

**Sexual Politics of Belonging:  
Sexual Identities, Nationalism, and Citizenship  
in Post-Yugoslav Croatia**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institutions and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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## Abstract

This research addresses the intersection of sexuality and nationalism in the context of individual self-identification practices of people who are marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. It focuses on the socio-historical context of post-Yugoslav Croatia where the exclusionary treatment of sexual minorities represented the constitutive element in the process of nationalization in the 1990s, and where the rights of sexual minorities became an important part of the discourses of tolerance emerging in relation to the processes of democratization and European Union accession in 2000s. Placing the practices of self-identification in a social context where nominal sexual tolerance is present along with practices of stigmatization, violence, and discrimination, this research explores how sexually marginalized people negotiate the dominant nationalist discourses of belonging in and through the process of self-identification and self-understanding emerging in their life narratives.

Drawing on postpositivist realist conception of identity as a product of dynamic interplay of the social and the personal, which opens up a space for individual agency, this project engages with the political relevance of (sexual) identity in relation to the struggles for social equality. It reveals that, in their life narratives, sexually marginalized people in Croatia develop different strategies of self-identification, some of which challenge nationalist notions of citizenship and belonging. These strategies can be identified as assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning. Research also demonstrates important role that social positionality plays in shaping the emancipatory potential of (sexual) identity. By revealing that identity construction process may result in different degrees of reification and subversion of the dominant order, and possibly open up a space for non-exclusionary relations, this project questions the view of identities as inherently exclusionary and inevitably harmful for the emancipatory politics present in much of queer theory scholarship.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The centrality of identity as an analytical category and object of research in the social sciences and humanities has been widely acknowledged (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The prominence that the concept of identity has gained in contemporary social theories is undoubtedly influenced by its salient presence as an important organizing element in the struggles against different modes of social oppression, LGBTIQ movement being one of them (Phelan, 1993; Alcoff, and Mohanty, 2006), as well as in the nationalizing processes still dominant in the globalized world (Brubaker, 1996; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Malešević, 2011). At the same time, in the past two decades the political utility of gender and sexual identities for emancipatory political struggles has been heavily contested from the position of queer theory. Informed by Butler's (1990, 1991, 1993) view of identities as "instruments of regulatory regimes" (Butler, 1991, p. 13) operating through the processes of categorization that stabilize the otherwise fluid self, queer theory scholars argue for a politics that would challenge the notion of identity as a useful ground in the struggles for equality (Warner, 1993; Duggan, 1994; Halperin, 1995; Bunzl, 1997; Jagose, 1996; Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005).

Situated in a scholarly context where the concept of identity represents an important yet contested analytical and political category, my research explores the intersection of nationalism and sexuality in relation to self-identification in order to reclaim the relevance of the concept. The position on identity that I take in this project is informed by postpositivist realism, which conceives of identity as a product of dynamic interplay of social and personal aspects of life, thus opening up a space for individual agency situated in the process of negotiation whereby identities are constructed (Alcoff, 2006; Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006; Wilkerson, 2007). Drawing on the notion of non-pre-determined agency located in socially embedded self-reflexivity, in my research I examine the ways in which the notion of citizenship is re/imagined from the differential positions of people "othered" on the grounds of their sexuality in the contemporary Croatian context of nation-building. I am analyzing the practices of self-identification in the life narratives of people whose sexual practices do not follow the hetero-norm in order to explore the ways in which nationalism as the dominant ideology of belonging has been challenged or reinforced by the narrative strategies of those who have been denied access to national belonging.

The main aim of my research is twofold. By examining the ways nationalism and sexuality constitute each other on the level of personal experiences and self-identification I will contribute to the ongoing discussions on the intersection of sexuality and nationalism/national citizenship. I will argue that these debates, by focusing exclusively on the larger processes of social structuring, have mostly overlooked the ways in which these larger processes influence and, in turn, are influenced by individual sense-making practices (Mosse, 1985; Stychin, 1998, 2003; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Nagel, 2003; Berlant and Warner, 2003; Bunzl, 2004; Richardson, 1998, 2004; Puar, 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem, 2008). Thus, one of the main goals of my research is to reveal how nationalism and sexuality constitute each other on the level of self-understanding. At the same time, by exploring whether and to what extent the particular position of “sexual minority” may carry a potential for progressive social change, I wish to revisit the political potential of (sexual) identity against the tendency in queer theory to argue for a “subjectless” queer critique (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005) over identity politics.

Regarding post-Yugoslav Croatia, the particular social context that is the focus of my research, it is above all the space of my activist engagements that this research pertains to. At the same time, it also represents a rich source for theorizing sexual identity, especially when it comes to its intersection with other “social totalities,”<sup>1</sup> such as nationalism in this case. The process of nationalization emerging in relation to the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) resulted in the constitution of Croatia as an independent nation-state at the beginning of the 1990s. The process was greatly informed by heterosexist discourses and practices serving as a tool for national homogenization. In particular, the project of building the Croatian nation emerged in relation to armed conflicts (1991-1995) and separation from Yugoslavia. It was centered on the discursive construction of an aggressive heterosexual masculine self as the basis of national identity. In the context of nationalist heteronormative discourses and politics anyone seen as non-heterosexual, particularly men, together with Serbs, women who did not procreate, and feminists were declared national enemies and as such were denied belonging in the nation (Pavlović, 1999; Sagasta, 2001; Vuletić, 2004, 2008). At the same time, some political practices of liberal democratization present in the post-socialist period opened up a space for liberal discourses of human rights to

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this term from Rosemary Hennessy (2000). Hennessy uses the term “social totality” to define the social structures which have “persistently [...] organized people’s lives across social formations and specific situations. Among these are capital’s extraction of surplus labor, imperialism’s tactics of eminent domain and white supremacy, and patriarchal gender hierarchies” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 26).



enter the public space, creating a counter-pressure. With financial aid from international donors, civil society associations, including the lesbian and gay organizations, emerged.

The influence of liberal discourses of global capitalism is more present in the period following the 2000 elections that brought about a change of political regime. The new government dominated by SDP (Social Democratic Party) introduced a new rhetoric and politics with accession to the European Union as the main political goal. Sexuality, and the rights of sexually marginalized people, came to the forefront of this accession process with a focus on the alleged implementation of European liberal democratic values of inclusive plurality and tolerance as a “proof” of Croatia’s “Europeanness.” However, as my analysis will demonstrate, although sexuality became a visible element in the process of national identity re-construction, the power of heteronormativity and the dominance of nationalism that inform the notion of citizenship have been hardly challenged. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the 2000s saw a great proliferation of lesbian, gay, and queer organizations with Zagreb Pride, which in 2011 celebrated its tenth anniversary, as the central event of the emerging struggles of sexual politics of visibility in Croatia.

Thus, post-Yugoslav Croatia represents a space where the complex entanglements of global and local practices and their influence on sexuality/sexual identity are clearly visible and may contribute to ongoing academic debates in productive ways. This complexity, resulting from the processes of nationalization/nation-building, integration into the system of global capitalism, democratization, and Europeanization, produces multiple, often conflicting, discourses of belonging such as nationalism, Yugoslavianness, and Europeanness.

It is reasonable to assume that sexually marginalized groups of people, drawing on the available discourses, develop multiple strategies of self-identification and belonging in a social context where nominal sexual tolerance serving as a marker of Europeanness is present along with practices of stigmatization, violence, and discrimination. Hence, the aim of my PhD research is to explore and assess the particular strategies of self-identification and belonging created and utilized by various sexually marginalized individuals vis-à-vis contradictory state and media practices. By looking at the ways people negotiate their sexuality in relation to national belonging, my PhD project seeks to explore how sexuality and nationalism are mutually constitutive of identity and belonging. I want to see whether and to what extent the position of sexual “other” opens up a space for the re-articulation of the dominant discourses of citizenship and belonging.

In order to explore the modes of belonging that are forged from the position of people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality, I collected fourteen life-span narratives that

are results of semi-structured oral history interviews with people diversely positioned as lesbian (six participants), gay (seven interviewees), and trans (one person), who are either activists or non-activists, aged between twenty seven and sixty five. To explore and assess my informants' self-identificatory strategies I also analyzed legal documents and materials of mainstream print media production published between 2000 and 2008, as well as documents produced by lesbian and gay organization in Croatia over the past ten years. The latter sets of data together with the relevant secondary literature allowed me to establish the external interpretive context in relation to which the particular strategies articulated in the interview narratives can be identified.

The ultimate aim of my analysis is to explore the political potential of sexual identity for emancipatory social change. Thus, in the course of analysis I will expose the shortcomings and emancipatory potentials of different discursual strategies of self-identification. I will do so by looking at the lines of argumentation informing the narratives and placing them in a dynamic interplay with each other and with the social and discursive context, including lesbian and gay activism. As points of comparison of the different patterns of self-identification in the narratives, I identified two crucial points of reference that kept emerging in the life narratives: visibility and commonality. They are discursual sites that articulate together sexual identities and national citizenship in a dynamic and sometimes progressive interplay.

On the basis of my analysis of the ways articulations of visibility and commonality come about in the process of self-narration, it is possible to distinguish three main patterns of self-identification. I will call them "assimilation," "queer disposition," and "strategic positioning." The strategy of assimilation, the most frequent one in my data, is present mostly in the narratives of gay men. It is characterized by the reinforcement of dominant nationalist ideas of citizenship, which articulate the meaning of visibility in terms of assimilationist privacy and normalcy while reiterating the idea that solidarity and belonging should be grounded in an essentializing and homogenizing logic of descent. In contrast to it, the strategies of queer disposition and strategic positioning represent a break with the exclusionary nationalist framework by articulating a non-hegemonic politics of belonging. I will also critically reflect upon the queer disposition by exposing its de-contextualized politics of anti-normality that dismisses and fails to recognize the particular experiences of multiply oppressed subjects. Against the marginalizing practices of queer disposition strategy, I argue for the political potential of strategic positioning that, in my reading, offers a more powerful

position of embodied critique when arguing for emancipatory politics of commonality, solidarity and alliance.

Regarding the structure of the chapters, first I will establish the theoretical and social context in Chapters 2 and 3 for my analysis of the life narratives in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 4 I will account for my own positionality and the choices I have made as a researcher bridging in this way my discussion of scholarly debates and the analysis of self-narratives. In Chapter 7 I will summarize my major findings and contributions to the existing research on identity and identity politics.

