are defined by three main characteristics in literature: nationalism or nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 2007). While the first two are agreed upon by most authors, the third is more contested because of the lack of conceptual clarity and empirical cases of non-populist right-wing radicalism (Minkenberg 2017; Pytlas 2016; Pirro 2015). Michael Minkenberg defines the radical right as 'a populist and romantic ultranationalism, a myth of a homogenous nation which puts the latter before the individual and his or her civil rights and which therefore is directed against liberal and pluralist democracy' (Minkenberg 2017, 14). He identifies three types of radical right actors: an extremist or autocratic-fascist right which openly opposes democracy, a racist or ethnocentric right which is inclined towards an ethnically exclusive democracy and a religious-fundamentalist right in which religion is directed against liberalism and pluralism.

Minkenberg provides a more sharp toolkit for analyzing the radical right, when compared to Mudde's seminal work. First, the surprisingly narrow understanding of radical right's success which is usually measured in the electoral arena of party competition is replaced with a comprehensive understanding of the radical right as a collective actor comprising of parties, movements and subcultural milieus (Minkenberg 2017b, 12). This is related to a second point, the one in which the author allows for a more dynamic understanding of the radical right as 'a kind of bridge between the mainstream and an extreme right which is usually disconnected from the mainstream' (Minkenberg 2017b, 13). Finally, Minkenberg provides us with a more complex set of elements based on different criteria of in-out distinction, including: racism, anti-semitism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, nativism, religiocentrism and heterophobia (Minkenberg 2017b, 14). While some of these might seem

unnecessary and overlapping, their differing saliency is important and relative to different contexts.

The right side of the political spectrum in Croatia since the 1990's has been dominated by the nationalist movement-turned-into-party – the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ). Political science literature has shown how, in order to weaken the more extremist competition from the Croatian Party of Rights, HDZ has adopted a lot of the radical right discourse and policy positions since the 90's, which makes the party itself a good candidate for the label of the populist radical right (Mudde 2007; Obućina 2012). According to Bustikova and Kitschelt, 'the electoral weakness of the radical right may have been bought at the price of much larger, more mainstream, “near radical right” parties that command substantial support' (Bustikova and Kitschelt, 2009, 470). While the process of EU accession and party Europeanization has strongly influence HDZ to liberalize and move towards the center-right, the current post-accession democratic backsliding and reentry of right-wing radicalism into the mainstream provides a fertile ground for a new challenge to HDZ from the right (Koska and Matan 2017).

Religion and the Radical Right

The first strand of literature within the field dealing with the links between the RR and religion analyzes the way radical right actors, primarily parties from the populist radical right family (PRR), use religion as a cultural marker of group identity, with the in-group defined by the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the out-group mostly by Islam (Betz 2013; Brubaker 2017; Minkenberg 2017a). Religion is, therefore, an aggravating element used to radicalize the exclusionary criteria. According to Brubaker, the ‘culturalization of religion’ and the

appearance of 'identitarian Christianity' is not a defense of religious values and religiosity as such (Brubaker 2017, 1198). In fact, it is precisely because 'We' are Christian that we can be secular, unlike 'the Muslims'. This civilizationist discourse groups Christianity, Europe, the West and secularism against the uncivilized, fundamentalist, Muslim, Oriental other. It should, however, be noted that a more anti-secular religious discourse and agenda feature much more seriously in the programs of the Central and Eastern European radical right parties.

The other strand of literature within political science is more focused on electoral and party politics, trying to quantitatively trace the link between the levels of religiosity and voting behavior. The prevailing finding from these types of research is that the more religious an individual is, especially measured as religious practice, the less likely they are to vote for a populist radical right party. This correlation is explained by the so-called 'vaccine effect', which points to the fact that those who are more religious tend to vote for the mainstream Christian democratic or conservative parties, are generally more integrated into the life of their religious communities and are therefore less likely to get radicalized and vote for a PRR party (Montgomery and Winter 2015; Arzheimer, Carter, and Unit 2009; Immerzeel, Jaspers, and Lubbers 2013). Repeated findings of the vaccine effect point to a positive role played by religion in mitigating the appeal of the populist radical right. On the other hand, there are some limitations to the theory.

Firstly, there seems to be nothing in religious beliefs and values that would 'inoculate' a person against accepting a PRR ideology. In fact, Montgomery and Winter find a significant positive correlation between religiosity and both authoritarian and nativist attitudes, which are the two of three main elements of PRR ideology (Montgomery and Winter 2015). Consequently, the vaccine may become ineffective with further dealignment of voters with mainstream right-wing parties (MSR). Secondly, results from studies done by different

authors point to a large number of exceptions – European countries where the vaccine effect was not found and/or voting for MSR parties was negatively correlated with religiosity, including, but are not limited to France, Greece, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Italy, Switzerland and Finland (Montgomery and Winter 2015; Arzheimer, Carter, and Unit 2009; Immerzeel, Jaspers, and Lubbers 2013). Thirdly, research has so far either focused on Western Europe, or has found significantly different patterns between Western and Eastern Europe, which means the ‘vaccine effect’ should be investigated in a more inclusive and context sensitive way, especially since the line between PRR and MSR parties in Central and Eastern Europe is quite blurred. Fourthly, constructs used to measure different variables in the existing studies seem quite lacking to grasp the phenomenon of the populist radical right ideology. For example, Arzheimer and Carter’s study focuses only on ethnocentric and xenophobic attitudes, measured by items regarding ‘people who come to live and work here’. Such a measure is clearly lacking, considering the importance, depending on the context, of racism and prejudice towards autochthonous national minorities, as well as other radical right attitudes which are rarely measured, like those on gender and sexuality issues. While Montgomery and Winter broaden their measurements to nativism, authoritarianism and populism, the measures seem quite unreliable, with populism being measured with items on trust in democracy and politicians, and nativism measured through a curious patchwork of anti-immigrant, racist and antifeminist attitudes (Montgomery and Winter 2015). Fourthly, in countries with a higher Christian population, individuals with higher religious community engagement are more likely to vote for PRR parties, and so are more orthodox believers in general (Immerzeel, Jaspers, and Lubbers 2013; Xia 2017).

Understanding the relationship between Christianity and right-wing radicalism in contemporary Europe requires moving away from the analysis of electoral behavior, and expanding the research with more focus on historical, institutional and discursive studies. The

various and contradictory links between religion and right-wing radicalism may be dependent on differing church-state relations, levels of religious diversity and pluralization as well as denominational difference. People do not only engage in politics through voting, and right-wing radicalism is not only a matter of party politics – analysis of radical social movements as well as institutional politics and policies should also be enriched by investigating the role of religion (and not only religiosity). There seems to be a gap in the field when it comes to studying religious elites and how they interact as political actors with both the MSR, PRR and their religious communities. It is important to investigate why supporting or even joining the radical right might be a rational choice for religious actors. This type of research might be particularly important when examining Eastern European cases, where religion seems to play a more dominant role in everyday politics, in defining social norms and in articulating the nationalist discourse. While there is plenty of research and theories on the historical advent of Catholic political mobilization, the rise of Christian democracy and the importance of religion in creating the cleavages of party politics, contemporary research focuses mostly on the fundamentalist mobilization of either Islamists, Hindus or Evangelical protestants, to name the most common cases. However, there is little research on the contemporary influence or role of the Christian churches and actors in mobilizing, providing resources or opening discursive opportunities for the populist radical right in today's liberal democracies. Nevertheless, there are several newer case studies investigating how the position of dominant religious actors can influence the rise of the radical right.

Konstantinos Papastathis looks into the role of the Orthodox Church of Greece (OCG) in ‘mediating nationalist, populist and authoritarian value systems’ by shaping the cultural opportunity structures, and traces the open participation, support or sympathizing of the Golden Dawn party from bishops and other clergy members (Papastathis 2015). He identifies the crucial role of the OCG in fostering nationalist, Eurosceptic and increasingly anti-

immigrant attitudes, as well as how the shift from the more pro-fascist archbishop Christodoulos to the more moderate archbishop Hieronymus affected the discursive shift within the Church. He convincingly traces the ideological common points between the Church and Golden Dawn, from an authoritarian concept of law and order, the anti-liberal and anti-intellectual tradition to specific ethnic prejudices like anti-Semitism and anti-Turkism (Papastathis 2015: 240). Such studies can also explain why in certain countries like Greece the vaccine effect is not present, and how the links between the PRR and religion are shaped specific denominational specificities, church-state relations and dominance of one church. Similarly, Gabriel Andreescu traces the links between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the state, the military and intelligence services, as well as the important role of an exclusivist mandatory religious education program (Andreescu in Minkenberg, 2015). While the mainstream parties were successful in containing the far-right parties, the Church took up the role and acted as a passive resource for the radical right, providing a strongly nationalist ideological leadership and radicalizing the criteria of exclusion with an anti-American, anti-European and conspiratorial tone (Andreescu in Minkenberg, 2015). Religious actors might also tend to act against the radical right. For example, John Veugelers writes about French political alignments in a historical context, noting the strong historical links between the French Catholic church and the far right. However, a decreasing influence of the Church and its acceptance of republicanism has positioned the Catholic clergy to mobilize against the Front National (Veugelers, 2000: 33).

The analysis of the role of religious actors and discourse in shaping nationalist mobilization is the field which this thesis wishes to contribute to. My goal is to point to the importance of analyzing, not only ways in which the populists (ab)use religion, but also how and why religious leaders, institutions and communities interact with and join in the new radical wave that's sweeping Europe. One such significant religious movement, influenced,

and arguably initiated by the Catholic Church is the mobilization against 'gender ideology' which has been growing across Europe in the last decade. The importance of analyzing the links between organized religion, social movements and radical politics also stems from the specific resources and opportunities which religious actors have at their disposal. According to Smith, religion provides specific assets for activism, including: a transcendental motivation and a defined, rigid system of morality; a repertoire of symbols, rituals and values; emphasis on self-discipline and sacrifice; organizational, financial and communication resources provided by the clergy and the authority structure; an existing shared confessional identification; and social and geographical dispersion of members and movement structures (Smith 1996). From the social movement perspective, the Catholic Church in Croatia played precisely the role defined by Smith as the 'movement midwife' – an organization which helps create and support a movement without directly becoming a part of it.

The Anti-Gender Movement

Different concepts such as anti-gender movements (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017), religiopolitics (Petricusic 2015), neo-conservative movements (Hodžić and Bijelić, 2014) and religious fundamentalism (Minkenberg 2017) have been used to define the phenomenon. In the center of the movement's activities, in different countries and contexts, is the mobilization against 'gender ideology' or 'gender theory' which is denounced as a threat to society and the natural way of life. The movement mobilizes against women's and LGBT activism, sexual and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage and adoption, sexual and civic education, gender mainstreaming policies and seeks to reaffirm differences between men and women (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 5). 'Gender' is denounced as an inauthentic value system which promotes a 'culture of death', is threatening to children, a 'totalitarian ideology of social engineering', or

a 'covert political strategy and conspiracy of deviants and minorities' (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 6–7). The conservative movement's discourse is heavily shaped by the Vatican and its position on 'gender theory' and the 'complementarity of men and women' (Kováts in Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 179).

Estzter Kováts has pointed out the growing literature on the link between anti-gender movements and the current 'crisis of the socio-economic order' (Kováts 2017). She opposes the conceptualization of the issue as a simple conservative backlash. Instead, she proposes the concept of gender as 'symbolic glue': „Gender as a symbolic glue integrates anti-EU, anti-liberal, anti-communist and homophobic attitudes, which can produce voters for the rightists“. (Kováts 2017, 77) The concept of gender as symbolic glue for the right-wing might be particularly important in Croatia where there are no (successful) radical right wing parties and where anti-immigrant discourse and euroscepticism are not salient, or at least not politicized.

Interpreting the movement merely in terms of a conservative backlash, or as a sexist, patriarchal reaction against liberalism and secularization means missing the important interplay of anti-gender mobilization, nationalism and the radical right. Further conceptualization is necessary, especially in societies in which national identity is intertwined with religion and the Church is in a sense 'nationalized'. According to Minkenberg, the emerging religious actors figure as 'torch-bearers of radical right thinking', in countries like Poland and Romania (Minkenberg 2017, 47). The new Croatian movement might prove to be another case of a 'religious-fundamentalist right, in which nationalism merges with religious rigidity in an anti-liberal and anti-pluralistic way'. (Minkenberg 2017, 23). This type of movement is conceptualized by Minkenberg as a specific type of the radical right phenomenon, and is appearing in most cases as a social movement.