In Chapter 2 I will discuss the debates that address the nationalization of citizenship and belonging. I will point out that, in the process of nationalization, citizenship comes to be grounded in the exclusionary “us” vs. “them” binary in both “civic” and “ethnic” forms of nationalism. I will then focus on the decisive role that gender and sexuality play in the process of nationalization. I will focus on three particular aspects of the ways gender and sexuality are mobilized by nationalist discourses and practices: the public/private dichotomy, deployment of sexuality as a means of bordering, and sexual citizenship and politics of belonging in Anglophonic West. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the intersection of gender/sexuality and nationalism in Croatia through and after the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation.

In Chapter 3 I will establish a theoretical position on identity and identity-based politics in relation to which I may assess different strategies of self-identification in the life narratives. I will reflect upon the two dominant approaches to sexual identity articulated in relation to emancipatory politics of sexuality in Anglophonic West, namely, gay and lesbian identity politics emerging since the late 1960s and queer theory that has developed as a critical response to identity politics since the 1990s. My central claim is that, although queer theory opened up a space for the formation of wider alliances, with its focus on de-contextualized anti-normality, it often results in the marginalization of multiply oppressed subjects. As an alternative to the “subjectless” critique of queer scholarship, I will propose the postpositivist realist account of identity that conceptualizes identities as products of dynamic negotiations between the social and personal that allows for individual agency that is argued to be located in the capacity for socially embedded (self)reflection. I will invoke the political potential of lived experiences that may open up a space for reflective solidarities based on accountability for differences that can lead towards non-oppressive relations.

In Chapter 4 I will account for the particular methodological choices that inform my research in relation to the theoretical issues raised in Chapters 2 and 3. Before discussing the

sampling strategy and the method of analysis, I will draw on the postpositivist realist perspective on the politics of knowledge production and Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" in order to account for the scholarly and political relevance of the positioned, self-reflexive knowledge production process.

Chapters 5 and 6 consist of the analysis of the three narrative strategies of self-identification. In both chapters I will first establish the socio-discursive context with a focus on the dominant discourses that my informants draw on in their narratives. In Chapter 5 I will analyze the ways in which the notion of (in)visibility is differently articulated from the positions of assimilation, queer, and strategic positioning. In order to assess the political potential residing in the way the politics of visibility is articulated, I will read the narratives against the dominant (nationalist) and non-dominant discourses of visibility of sexual minorities. In Chapter 6 I will focus my analysis on the articulation of commonality. I will analyze the ways in which the nationalist mode of belonging based on the homogenizing exclusionary "us" vs. "them" binary is negotiated from the perspectives of three narrative strategies, that is, assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning. The ultimate aim of my analysis in both chapters is to see whether and to what extent the three strategies re-articulate belonging in a way that allows for non-oppressive relationships based on a critical engagement with, and responsibility for, differences.

## Chapter 2: Nationalism and Sexual Citizenship in the Globalizing World

Ours is not [...] “a world of nations.” It is a world in which nationhood is pervasively institutionalized in the practice of states and the workings of the state system. It is a world in which nation is widely, if unevenly, available and resonant as a category of social vision and division.

(Brubaker, 2001, p. 236)

Nationalism, in particular, remains the preeminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to “the people” of a country.

(Calhoun, 2007, p. 51)

As the growing literature on the relationship between sexuality and the nation shows, despite the imperatives of globalization and transnationalism, citizenship continues to be anchored in the nation, and the nation remains heterosexualized.

(Bell and Binnie, 2000, p. 26)

In the past few decades, with the rise of global capitalism and the development of newer communication technologies and transportation, predictions about the final decline of the nation-state have emerged. However, the rise of the “global village,” to borrow McLuhan’s concept (1964), did not result in the disappearance of the nation-state, but rather has been followed by new processes of nationalization throughout the world (Brubaker, 1996). Although contemporary globalizing tendencies brought about transformations in the structure of the state, nation-states continue to function as the primary ideological and political framework within which political engagements, solidarity, and belonging are articulated in the contemporary context of global capitalism (Giddens, 1987; Brubaker, 2001; Robinson, 2001; Malešević, 2006; Calhoun, 2007).

The re-configuration of the functions and structure of the nation-state in the contemporary context of a global economy (Robinson, 2001) is of particular relevance in Europe. The project of European integration within the European Union as a supranational polity entails the weakening of national authorities and boundaries across the member states. At the same time, the constituent nation-states remain a primary framework of political life in the functioning of the EU, resisting its supranational policies. What is more, while the borders

between the member states are weakening and becoming more permeable, the borders between different ethnic and national groups within the EU as well as the outer borders of the EU are being preserved, if not strengthened.

Citizenship is one of the main institutions contributing to the reification of the nation-state as a primary framework of belonging. It institutionalizes belonging by reinforcing the strict boundaries between “us” and “them,” thereby playing an important role in constituting nationalism as an exclusionary practice in both its more “civic” and more “ethnic” variations (Calhoun, 2007). As feminist and sexuality studies scholars point out, gender and sexuality play a decisive role in the process of re/producing the boundaries and the content of national citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Thus, although the emergence of the discourses of multiculturalism, human rights, and tolerance have brought about the re-definition of national identities and citizenship regimes that became more open towards sexual minorities, these changes resulted in further exclusions on the grounds of ethnicity, race, and nationality (Bunzl, 2004; Puar, 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem, 2008). At the same time, citizenship remains anchored in heteronormativity, securing the status of the heterosexual nuclear family as the basic unit of social organization while discriminating against other sexual identities and practices. However, mainstream sociological, anthropological and historical accounts of nationalism remain largely blind to the role that gender and sexuality may play in the re/production of unified nations worldwide (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

In this chapter I will address the nationalization of citizenship and belonging and its interplay with exclusionary gender and sexuality regimes in the context of global capitalism and capitalist patriarchy in order to establish the scholarly and socio-historical contexts of my research on practices of self-identification of sexually marginalized people in Croatia. I will first reflect upon the notions of nation and nationalism in order to set up a theoretical ground for exploring and assessing the role of gender and sexuality in nationalist projects, including the process of nation-building and maintaining in post-Yugoslav Croatia. I will then attend to the various ways in which gender and sexuality figure in to the process of nationalization of citizenship and belonging focusing on the contributions of feminist and sexuality studies scholars. Finally, in the last section I will discuss the intersection of nationalism and sexuality

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<sup>2</sup> On the role of gender in the nationalizing process see for example Yuval-Davis, N. and Anthias, F. (eds) (1989); McClintock, A. (1995); Yuval-Davis, N. (1997); Tolz, V. and Booth, S. (eds) (2005). The intersection of nationalism, citizenship, and sexuality has been discussed in Parker, Andrew, Russo Mary, Sommer Doris, and Yaeger Patricia (eds) (1992); Stychin, Carl F. (1998); Bell, David and Binnie, Jon (2000); Nagel, Joane (2003); Puar, Jasbir (2007). This list of works that address the role of gender and sexuality in nationalist projects is by no means exhaustive. It only signals some of the main works that attend to different issues emerging from this complex problem.

in Croatia over the past two decades, mapping the socio-historical landscape in which different strategies of belonging came to be articulated in the life narratives of the sexually marginalized people with whom I carried out interviews for my research.

## 2.1. Nationalization of solidarity and belonging

Many contemporary scholars of nationalism would agree that nationalism is a modern phenomenon whose emergence and strengthening is interrelated with the growth of the modern – centralized, bureaucratic – state (Giddens, 1987; Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1992; Brubaker, 1996; Calhoun, 1997, 2007; Hearn, 2006; Malešević, 2006). Exploring the genealogy of the world nation-state system, Giddens (1987) points to the interrelation between the emergence of the nation-state and the rise of industrial capitalism from the late eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Craig Calhoun (1997) notes that while it is impossible to establish the exact time and place of the birth of nationalism, there is no doubt that French Revolution is the point, the actual historical event, where nationalist discourse was first present. Relating the origins of modern liberal democracy with the rise of nationalism, Calhoun argues that it is the affirmation of the assumption that “the people” and their interests are the only source of legitimacy for a particular way of governing that has paved the way for the formation of modern nations in the nineteenth century Western Europe and North America.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of the modern nation is thus closely related to the nationalization processes that, by positing the interests of “the people” as the source of governmental legitimacy, construct “the people” as a nation that should enjoy its freedom and sovereignty (Calhoun, 1997). Once the mutual interdependence between the people/nation and the territorially bounded form of government, i.e. state, is established, it becomes crucial that the boundaries of nation correspond with that of the state (Calhoun, 1997). What is more, as Judith Butler in her conversation with Gayatri Spivak points out, the nation that constitutes

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to industrial capitalism, Giddens (1987) also emphasizes the role of the military complex as one of the key factors in the re/production of the world system of nation-states. Militarization played a decisive role in the process of nationalization in Croatia in the early 1990s securing its relative “success” in bringing about an independent nation-state. I will discuss the process of nationalization in Croatia in more details in *Section 2.4*.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that democracy is not possible outside of a nationalist framework and the other way around, but that the dominant modern form of government, i.e. Western-style liberal democracy, is closely related to nationalism rather than being antithetical to it. As Jonathan Hearn (2006) points out, contradictory to common understandings nationalism is not antithetical to Western democracies, but is crucial for their self-legitimation. Or, in the words of Siniša Malešević, “Whether democratic or authoritarian, left wing or right wing, religious or secularist, radical or moderate, at the end of the day modern political orders tend predominantly to legitimize their rule of others in nationalist terms” (Malešević, 2006, p. 94).

the grounds for the “nation-state” needs to be as homogeneous as possible (Butler and Spivak, 2007). In other words, it is possible to conclude that since “the people” are constituted as “nation,” i.e. as a source of legitimacy for the state, the need to determine who “the people” *are* arises. Thus, in the process of creating the nation with a distinct “national identity” as a source of governmental legitimation, the grounds for who is “in” and who is “out” are being (re)established (Butler and Spivak, 2007; Calhoun, 1997).<sup>5</sup>

Liberal theories of nationalism try to establish a theoretical distinction between the “civic” and “ethnic” forms of nationalism in contemporary Western liberal democracies, depicting the former as “good” and labeling the latter “bad” and “harmful” form of nationalism. The proponents of this dichotomization argue that “ethnic” nationalism is inherently pernicious because it is based on a pre-political culture that becomes political by the formation of the state that, in turn, legitimizes itself by arguing it represents the interests of its people – the nation. In contrast to such imposition of a pre-political belonging, liberal theory places examples of modern Western democracies (notably the U.S. and France) as the representative models of “civic” nationalism where belonging to a political community is said to be based on the idea of *individual choice* in accordance with individual rights, heterogeneity, and liberal democracy, making up the core values of liberal thought (Brubaker, 1999; Yack, 1999; Özkırımlı, 2005; Calhoun, 2007).

The distinction between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalisms has been further reinforced in relation to the proliferation of armed conflicts in the early 1990s, and especially in the light of the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, which were justified through the nationalist claims to “national self-determination” and “national sovereignty” (Yack, 1999). One of the most influential advocates of the hierarchical division between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalism in the beginning of the 1990s is Michael Ignatieff. His book *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (1993) is based on his travels through war zones in the former Yugoslavia and has been widely praised (Yack, 1999; Özkirimli, 2005). Ignatieff discusses nationalisms in the former Yugoslavia as examples of the dangerous and war-provoking ethnic model of nationalism. He grounds his arguments in the essentializing discourses of Balkanization, identifying some primordial “ancient hatred” in the Balkans as an explanation of the situation. That discourse gained much prominence in the Western liberal

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<sup>5</sup> Although we can link the first nation-state formations with the particular socio-political trajectories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, we should bear in mind that every case of nationalization is different and that homogenizing practices vary across time and space. It is also important to note that the fact that the first nation-states emerged in the West does not and should not provide grounds for dismissing non-Western nationalisms as secondary and derivative of the Western original (Calhoun, 1997).



thought in the first half of 1990s. In contrast to the “unruly,” “tribal” nationalization in former Yugoslavia, Ignatieff praises the “civilized,” “non-exclusionary” nationalisms in Western Europe.

The critics of this “Manichean myth,” as Rogers Brubaker (1999, p. 55) terms it, warn against the Orientalizing logic of the civic vs. ethnic dichotomy that creates the illusion of Western nationalisms as non-exclusionary and reinforces other hierarchical dichotomies such as reason vs. emotions, West vs. East, and choice vs. inheritance (Yack, 1999). In order to expose as problematic and misleading the dichotomy between Western political and Eastern non-political modes of belonging to a particular polity, they argue that in reality pre-political communities based on a “common culture” provide the grounds for belonging in the “civic” versions of nationalism as well (Yack, 1999; Brubaker, 1999). What is more, if we take into account that the institution of citizenship is based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* in all Western European countries, we can argue that the so-called “civic” mode of belonging to a nation is anything but a matter of free choice. And conversely, “ethnic” nationalism is not completely deprived of the dimension of choice either (Yack, 1999; Brubaker, 1999; Calhoun, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Thus, Brubaker (1999) concludes that all known forms of nationalism have proved to be both inclusionary (civic) and exclusionary (ethnic), emphasizing that “[w]hat varies is not the fact or even the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, but the bases or criteria of inclusion and exclusion” (p. 64).

Brubaker (1999) takes the criticism of the dichotomization between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalism one step further arguing that not only is the distinction itself misleading and serves to re-produce unequal power relations between (in this context) East and West, but that the categories of “civic” and “ethnic” are themselves rather ambiguous, which puts their analytical usefulness into question. Their ambiguity lies in the fact that both are social constructs whose particular social manifestations can vary significantly, making it very hard, if not impossible, to “find” a single definition which would be applicable to all particular cases (ibid.). Typically, ethnicity is constructed on the grounds of various factors which can include, but are not reducible to, common language, religion, the belief in common origins, and long-term co-existence that should influence the construction of particular customs, and constitute the ground for community and belonging (Brubaker, 1999; Calhoun, 2007). What is

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<sup>6</sup> Discussing the institute of “birthright citizenship” and restrictions in relation to immigration in the U.S. and France as model representatives of “civic nationalism” in liberal theory, Yack points out that “birthright citizenship can promote toleration precisely by removing the question of communal membership from the realm of choice and contention about political principles” (Yack, 1999, p. 116). At the same time, as Yack rightly argues, “[t]he myth of the *ethnic* nation suggests that you have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you are your cultural inheritance and nothing else” (Yack, 1999, p. 107).

more, argues Brubaker, if we conceive of the category of ethnicity more broadly, as synonymous for culture, then almost all nationalisms would have to be identified as “ethnic,” since the notion of common culture is present in almost all nation-building projects, Western nations included (Brubaker, 1999). The ambiguity is also present when it comes to the category of “civic nation,” which, as we saw above, also has a strong cultural component and in reality never takes the form of a pure voluntary choice such as to be or not to be a citizen of such polity (ibid.). Hence, applying these ambiguous categories to assess particular nationalizing processes, more often than not, we mask many overlappings between “civic” and “ethnic” modes, while foreclosing the visibility of some important distinctions within the processes that are said to fall within one or the other of these two categories (Brubaker, 1999). It is also important to note that the connection between ethnicity and nation is multifaceted and complex and in many cases it is not possible to separate nation-building from the notion of ethnicity. However, precisely because of the complex interplay between nation and ethnicity, we should be careful not to perceive ethnicity as if some ancient pre-political origin of the nation (Calhoun, 2007).

In order to avoid the re-production of the West-East hierarchy and the reification of one’s own nationalist discourse in the scholarly debates on nationalism, Brubaker (2001, 2004) proposes an approach that views the nation as a social practice, which is contextual, relational, and, most importantly, generated and shaped by political, economic, and cultural processes. In particular, when arguing against the study of ethnicity, race and nationality in terms of some ahistorical groups, Brubaker asserts two possible ways in which these phenomena could be explored:

From above, we can focus on the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of “governmentality”. From below, we can study the “micropolitics” of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them.

(Brubaker, 2004, p. 13)

Hence, instead of asking a de-contextualized question “What is a nation?” and thus implying its ineluctability, Brubaker (2004) urges us to explore *how* nations as contingent events and particular forms of “social vision and division” are produced and reproduced in particular

socio-historical contexts. By so doing we are able to interpret particular events and practices, such as the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, not as “ethnic” *per se*, as Ignatieff does, but as results of the processes of ethnicization and nationalization. By viewing the nation as a process of *nationalization* which can result in different legal, social, political and cultural arrangements and meanings, rather than a static objective category bearing some inherent meaning, Brubaker’s approach, I believe, provides a useful framework for exploring the processes of nation-building and their intersection with other modes of “social vision and division,” such as unequal gender division or heteronormativity.

In order to reflect on the salience of symbolic practices in nationalization, I turn to Benedict Anderson’s groundbreaking work (1991) on the imagined nature of national belonging. He theorizes the nation as an “imagined political community” (p. 6) that first emerges as the interplay between three factors present in the sixteenth century Europe – capitalist production, the development of printing, and linguistic diversity. By drawing a connection between print capitalism, vernaculars, and the birth of modern nations, Anderson places the production of nation in the field of the symbolic. This theoretical move has heavily influenced subsequent conceptualizations of nationalism that focus on discursive strategies (Goswami, 2002). Anderson’s view of the nation as a symbolic site of an imagined community re-presented in and through discursive forms such as novels and newspapers has at least two important implications for my own investigation of the politics of belonging in the life narratives of people who are othered on the grounds of their sexuality. First, by proposing the view of the nation as a community that is imagined by its members, Anderson opens up a space to account for the formative role that people and their self-identification practices play in the process of nationalization. Second, inextricably linked to the first point, by suggesting that the nation is constructed on the grounds of some shared vision, Anderson asserts the importance of national identity construction in a relational process of negotiation whereby the boundaries of the nation are re/constructed.

The dominant processes of nationalization and ethnicization through which ethnic and national identities are re/constructed rely on an exclusionary logic that entails both homogenization within, and differentiation from others (Verdery, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Goswami, 2002). Through the process of homogenization the differences and inequalities among the members of a community are erased to achieve an overarching unification. As feminist scholars argue, the construction of particular gender relations plays a significant role in this homogenization. Yet, the ways in which nationalism intersects with other forms of “social vision and division” (Brubaker, 2001, p. 236) has been mostly unaddressed in

mainstream theories of nationalism (McClintock 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Spike-Peterson, 1999).

As recent studies of nationalism, mostly by queer studies scholars, show, even cases where national identity is argued to be based on allegedly universal human rights, tolerance, and multiculturalism, do not result in non-exclusionary modes of solidarity and belonging. As an example, let me refer to the U.S. “war on terror” after 9/11. Discourses on human rights and tolerance, ironically, became part of the legitimizing instruments in the “war on terror.” Once they are appropriated by nationalism, they become means through which the contemporary world system of nation-states is re/produced (Puar, 2007). Meanwhile, with the same exclusionary “us” vs. “them” logic where “us” stands for tolerant and liberal citizens, the nationalist multicultural discourses generate new “constitutive others,” mostly migrants who are constructed as “backward” and “uncivilized” (Bunzl, 2004; Puar, 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem, 2008).

On the other hand, if we situate the nationalization process in the context of contemporary neo-liberal global capitalism, as Calhoun (2007) argues, we can see some of the positive aspects of national solidarities. In particular, in a world that is imbued with military, social, and economic conflicts stemming from stark social and economic inequalities among countries, regions, and populations, national solidarity may represent a potentially effective means of organizing against the neo-imperialism enacted by some of the most powerful nation-states. However, Calhoun is also aware that, in order to become a truly emancipatory practice that may lead towards non-exclusionary relations, the nationalist logic of belonging has to be radically transformed (*ibid.*). This transformation should take us beyond the exclusionary solidarities that erase the differences within a group while drawing fixed and non-permeable boundaries around it. In order to do so, we should start thinking about ethnic/national groups in terms of solidarities that are based on the principle of reflexivity, positionality, and accountability for differences, which will be discussed from the perspective of postpositivist realism in the next chapter. As long as the concept of nationalism generates solidarities that are based on the assumption of the constitutive other(s), it cannot be considered a post-colonial anti-imperialist emancipatory project. The same can be said for the existing multiculturalism(s) in the West. By fixing the boundaries between the different cultures without engaging critically with the multiple differences that cut across the homogenized groups, contemporary forms of multiculturalism are caught within the exclusionary dualistic logic (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Calhoun, 2007).