Relying on Roger Friedland's work, Rogers Brubaker defines religious nationalism as a specific phenomenon, one in which religion provides content for nationalism as a form (Brubaker, 2012, 17). Religious nationalism is a specific type of collective representation within a nation-state which is based on a religious principle of ordering of the social field. Within its frame, individualism and pluralism are subordinate to the moral guidelines of good life as proscribed by the religious nationalists, with the family and the nation serving as the fundamental and sacred units of society. According to Friedland:

„Religious nationalism... makes religion the basis for the nation's collective identity and the source of its ultimate values and purpose on this earth. Religious nationalist give primacy to the family... as the social space through which society should be conceived and composed. Familial discourse, with its particularistic and sexual logic of love and loyalty, is pervasive.“ (Friedland 2001, 134)

Sremac and Ganzevoort list the following key elements of religious nationalism: sacralization of politics, exclusivity and the promotion of group homogeneity through separation from racial or sexual 'others', the employment of religious rhetoric and symbolic resources, disciplining the body and sexuality, totalitarianism and extremism (Sremac, Ganzevoort 2015, 5). It is important to make two further claims for a more precise definition of religious nationalism. First, as Friedland argues, it does not necessarily require a theocratic fusion of church and state, since focus is on the content, not the form (Friedland 2001, 138). Second, as Brubaker warns, we should be precise when using the concept of nationalism, not to overstretch it – a 'central orientation to the nation' must be present within a discourse of a movement (Brubaker 2012, 20). For the conceptual purposes of this thesis, I will be combining Minkenberg's work on the radical right and Friedland and Brubaker's concept of religious nationalism. The new radical movement in Croatia will therefore be addressed as the religious nationalist right (RNR), a term which is both more precise than 'radical right', less exclusive than 'religious fundamentalism' and more comprehensive than 'anti-gender movement'.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The position of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in contemporary Croatia is heavily influenced by the specific historical trajectories of the church-state relations as well as the political and discursive orientations of the clergy and political actors. Specifically, I will address the following crucial developments: the emergence of 19th century Croatian nationalism and its Catholicization during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; the collaboration of the Catholic Church with the Ustasha regime and its anti-Serbian policies; the intertwining of Croatian national identity and Catholicism as a mark of resistance to communist repression in the second Yugoslavia; and the reemergence of religiosity and influence of the Catholic Church during the Yugoslav wars and in Tuđman's authoritarian regime of the new Republic of Croatia.

Historical literature traces the link between Catholicism and Croatian national identity which dates back to the nationalist movement of the Croatian elites of the 19th century and is tightly connected to the political shifts in Serbo-Croatian relations. According to authors such as Grzymala-Busse and Georg Fleck, the Croatian liberal nationalism of the 19th century initially rejected Catholicism as a national marker, both because of its secular, modernist character and its panslavic political inclination towards the unification of South Slavs (Grzymala-Busse 2015; Fleck and Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung 1999). Although the mainstream 19th century nationalist project of the Croatian *intelligentsia* within Austria-Hungary was pan-Slavic¹ and secular, the appearance of an exclusive, ethnonationalist ideology of *pravaštvo* of the Croatian Party of Rights would foster the identification of

¹ One of the most important proponents of the pan-Slavic political thought in Croatia – Juraj Strossmeyer – was in fact a Catholic Archbishop.

'Croatness' with Catholicism, as opposed to Serbian Orthodoxy. While the First World War pitted Austria-Hungary, as well as its Croatian territories and peoples against Serbia, its aftermath provided a unique opportunity for the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The ethnic tensions within the new Kingdom stemmed primarily from the opposition of the strongest Croatian political parties to the Yugoslav national homogenization as well as economic and administrative centralization which was perceived as Serbian hegemony and repression. While the majority of the Serbian elites, backed by the King, preferred a unitary monarchy and fostered Yugoslav identity, the Croat parties pressured for a federal republic. The introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929, after the most popular Croatian politician Stjepan Radić was shot in the Yugoslav Parliament, created the conditions for a more radical and violent Croat nationalism which would later transform into the fascist Ustasha movement. One of the political controversies during the short-lived Kingdom was the refusal of the Government and King to support a Concordate with the Vatican, despite the fact that nearly 40% of Yugoslavia's population was Catholic². Even though the Serbian Orthodox Church strongly lobbied and protested together with the political opposition, Stojadinović's Government finally ratified the Concordate in 1937 with the hope of gaining favor with Italy (Ninčević and Brčić 2016, 305). Additionally, the Catholic clergy in Croatia led a public campaign against the Government's decisions to ban political activities of religious institutions, considering it a direct attack on the Catholic Church (Fleck 1999, 20). The stage was set for a discourse of Catholic Croat martyrdom – a suppressed nation and its suppressed Church.

As argued by Ogyanova, once the fascist Ustasha movement came to power with the help of the Axis forces in 1941, religious nationalism, inspired by *pravaštvo*, was used to

² Interestingly, the strongest Croatian Party of Peasants was also against such an agreement, condemning the Pope for alleged cooperation with Italian irredentists.

differentiate between the civilized, European and Catholic Croats and the primitive, Balkan, Orthodox Serbs (Ogyanova 2009). Not only did the Catholic Church in Croatia support the nazi-puppet regime of the Independent State of Croatia, but it also played an important role in performing forced conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism. According to Mark Biondich's research, Serbs were considered to be Orthodox Croats, or 'Croats by the language and Fatherland', and the solution of the Serbian question was to be dealt in the following way (quoting the Ustasha Minister of Education, Mile Budak): 'Part of the Serbs we will kill, others we will deport, and the rest we will convert to the Catholic faith, and thus we will assimilate them' (Biondich 2005, 87).

The Catholic Church also played a crucial role in defining the ideological contours of the new regime, especially in emphasizing the importance of traditional family and marriage, in line with the conservative Catholic ideals. While the gender policies and propaganda of the Ustasha regime enshrined the figure of the mother and wife, giving birth to and educating the new generation of the Croat nation, the realities of the war actually led to an increased participation of women in public life, the labor market and in the war effort as well (Yeomans 2013). Catholic intellectuals and journalists strongly rejected this phenomenon, criticizing the regime's praise of women's activities that were not confined to the household. According to the clergy, the new Croatian women must 'aspire to the virtues of the devout Catholic girl'...'exemplifying purity, sacrifice and love' (Yeomans 2013, 151). The regime's paradoxical praise of both the Spartan, militant Ustasha woman and the gentle, devout mother and wife was denounced by the Church, critical of this 'new Amazonian woman' resulting from the 'disastrous mistakes of the modern era' (Yeomans 2013, 167). Furthermore, the fascist propaganda backed by the Catholic Church's harsh stances on abortion, devised another important discourse – the new Croatia must rebuild a harmonious society with traditional gender roles which rejects the dangerous and damaging Yugoslav immorality

which promoted prostitution, sexual vices, abortion and general decadence (Jelinić 2018, 73). The conspiracy of the destructive forces of Yugoslavism and communism which strategically promote immoral policies to destroy the Croatian nation and progeny will remain an influential trope in the Croatian radical right and will return after the fall of communism.

Since the Church colluded with the Ustashas in building the new fascist society, its fall and the establishment of Socialist Yugoslavia led to aggressive secularization and repression of public religion. After the initial hostile treatment of religious communities and the Catholic Church in the new Socialist Yugoslavia, the Church gained relative autonomy in turn for cooperating with the regime. According to Ramet, the 1960's was a period of a mutual search for a *modus vivendi* which led to the improvement of church-state relations (Ramet 1982). Tito called for an end to physical harassment of the clergy, and the Church was able to come into the open and operate more or less without fear. It started co-operate with the régime on a legalistic basis and tried to expand its activities within the framework of the Constitution (Ramet 1982, 257). Given this position of the Church in late communist Yugoslavia, incorporating nationalist symbols, myths and cultural practices into religious ceremonies was the only legal and at least semi-legitimate way of expressing national identity. As Perica points out: “After the collapse of the Croatian (secular) nationalist movement, the Church became the only driving force of Croatian ethnic nationalism. Many secular nationalist leaders recognized the Church’s leadership and became practising Catholics.” (Perica 2002, 63). Inspired by the Polish Cardinal Wyszyński, the Croatian clergy used religious events and symbols like the Great Novena and the Marian cult to publicly mobilize masses and strengthen the link between Croatian and Catholic identity, commemorating historical events, monuments and churches which were proof of the deeply Catholic character of the Medieval Croatian nation and of its ties with the Catholic Church. The Croatian national anthem as well as its historical flag, differing from the socialist one, were used openly during the events, and

new symbols such as the icon of 'Our Lady of the Great Croatian Christian Covenant' were promulgated (Perica 2002, 65). With the advent of political pluralism, the radical nationalist parties and actors, similarly to other Catholic authoritarian regimes, were thus able to draw upon a long tradition of cooperating with the Catholic Church and the links between national and religious identity. Furthermore, the Church's activities in the 1980's established the main discursive frames and strategies which would shape its politics in the new regime – legalism and human rights, nationalism, as well as the rejection of harmful communist 'anti-human' attacks on life and family.

After winning the first free elections in Croatia, the new nationalist president Franjo Tudjman was introduced to a cheering mass of supporters with the following words: "On this day Christ triumphant came to Jerusalem. He was greeted as a Messiah. Today our capital is the New Jerusalem. Franjo Tudjman has come to his people." (Nagle and Clancy 2010, 128). During the Yugoslav wars, The Catholic Church became an important center of national homogenization during Tudjman's authoritarian regime. Being a Croat meant being Catholic. In Croatia, a kind of symbiosis developed between Church and State, religion and politics, through the deprivatization and politicization of religion and the increasing importance of religion in the public sphere. The Church became a vital provider of legitimacy for the new regime, and the regime enabled the revitalization of the Church (e.g. introduction of religious instruction in schools, anti-abortion campaign, the restitution of property which was nationalized during communism, etc.). The Catholic Church never openly instructed people for whom to vote, but it gave tacit support to the ruling HDZ by advocating for conservative and Christian values as guidelines for voting.

A highly patriarchal and conservative process of retraditionalization was part of the new government's policies, especially in the areas of demographic, social and family policies. Tudjman pronounced 'women, pornography and abortion' are to blame for the tragedy of the

Croatian nation – he decried women who have abortion as 'mortal enemies of the nation' (Shiffman, Skrabalo, and Subotic 2002, 633). Initiated by the new Croatian Population Movement, policy recommendations included taxing parents without children, incentivising women to leave work and financially supporting women with more than three children, to name a few. The new authoritarian nationalist regime was openly advocating gender inequality, Christian morality as well as discrimination of Serbs and propaganda against mixed marriages producing 'foreign bodies' (Shiffman, Skrabalo, and Subotic 2002, 636). The regime's new obsession with demography, gender roles, family policies and abortion was heavily intertwined with the nationalist and exclusive narrative of protecting the borders – protecting the identity of the Croat people. Pavlović describes how this process particularly affected the (re)construction of gender roles:

‘Anxieties about the Nation and the family are inseparable from anxieties about masculinity and femininity. The climate of war made gender roles even more rigid than before... Their [women's] new identity and the identity of the Nation became inseparable. They are not just women, they are reduced to the category of *Croatian* women. They are tied to their home and their nation.’ (Pavlović in Ramet 1999, 133).

Simultaneously, the war-induced obsession with constructing a new, hypermasculine type of man utilized homophobia as a political weapon – the homosexual Croat, similarly to the Croatian Serb, is a dangerous Other, ‘a dark counterpart of the hypermasculine father/defender/warrior’ (Pavlović in Ramet 1999, 134). The radical right established a discursive connection of the socialist progressive policies regarding gender roles, family and sexual/reproductive health with the nationalist narrative of the ‘Yugocommunist’ or ‘Serbocommunist’ threat. This discourse, reminiscent of the Ustasha’s propaganda, solidified the importance of gender, family and marriage policies for national identity and narrative. It is within this context that the first generation of ‘anti-gender’ activist was raised, and it

explains why the new RNR movement finds it politically useful to this day to relate the struggles against gender ideology to attacks on the Serbian minority in Croatia.