As shown above, democracy, liberal pluralism, and human rights have become integral parts of the exclusionary nationalist logic that constitutes the dominant framework for solidarity and belonging and gender and sexuality play a decisive role in this and other types of national homogenization practices. In the next section I will discuss further the contributions of feminist and queer studies scholars for thinking about intersection of nationalism with gender and sexuality regimes. I will pay particular attention to recent academic studies that deal with the issues such as “ethnosexuality,” “good gay citizen,” “homonationalism,” and sexual politics in the context of globalization. I will produce a theoretical map in which I will situate my discussion of the intersection of nationalism, gender and sexuality in the past two decades in Croatia.

## **2.2. The intersections of nationalism, gender and sexuality**

### *2.2.1. National citizenship and the public/private divide*

The process of nationalization usually involves “inventing traditions” as a means of legitimization through which a nation’s unique identity and continuity is being established over time (Hobsbawm 1983; Chatterjee, 1989). At the same time nationalization relies on the idea of progress that is invoked in the practices of democratization. As feminist scholars point out, it is through the perspective of gender that further ideological investments in the tension between tradition and progress can be exposed (McClintock, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1996; Tolz and Booth, 2005). As McClintock (1996) specifically points out, the paradox of nationalism is resolved through the unequal gender relations depicted in the metaphor and institution of the “family” that both secures the idea of “organic unity” and naturalizes the social subordination of women. In particular, the exclusion of women from the allegedly universal notion of citizenship, which is available only to men as progressive agents of national modernity, is grounded in the view of women as both symbols and bearers of the principle of continuity due to their reproductive tasks and position in the *private* domain (Chatterjee, 1989; McClintock 1993, 1996; Verdery, 1994).

As Carole Pateman (1988) points out, modern Western governmentality, which resides in the nation-state and the institution of citizenship, is based on the problematic distinction between the political *public* sphere of decision-making, law and work and the allegedly non-political *private* sphere of marriage and domesticity. Pateman argues that this distinction is a result of the social contract made between white men who, by agreeing to be governed by the

state, “transform their natural freedom into the security of civil freedom” (Pateman, 1988, p. 6). The transformation of men’s natural freedom is based on the sexual contract that secures men’s rights (regardless of their internal class differentiation) over women in the private sphere. In this way women are constituted as both free individuals and the property of men, which creates the contradiction that lies at the heart of the modern social order, and which is central for the effective functioning of modern patriarchy (Pateman, 1988).<sup>7</sup> The ambiguity that underpins the status of women has a twofold function: it secures the subordination of women while at the same time it conceals the (hetero)sexualized nature of allegedly gender neutral citizenship (ibid.).

Discussing the role of the public-private distinction in securing the political power of men, Pateman (1988) emphasizes the ways in which this dichotomy is used in controlling women’s sexuality, which has been perceived as a threat to the (nationalized) political order. The concern over women’s sexuality has been especially salient in nationalist projects that construct and legitimize national communities through a claim to common origins. In the nationalization processes that invoke an alleged common descent, women’s reproductive capacities are constructed as the obvious and ultimate bearers of national unity and survival (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Žarkov, 2007). Furthermore, as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis in their important work *Woman-Nation-State* (1989) argue, besides being seen as biological re-producers of members of the national communities, women in nationalist projects are also constructed as signifiers and re/producers of national differences, and as transmitters of the dominant national ideology and culture, i.e. tradition (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989, pp. 7-8).

It is clear that the re/production of the gender/sex binary through which particular bodies are constructed as male and female with their sex appropriate masculinity and femininity as their “natural” expressions relies on the unquestioned assumption of heterosexuality as the only legitimate and moral form of sexuality. As materialist/lesbian feminists have pointed out as early as in the 1970s, “compulsory heterosexuality” is a corner stone in the re/production of the unequal gender binary (Rubin, 1975; Rich, 1980; Wittig, 1992). Monique Wittig (1992) in her powerful analysis of the intersection of sex and sexuality in modern capitalist economies argues that the category of “woman” is constructed only within the heterosexual system in

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<sup>7</sup> According to Pateman (1988), “[m]odern contractual patriarchy both denies and *presupposes* women’s freedom and could not operate without this presupposition” (pp. 231-32, emphasis in the original).

which they exist as a class.<sup>8</sup> According to Wittig, women carry out most of the work in society through their practices in the public and private domain combined with their reproduction tasks. In other words, the economic basis of normative heterosexuality and gender hierarchy can be found precisely in the obligatory reproduction of human lives (*ibid.*).<sup>9</sup> However, the role of heteronormativity in constructing the allegedly “organic unity” of the nation and securing unequal gender relations has been mostly overlooked in the feminist literature on nationalism that tends to focus solely on gender (Spike-Peterson, 1999).

The complex interplay between sexuality and nationalism has come to the fore of academic inquiry since the late 1980s, mostly in the context of the newly established field of gay and lesbian studies. Most of lesbian/gay studies scholars who focus on the interplay of sexualities and nationalisms start from the same premise as feminist scholars. They also link the rise of heteronormative nationalist ideologies emerging throughout the world in the past two centuries with the creation of the modern nation-state as developed in the West in the nineteenth century. In one of the earliest studies, George Mosse (1985) discusses the interplay between modern nationalism, bourgeois respectability, and heteronormativity. He argues that the history of European nationalism and of the specifically bourgeois cultivation of the body and sexual morality appeared together at the end of the eighteenth century paving the way for the rise of the fascist nation-state in the twentieth century. Modern heteronormalizing discourses and practices generate a hierarchical homo/hetero binary that functions as a means of normalizing productive (monogamous) sexuality through stigmatizing non-reproductively oriented sexualities, usually with the help of religious and legal authorities (Mosse, 1985; Alexander 1994; Nagel, 2003).

The institution of citizenship in contemporary Western nation-states remains anchored in the nuclear monogamous heterosexual family that represents the economic linchpin of national citizenship in the context of global capitalism (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Berlant and Warner, 2003; Richardson, 2004). In other words, the contemporary notions of heterosexualized citizenship in European countries are located at the intersection of three distinct “social totalities,” to borrow from Rosemary Hennessy (2000) – capitalism,

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<sup>8</sup> According to Wittig, “women” are a class created in economic, political and ideological subjection to “men,” which leads her to conclude that lesbians, by contesting this relationship, represent a cornerstone in the fight for a sexless society. However, by placing lesbians beyond the categories of sex, and coming even close to the concept of a “third sex,” Wittig fails to recognize that the very category of “lesbian” is a product of the same heteropatriarchal ideology which naturalizes the concepts of sex and heterosexuality. Defining lesbians in a rather strict identitarian way, Wittig still sticks to the concept of sex and the pre-determination of desire (Kahlina, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> For earlier versions of the argument about the intersection of sexuality and gender in the work of materialist/lesbian feminists see Kahlina, 2008.

nationalism and patriarchy.<sup>10</sup> What is more, the public/private hierarchical dichotomy that secures an unequal gender division plays a significant role in the re/production of heterosexualized national citizenship, which relies on the heterosexual nuclear family confined to the de-politicized space of the “home” (Gopinath, 2003; Berlant and Warner, 2003). As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (2003) argue, in order to conceal the “sexualization of national membership,” nationalist ideologies draw on the concept of the private sphere that is structurally divided from the public political sphere (p. 170). The dominant normative presumptions about the private as a place that is separate from the public political culture construct the notion of the private as a “proper” location of (hetero)sexual coupling and intimacy. Based on this assumption, sexuality is conceived as something that is non-political, non-public, highly individualized, and linked to the notion of heterosexual intimacy (Berlant and Warner, 2003).

The same logic that underpins the production of the private sphere as the “proper” location of sexuality informs the recent discourses and practices regarding the rights of sexual minorities. The main condition under which particular rights are granted to people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality is their confinement to the sphere of privacy. As Diane Richardson (1998) points out “[l]esbians and gay men are granted the right to be tolerated as long as they stay within the boundaries of that tolerance, whose borders are maintained through a heterosexist public/private divide” (p. 89). Thus, the introduction of the rights of sexual minorities resulted in the emergence of a new figure – that of the de-politicized “good gay citizen” – who no longer poses a threat to the nation, nor to heterosexualized citizenship for several reasons (ibid.). First, the “good gay citizen” and “good heterosexual citizen” are in no sense equal. As I pointed out earlier, the heterosexual nuclear family continues to constitute the basic social unit in most national contexts regardless of the availability of “gay rights.” Second, the creation of a new norm (“good gay citizen”) produces new sexual “others” – those who do not live in monogamous relations, which are believed to mirror the conventions of heterosexual family. Yet, argues Richardson, with the figure of a “good gay citizen” there is also potential for the homo/hetero divide to become more and more meaningless in the future (Richardson, 2004).

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<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Hennessy uses the term “social totality” to define the social structures which have “persistently [...] organized people’s lives across social formations and specific situations. Among these are capital’s extraction of surplus labor, imperialism’s tactics of eminent domain and white supremacy, and patriarchal gender hierarchies” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 26).



### 2.2.2. *Sexuality as a border: Heteronationalism and homonationalism*

As I noted above, studies that bring the issue of gender and sexuality in to the discussion of nationalism expose the nation as a socio-historical construct that is re/produced through the dynamic interplay with other “social totalities.” By doing so, these studies challenge the common view of the nation as a fixed, stable category either based on common origin or common culture. Building upon previous work by feminist and sexuality studies scholars and drawing on the earlier work of Fredrik Barth, Joane Nagel (2003) argues for the conception of both ethnicity and sexuality as bordering processes whereby the boundaries of ethnic, racial and national groups are re/constituted. Such an approach allows Nagel to explore and assess the significant place of sexuality in homogenizing processes, which re/construct ethnic and national identities, without treating ethnicity, race, or nation as naturally given and stable categories. Instead, by looking at the intersection of sexuality and ethnicity as a matter of boundary negotiations, Nagel explicitly emphasizes the permeability and instability of national and ethnic unity (Nagel, 2003).