THE ANATOMY OF A MOVEMENT

While the central social movement organization of the religious nationalist movement – In the Name of Family – was founded as late as May 2013, several other NGO's, groups of individuals and political actors were previously promoting the RNR agenda, backed both by international organizations as well as the Catholic Church (in Croatia). The local roots of the new movement stem from the 1990's ultraconservative groups fighting against abortion and demographic decline, most notoriously under the name of the 'Croatian Population Movement' founded by a Catholic priest. However, the actors, strategies and organizational structures of the new movement are different and appear in the public only in the late 2000's. The first efforts of the central figures of the movement – Željka Markić³ and Ladislav Ilčić⁴ – were focused on an abstinence-based sexual education program called 'TeenStar' which was experimentally introduced in schools in 2003. The first NGO founded in 2006., focusing on the rights of parents, issues concerning education and protection of children's rights, GROZD (Glas roditelja za djecu – The Voice of Parents for Children), would become a central actor challenging the left-wing Government's health curriculum in 2012. The more libertarian

³ Željka Markić, daughter of Marijo Živković, a prominent Croatian pro-life activist, started her career as a war reporter and continued working in the field of human rights, collecting testimonies of victims and prisoners of war from Srebrenica and Vukovar. She founded the local chapter of 'Mary's Meals' – an NGO providing food to poor children worldwide, she was the first president of the radical right party HRAST, and one of the leaders of both GROZD and INF. She has a degree in medicine and currently works as a pharmaceutical entrepreneur.

⁴ Ladislav Ilčić is a violinist, and academic musician who worked as the head of a Varaždinian church choir, was one of the founders of GROZD as well as the president of HRAST, on whose list he was elected into Parliament in 2015. He also served as an Advisor for Human Rights for HDZ's Foreign Minister Stier, and later as an Advisor of the current Minister of Culture, Nina Obuljen.

branch of the movement was formed in 2009 when the Center for Cultural Renewal was founded by an Opus Dei member Stjepo Bartulica – an NGO which would, along with Vigilare, focus on lobbying issues concerning reproduction and abortion. The NGO ‘Vigilare’ was formed in 2011 by John Vice Batarelo, Head of Office for the Pastoral Care of the Family of the Zagrebian Archbishopric, with the goal of promoting ‘conservative social values and the culture of life’ (Vigilare, 2015). It is clear that the movement had political ambitions from the very beginning, since Markić and Ilčić founded the political party HRAST (Croatian Growth) in early 2011, with a platform promoting ‘Christianity, family, patriotism and philanthropy’ (HRAST 2010), Željka Markić becoming its first president.

The movement’s first comprehensive public campaigns were targeting the newly formed left-wing Government’s policies introduced in 2012: a new law liberalizing artificial insemination and the health education program. Vigilare and GROZD campaigned with protests, petitions, e-mails to Parliament representatives and even organized parliamentary discussions, slowly gaining legitimacy and entering the ‘halls of power’ as civil society stakeholders with expertise in family policies. Their discourse focused on protecting life and childhood from the ‘culture of death’, under the slogans ‘I was an Embryo, Too’ and ‘Stay Away from Their Childhood’. Their first political victory was the Constitutional Court’s repeal of the new health education curriculum. The Croatian Bishop’s Conference openly supported their efforts, as Cardinal Bozanić first warned against gender ideology in his Christmas homily in 2012. In the Name of Family was formed in May 2013, with the stated goal of ‘protecting and promoting the dignity of marriage and family, human sexuality, birth and every human life’ (U ime obitelji, 2015). The stage was set for their first big project – a constitutional definition of marriage. In the Name of Family managed to gather more than 750,000 signatures to call for a referendum for December 2013. The petition and referendum were a success and the Constitution was changed to define marriage as a union between a man

and a woman. According to the only study, carried out by the Science and Society Synergy Institute, on the social characteristics of referendum voters, those who voted for the heteronormative definition of marriage tend to be less educated, from less urban areas and less likely to support the left-wing coalition (ISZD, 2013). Furthermore, the most robust finding shows a strong correlation between those voting against the definition of marriage and those identifying as ‘sceptics, agnostics, atheists and non-believers’ (ISZD, 2013).

Fueled by the victory, interpreted as an alleged proof of popular support and legitimacy of the movement as representatives of ‘the people’, INF started broadening its activities, including a failed referendum aiming at electoral reform which would introduce preferential voting, as well as joining electoral oversight committees as civil society experts. After the failures of HRAST as a political party, and a split within its ranks, a new party was founded in 2015 – ‘In the Name of Family – Project Homeland’. Simultaneously, both INF and Vigilare started working on the next item on their agenda – contesting the right to abortion. Already in spring 2014, Vigilare supported the forming of a local branch of ‘40 Days for Life’ – an American Catholic-initiated organization which mobilizes believers in prayer vigils in front of hospitals and abortion clinics to dissuade women from abortion. In 2016, INF organized the first ever National March for Life in Zagreb, while Vigilare initiated a controversial and aggressive campaign ‘I Want to Live’, with videos, posters and flyers condemning abortion, using the perspective and ‘voice’ of the aborted child crying for help. Simultaneously, the November 2015 elections brought a HDZ-led ‘Patriotic Coalition’ in power, with HRAST being one of the coalition partners, and Zlatko Hasanbegović from INF serving as Minister of Culture. Although the Government lasted only for eight months, it marked a strong swing towards the radical right, both for HDZ and the political mainstream in

general. The RNR actors used this period to infiltrate institutions and lobby the government⁵, to institutionalize its movement and develop a ‘right-wing civil society’ of experts and governance stakeholders. After HDZ managed to form a new Government, led by the moderate Andrej Plenković, a former member of European Parliament, the RNR would start turning against it, first in a campaign against the Serbian minority newspapers and then against the Istanbul Convention.

In addition to the movement’s direct links with the Croatian Catholic clergy, its members have personal, ideological and organizational links to several international organizations promoting the (ultra)conservative Catholic agenda. Both GROZD and ‘Family Enrichment’⁶ – NGO’s led by Markić, are members of the International Federation for Family Development. According to Lukić, The IFFD works to support parenting in the spirit of the teachings of Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei⁷ (Lukić 2013). Vigilare, on the other hand, is part of the international organization ‘Tradition, Family and Property’ – an extremist ultraconservative organization rejected by the Catholic Church, originating in Latin America and founded in the 1960’s by Plinio Correa de Oliveira. TFP was famous for its attacks on liberation theology and the ‘spread of Marxism’ within Latin American clergy, as well as its rejection of the Second Vatican Council (Šimčević 2018). Furthermore, Markić and the Croatian RNR movement have recently been linked to an extremist political platform called ‘Restoring the Natural Order: an Agenda for Europe’ aiming to dismantle human rights

⁵ While a few of the movement's leaders such as Ladislav Ilčić and Hrvoje Zekanović managed to enter the Croatian Parliament, or hold governmental positions like Hasanbegović, its members like Ivan Munjin and Krešimir Planinić have entered Working Groups and Parliamentary bodies working on legislative, regarding the Family law and the ratification of the IC. On of the movement affiliated persons, Jasminka Culej, also became the leader of the expert group for the implementation of the comprehensive education reform. Furthermore, the INF is also funded by the National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society.

⁶ An organization recognized as a partner of the Office for Families of the Croatian Bishop's Conference

⁷ When asked directly by a journalist, Markić refused to answer whether or not she is a member of Opus Dei herself.

legislation, including issues such as: the right to divorce; access to contraception; assisted reproduction technologies and abortion; LGBT equality and gender/sex change (Datta 2018). Finally, Marijo and Darka Živković, parents of Željka Markić, both distinguished actors of the controversial 1990's Croatian Population Movement, were appointed to the Pontifical Council of the Family of the Catholic Church, after having visited Pope John Paul II in 1980. along with 15 other married couples, in what was the first occasion of lay people being invited to the Vatican's Synod on the Family (Brakus 2018). To conclude, there are direct links between the main actors of the Croatian RNR movement, Opus Dei, and the top of the Catholic hierarchy. These links are not surprising since it was precisely John Paul II who elevated Opus Dei to a personal prelature in 1982. According to a Spanish Vatican correspondent: 'Opus responds... to the Pope's idea of creating an army of lay people who are both consecrated and at the same time capable of being active in the temporal world under Rome's control.', while also responding to John Paul's integralist orientation (Arias in Lernoux 1989). Although the Croatian RNR movements has direct links with international organizations and the Vatican, its appearance should primarily be situated in the context of the attempts of the local Catholic clergy to regain political and social influence in an increasingly secularizing society. The following chapter defines church-state relations in Croatia, placing it within a theoretical framework, and traces the political positions and activities of the CC since Croatia's independence.

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN CROATIA

To understand the importance of religion in a given society, one should start from analyzing the legal, institutional arrangements regulating the relationship between religious actors and communities and state authorities. Traditional categorizations usually start by

recognizing whether or not religion is formally established within the constitutional system of a country. In liberal democracies, the next task involves placing a state somewhere on the spectrum of church-state separation – from a 'pure' theocratic arrangement to a secular-promoting state with a highly privatized role of religion. From a normative perspective, Alfred Stepan's understanding of 'twin tolerations' is often used to formulate an ideal type of religion-state relationship in democracies. According to him, religious actors should not have the 'veto power' to influence or override decision-making of a democratically elected government, while religious individuals and communities should be able to exercise their religious freedom both privately and publically, as well as organize collectively to promote their values, within the boundaries of the law and constrained by the freedoms of others (Stepan 2000, 39).

From a social science perspective, Monsma and Soper as well as Jose Casanova provide an elementary trichotomic categorization of church-state relations. Casanova focuses on establishment and distinguishes between formal establishment with freedom of religion (UK, Scandinavian countries); formal disestablishment, constitutional separation and strict regulation of religion (France and post-communist countries) and finally; formal separation with informal 'single or multichurch quasi-establishment, along with various corporatist-consociational arrangements' (Germany, Netherlands, etc.) (Casanova 1994, 111). Similarly, Monsma and Soper recognize formal or informal establishment where state and church cooperate and mutually support each other; strict separation model which promotes state neutrality and privatization of religion and; a more specific model of a 'pluralist or structural pluralist model' in which government is neutral towards different competing worldviews – whether they are religious or secular (Monsma and Soper 2008, 11).

Croatia is country belonging to what Madeley categorizes as the monoconfessional Catholic south of Europe (Madeley 2003). The history of church-state relations in the country

has been marked by a strong *Antemurale Christianitatis* ideology or identity of defending Catholic Europe from the Ottoman Empire, as well as by the Great Schism and the subsequent historical importance of a strong and growing Eastern Orthodox Serb minority. Similarly to other countries of the monoconfessional bloc (Madeley 2003, 39), religious conflict and dissent within Croatia were historically not between different religions or denominations, but between believers and a growing secular, anti-clerically oriented elite. First, it was the liberals pitting the modern pan-slavic national project against Catholicism in the 19th century, and then a communist atheist elite attacking organized public religion in the 20th century. Today, by all categorizations, Croatia is a secular state with a formal separation of church and state accompanied by 'quasi-establishment' of one dominant church. The Catholic church is privileged by the state both formally, through the Concordats with the Vatican, and informally, given the traditional, numerical and cultural strength of Catholicism (Monsma and Soper 2008, 11). The ethno-religious intertwining is also an important factor, as explained by Halmai: „the state has embedded interest in preserving or promoting a viable 'state religion' to the extent that this religion provides meaning to the national metanarratives that constitutes the nation as such“ (Halmai 2015, 27). Finally, as described by Fox's fifth model of acceptable support for a single religion (Fox 2012, 67) – minority religions and religious freedoms in general are still protected, although there is a significant degree of discrimination, which will later be discussed in more detail. Still, the religious cleavage in contemporary Croatian society follows Madeley's rule of the monoconfessionalist struggle between clerical and secular forces. The Catholic Church in the post-communist, newly independent Republic of Croatia was ready to side with the main nationalist party in order to exact a privileged position in the new democratic society. The Holy See was also the first state to officially recognize Croatia's independence in 1992. With the abandonment of the repressive state

atheism, religion was revitalized on the level of individual religiosity as well, not only religious affiliation but belief and practice as well (Zrinščak 2011).

Between 1996 and 1998, the relations between the Catholic church and the Croatian state were solidified through four highly controversial concordats with the Holy See: The first regulates cooperation in the field of education and culture; the second is for providing spiritual guidance in the Croatian armed forces and police; the third is about legal matters; and the fourth regulates economic cooperation. Together, they established a privileged, dominating position of the Catholic church, recognizing religious marriage by the state, giving the Church access to prisons and hospitals for pastoral purposes as well as mass media and TV programs. Religious institution was introduced on all levels of education, from nursery schools, primary and secondary schools, and ecclesiastic schools were to be supported financially by the state. Pastoral care in the army and the police would be regulated through a new army ordinariate, also funded by the state. Finally, the state would partly finance the activities and salaries of the Church clergy and its social services through the general tax system (thereby imposing mandatory financing of the Church on non-believers) and would give back property nationalized during the communist period, or reimburse it when restitution is not possible.