Although, by conceptualizing the “ethnosexual frontiers” as “sites where ethnicity is sexualized, and sexuality is racialized, ethnicized, and nationalized” (p. 14), Nagel exposes different ways in which sexuality and nation/ethnicity constitute each other across time and space, she nevertheless treats the national heteronormativity as an almost universal means through which ethnic and national boundaries are re/produced. However, as I indicated earlier, recent studies reveal that exclusionary ethnicization and nationalization processes may also involve the discourses and practices of liberal pluralism that promote tolerance and respect of human rights as the highest values (Bunzl, 2004; Puar, 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem; 2008). For example, the rights of sexual minorities played an important role in the process of nationalization whereby, in the late 1970s the new Québécois identity has been re-defined in terms of inclusive plurality and modernity (Stychin, 1998). Furthermore, there are similar tendencies in contemporary South Africa, Israel/Palestine, and in some European countries, where the protection of the sexual rights became a marker of distinct national identities (Stychin, 1998; Binnie, 2004; Bunzl, 2004; Oswin, 2007; Haritaworn et al, 2008; Ritchie, 2010). The processes of nationalization that rely on the discourses of tolerance towards sexual minorities in some Western nation-states are most clearly articulated through the concept of *homonationalism* put forward by Jasbir Puar (2007). According to Puar, within the framework of contemporary discourses of liberal pluralism, multiculturalism, and tolerance in the U.S. we witness the emergence of “national homosexuality” as a form of

homosexuality that “operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects” (ibid., p. 2).

The contemporary nationalization practices through which the rights of sexual minorities are domesticated in the liberal framework of modernity, plurality, and tolerance, more often than not, result in reasserting the boundaries of class, ethnicity, race, and nation and reaffirming existing privileges (Binnie, 2004; Puar, 2007; Haritaworn et al, 2008). In particular, Jon Binnie (2004) warns against new forms of racism in contexts where rights in relation to sexuality are framed as markers of modernity and development against “backward others.” Haritaworn et al (2008) specifically identify the practice of constructing the Muslim population in Great Britain and Germany as the homophobic, misogynistic, uncivilized “other” that represents a threat to an allegedly tolerant and thus superior and “civilized” British-ness and German-ness.

The exclusionary logic underpinning the homonationalist orientalizing discourses, which construct the hierarchical dichotomy between the tolerant progressive “self” and homophobic uncivilized “other” represents one of the most visible means through which the unequal division between the Western and Eastern Europe within and outside of the European Union is constructed (Butterfield, forthcoming). The international organizations dealing with the rights and status of sexual minorities, such as ILGA Europe and the EU enlargement officials, uniformly depict Eastern Europe as a place of violent homophobic attacks and banned Gay Pride Marches, which serves as “evidence” of the democratic deficit, also contribute to securing the West/East hierarchy (Stychin, 2003). In opposition to the homophobic Eastern Europe, Western Europe is framed as a place of rights and safety for sexual minorities, strengthening its image as a role model of liberal pluralism and democracy for Eastern Europe to follow. In this way, the problematic “catching up” model that secures the Western leadership position while keeping the East in the need of help from the West is reinforced. The position of Western Europe as a knowledgeable teacher, leader, and help-provider further legitimizes its role of an informed decision maker capable of making decisions for the entire EU. The concentration of political power in the Western part of the EU is particularly visible if we look at recent economic crisis management, especially in the period from 2011 onwards, when German and French political elites almost completely took over the decision making process in the Union.

Thus, it is clear that the West/East dichotomy is re/produced through the homogenizing discourses that construct these two poles as if two homogeneous wholes, one uniformly

homophobic and the other uniformly liberal. In reality, the situation is far from being unambiguously black and white. Anti-discriminatory legislation that protects sexual minorities is a very recent achievement in some Western European countries. For example, in the UK and Germany such legislation was introduced during the 1990s. Meanwhile, the scope and implementation of legal protection and rights also varies significantly from state to state. Homophobia has a long history and is still very much present in what is often labeled as Western Europe (Stychin, 2003; Haritaworn et al, 2008). Put differently, the new phenomenon of “homonationalism” in Western Europe and North America has not challenged traditional “national heteronormativity,” but rather, the two regulatory mechanisms jointly participate in nationalist and imperialist projects (Puar, 2007). Although there is a widely accepted recognition of particular rights in relation to sexual diversity in most Western European nation-states and nominally on the level of the EU, national citizenship largely remains articulated within the heteronormative framework of homonationalism at best (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Stychin, 2003; Haritaworn et al, 2008).

At the same time, the position of sexual minorities in the former state-socialist countries is much more complex than the oversimplified analysis that takes Pride Marches as the epitome of gay liberation suggests.<sup>11</sup> The homogenizing practices that support the unequal West/East binary not only conceal the differences within these two poles, but also overlook their complex intersection, which results from the interplay of the national and transnational influences on state practices, legal frameworks, and sexual identities across Europe. Hence, one of the main aims of my research is to look at the ways in which the national narratives of solidarity and belonging re-defined in relation to the struggles for the EU membership are negotiated by sexual minorities in Croatia. This opens up a space for more ambiguous and complex perceptions of the intersections of nationalisms and sexualities in the Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

### 2.2.3. *Sexual citizenship and the politics of belonging in the Anglophonic West*

The concept of citizenship is commonly framed in terms of rights and duties in relation to membership in a nation-state (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Richardson, 1998; Isin and Wood, 1999; Bell and Binnie, 2000). By trying to challenge this rather nation-centric and Western-centric conception of citizenship, Isin and Wood (1999) suggest that citizenship can

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<sup>11</sup> See for example articles gathered in Kuhar, Roman and Takács, Judit (eds) (2007), and Kulpa, Robert and Mizelińska, Joanna (eds) (2011).

be better theorized if regarded as a set of cultural and economic *practices* that, together with political, social and civil rights and obligations, determine membership in a particular polity. A similar conception of citizenship, as a set of socio-cultural practices, rights and obligations, underpins studies of nationalism that emphasize the important role sexuality plays in determining the scope of rights and practices that define membership in a particular polity, thus putting forward the concept of sexual citizenship (Evans, 1993; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Stychin, 2003; Richardson, 2004; Cossman, 2007). As we saw above, by favoring the heterosexual nuclear family as the privileged social unit and thus discriminating against sexual minorities, membership in the nation-state remains formulated in heteronormative terms (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Richardson, 2004). However, it is important to acknowledge, as Richardson (2001) does, that, given the complexity surrounding the concept of sexual rights, which includes multiple and often competing arguments, it is hard to come up with a single definition of sexual citizenship.

With their reassessment of the notion of citizenship in terms of modes of membership in a polity, Isin and Wood (1999) open up a space for the concept of citizenship to become a useful tool for evaluating different forms of belonging beyond the context of contemporary Western-style nation-states. However, although they link the practices of citizenship with the practices of identity, Isin and Wood (1999) nevertheless focus on the role of identity in the process of claiming rights, which places their conception of citizenship within the domain of discourses on rights and status. A productive re-definition of the notion of citizenship towards broader conceptions that include an engagement with the very meaning of the “proper citizen” together with the processes of self-identification and subject construction comes from the field of anthropology. In this regard, I find the notion of “cultural citizenship” as formulated by Lisa Rofel (1999, 2007) in her study of sexual citizenship in contemporary China very useful. Cultural citizenship as a “process in which culture becomes a relevant category of affinity,” argues Rofel, represents a new site of struggle over “new schemes of hierarchical difference” and “new modes of inclusion and exclusion” (p. 95). At the same time, referring to Aihwa Ong’s previous conceptualization, Rofel describes cultural citizenship as “a process of self-making and being made, of active modes of affinity as well as techniques of normalization” (Rofel, 2007, pp. 94-95). In other words, Rofel (2007) argues for a notion of citizenship that includes the production of subjects thus focusing on individual negotiations of the dominant norms in citizenship debates (see also Ong, 1999; Rofel, 1999; Cossman, 2007). Furthermore, according to Rofel (2007), cultural citizenship is also a site where transcultural practices and a sense of (cultural) belonging are brought together.

There are two important implications emerging from Rofel's conceptualization of citizenship. First, by assuming the active role of individual people in negotiating the existing set of citizenship practices and norms, Rofel conceptualizes citizenship as a practice of negotiation whereby the meanings of a "good citizen" are reified, modified, or contested, which has been mostly overlooked in the scholarship on sexual citizenship (Rofel, 1999, 2007; Manalansan, 2003). Such a conception of citizenship that leaves a space for resignification goes beyond a mere depiction of inclusions and exclusions by allowing us to address the ongoing processes through which the meanings of citizenship are re/constructed (Wray 2000). Second, by bringing transnational practices into the discussion of citizenship, Rofel articulates the role of global influences in local citizenship regimes, seeing them as a possible source of disruption of local practices.

Conceptualized in this way, the notion of cultural citizenship represents a very useful analytical tool for assessing the interplay between transcultural practices and national governmental strategies on the one hand, and diverse ways that competing meanings and discourses are negotiated in the process of self-identification and belonging on the other. That being said, I think that the term cultural citizenship is somewhat misleading, suggesting that it focuses exclusively on the practices of meaning production and negotiation. Since the process of self-identification, whereby the meanings of citizenship are negotiated, always includes material factors stemming from a particular social positionality that influences meaning production practices, we should be careful not to lose sight of the wider social aspects bearing upon citizenship practices. In order to avoid the unwanted implications that the concept of cultural citizenship, with its overemphasis on the cultural production of meaning, may have, I will continue to use the notion of sexual citizenship that stresses the heteronormative assumptions of citizenship but in a way that allows for "processes of self-making and being made." I believe that the interplay of the two concepts – that of sexual citizenship put forward by queer and sexuality studies scholars and cultural citizenship as proposed within the field of "queer anthropology," to borrow from Boellstorff (2007) – brings about a productive framework for exploring and assessing the political potential residing in the self-identification of people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality.