The treaties were controversial because, first, the comprehensive state funding scheme in different areas could be interpreted as the state financing proselytizing and missionary work of the Church (Perica 2006: 314), second, it relegated other religious communities into a deprivileged and discriminated position, and third, the treaties were ratified in a non-democratic, non-transparent and expedient way (Gruenfelder 2000). It was not until 2002, after the fall of the nationalist authoritarian regime and death of Franjo Tuđman, that the government passed the Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities enabling other religious communities to conclude agreements with the state in a way similar to what the

concordats entitled the Catholic church to. Still, very strict criteria were required, including that a religious community should have been present in the territory of Croatia since 6 April 1941, that the number of their adherents should be 6000 or more and that they should be a 'historical religious community of the European cultural circle'. It was only in 2010, after the European Court of Human Rights sided with small Protestant communities suing the Croatian state for not being able to conclude agreements according to the 2002 law, that the law was recognized as problematic and was finally changed in 2012.

Although the Catholic Church in Croatia is quite influential in the public and political sphere, its institutional access and policy veto powers are not as strong as in Poland, primarily because the mainstream nationalist party HDZ did not need the Church's support as much in the 1990's. According to Grzymala-Busse, this stems from the fact that, unlike in Poland where the pro-democratic forces needed the Church's help in negotiating with the communist elites, in Croatia, both the reformed communists and the new nationalists were fighting a common enemy in the war against Serbian aggression (Grzymala-Busse 2015). It was not until late 1990's, when HDZ was losing legitimacy due to corruption, authoritarianism and increasing poverty, that the Church was able to offer legitimacy and support in return for favors – the four Concordats.

However, after Croatia's 'second transition' and the fall of Tuđman's authoritarian regime in 2000, the process of Europeanization, political liberalization, the growth of civil society and a relatively short period of economic growth halted the retraditionalization of society championed by the Church and the hard-liners of HDZ. Under the leadership of Ivo Sanader, the party moved closer to the center and the radical right Croatian Party of Rights lost parliamentary seats and political significance. During the ten-year long EU accession period and seeming stabilization of the political and party system, a vacuum created on the radical right part of the spectrum coincided with the the Church's loss of influence and

political relevance. According to one study analyzing changes in religiosity from 1999. to 2008., a limited fall of religiosity was found regarding confessional identification, engaging in religious practices and a significant fall of trust in the Church and especially its ability to 'adequately answer to moral, spiritual, religious and family issues' (Črpić and Zrinščak 2010, 18). The number of ordained religious marriages also continues to drop, and according to one study, civil marriage will become as popular as religious marriage by 2020 if the trends continue (Polšak Palatinuš 2018). Furthermore, the strong ties between Catholic clergy and the HDZ that previously increased the political and social relevance of the Church contributed to the fall of trust in the Church once the political corruption scandals decimated trust and support for the party and lead to its unprecedented defeat in the general 2011 elections with HDZ winning a historically low 23% of the total vote. It is not accidental that the new RNR movement started mobilizing precisely during the mandate of the newly elected social democratic government, attacking the liberal policies proposed by the new government in areas of family policies, LGBT rights and gender equality. However, this time, partly because of the Church's wish to avoid criticism for political involvement, a new army of lay Catholics was ready to take up the political struggle and act on the Church's behalf. In this sense, the Croatian Catholic Church made an important disestablishing step forward in the process of moving from the political to civil society, as described by Casanova (Casanova 1994, 62). Although this process might be interpreted as conducive to democratization, the Church's employment of an essentially anti-modernist ideology against ethnic, sexual and other minorities through a populist uprising of illiberal referendums aiming to constrict human rights in line with the 'natural moral laws' of the Church is worrying.

METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of how the contemporary radical right mobilizes support to achieve its political goals, especially in contexts where anti-immigrant discourse is not salient. A secondary aim is to contribute to the field of research which deals with the relationship between religion and the radical right, specifically, the gap regarding the role of religious actors and elites in mobilizing support, formulating discourse or even organizing the radical right. Additionally, this research will shed some light on issues of gender politics in Europe today and the recent international conservative backlash, coined by authors as the 'anti-gender movement', by attempting to build a bridge between the studies of gender, religion, nationalism and the populist radical right. The three main hypotheses of this research are:

1. The Catholic Church in Croatia (CCC) is using nationalist discourse and political mobilization of laity to achieve its political goals in areas of family, social policies and gender equality.
2. The new radical right movement in Croatia, centered around the NGO 'In the Name of Family', has both ideological and organizational roots in the Catholic Church.
3. The discourse on 'gender ideology' functions as a symbolic glue – a nodal point of rallying for different radical right groups and conservatives, crystallizing Eurosceptic, xenophobic and homo/transphobic attitudes and prejudices.

The method which will be used to test the hypotheses is critical discourse analysis (CDA), more specifically, the discourse-historical approach, as developed primarily by Ruth Wodak. Discourse is defined as a 'cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action; are socially constituted and constitutive; are related to a

macro-topic and linked to argumentation on 'truth' and normative validity' (Wodak and Meyer, 27). The critical aspect includes both text or discourse immanent critique as well as the socio-diagnostic critique which are used to reveal the textual and socio-political manipulative practices, inconsistencies and fallacies. Finally, the historical aspect 'attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive 'events' are embedded' as well as investigate how discourse genres change diachronically (Wodak 2009, 65). The method is an appropriate choice for the proposed research for two main reasons. Firstly, by identifying the discursive links, it aims to reveal the purposefully concealed relationship between the Catholic hierarchy and the civil society organizations which form the center of the movement. Secondly, it aims to unravel the functions and interrelated meanings of 'gender ideology' and explain why a seemingly marginal issue became a nodal point of right-wing organizing. Critical discourse analysis is a method which helps to reveal hidden meanings, subtexts and messages. It also enables the tracing of how a discourse spreads and changes between different actors, in different fields and time periods, which will help uncover relevant political and discursive influences of the Church in Croatian politics in this case.

The method will be used to analyze the discourse on 'gender ideology' in Croatia and how it relates to macro-topics like religion, nation, democracy and sovereignty. The analysis will focus on the texts of different organizations associated with the new religious radical right movement – from the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Croatian Bishop's Conference, individual clergy members to the NGO's and right-wing politicians associated with the movement. The first procedural step of the method includes locating and sampling information on the context of the chosen texts (social, historical, political, etc.) (Wodak 2009, 93). The second step is to analyze the texts, identify and correlate the different fields of action, genres, discursive topics as well as related and historically informed macro-topics

which might be providing interdiscursive and intertextual links. The third step consists of revealing the discursive strategies, linguistic argumentation means (topoi/fallacies) as well as lexical and syntactical types of realizing the argument. The final step consists of relating the findings to existing theoretical models, specifically, ones on the discursive realization of discrimination and prejudice, the construction of national and other types of group identities as well as the discourses typical for the populist radical right.

The first part of the analysis will focus on the historical aspect and background of the term 'gender ideology', with the goal of tracing the term from its source in Catholic doctrines; its promulgation and articulation within a new religious lay movement; and its entry into the Croatian political context. Selected central documents of relevant organizations will be analyzed in order to map the network of interdiscursive and intertextual relationships as well as the fields of action, genres and macro-topics they belong to. After analyzing several relevant Papal writings dealing with gender issues, a discourse analysis of five documents of the Croatian Bishop's Conference dealing with 'gender ideology' will be employed to trace the adoption of the discourse on gender in the Croatian context. The goal is to reveal the different layers and chains of discourse which crystallized 'gender ideology' as a nodal point of contemporary radical right ideology in Croatia and to explain the broader socio-political functions of such a discourse.

The second part of the analysis will focus on discourses around a recent chain of events in Croatia centered around the movement's mobilization against the ratification of Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, shortly known as the 'Istanbul Convention' (IC). This thesis examines 33 units of text sampled from November 2016, when the ratification was first announced, to April 2018 when the Convention was finally ratified. The texts are primarily articles and press releases of the RNR movement itself, taken from its webpages and its official news portal

narod.hr, but also include all the relevant statements made by Church hierarchy as well as several comments of the more traditional radical right not directly related to the RNR. The units of analysis include 12 news articles, 8 public speeches, 6 press releases, 3 conference reports, 2 petitions, 1 information flyer and 1 official public debate comment submitted by the movement to the Government. The relevance of the events surrounding the IC stems from the movement's successful mobilization of citizens to protest the Convention, ability to push the concept of 'gender ideology' into the mainstream political debate, even formally into the legal system, to call into question the legitimacy of a right-wing government and to express a strongly nationalist, conservative and Eurosceptic position challenging the moderate and pro-European nationalism of mainstream parties. Even though the IC was eventually ratified, and the movement failed to prevent it, it led to a new cycle of contention with a successful petition to reform the electoral system and limit minority representation which might in the near future lead to a referendum.

THE INVENTION OF GENDER IDEOLOGY

A Papal Invention

The adoption and use of the term 'gender ideology' by the Catholic Church has been traced to the mid-1990's and is related to Vatican's international activities, mostly on the level of the UN, regarding women's rights. According to Anić, the Church's reactions to the appearance of 'gender' in UN documents were developed in relation to four events: the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the Fourth International Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, the Roma Conference in 1998 and Beijing +5 held in the year 2000 (Anić 2011, 63). Afraid that the concept of gender might

be used to blur the definitions, approaches and positions on issues regarding women's (reproductive) rights as well as homosexuality, the Holy See adopted a formal Statement interpreting 'gender' as based on biological sexual identity – either female or male – 'excluding dubious interpretations based on worldviews which assert that sexual identity can be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes' (Holy See, 1995).

Gender ideology and the notion of complementarity between the sexes are the most recent in a long line of theoretical developments of the Catholic anthropology of sexuality. Mary Anne Case tracks the importance of several Popes in this development: Paul VI's opposition to contraception, homosexuality and women's ordination; John Paul II's 'Theology of Body' and 'Mulieris Dignitatem', inventing the theology of complementarity; and Benedict XVI's invention of 'human ecology', already influenced by the concept of gender, which connects issues such as LGBT rights, feminism and new reproductive technologies (Case 2016, 2). However, it was the works of several Catholic scholars, lay or clergy, that introduced the notion of 'gender ideology' to the Vatican: authors like Tony Anatrella, Gabriele Kuby, Marguerite Peeters and Dale O'Leary. The latter's book 'The Gender Agenda' is usually mentioned as crucial in influencing Cardinal Ratzinger's views on gender, herself attending the Beijing conference and lobbying against gender (Kuhar & Patternote 2017, 11).

A significant part of the contemporary RNR discourse can be traced to the concepts and discourses used by the Catholic Church, especially by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI; most notably the 'complementarity of women and men', the 'culture of death', 'structures of sin' as well as 'human' or 'integral ecology'. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II argues for equality between the sexes but points out that women's ultimate role is marked by 'the principle of help':

‘Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary. Womanhood expresses the ‘human’ as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way... not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological. It is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realization.’ (John Paul II 1988, 5).

The discourse on complementarity serves the function not only to solidify the gender binary, but also to legitimize the institution of marriage as central to human existence and fulfillment, since ‘the original solitude is overcome, the solitude in which man does not find ‘a helper fit for him’ (John Paul II 1988, 15). Furthermore, it is the prerequisite of life as such: ‘God’s instituting marriage as an indispensable condition for the transmission of life to new generations.’ (John Paul II 1988, 15) The discourse on complementarity is therefore a function of preserving the traditional structure of gender roles, sexuality and family, confined within the institution of marriage. In *Evangelium Vitae*, the Pope defines the threats to such traditional life in contemporary societies, with a special focus on condemning abortion, artificial reproduction, contraception and euthanasia. The widespread immorality is a result of what John Paul II calls a ‘structure of sin’ producing a ‘culture of death’:

‘This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death". This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak.’ (John Paul II 1995, 8)

The culture of death, caused by secularism, moral relativism and the ignoring of natural laws, is interdiscursively linked to several political meta-topics which form the basic building blocks of the religious nationalist movement’s discourse: populism, human rights and democracy. The ‘war of the powerful against the weak’, framed in Manichean terms as the ‘dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the ‘culture of death’ and the ‘culture of life’ (John Paul II 1995, 18), as well as the danger of democracy becoming an ‘empty

word’ in the hands of the powerful (John Paul II 1995, 48) expresses the fundamental elements of populist discourse. The Pope’s emphasis on international pressures which attack human life and ‘jeopardize the very meaning of democratic coexistence’ create a discourse of threat which is easily interconnected with anti-communist or Eurosceptic discourse:

‘Should we not question the very economic models often adopted by states which, also as a result of international pressures and forms of conditioning, cause and aggravate situations of injustice and violence in which the life of whole peoples is degraded and trampled upon?’ (John Paul II 1995, 12)

However, it is not human rights or the will of majority which are exalted in the Gospel, because it is precisely their abuse and the relativist understanding of democracy which threaten life and natural laws which are beyond decision-making. Ignoring natural laws and the ‘objective truths’ revealed by God lays ground ‘for society to be at the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority’ (John Paul II 1995, 63). The recognition of an absolute truth as above the liberal principles recognizing the relative and conceptions of good held by different individuals and groups in society enables the Pope to attack liberalism and secularism, coded as ‘moral relativism’, as a potentially totalitarian threat to human life, especially the weakest members of society – women and children. As will be demonstrated in the case study of the Istanbul Convention ratification, it is precisely this understanding of the contemporary human condition and society which informs the discourse of the religious nationalist movement in Croatia.

It was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who included ‘gender’ as a problematic concept belonging to the ‘structures of sin’ in his letter to the Bishops issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, claiming that gender:

‘has in reality inspired ideologies which, for example, call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality.’ (Ratzinger 2004, 2)

In his writings, he develops a theory of ‘human ecology’, a responsibility to protect not only the environment, but also to protect human nature, its inherent dignity as it was gifted by God, to protect man from self-destruction. Adopting gender ideology, according to such an understanding, ‘ultimately ends up being man’s attempt at self-emancipation from creation and the Creator’ (Benedict XVI 2008, 6). Such an understanding of gender would later be accepted by Pope Francis as well, under the concept of ‘integral ecology’ (Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015).

A Call to Action

The development of the Catholic Church’s anthropology of sexuality was not only an intellectual, philosophical effort, but one calling to action on everyone – lay or clergy – to promote the ‘culture of life’ in politics and everyday life. In the final chapter of the *Gospel of Life*, John Paul II notes the importance of involving hospital personnel, marriage and counseling services, volunteers, clinics and social care workers, but stresses precisely the role of ‘civil leaders’:

‘Individuals, families, groups and associations... all have a responsibility for shaping society and developing cultural, economic, political and legislative projects which, with respect for all and in keeping with democratic principles, will contribute to the building of a society in which the dignity of each person is recognized and protected and the lives of all are defended and enhanced. This task is the particular responsibility of civil leaders. Called to serve the people and the common good, they have a duty to make courageous choices in support of life, especially through legislative measures.’ (John Paul II 1995, 59)

Furthermore, in the ‘Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political life’, Cardinal Ratzinger attacks ‘moral anarchy’ and secularism which create a harmful duality between a person’s spiritual and secular life and calls for moral coherence of Catholics, inviting them to reject policies which go against their Christian

conscience. While reaffirming the dual autonomies of the political and religious spheres, Ratzinger warns that politics cannot be separated from morality (Ratzinger 2002, 5). The moral relativism promoted by liberalism and secularism allegedly endanger democracy and human rights because they go against the ‘non-negotiable ethical principles’ which are coded by ‘natural moral law’. However, as Kulenović argues, the Church’s concept of morality prevents and negates the ideal of liberal institutions which should reflect a diversity of individual or group conceptions of good life (Kulenović 2004, 60). This includes pluralism on issues proscribed by the Doctrinal Note as intransigent, namely: laws concerning abortion and euthanasia; the monogamous marriage between a man and a woman as a privileged community; inalienable freedom of parents regarding the education of their children, etc.

To summarize, the Catholic Church requires believers to preserve and promote the Gospel of Life in politics and their everyday lives. It requires them to privilege the natural moral laws, defined by the Catholic doctrines, as non-negotiable, and thereby potentially harming the church-state separation principle as well as opening up the discursive field for illiberal rhetoric and policy, which will be discussed in detail in the later chapters. The focus on lay and familial involvement in civil society must also be put within the larger context of the Church’s invigorated calls for ‘New Evangelization’, aimed at regaining influence and combating secularism, in which Opus Dei again plays an important role (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 13). The organizational prerequisites for such activities in Croatia were met a few years after the signing of the Concordats with the Holy See, with the gradual founding of Church offices and pastoral care services for family and marriage in the early 2000’s. The discourses of the Catholic Church produce politicizing frames which are used by the RNR – gender ideology, sovereignty issues, even populism. Even though the ideology of the movement is based on a populist demand for more direct democracy, and its actors primarily mobilize citizens around petitions and referendums claiming to give power back to the people, the

origin of the movement's ideology is in the deeply anti-modernist and anti-democratic rejection of moral pluralism, individualism and diversity in favour of a collectivist, conservative vision of society guided by God's laws.

The Croatian Catholic Church Weaponizes Gender Ideology

In his Christmas homily, delivered in December 2012, Cardinal Josip Bozanić introduces gender ideology for the first time in the public discourse in Croatia. The topic was thus introduced directly by the Church almost six months before the founding of 'In the Name of the Family' – the central social movement organization of the RNR. Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, he warns about the dangers of an anthropological revolution attacking both humanity and the Creator himself.

'Brothers and sisters in faith, strong is the Pope's outcry directed at our civilization; an outcry similar to those of Roman Pope's and our blessed Alojzije Stepinac, from times of totalitarianisms which trampled on the image of man and presented themselves as deities. This 'new philosophy'... goes against all great monotheistic religions, to which more than 90% of citizen's of Croatia belong to... Let's lean on God and pray for our faith to be strengthened, because its increasingly clear that in today's society it's not easy to be a Christian, Catholic, a believer.' (Bozanić 2012)

Through the mentioning of the famous communist martyr Cardinal, the speech invokes the victimhood of the Croatian nation and conjures the populist reversal in which the Catholic believer becomes an endangered, threatened minority. The context of his warning was the center-left Government's announcement of the introduction of a new health education curriculum which would include teaching primary and secondary school children about gender equality as well as the existence and respect of different sexual minorities. A month after the homily, the CBC published a press release to address the health education program,

as well as gender ideology as an attack on human dignity – a part of the ‘culture of death which is dissolving Christian culture and civilization’ (CBC 2013, 1). In October 2014, the CBC published a comprehensive document on gender ideology titled ‘Man and Woman He Created Them’. Other than the strictly doctrinal understandings of the ‘culture of death’, complementarity and moral relativism, the document introduces most of the discursive topics which would be adopted by the RNR movement, especially salient the cycle of contention regarding the Istanbul Convention: totalitarianism and communism; homosexuality; attack on family and children; parent’s rights; conspiracy of elites; as well as the notion of a ‘dictatorship from above’ (CBC 2014). The latter is especially important and interesting as an innovation when compared to Papal doctrines and writings, clearly positioning the Croatian Catholic Church on the nationalist and sovereigntist side of the political spectrum:

‘Gender ideology is implemented not only in educational, but also in legislative systems... This is done through different international institutions, starting with the UN and European institutions all the way to domestic legislation. Together with other ideological trends, gender ideology is becoming established as a spiritual dictatorship suffocating personal and social freedom without compromise. This anthropological revolution is imposed top-down, spreading from different centers of power, trying to encompass the whole of humanity.’ (CBC 2014, 8)

Continuing to comment on the unnatural manipulation of human nature, the sovereigntist and conspiratorial tone is emphasized with an ending interrogative question: ‘Who would blind humanity in such a way; who would play with it?!’ (CBC 2014, 10). By 2017, armed by Pope Francis’ understanding of ‘ideological colonization’ (Pope Francis in San Martin 2017) , the Croatian Church reinvented its own traditional discourse on the importance of its role in Croatian society: ‘The Church intercedes to stand for the freedom of individuals and nations and will not accept any type of colonization which would encroach upon the anthropology on which we create and build our identity’ (CBC 2017). Given that the context of Pope Francis’ understanding of ideological colonization relates to Western secular values imposed on non-

Western societies, its adoption by the Croatian Church marks an interesting shift from its traditional pro-European stance, affirming Croatia's belonging to Western Christianity, to a discourse which opens up a space for the articulation of Euroscepticism.

Finally, while the Church itself today avoids expressing openly anti-Serbian sentiments⁸, and the RNR movement boasted about receiving support from the Serbian Orthodox Church during the marriage referendum campaign, the domestic Serbian political elite is still targeted as the Other – as the corrupt minority which is part of the system of oppression against the Catholic Croats⁹. Denunciation of Serbs is largely framed within the human rights discourse, attacking alleged instances of hate speech, intolerance, corruption and political repression. The exclusive aspect of the discourse is therefore mostly realized through the human rights reversal, or the victim-perpetrator reversal, where the minority is constructed as the elitist oppressor of the majority people. In this case, this division crosses even ethnic lines, forming the 'good', 'organic' majority of Serbs who care for their culture and traditions and the 'bad', 'corrupt' or 'agressive' politicized minority. RNR's reveals strong links with traditional prejudice and stereotypes about the Serbian minority in Croatia. First, the implied criminality, aggressiveness and disloyalty of Serbs which is inherently there even when dormant, just waiting for a chance to repeat history and rebel against Croatia's sovereignty. Secondly, the division between the 'good' and the 'bad' Serbs, where the majority gets to define what the actual legitimate interests, actions and values of the minority are. Thirdly, the request for depoliticization of the Serbian minority, who's only legitimate field of action and

⁸ However, individual priests and bishops like Damir Stojić or Košić, known for their radical rhetoric, do not shy away from exclusive nationalism, nor are they sanctioned for it by the Church.

⁹ The results of the analysis of the RNR's anti-Serbian discourse are taken from an unpublished paper 'I Wish I were a Minority, Too': An Analysis of Anti-Serbian Prejudice in the Discourse of the Contemporary Radical Right in Croatia', written as a term paper for the course 'The Sociology of Prejudice: Understanding the Methods of Social Research' at Nationalism studies, Central European University, 2018.

protection is that of maintaining cultural heritage and traditions. Fourthly, and related to the previous one, the exclusion of the Serbian minority from the discourse on 'real' social problems which are faced by the majority (minorities only have minority-related issues), which is an important strategy of in-group and out-group distinction, preventing interethnic solidarity (Čolović and Opačić 2017, 165). Finally, the trope of the 'ethnic entrepreneur' whose involvement in politics is always viewed with suspicion, who incites interethnic tensions only to profit personally from it. The way in which interdiscursivity between the anti-Serbian rhetoric is established with the Istanbul Convention will also be mentioned in the following chapter. It is important to point out the somewhat paradoxical nature of the RNR's discourse on the Serbs: traditional ethnic prejudices against Serbs are utilized within the populist divide to denounce the Serbian party and media as part of the corrupt minority elite, but the 'real' Serbian people is still partially extricated as a depoliticized 'good' minority, preserving its traditional culture and life.

THE CONTEXT AND CONTENTION SURROUNDING THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

While the Church in Croatia managed to realize most of its interests through the ratification of the quite generous four Concordats with the Holy See, as was previously mentioned, and managed to establish itself as the symbolic authority – the protector of the nation – developing a permanent institutional access to the 'halls of power' was not quite as successful. The process of Europeanization and liberalization of the politics and policies as well as the development of an institutionalized civil society endangered the Church's monopoly in areas of family policies, social policies and the relevance of its doctrinal

understandings of marriage, sex and gender roles. This process culminated with the victory of the centre-left coalition in 2011, which promised to further liberalize policies in the mentioned areas. The Church's role of the 'movement midwife' for the new religious nationalist right served several functions. First, to deal with its increasing unpopularity and the fall of people's trust in the Church, which was partly a result of its direct and open entanglement with HDZ, it created a movement of lay activists who can provide the necessary political distance and act as a buffer to the Church's direct political involvement, but can also work directly with people and mobilize support for the Church. Second, to mobilize the conservative population, mostly HDZ's voters, against the new left-wing policies endangering Church's authority. Finally, to reassert its right to publicity, to social and political involvement, against increasing secularization and a highly anti-clerical civil society. Most importantly, through the adoption of the human rights discourse and engagement with activism through CSO's as carriers of the new movement, the Church managed to reassert itself as a political stakeholder and to gain new forms of institutional access.

The discourse on 'gender ideology' was the Church's primary weapon, crafted to acquire issue ownership, set the political agenda, and to delegitimize not only the left-wing, but also the more moderate parts of HDZ which do not fall in line with the ultraconservative agenda. Through the populist construction of 'Us' and 'Them' – where 'Them' includes the mainstream parties of both parts of the political spectrum, the Church again positions itself on the side of the Croat people, as a protector of the 'common sense' traditions, values, and self-evident truths which the decadent, corrupt elites, together with, or even in service of their international counterparts, have abandoned. While the RNR movement tries to capitalize on other issues such as anti-Serbian politics, memory politics concerning the Homeland war and

its 'national heroes', as well as social policies reflecting the Church's anti-capitalist stance¹⁰, it is not able to acquire issue ownership over them, since most of the issues are already covered either by (parts of the) HDZ, or the growing populist party 'Living Wall', mobilizing on an anti-banker discourse and social issues. Gender ideology therefore functions as an easily understandable, 'common sense' discourse which capitalizes on the fears and prejudices of people, on homophobia and transphobia, political disenfranchisement and a sense of a threatened national identity. It seems to serve the function which is most commonly taken up by the anti-immigrant discourse of the Western (and increasingly Eastern) European radical right. The chapter continues to analyze one specific cycle of contention – regarding the ratification of the Istanbul Convention – which best demonstrates the different elements of the RNR's discourse, its proliferation, relation to other meta-topics and its mobilization capacities.