In my research, I follow the view put forward by some "queer anthropology" scholars such as Rofel (1999, 2007), Manalansan (2003), and Boellstorff (2005) that sexual subjects are constructed at the intersection of the social and personal without being deprived of agency, which is reflected in meaning negotiation practices. By pointing to the dynamic negotiations between the social and the personal as an integral part of the process through

which citizenship regimes are re-constructed, my research contributes to the existing literature on sexual citizenship that tends to focus solely on the practices that define membership in the particular polity, thus leaving out the aspect of negotiations from their discussions (Evans, 1993; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Stychin, 2003; Richardson, 2004; Cossman, 2007). At the same time, “queer anthropology scholars” do not explicitly address the political potential of sexual identities for transformatory politics that inheres in this process of negotiation. Thus, I will contribute to this body of literature by explicitly analyzing in what ways and to what extent the practices of self-identification and belonging emerging in the life narratives of sexually marginalized people in Croatia carry the potential for the radical re-definition of citizenship and belonging towards non-exclusionary relations. The theoretical discussions that open up a space for thinking about the transformatory potential of sexual identity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In the remainder of this section I will address the dominant ways in which nationalized, heterosexualized citizenship has been negotiated in the Anglophonic West and what new modes of belonging have been established in this process.

As I discussed above, sexual citizenship in a large part of the EU is based on “special sexual rights” that are conditioned upon a strict public/private divide (Richardson, 1998; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Stychin, 2003). The space of conditioned acceptance opened up by the new discourses of tolerance and of re-privatization has been seized by many non-heterosexual subjects (Duggan, 2002; Richardson, 2005; Cossman, 2007). In this regard, Lisa Duggan (2002) points to the “new homonormativity” emerging in relation to the neoliberal politics of commodified and privatized citizenship in the West. The rhetorical and political strategies of this new gay mainstreaming rely on a political position against the proponents of “radical social change” promoted by queer theory on the one hand, and the “old homophobic conservatives” on the other.<sup>12</sup>

According to Diane Richardson (2005), since the 1990s, lesbian and gay activism in Western Europe, North America and Australia has been dominated by rights-oriented strategies that, in line with “new homonormativity,” draw on arguments about normalizing sameness in relation to hetero-majority, demanding in this way inclusion into existing institutions and social structures. The assimilationist tendencies grounded in the assumptions

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<sup>12</sup> Under the title “Forging a Gay Mainstream” the U.S. online group called Independent Gay Forum published the following arguments cited in Duggan’s article: “We equally oppose ‘progressive’ claims that gays should support radical social change or restructuring of society” together with “we deny ‘conservative’ claims that gays and lesbians pose any threat to social morality or the political order” (Duggan, 2002, p. 176).

about “normalcy” are typically informed by neoliberal discourses of social pluralism, individual freedom, and human rights that, as we saw earlier, play an important role in contemporary nationalizing practices in the West, generating new exclusions (Duggan, 2002; Richardson, 2005). In other words, by supporting the category of a “proper” (gay) citizen, rights-based activism that aims at inclusion into the national mainstream tends to reinforce the dominant exclusionary and heteronormative meanings of nation and citizenship (Wray 2000). As Duggan (2002) points out, new homonormativity “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179). The only thing politics grounded in the discourses of “normalcy” can achieve is, in the words of Richardson (2005), “*imaginary* equality and the illusion of progress” (p. 394, original emphasis).

Criticism of the normalizing tendencies that dominate the “rights” oriented lesbian and gay activism exposed its depoliticizing and privatizing effects (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Richardson, 2004; Brandzel 2005). Being dominated by white, upper-middle-class, gay men, mainstream lesbian and gay politics results in the marginalization of non-white, working class, lesbian and trans subjects (Duggan, 1994; Warner, 2000; Brandzel, 2005; Richardson, 2005). Although assimilationist politics do not lead towards non-exclusionary relations, the limited success that this strategy has achieved must be acknowledged. By demanding “equal rights,” assimilationist gay and lesbian politics generated positive change in the social status of some sexually marginalized subjects (Duggan, 1994; Richardson, 2004).

In opposition to assimilationist claims, radical politics of sexuality, based on a queer perspective, sets its agenda around the normalizing practices that marginalize, discriminate, and criminalize different non-hegemonic practices and subjects. Setting itself against the wider “regimes of normal” through which contemporary societies are raced, classed, gendered, and heterosexualized, queer politics calls for a broad coalition of people who are excluded through normalizing practices (Warner, 1993).<sup>13</sup> By calling into question the institutions of marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, gender binary, citizenship, and identity, queer politics demands a more radical change to the underlying principles that structure and organize contemporary societies (Warner 1993, 2000; Duggan, 1994; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Richardson, 2004; Brandzel, 2005). With its attack on the contemporary practices of identity

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<sup>13</sup> This list is not exhaustive. Regimes of normalization include a variety of small and large scale norms that serve as a basis for discrimination.

and citizenship that are constituted in exclusionary terms, the queer perspective represents a promising alternative to assimilationist gay mainstreaming (Bell and Binnie, 2000).

However, queer politics has been criticized for a lack of self-reflexivity that results in exclusionary practices (Hames-García, 2001; Haritaworn, 2007; Puar, 2007). Queer politics is closely linked with an upper-middle or middle class Western population having an access to education and mobility and resonates with the assumptions of cosmopolitanism, individualism, and liberal humanism (Puar, 2007). As Puar (2007) notes, “freedom from norms” reflects the liberalistic *norm* of a self-contained individual who is free to choose his own destiny (p. 22). While rejecting the nation on the grounds of its exclusionary character as a framework of belonging, queer politics draws on the discourse of liberal cosmopolitanism and world citizenship. However, the sense of belonging to the world grounded in the universality of “world citizenship” and “belonging to humanity” is closely related to the structural and economic inequalities generated by globalizing processes (Calhoun, 2007). In other words, instead of representing a “view from nowhere,” cosmopolitan imagination predominantly represents a view of a white, English-speaking upper-middle or middle class Westerner (ibid.). At the same time, an alleged embeddedness in universality prevents the discourse of liberal cosmopolitanism from acknowledging its own socio-cultural basis. With its insensitivity for the structural inequalities produced by globalization, concludes Calhoun, “liberal cosmopolitanism does not provide the proximate solidarities on the basis of which better institutions and greater democracy can be built” (p. 165).

The above discussions of homonationalist discourses in Europe and sexual politics of belonging in the Anglophonic West suggest that globalizing transnational practices are an important factor in the study of sexual identities in a particular national context, such as Croatia. By “operat[ing] in conjunction with geopolitical power,” the discourses of sexual citizenship and belonging emerging in the Anglophonic West influence practices of identification and belonging situated at the intersection of the global and the national in contemporary Croatia (Bacchetta, 2002). The growing need to consider transnational impacts on sexual politics, legislation, practices, and identities that are practiced, enacted, and experienced nationally is closely related to the changing function of the nation-state in the context of globalization and the EU enlargement process. In the next section, I will discuss the importance of contemporary globalizing processes for studying sexual identities. In this regard, I will propose a theoretical framework for analyzing local sexual norms, practices, and identities in the globalizing world beyond the Western-centric approaches that result from and, in turn, secure the global economic and political inequalities.



### 2.3. Nation-States, Globalization, and Sexuality

The processes of decentralization of production and the centralization of control of the global economy by the supranational institutions such as International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization and the European Union are argued to have resulted in the transformation of the function of nation-states from the formulation of national policies to the administration of policies formulated through the supranational institutions (Robinson, 2001). As Saskia Sassen (2006) points out, the processes of denationalization and privatization of what used to be a “common good” in nearly all parts of the contemporary world have influenced the emergence of the “denationalized” nation-state of global capitalism. The actual outcome of denationalization is perhaps most visible if we consider the rapid change in the function of national banks from state regulatory institutions to that of servicing global capital (Sassen, 2003). However, as Sassen emphasizes, these developments should not be overstated. Nation-states are not just penetrated by supranational institutions. For example, *national* legislation still has a great role in securing the authority of the nation-state, which signals a decisive role in determining the scope and content of national citizenship (Sassen, 2003, 2006). What is more, strategies designed by national political elites and non-state actors have a significant impact on the course of local (national) transformations. Hence, it may be argued that the nation-state is still vital but by no means the only source of influence that has an effect on national social realities. To capture this specificity, Sassen emphasizes the changed function and meaning of the nation-state in global capitalism without presupposing its demise. She uses the term *denationalized* to break from the dominant concept of *postnational*, which assumes the decline of the nation-state in the globalized world (Sassen 2003, 2006).

We can see that globalization has not brought about the end of the world system of nation-states. On the contrary, as Calhoun (2007) argues, “while new institutions outside or beyond nation-states are important, nation-states themselves are called on to play central roles in the context of globalization” (p. 170). Furthermore, nation-states continue to constitute a primary framework for visibility and resistance towards inequalities produced both globally and locally, including struggles over sexual citizenship and belonging (Balakrishnan 1996; Verdery, 1996; Stychin, 2003; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Binnie, 2004). Nonetheless, given the simultaneous existence of local, national and global scales, and their mutual interdependence in the context of global capitalism, we must always be conscious of the complex negotiations taking place at the sites where these spheres come together. As queer studies scholars

increasingly emphasize, sexuality is one such site where the local, national and global intersect (Grewal and Kaplan, 2001; Manalansan, 2003; Boellstorff, 2005). Thus, in the next paragraphs I will reflect upon theoretical concerns emerging in relation to the process of globalization of sexualities, which is seen to be facilitated by popular culture, discourses of human rights (especially supranational European human rights legislation), and Internet culture (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Altman, 2001; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan, 2002; Binnie, 2004).

Speaking about the globalization of sexual identities in his pioneering work on “global sex” Dennis Altman (2001) argues that the global sexual figure of the politically active gay man entitled to rights produced in the West has been adopted by lesbian and gay politics worldwide. However, as several authors point out, (Manalansan, 2003; Binnie, 2004; Rofel, 2007), Altman, by (wrongly) treating the West as a monolithic unified culture that penetrates other parts of the world, conflates three distinct processes – Americanization, homogenization, and globalization – and thus proves to be insufficient for capturing the dynamics of global and national instances and their complex interplay. Therefore, in order to move beyond the Western-centric notion of “global gayness” Lisa Rofel (2007) in her study of lesbian and gay cultures in contemporary China proposes the concept of “transcultural practice.” By putting an emphasis on globalization as a process and dialogical relationship between the local, national, and global, the notion of “transcultural practice” opens up a space for exploring different developments and asymmetries of globalization beyond the global vs. local divide (Rofel 2007).