On 24 November 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the accession of the EU to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women (the 'Istanbul Convention', IC). The next day, in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković announced that his centre-right Government would start a procedure to ratify the Convention which a previous Government had signed in 2013. The Convention was framed in the media as an important instrument in the further and more thorough protection of women from violence. A month later, an article titled 'What is the Istanbul Convention?' was published on the news portal *narod.hr*¹¹, owned by the religious right-wing NGO 'In the Name of Family', claiming the Convention aims at introducing 'gender ideology' (GI) into Croatia. Two weeks later, a petition was started on the CitizenGO

¹⁰ Such as the campaign to ban work on Sundays.

¹¹ 'narod' meaning 'nation' or 'people' in Serbo-Croatian

platform to collect signatures online against the ratification of the Convention. Soon after, in January 2017, two Croatian MP's, both closely tied to the RNR movement, condemned the IC for bringing the harmful 'gender ideology' 'through the back door' and under the guise of protecting women. In the following months, leading government and opposition officials supported the ratification, including the relevant ministers from the ruling right-wing HDZ. A working body of the Croatian Parliament was formed to start the ratification procedure, including two external members from the radical conservative groups Ordo Iuris¹² and INF.

In mid-April, the EU Commissioner for Human Rights sent a letter to the Croatian PM to press for the swift ratification of the Convention, and a month later, the European Council adopted two decisions on the signing of the Istanbul Convention. The formal, legally required public discussion on the ratification law was started in May, with the RNR groups and their parliamentary representatives mobilizing and engaging to formulate a thorough legal and political critique of the Convention. Simultaneously, the main Catholic weekly newspaper 'Glas Koncila' published an interview with a legal expert criticizing the IC's focus on violence as gender-based. In July and August of 2017, other NGO's from the RNR movement, namely GROZD and Vigilare publicly opposed the IC, contributing to the discussion and holding conferences. By mid-summer, the main the controversies and debates proliferated and IC was on the agenda of most mainstream media as well as political parties. In September 2017, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, with the right-wing Croatian MEP's split between positive and negative votes, triggering a debate and division within the mainstream party in power, the HDZ.

The Croatian Bishops' Conference (CBC) publicly condemned the IC as promoting a gender ideology which goes against 'human dignity' and the natural, moral laws. A new

¹² The Polish radical conservative group known for its lobbying against abortion

citizen's initiative called 'The Truth About the Istanbul Convention' was formed and started a fearmongering campaign against the IC with strongly transphobic and homophobic rhetoric, using discursive strategies to link the Convention with pedophilia, indoctrination and confusion of children regarding their sex/gender identity. Starting from November, individual bishops, as well as the CBC, started publicly attacking the ratification process and holding public forums, educational conferences and meetings to educate people about the alleged dangers of the Convention.

The Prime Minister, a representative of the pro-European centrist wing of HDZ, did not change his position and continued supporting the IC, despite strong protests from within his own party, the Catholic Church and parts of civil society. In order to appease them, the Government included an 'interpretive statement' in the ratification law, stating that 'The Republic of Croatia believes the Convention's provisions do not contain the obligation to introduce gender ideology in Croatia's legal and education system nor the obligation to change the constitutional definition of marriage' (HINA 2018). After meeting with Church representatives, Plenković managed to gain lukewarm support for the statement from Church officials, although the RNR movement fiercely rejected it, claiming it has no enforceable legal validity or relevance. The culmination of contention occurred in late March and early April of 2018, with two protests against the IC being held in Zagreb and Split, with several thousands of protestors demanding the non-ratification of the Convention. On 13 April 2018, the Croatian Parliament successfully ratified the Istanbul Convention with an overwhelming majority of 110 votes. Out of the thirty negative votes, 14 were members of the HDZ who refused to bow down to party discipline. The RNR movement responded by starting an initiative to collect signatures for a referendum to change electoral laws, demanding preferential voting, more accountability and loosening the supposedly 'overrepresentative' system of ethnic minority representation. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention was the

direct cause of the formation of a new organization called ‘The People Decide’, aiming to prevent by referendum the repetition of what they claim to be ‘a betrayal of the people’ from Christian democratic representatives in the Parliament.

FIELDS OF ACTION, GENRES AND DISCURSIVE TOPICS

The discourse topics all fall within the two of the following fields of action, as defined by Wodak (Wodak and Meyer, 29): the formation of public attitudes, opinions and will and the field of political control. Within these fields, the political (sub)genres used are press releases and conferences, interviews and TV/radio debates, petitions, declarations, news articles and opinion pieces, as well as educational public forums and seminars. The following discursive topics and sub-themes are developed within the general macro-topic of ‘gender ideology’ which is the defining element of the Istanbul Convention within the RNR discourse:

1. An unscientific¹³ ideology
 - a. Attack on reality and ‘common sense’
 - b. A denial of God’s creation, inherent human nature and dignity
 - c. Social engineering of ‘a new man’
2. Dismantling of marriage and family
 - a. An attack on parenthood and traditional marriage
 - b. Threat of indoctrination and violence against children
 - c. Propaganda of homosexuals, transsexuals and pedophiles
3. Suspension of democracy and human rights

¹³ 'Unscientific' elements of the IC refer to the definitions of gender – social scientific understanding of the concept is considered to be unproven, while biology and medicine are referred to as scientific legitimation of the sex binary.

- a. Violation of human rights and freedom of religion
 - b. Violation of parent's rights to decide on their children's upbringing
 - c. Non-democratic dictatorship of the minority over the majority
4. An attack on sovereignty and national identity
- a. A loss of sovereignty of the Croatian people
 - b. An attack on traditional values and Croatian identity
 - c. A conspiracy of elites, Eurocrats and NGO's
5. A financial burden marked by corruption
- a. Costly implementation which burdens the state budget
 - b. Profit for a minority of NGO's propagating GI

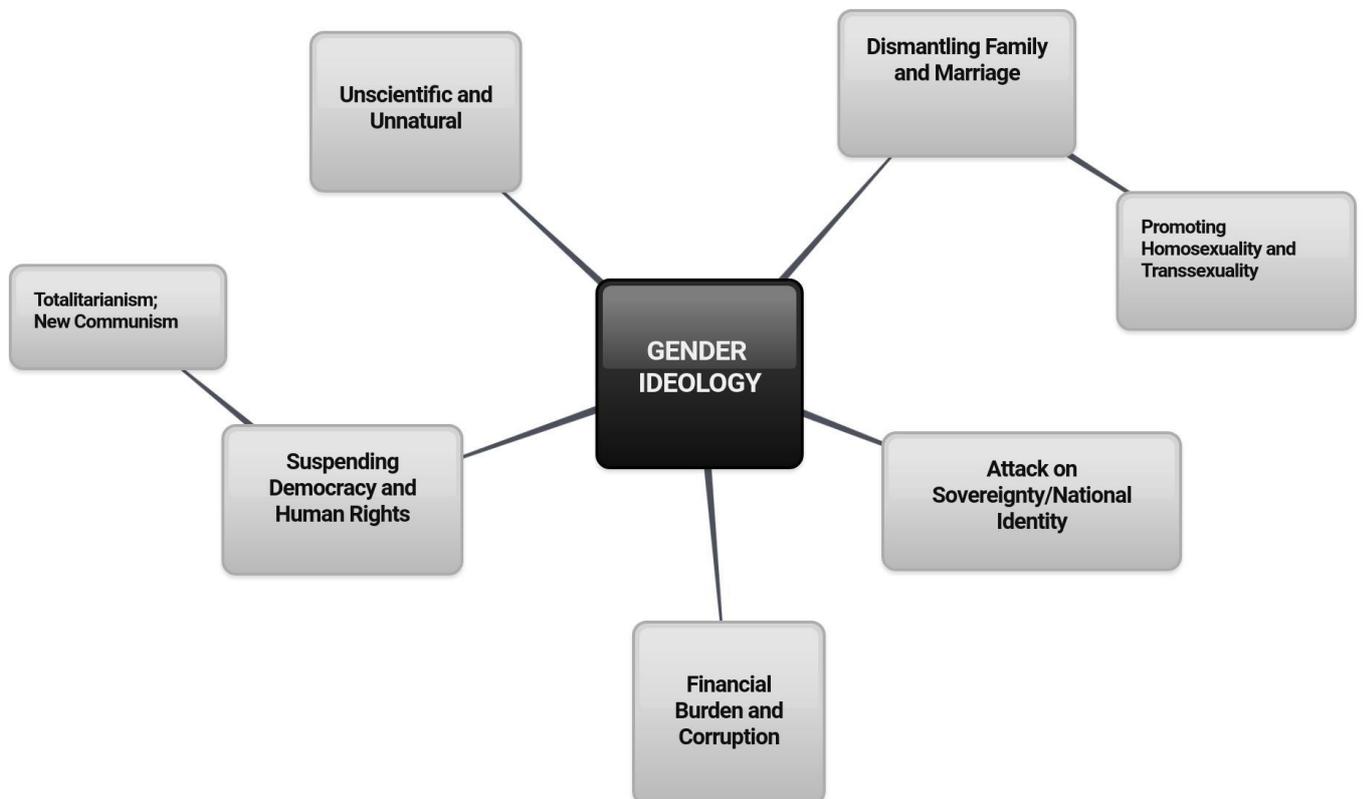


Figure 1 – Interdiscursivity

ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES AND ARGUMENTATION MEANS

Reinforcing the conservative Catholic doctrines

The Church's stake in combating 'gender ideology' is both an ideological struggle over the discourses and policies on family and gender roles and a struggle for protecting the material interests and activities in which the Church engages regarding domestic violence, family counseling, its marriage and educational services provided to Christian families and individuals. It also serves the function of reinforcing and widening the Church's sphere of influence in society by creating issue ownership in a seemingly depoliticized field, reestablishing its own right to publicity, social and political influence in light of secularizing tendencies. In the center of the theoretical rejection of the IC is the denial of the concept of gender-based violence and a rejection of feminism. According to the Vatican's doctrine on the 'complementarity between women and man', recognizing the gendered aspect of violence sets a dangerous precedent of pitting women against men, warned against in one of the texts through the *topos of comparison* with communism:

'Like communist ideology, which viewed social inequalities as a struggle between classes, gender ideology views violence against women as a product of the struggle between the sexes – as if the male and female sex were mutually opposed rather than complementing each other'. (Munjin on N1, 2017)

However, a bigger concern for the Church and its RNR representatives seems to be the IC's comprehensive and feminist focus on the woman as the victim – its goal to prevent and protect women from violence and remove the victim from her violent surrounding. Such an approach differs from the Church's counseling practices which focus on preserving the marriage as a sacred institution. As stated by the CBC: 'preventive actions should strengthen, build and fortify the family, instead of using domestic violence as a lever for destroying the family' (CBC 2017). The Church is also alarmed by a provision requiring priests to report

certain instances of severe violence to authorities despite the confessional secret, claiming this ‘violates the right to religious freedom’ (CBC 2017). The Church and the RNR are framing the issue not within the patriarchal context of violence, but the dangers which threaten the family:

‘The age of entering sexual relations is getting earlier, promiscuity is growing, so is the prevalence of STD’s, the number of marriages is declining and the number of divorces growing, fewer children are born (demographic collapse). Step by step, the family and family values are being destroyed, so is society, since family is its pillar.’

‘Everything possible must be done to achieve reconciliation and strengthening of the marital union, because this is the way marriage as an institution is protected, and simultaneously the constitutional obligation of the state to protect the family is being concretized.’ (CBC 2017)

In an implicit argument, fighting violence against women, as prescribed by the IC, can further endanger the family and marriage. Instead of preserving marriage, the IC is part of the problem. Again, the slippery slope and the *topos of threat* are used to warn against the coming collapse of civilization. Although the Church recognizes domestic violence as a social problem, the IC endangers its approach and work within this field since it demands stronger penetration of the state in what is traditionally a private sphere; a sacred sphere of family and marriage in which priests have a privileged access to mediate and resolve problems within the holy union. According to one priest commenting on the consequences of ratifying the IC:

‘The biggest problem shall be the fear of authorities and institutions, a constant repression against people who will be exposed to the revaluation and reinterpretation of the values of marriage, family and its relations, followed by new legal norms by which combating violence will surely turn into violence against public morals, tradition and the culture which defines an individual’s identity’. (Matulić in Slobodna Dalmacija 2018)

The Church fears the competition and redefinition of its own established doctrines and strategies of pastoral care, social services and counseling which are based on a traditionalist understanding of marriage as a private, sacred and protected sphere governed by the natural

laws of love, complementarity and faith. From this perspective, the struggle against 'gender ideology' seems to be a backlash against secularization and decreasing influence of Church doctrines and social influence. The Church is thus interested in elevating this seemingly marginal issue to the level of a threatening violent repression of human nature and tradition. Additionally, by attempting to achieve issue ownership over this field, it enhances its political and strategic position, as well as its mobilizing potential, not only vis-à-vis the left-wing, but also vis-à-vis the moderate currents of HDZ which might not share the Church's ultraconservative agenda.

A Threat to Humanity, Law and the Wallet

The overarching discursive strategy used by the RNR is the creation of an unreal scenario of threat delivered through the *topos of syllogism*. It is used to generalize a specific definition of gender from the text of the Convention which is used to define the concept of gender-based violence to invoke the threat of disastrous and 'far-reaching consequences for all citizens of Croatia' (CitizenGO 2017). In this scenario, the *slippery slope fallacy* is employed to demonstrate how the ratification of one international document can end up in nothing less than 'the end of Christian civilization' (Mijić 2018) and a 'redesigning of human society' (Čapalija 2017). The two central legitimation strategies described by Wodak as characteristic for the radical right are used by various actors in different texts, namely authorization and moral evaluation. Depending on the actor, with pronounced differences between Church hierarchy and CSO's, appeals to God, human nature, science, law as well as 'common sense'

are used to denounce GI as an ideology¹⁴. Appeals to ‘the people’ are also salient and will be discussed further in when addressing the populist aspects of the discourse. The center of the controversy is the IC provision defining gender as ‘socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men’ (IC, Article 3). As interpreted by INF, such a definition

‘introduces a dichotomy between a person’s sex as sex and the social dimension of sex, calling it ‘gender’, because it implies that sex and its social dimension are two separate and unconnected realities, which has absolutely no basis in reality nor science, but stems from ideology – gender ideology’ (Munjin 2016).

Here, not only science, but also the *topos of reality*, which warrants if something is ‘real’ it is also how it ‘should’ be, are used to denounce the alleged ideological character of the definition. The appeal to science is also misleading and fallacious since it is indeed a definition which is adequate if compared to the scientific consensus existing within sociology, psychology and social sciences in general. The dominant appeal to authority used by the intellectuals and activists within the movement is one using *the arrogance of ignorance* (Wodak 2015, 6):

Common sense warrants that a person which is of male sex is a – man, and a person which is of female sex is a – woman. (INF 2017)

In one text, the author, himself a right-wing journalist, explicitly notes the importance of understanding the common-sense perspective as central even when compared to Christian values:

‘It’s not as important that gender ideology is contrary to Christian anthropology, but, before else, it is contrary to common sense.’ (Šola 2017)

¹⁴ Ideology as a concept is used by the RNR as an inherently controversial, artificial, political and non-scientific set of theories, values and beliefs which are propagated by elites with specific interests.

Another common argumentation scheme refers to the authority of law, specifically, the Croatian Constitution. Although several Croatian laws recognize the concept of gender identity, including the Anti-discrimination Law, the constitution refers only to equality between the sexes, which is used by the RNR to denounce it as an unconstitutional and foreign concept in Croatia's legal system. The *topos of law* also relates interdiscursively with the strategy of autonomization and warning against the loss of autonomy:

‘The Istanbul Convention establishes institutes... which are completely foreign to the Croatian constitutional system and Croatian tradition. They cannot be helpful in preventing violence against women or domestic violence.’(Marija Radelj 2017)

‘The ratification of the IC would have negative consequences for the Republic of Croatia and its legal order and would lead to violation of human and constitutional rights of its citizens.’ (INF 2017)

The invocation of the ‘legal order’ or Croatian ‘legal tradition’ is an important and recurring discursive strategy in RNR's discourse, serving three central functions. First, it provides an aura of authority to their claim making which makes it easier to argue against change. Secondly, it veils the less rational argument claiming a threatened national identity and values behind a more objective and ‘non-ideological’ interpretation of ‘legal traditions’. Thirdly, it enables the RNR actors to frame the actions of those supporting the ratification of the IC within the field of semi-legal or illegal and unjust activities.

As the cycle of contention around the Istanbul Convention was nearing its culmination and end (with its ratification), the *topos of finances* and *topos of burden* were introduced as an additional argumentation strategy used not only for predication, but also establishing interdiscursivity between the topic of financial burden and sovereignty issues. The alleged conspiratorial link between an unelected international body of ideologists

represented by GREVIO¹⁵, local NGO's which will benefit financially from the ratification and political elites, invokes another scenario of threat linked to common macro-topics in Croatian politics, primarily political corruption, inequality and the problem of 'uhljebi'¹⁶:

'There is no public interest in the ratification of the Convention, only benefits for politicians wheedling to Brussels and the parapolitical organizations which will get huge financial means for activities which are unrelated to victims of violence.'
(Lukačin 2018)

The attacks on civil society and NGO's have been on the agenda of the RNR in Croatia since one of their members served shortly as a Minister of Culture, promising to 'drain the swamp' and rid the Croatian people from the 'parasitic left-liberals' living off of the state budget while attacking Croatian identity and sovereignty. The repeated mentioning of 'billions' which will allegedly be spent to implement the ratification serves to portray the IC as a corrupt endeavor of redistributing money to perverted leftist 'uhljebs', which resonates very clearly to the macro-topics of high ranking political corruption scandals troubling Croatia in the last decades. The discursive strategy using *topoi of finance* and *burden* goes beyond the mere economic logic – it's function, previously tested during the RNR's campaigning against the Serbian minority in Croatia, is to enrage people through a simple argument: your own money is being spent to force upon you something which you don't want but cannot reject. Such a strategy reinforces the populist division between the people and the corrupt elite working against it, best exemplified by one of the speeches of an activist during the Zagreb protests against the IC:

¹⁵ GREVIO is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Its main task is to publish reports evaluating measures taken by the Parties of the Convention to give effects to the provisions of the Convention.

¹⁶ A common word which could be translated to 'parasites', used for those who allegedly live off of the state budget without doing any meaningful work, mostly targeting state administration employees, but also NGO's in the RR's discourse.

‘They are financed to protect beaten women, but they organize protests against the Minister of Culture or war veterans. They get money to protect raped women, and they falsify the truth about the Homeland War. They get money to protect frightened children, but they use the public money to organize campaigns against the referendum on marriage or to protest against the Catholic church.’ (Lukačin 2018)

The CBC and individual clergy members use a somewhat different argumentation, appealing to the divine and natural laws as a central source of authority. As explained by Bishop Košić, GI aims to ‘cancel the God-given natural law of difference between men and women’ (Košić 2017). The main press release of CBC dealing with ‘gender ideology’ was appropriately called ‘Man and Woman He Created Them’. Quoting *Persona Humana*, a 1975 document published by the Church’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which interprets issues of sexuality from Divine Law, the CBC proclaims:

‘We are all called upon to respect the principle which warrants that there is no true advocacy of human dignity if basic laws of human nature are not respected.’ (CBC 2017)

The sacralized discourse of the Church establishes the much needed link utilized for the *slippery slope fallacy* which enables a direct causal effect from a seemingly random international document to the destruction of human dignity, thus proving to be a useful intensification factor used even in the non-religious discourse of the movement, especially when it is translated into the condemnation of GI as ‘unnatural’.

Strategies of Creating Difference

Wodak identifies five main strategies used to analyze how discourse is used to create social divisions and attach normative evaluations to different groups, namely: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation and intensification/mitigation (Wodak 2009, 73).

The nomination strategy is used to construct in-groups and out-groups, which in the discourse on gender ideology implies a relatively simple dichotomy between a homogenized ‘Croat people’ and a more diverse set of actors conspiring to implement GI. As proclaimed by one of the leaders of the RNR movement: ‘This is a struggle for our identity. For the Croatian people’ (Ilčić 2017). While ‘the people’ are almost exclusively nominated as Croat, or Catholic Croat¹⁷, and the Serbian minority elite personalized in Milorad Pupovac¹⁸ is occasionally blamed for lobbying for the IC or blackmailing the Government with the same goal, the out-group is primarily a collective of international actors conspiring with an internal ‘other’.

The ratification of IC is denounced because it would ‘enable the suppression of tradition, culture, religion and other values important for the Croatian people’ (Munjin in Tašev 2017). Furthermore, the in-group is a precisely defined group sharing Christian values and traditions, living a heterosexual family life with children, as portrayed by INF’s visual logo. When it comes to women, rather than protecting them, the GI supposedly endangers women by attacking motherhood and ‘creating a new stereotype according to which being a traditional woman is unwanted and degrading’ (Mijić 2018). Finally, feminist activists are denounced as working against women. As one female protester stated:

‘I don’t want our tax money to be used for financing women who present themselves as protectors, but simultaneously insult, degrade and label all women who think and live different than they do.’ (Lukačin 2018).

The stereotypical figure of motherhood is invoked by female activists from the RNR movement itself. During the Zagreb protest, the different female activists presented themselves repeatedly as mothers, with strong cheers and applause following the statements.

¹⁷ Zašto Hrvatima katolicima smeta

¹⁸ The most prominent politician of the Serbian minority in Croatia

Opposing the ‘Croat people’, the families which are its basis and their traditional way of life is an out-group which is a conspiring cluster of three different elements: the international actors (‘the Eurocrats’, ‘Brussels’ and other organizations); the deviants (‘homosexuals’, ‘transsexuals’ and pedophiles) and the domestic corrupt and self-serving political elites and NGO’s. As proclaimed by friar Knezović during the second Split protest against the IC:

‘This gathering in Split was a previously silenced voice and outcry of the people against an alienated political elite. I’ve experienced the gathering as a moral battle in which the weapon of love is used.’ (Knezović 2018)

Perhaps the most revealing and wholesome example of both nomination and predication strategies used to construct the out-group was provided during the first Split protest against the IC, given in October 2017 by John Vice Batarelo, the leader of the RNR NGO ‘Vigilare’, an Australian-Croat returnee and the head of the Family Pastoral Office of the Zagreb Archbishopric:

‘Their decadent, weird and indescribable ideas have flooded our institutions and laws – not an accidental, but a carefully planned action. Most of these international institutions and their Croatian followers are anti-family, anti-children, anti-tradition and finally, anti-Catholic. They want us to reject fundamental and obvious truths and accept their perverted ideas by force, under command of faceless Eurocrats.’ (Vice Batarelo 2017)

Referential dissimilation is used to construct the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ with strong use of pejorative and derogatory denotations. Finally, the intensification of the discourse is achieved in the rest of the speech through the *topos of threat*, invoking the image of endangered, molested and indoctrinated children. A manipulative interpretation of the provision of the IC which defines women as also including ‘girls younger than 18 years’ warrants that the Convention actually promotes pedophilia. Furthermore, *topos of example* is commonly used to warn against the consequences of ratification, one of the most common

ones being the image of a man (transgendered women are not recognized as an identity) becoming able to urinate in toilets together with ‘little girls’ and ‘our daughters’. According to the flyer handed out by the initiative ‘The Truth About the Istanbul Convention’, gender ideology forces people and children from an early age to choose their own gender:

‘According to these laws, everything is possible: e.g. a Canadian (52 year-old) man left his wife and child to live as a 6 year-old girl which ‘plays’ with the grandchildren of his adoptive parents. An American (22 year-old) man went through 110 operations to become a ‘genderless alien’...’ (Istina o Istanbulskoj, 2018)

Such discourse heavily rests upon the traditional homophobic and transphobic prejudice linking non-heterosexual individuals to pedophilia, perversion and mental illness. It is thus made clear that the ultimate Other not belonging to the body of the Croat nation are the deviant sexual minorities whose goal is to indoctrinate children, with the help of domestic and international elites. Homophobia and transphobia are thus used to suppress intra-national difference and as a predicational strategy used to label both the domestic and international elites as in service of dangerous deviants. The classical populist *victim-perpetrator reversal* is used to obscure the actual powerlessness and discrimination faced by these minorities and to posit them as a minority which is, in fact, oppressing the majority in collusion with the elites. While commenting on the Istanbul Convention, Bishop Košić went as far as to claim that it is the work of the Devil, thereby framing the contention surrounding its ratification as an absolute struggle between Good and Evil:

‘The goal is to seduce youth and create a new order and society without God and family. The Devil wishes to destroy family and has set this as his goal.’ (Košić 2017)

During the mass, the Bishop introduces the topic of the Convention immediately after condemning the removal of a memorial for war veterans from the 1990's¹⁹, establishing interdiscursivity between Serbian aggression, the war and gender ideology:

‘What kind of battle is fought today and what kind of ambush and temptation does the Devil put on our personal and family path?... The Homeland War was a righteous, defensive war from Serbian aggression and has still not finished – it is being led by different means, imputations and distortions of truth. It is necessary to root this out and fight for the truth and freedom of all of the people in the Homeland.’ (Košić 2017)

The use of war rhetoric and the nationalist framing of threat serves as an intensification strategy which is realized through *particles creating continuity* in order to establish a link between the War and the IC. That the Devil is waging a constant and continuous war on Croats using different means is related to the traditional discourse on Croat Catholics as the chosen nation, exemplified in the nationalist motto introduced by the Croatian Party of Rights: ‘Bog i Hrvati!’ (‘*God and Croats!*’). A similar link is established with the period of communist repression.