Another successful attempt at bypassing the monolithic view of globalization (of sexualities) that reinforces the distinction between “the West” and “the rest” is Tom Boellstorff’s (2005) concept of “dubbing culture.” Boellstorff utilizes the metaphor of *dubbing* in order to account for the construction of lesbian and gay identities in Indonesia at the intersection of national and global influences. The notion of *dubbing* conceptualizes globalization as a particular form of translation where the global and national are brought together in a “productive tension” (p. 5). In his own words, “[t]o ‘dub’ a discourse is neither to parrot it verbatim nor to compose an entirely new script. It is to hold together cultural logics without resolving them into a unitary whole” (p. 58). In addition to illuminating the ways in which global influences are translated in a national context, the logic of dubbing posits the process of sexual identity construction as a complex negotiation that is neither pre-determined nor completely contingent, taking place at the intersection of national and global.

What both concepts, “transcultural practice” and “dubbing culture” have in common is a view of non-Western (homo)sexual practices and identities as emergent products of complex negotiations between global influences and national politics challenging in this way Western-centric ideas of globalization. Such an approach, which conceptualizes the globalization of sexuality as a heterogeneous and uneven field that consists of manifold discourses and practices that are in constant negotiation with local and national meanings and practices, constitutes a productive framework for exploring the construction of sexual identities in the regions of Southeastern Europe that strive for the EU membership.

It is important to emphasize that globalization has both positive and negative impacts on the social realities of sexually marginalized people worldwide. On the one hand, the globalization of human and sexual rights discourses contributes to positive transformations of national legal frameworks that are beginning to grant certain rights to some sexual minorities. However, the spread of the human rights discourse and sexual politics around the globe results in some negative effects as well. In particular, Martin Manalansan points to the ways in which transnational LGBTIQ organizations such as ILGA impose the Western model of “developmental narrative that begins with an unliberated, ‘prepolitical’ homosexual practice [...] that culminates in a liberated, ‘out,’ politicized, ‘modern,’ ‘gay’ subjectivity” (Manalansan, 1997, p. 487, original emphasis). In this way the so-called “Stonewall” form of resistance embodied in the Gay Pride Marches and the related ideal of the “outed” visible subject have become universal benchmarks for gay liberation throughout the world, while all other identities, practices and forms of resistance are regarded as “backward,” “premodern” and thus less-worthy (Manalansan, 1997; see also Stychin, 2003). Hence, new subject positions such as the “good gay citizen,” in addition to being sites of resistance, become the new locations of power and new sources of inequalities among sexually marginalized people worldwide (Grewal and Kaplan, 2001; Stychin, 2003). Also, by imposing the Western model of gay liberation as a universal form of resistance, the international LGBTIQ organizations participate in the re/production of Western economic and cultural domination (Bacchetta, 2002).

As I argued above, instead of conceiving of nationalization and globalization as two contradictory processes undermining each other, we need to consider them as not only complementary, but rather as mutually constitutive trends. As an effect of productive interplay between these supposedly contradictory tendencies, new subject positions and new identities emerge, some as a direct result of tensions between the “national heteronormativity” and “national homonormativity,” such as the “good gay citizen”. Having reflected upon

contemporary debates on the intersection of nationalism, gender and sexuality, and the impact of globalization on these debates, in the next section of this chapter I will address the specific intersection of nationalism and sexuality in Croatia. The aim of my discussion in the following paragraphs is to establish the socio-historical context that structures the strategies of self-identification and belonging of sexually marginalized people in Croatia.

## **2.4. The intersections of nationalism, gender and sexuality in Croatia after the break-up of Yugoslavia**

Discourses of sexuality played a decisive role in the project of nation-building that took place in the 1990s as well as in subsequent Europeanization and democratization pertaining to desired membership in the European Union in 2000s. In order to provide a context for changing discourses of gender and sexuality in relation to the nationalization process in the 1990s, I will first briefly reflect on the process of relative liberalization in the 1980s in the Yugoslav Federation. When socialist Yugoslavia was established during World War II male homosexuality was illegal, which made non-heterosexual sexualities mostly invisible in public life. Decriminalization of male homosexuality in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, the constitutive autonomous unit within Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, took place in the 1977.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to earlier periods, the 1980s, the last decade of Yugoslavia as a unified polity, were marked by a proliferation of pro-democratic liberal initiatives with Ljubljana, the capital of the SR Slovenia, as the center of new political organizing. The student initiatives in Ljubljana, in addition to feminist, green, and peace movements also included a gay movement (Vuletić, 2003). In 1984, in Ljubljana, a student group for the rights of homosexual people called *Magnus* was established. In the same year they organized the first lesbian and gay festival “Homosexuality and Culture” (Vuletić, 2003). The libertarian spirit in Ljubljana was met with sympathetic reception in Zagreb, the nearby capital of SR Croatia. The popular journal *Polet* [Verve], the weekly magazine of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia published positive reports on the political events taking place in neighboring Slovenia (ibid.). Influenced by the affirmation of the new perspectives in the cultural life of Ljubljana, *Omladinski radio* [Youth Radio], managed by the League of

<sup>14</sup> Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was structured as a federation of six republics – SR Slovenia, SR Croatia, SR Bosnia and Herzegovina, SR Serbia, SR Montenegro, SR Macedonia, now all independent states, and two autonomous provinces within Serbia, SAP Vojvodina and SAP Kosovo. In addition to SR Croatia, in the same year male homosexual acts were decriminalized in SR Slovenia, SR Montenegro and SAP Vojvodina. Interestingly, in Serbia male homosexual encounters were decriminalized in 1994 during a period of aggressive military nationalism emerging in relation to the wars in the former Yugoslavia.

Socialist Youth of Trešnjevka district in Zagreb, broadcasted a show called *Frigidna utičnica* [Frigid Socket] focusing on issues of sexuality including homosexuality (Vuletić, 2003). In the late 1980s the first lesbian group in Zagreb *Lila inicijativa* [Lavender Initiative] was established (Sagasta, 2001).

The liberalization of the political climate culminated in the 1990s with multi-party elections in all parts of the former Yugoslavia and resulted in the victory of nationalist parties in the Socialist Republics of Croatia and Serbia (Wachtel and Bennett, 2009). These results opened up a space for the nationalization of belonging that had emerged by the beginning of the 1990s. The democratization of the election system, ironically, brought about the end of the libertarian movements in SR Croatia. Gender and sexuality came to the forefront of the process of nation-building from the beginning of the 1990s (Kahlina, 2011).<sup>15</sup>

Even though the “national question” was constantly present and manipulated in different ways in the multinational Yugoslav Federation, it was the secessionist movements at the beginning of the 1990s that generated an expansion of militarized ethnic nationalisms resulting in armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The conflict in Croatia started soon after the Croatian Parliament, dominated by the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) party, proclaimed the independence of Croatia in the summer of 1991. The armed conflict itself was a result of the Croatian Government’s and political elite’s nationalist rhetoric and politics which privileged the Croat ethnic group as the “constituent” nation, consigning all others to inferior status, as well as the politics of the Serbian Government, which encouraged and gave material support for the rebellion of the Serb self-identified people who lost their constitutive status in Croatia (Malešević, 2006; Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).

Nationalization processes and struggles over self-determination in the former Yugoslavia relied on the symbolic construction of national identities that were increasingly constituted in ethnic terms (Malešević, 2006).<sup>16</sup> The new national imaginary constructed women/women’s bodies as symbolic markers of ethnicity/nation and its imagined territory. Facing the risk of being violated and invaded, they were seen to be in need of protection. At

<sup>15</sup> The earlier version of the arguments presented in this section appeared as a part of Kahlina, K. (2011) ‘Nation, state and queers: Sexual identities in the interface between social and personal in contemporary Croatia’ in Anna G. Jónasdóttir, Valerie Bryson and Kathleen B. Jones (eds) *Sexuality, gender and Power: Intersectional and transnational perspectives*, New York: Routledge. pp. 30-44.

<sup>16</sup> In order to emphasize the ethnic exclusiveness of Croatian and Serbian nationalisms, I will refer to the people affiliated with Croatian ethnicity as *Croats*, while using the term *Croatians* for all inhabitants and citizens of Croatia regardless their ethnic affiliation. Likewise, I will use the term *Serb* when referring to people affiliated with Serbian ethnicity (mostly when talking about Serb population in Croatia) and term *Serbian* for the citizens of Serbia.

the same time, men were given the role of protectors of woman/nation. More importantly, they were also constructed as bearers of the “genetic material of the nation,” which, in the act of rape, was planted in the body/territory of the ethnic other, violating in this way its national integrity (Mostov, 1995; Pavlović, 1999; Žarkov, 2001).

What is implicit in these constructs of women as bearers of future generations and men as bearers of the genetic material of the nation is that such different constructions of the sexual bodies of women and men play a crucial role in defining an “ethnic group” in terms of its “purity” (Žarkov, 1995, p. 113). In particular, the logic of “ethnic purity” posits the male (hetero)sexuality as a decisive element in controlling and defining the boundaries of an ethnic group, which, at the same time, depend on the control of female procreative sexuality (ibid.). In other words, as it was pointed out by Dubravka Žarkov (2001), the male body is both male and ethnic in the context of the “war for ethnically exclusive and exclusively ethnic territories” in the former Yugoslavia (Žarkov 2001, p. 70).