From Anti-Communism to Euroscepticism

Another argumentation strategy used by different actors within the RNR movement is realized through the uses of *topos of history* and *topos of comparison* which invoke the similarities between communism or ‘cultural Marxism’ and gender ideology, or totalitarianism in general. The anti-communist discourse as an important part of the radical right ideology is a regional specificity which is used to invoke different types of threat

¹⁹ After strong pressures, the Government removed the memorial which used the fascist Ustasha salute: ‘For Homeland, Ready!’

scenarios, most commonly the fear of political repression, violence and negation of national/religious identity. Communism is also the most common danger invoked by the Catholic Church, itself recognized and self-proclaimed since communist times as a protector and care-giver of the nation. In a speech given during the first protest in Split, reverend Josip Mužić of Split quotes Pope John Paul II:

‘He speaks about the 20th century, when various ideology of evil were created – Nazism and communism – but among those he includes gender ideology and wonders if maybe it is even more sinister and hidden since it tries to use human rights against the rights of humans and families... Our time is marked by a growing evil which uses parts of the perverse systems that were previously used to oppress and practice violence. There has, therefore, been a collusion of elements of previous totalitarian regimes which have joined forces to spread gender ideology.’ (Mužić 2017)

The invocation of communism and totalitarianism is a common *topos of threat* used by the radical right to denounce opponents. However, in the discourse surrounding gender ideology, it serves an additional purpose, related to the issue of the very core of a person’s dignity and what it means to be human. Gender ideology, just as communism and Marxism, is presented as an artificial project of social engineering which aims to destroy tradition, religion and the natural order to establish a new one. It is also a violent imposition of a minority worldview onto ‘the people’ – thereby threatening democracy, sovereignty and human rights. While Euroscepticism has been present only marginally in far-right fringe groups in Croatia, this reinterpretation of Croatia’s place in Europe and the dangers it presents to traditional life are heavily influenced and linked to the Church’s discourse, exemplified by Pope Francis’ concept of ‘ideological colonization’. Since the dominant nationalist narrative in Croatia since the 1990’s has been one of ‘escaping the Balkans’ and joining the EU where Croatia has a rightful place due to its historical role in protecting Christianity, the Euroscepticism of the RNR movement is made more salient through the establishment of an interdiscursive link

between communism and the European union. This is best portrayed in the speech of Vice Batarelo, continuing from the previously quoted speech in Split about ‘faceless Eurocrats’:

‘Us Croats know very well how indoctrination looks like. Forty five years they were indoctrinating us here, and just as we finally set ourselves free from it, in blood, here comes a new supranational organization wishing to impose something, in an undemocratic manner, which most Croats do not want’. (Vice Batarelo 2017)

The text goes on to use examples simplifying the argument to the most principal and emotionally charged elements of the RNR discourse – the threat to children symbolized in the ‘man urinating in the same place where our underaged daughters use the toilet’ (Vice Batarelo 2017). The function of ‘gender ideology’ reveals itself clearly in this speech – its ability to invoke a simplistic, ‘common sense’, understandable and emotionally charged feeling of threat serves to mobilize people around the RNR’s agenda, with a clear anti-European, nationalist and traditionalist agenda.

Adoption of the Human Rights Discourse

Depending on the genre, audience and function of a specific text, the discourse on gender ideology swings from apocalyptic threats and pedophilia to human rights, democracy and legal arguments. Dominating in the petitions, press releases and public debates is the argument of the anti-democratic character of the IC which supposedly endangers human rights, specifically, the rights of parents to decide on their children’s upbringing as well religious freedom. This finding is in line with previous research pointing to the adoption of a human rights discourse from the RNR movement (Juroš et al. 2015) through the *victim-perpetrator reversal* in order to establish political legitimacy and avoid explicit prejudicial discourse frowned upon in the mainstream media and civil society.

Interdiscursivity is then easily established between different genres and fields of action, depending on the function and context of a given text, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

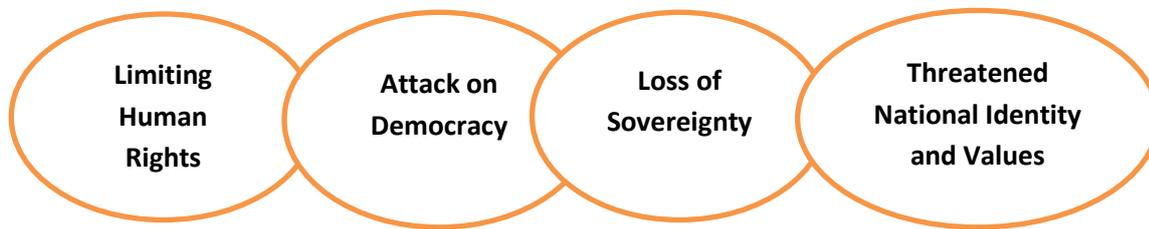


Figure 2 – Loss of Sovereignty

The discourse on GI as threatening to human rights is centered around the notion of state penetration into the sacred sphere of the family and an alleged attempt to indoctrinate children against the values and will of their parents. In the very first press release on the IC from INF, the *topos of consequence* warrants:

‘If the mentioned definition of ‘gender’ were to become binding, it would lead to the following consequences: ... 2. Limiting the primary role of parents in their child’s upbringing and decisions on their education. 3. Endangering freedom of religion because of intolerance towards religious communities caused by its teaching which differs from gender ideology...’ (Munjin 2016)

The human rights argument, as presented above, functions as a micro-level, individualized version of the loss of autonomy argument, and creates the interdiscursivity with issues of democracy, the people’s will and sovereignty. The endangered family is tightly connected to the Church, which is why challenging the teachings of the Church on issues around gender threatens not only religious freedom in the abstract, but also the influence of the Church in the social reproduction of the basic societal unit, its morals, traditions and values. Furthermore, the right to decide on the child’s upbringing relates to the right of the people to decide on their future, their values and their national identity.

The Catholic church, through the argument of the endangered religious freedom, posits itself on the side of ‘the people’ – as the traditional ally protecting the Croat identity against unwanted foreign influence and oppression. The alleged ‘intolerance’ towards religious communities is another example of the employment of the *victim-perpetrator reversal* in which the Catholic majority is actually endangered by the powerful minority and its ‘Christianophobia’. The language of human rights is thus decontextualized from its liberal roots and recontextualized within the populist radical right framework – in service of a nativist understanding of the homogenous, organic people threatened by the enemies conspiring from ‘within’ and from the ‘outside’. The RNR’s excessive focus on the threatened family serves as a symbolic and unifying signifier, a synecdoche in which the traditional family represents the nation as a whole; where the threatened and powerless daughters facing perverted men in a toilet are simultaneously the disenfranchised and powerless nation subjected to the dictates of ‘the Eurocrats’.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This thesis might prove useful for scholars wishing to develop conceptual and methodological tools for analyzing religious actors or religiously inspired social movements, their strategies and ideology, and it helps bridge the study of radical right-wing politics with gender and religious studies. It demonstrates the importance of analyzing religious actors and communities, their political involvement and the role they play within the populist radical right phenomenon. While the importance of ‘gender ideology’ or religious discourses in general is very context-dependent, and might not be salient everywhere, especially in countries where anti-immigrant discourse is dominant, it points out the relevance of religious

actors as agents of political action and change. Furthermore, the thesis locates the importance of gender issues in the radical right ideology, and how they intersect with issues of democracy, sovereignty, xenophobia and Euroscepticism. Religious nationalism in Croatia has emerged as an ideology inspired by Catholic doctrines and political interests and is seemingly filling the vacuum which has emerged since Croatia's EU accession in the radical right part of the political spectrum

The critical discourse analysis employed on both Church and movement documents, as well as other units of text relating to the IC cycle of contention, demonstrates the diffusion of discourses from the doctrines of the Catholic Church to the local Croatian clergy and the RNR movement. The analysis of both discursive intersections as well as the links between the actors, organizations and networks reveals the Croatian religious nationalist right as stemming from Catholic Church doctrines, its political agenda, its institutions and personal connections. Different individuals and organizations from the RNR movement have direct links with either Opus Dei, the Croatian Catholic Church, the Vatican or Catholic-initiated international organizations.

The highly religious discourse centered in the Papal theology on the 'culture of death', 'human ecology' and 'ideological colonization' is transformed into the nationalist, populist discourse aimed at mobilizing people against the political elites, international organizations as well as the secular policies challenging the CC's conservative doctrines on family, social policy, marriage and traditional sex/gender roles. By using 'gender ideology' as a central discursive topic of contention, the CCC itself adopts an openly nationalist, sovereigntist and populist position, creating the social division between the immoral corrupt elites and 'the people' – the Catholic Croats. The RNR movement itself focuses on creating scenarios of threat by linking gender ideology to different discursive topics – transphobia and homophobia, finance and corruption, loss of sovereignty and national identity. The discourse

on ‘gender ideology’ is highly adaptable to modifications and contextual reconfiguration and is articulated by the actors flexibly as communist, anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic, anti-Croatian or non-scientific. At the heart of the discourse is a ‘common sense’ understanding of the gender binary which represents the natural, God-given division of sexes, as well as the traditional family as central to the reproduction of a healthy nation. The central populist division is therefore constructed to *other* those who are twisting the natural laws, traditions and the will of the people – the international political elites, local elites and NGO’s, communists, liberals as well as the perverted sexual minorities, all of which are allegedly engaged in a conspiratorial plot to attack women and children and destroy the family. The analysis of the case of the Istanbul Convention has shown that the religious discourse on ‘gender ideology’ taken from the Catholic Church indeed functions as a symbolic glue – a nodal point around which Eurosceptic, xenophobic, homo/transphobic and populist attitudes are crystallized and expressed.

While the Catholic Church primarily weaponizes gender ideology to combat secularizing tendencies and policies which aim to dismantle its traditional, heteronormative and patriarchal doctrines on gender, family and morality, its discursive construction and political mobilization in the Croatian context serves several other important functions. First, it reaffirms the Church’s role as an important social and political actor, as a stakeholder with vested interests and a legitimate civil society partner that allegedly represents a majority of the conservative, Catholic population of Croats. Second, the articulation of a complex set of interdiscursive topics and ideological positions empowers the new religious nationalist movement to act not only as a civil society actor, but as a political one – one challenging the dominant, mainstream HDZ and influencing its policy positions through agenda setting and issue ownership. Third, in line with the doctrines on new evangelization which aim at mobilizing laity and reaffirming the role of Catholicism in contemporary societies, the Church

is creating a movement of educated, lay Catholics which are able to represent the Church's political interests and should simultaneously allow the Church to appear as non-interfering with governmental politics. The Catholic Church in Croatia and the international organizations promoting its agenda have fostered the creation of a new populist radical right actor in Croatia. Despite its poor performance in the elections, the RNR movement is able to successfully mobilize citizens, lobby the government, put pressure on the right-wing political parties, practice indirect democracy to change laws and policies and infiltrate the institutions as a relevant stakeholder in certain policy areas. The Church's conceptions of moral laws which are non-negotiable prerequisites of democratic life are revealed as anti-modernist and illiberal. The nationalist, populist adaptation of the gender ideology discourse in the Croatian contexts adopts other discursive topics and grievances which are historically and politically salient in the broader region as well, especially anti-communism and Euroscepticism.

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