At the same time, Žarkov (2001) points out an important process in the nationalization of Croatia. She explores the invisibility of Croatian men both as victims and perpetrators of sexual violence against men in the Croatian media. She identifies this media strategy of silencing as a means of establishing a difference between the ethnic/national “self” and the “other” by stigmatizing particular forms of sexuality and masculinity as ethnically inappropriate and “weak.” The media discourses silencing both Croatian male victims and perpetrators of homosexual rape are based on the image of the ethnic Croatian “self” in terms of powerful heterosexual manliness, which would be undermined by acts of rape and/or castration (Žarkov, 2001). At the same time, all the figures other than the norm of the potent and aggressive Croatian “self,” namely women, non-heterosexual and non-aggressive people have been disempowered, assigned to a hierarchically lower position in relation to the warrior heterosexual man.<sup>17</sup>

Inseparable from the production of the heterosexist and violent “Croat man” is the accompanying strategy of emasculating the ethnic “other.” The image of the “Serb-faggot” has emerged in the Croatian far-right discourses as a means of naming Croatia’s “ultimate other(s)” – Serbs and gay men (Vuletić, 2008). On the basis of both its ethnic and sexual dimensions, it is possible to identify the twofold function of this image. On the one hand, by taking away the power of Serb men’s masculinities, the function of the “Serb-faggot” was to diminish the power of the ethnically perceived enemy in the post-Yugoslav conflicts. On the

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the construction of women as the “other within” in the context of the Croatian nation-building project see Iveković (1993).

other hand, the image of the “Serb-faggot” demarcated borders “internally:” the Croat ethnic “self” comes to be reified in heteronormative terms when expelling the non-heterosexual man from national collective. For instance, “faggot,” as one of the most common swearwords in Croatian language, has been often used in discrediting political opponents by constructing them both as non-Croats and cowards (Pavlović, 1999). This particular discourse of homosexuality functioned as a way of naming the “other” in relation to the building of the Croatian nation, meanwhile all other discourses of non-normative sexuality were silenced. Facing the danger of gay-bashing in the context of a homophobic political climate, the majority of lesbians, gays, and trans people in Croatia in the 1990s were closeted (Pavlović 1999; Vuletić, 2008).

These points make it clear that by symbolizing the ultimate opposition to the “Croat man,” the “Serb-faggot” became a key figure, or what Matti Bunzl would call a “constitutive other,” that explicitly exposes the heteronormalizing aspect of Croatian national identity construction process (Bunzl, 2004). However, there was no analogous counterpart to the “Serb-faggot,” which could construct, for instance, lesbians in similar terms. This in itself exposes the different positioning of men and women in relation to the masculine project of nation-building. Nevertheless lesbians, together with feminists, and women who did not procreate, were commonly perceived as foreign elements that are inherently antinational, and endanger the nation by “refusing to play a role in the heteronormative biological and cultural reproduction of the nation” (Bacchetta, 2002, 952).<sup>18</sup> The construction of feminists, lesbians, and women who did not procreate as enemies of the nation exposes the centrality of the control over women’s body through sexuality in the nation-building project in Croatia (Salecl, 1992; Žarkov, 2007). In line with this logic, motherhood came to be celebrated as the only category defining *both* the ethnicity and femininity of Croat women (Žarkov, 2007). This position was strongly supported by the Catholic Church whose influence on the state politics in the 1990s was enormous (Škrabalo and Jurić, 2005).<sup>19</sup> In order to secure the normative position of motherhood as the only “proper” definition of womanhood, the Government in the mid-1990s introduced several policies to “help” women with several children, including the

<sup>18</sup> In the beginning of 1990s, mainstream media attacked feminists who were critical of the political regime. In an article entitled “Hrvatske feministice siluju Hrvatsku” [Croatian feminists are raping Croatia] published in Croatian weekly *Globus*, December 11, 1992, five prominent writers and social analysts were discredited on the grounds of not being “real Croats” because they were not “real women” but feminists. Soon after the wide media attack, they all left Croatia (Jansen, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> In order to promote human reproduction as the ultimate national value, at the beginning of the 1990s one of the local Catholic Church officials, Father Anto Baković, founded the Croatian Population Movement (*Hrvatski populacijski pokret*). Baković’s public engagements were mostly directed against non-heterosexual people (Vuletić, 2008).

provisions for prolonged paid maternity leave, entitlements to tax reduction, and child support (Pavlović 1999).

From what I have said so far, it might look as if the dominant ideology in the 1990s was unambiguously a neo-traditionalist ethnic model of nationalism promoted by HDZ, aiming to create of an ethnically pure nation co-extensive with the new political borders of the state. However, global demands of multinational capital and supranational institutions such as IMF, UN, and EU, as well as concerns voiced by international human rights organizations presented counter-pressures. At the same time, on the national level, the new Croatian state lacked the economic resources to implement its formal support for traditional gender roles.<sup>20</sup> These conflicting pressures created the precondition for what Dejan Kršić calls the inconsistent (as every ideology always is) and eclectic nationalist ideology of the 1990s (Kršić, 1997). In practice, Croatian politics included both anti-fascism and a celebration of the racist, pro-Nazi Ustaša movement,<sup>21</sup> anti and pro-American rhetoric and politics, and the coexistence of democratic institutions with the authoritarian rule of president Tuđman (Kršić, 1997).

The influence of the international community and multinational capital is more prominent in the period following the 2000 elections. The elections were won by the coalition of six parties with SDP (Social Democratic Party) as the dominant partner. Some of the parties in the ruling coalition, such as HSS (Croatian Peasant Party) for example, represented rather nationalist and traditionalist politics. Notwithstanding the ideological differences among the partners in the coalition, the new government immediately started to promote a strong pro-EU position and to support the values of liberal democracy.

The pro-EU tendencies involved harmonizing the Croatian legal system with the EU legal framework. As part of these legal changes, in 2003 the rights of non-heterosexual people were included in the Croatian legal system for the first time (Juras, 2006). Together with the protection of national minorities, the inclusion of gay rights was claimed as proof that Croatia belonged to the community of European democracies. It is also important to note that the post-2000 period saw continued attempts at the reinforcement and expansion of the local

<sup>20</sup> The actual economic situation did not allow the political elites to introduce all the legal measures they proposed, such as the recognition of women with four or more children as “mother educator” with proper professional status and salary declared in 1996 by the Labor Act (Pavlović 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Ustaša originated as an illegal radical nationalist political movement in the first half of twentieth century whose aim was to create an ethnically pure independent state of Croats. During WWII, with the support of Hitler regime, Ustaša movement established a fascist puppet state named Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, abbreviated *NDH*). Soon after seizing power, the Ustaša regime organized concentration camps where Serbs, Jews and Roma people were systematically killed.



NGO network, especially NGOs dealing with the rights and cultural promotion of sexual minorities, most of which were funded by donors based in Western Europe and the U.S.

This new period meant the re-definition of national unity on the basis of inclusive plurality. As a result, the image of the “Serb-faggot” that constituted the primary focus of nationalist exclusion in the 1990s was abandoned by the new political elites. The change in the dominant ideology was clear in the SDP government’s support for the emerging Gay Pride events. Indeed, a number of leading politicians even participated in the first Zagreb Pride March in 2002.<sup>22</sup> However, Borislav Mikulić (2006) observes that the doubled object of hatred, the “Serb-faggot,” continued to be present in the form of homophobic-racist threats coming from the anti-pride protestors.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Mikulić argues that the emergence of Gay Pride Marches indicates a change in the dominant ideology. However, the logic of tolerance, the incorporation of non-heterosexual people and Serbs as the “tolerated other,” signals the limits of the new national ideology to challenge the exclusionary logic of the 1990s that constituted ethnic and sexual groups as “outsiders” in the first place. Moreover, as some critics of multiculturalism have argued, so far, the logic of tolerance that grants special “minority” rights to particular groups of people has not significantly challenged existing hierarchical social divisions (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Bunzl, 2004).

Meanwhile, the image of the “Serb-faggot,” together with a new construct, the “eurofaggotization” (*europederizacija*) of Croatia, which appears in relation to the transformation of the Croatian “self,”<sup>24</sup> remain present in the rhetoric of the Catholic Church and nationalistic parties as well as their supporters. Apparently contradictory images of the “Serb-faggot” and “eurofaggotization” are combined in this nationalist discourse to accuse the new government of putting the “integrity” and “purity” of Croatia in danger with its new pluralizing politics. Here the charge of “eurofaggotization” implies that the “faggot,” formerly established as the threat to the ethnic self, still functions as a constitutive “other” in Croatian nationalist discourse. However, the location of this threat has moved from neighboring Serbia to the European Union. From this perspective, it is the national government along with the “improper” individual that is seen to “faggotize” Croatia through its pro-EU politics, imposing new sexual norms that are argued to be alien to Croatian “traditions” and as such

<sup>22</sup> *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper], “Rekreativni liberali i liberalni narodnjaci,” p. 7, June 29, 2002; and *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper], “Po Gay Prideu jajima, bocama i suzavcem,” p. 3, June 30, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> “Serbs-faggots” together with “go to Serbia” was (and still is) one of the most common insult coming from the anti-pride protestors.

<sup>24</sup> The term “eurofaggotization” (*europederizacija*) appeared on the leaflets that were distributed in Zagreb a month before the first Zagreb Pride. *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper], “Zagrebom kruži crveni letak protiv Gay pridea,” p. 20, May 27, 2002.

represent a threat to its heterosexual masculine “self.” Finally, in line with the threatening presence of the “faggot” in the imaginary of Croatian nationalists, far more gay men than lesbians have been physically attacked in public spaces after the rights of sexual minorities became a part of public discourses.

The incorporation of same-sex relations as “special minority rights” into the legal framework constructed the “homosexual population,” represented in the *Same-Sex Communities Act (Zakon o istospolnim zajednicama)*<sup>25</sup> from 2003 and other anti-discriminatory stipulations, as a homogenized and formally established minority group. In relation to this homogenizing process, any distinction among lesbians, gays and other non-heterosexual identities and practices has been blurred in the new pluralizing ideology, while the homo/hetero divide that serves to control and define “normal” based on its relation to “non-normal” has been strengthened (Warner, 1993; Puri, 2002). At the same time, the *Same-Sex Communities Act* includes only three stipulations – the right to common property, the right to be sustained by the partner, and prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of same-sex communities and homosexual orientation – in contrast to many benefits granted to married heterosexual couples by the *Family Law Act*. In other words, the unified cultural voice of the “tolerant heterosexual Croat citizen” was itself constructed from within the old dominant position. As a result, the new ideology did not significantly challenge existing social hierarchies: the nuclear heterosexual family remains the normative social unit of Croatian society.

## 2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the ways in which gender and sexuality play a relatively distinct and decisive role in the process of nationalization of solidarity and belonging. In the process of being nationalized, citizenship, belonging, and solidarity are constructed as exclusionary practices, producing a complex network of “us” vs. “them”. In the next chapter I will explore theoretical insights on the notion of identity that may allow me to conceptualize the political potential residing in the social category of sexual identity. The main concern that I will address is whether, and to what extent, sexual identities that are grounded in a marginal social position in the context of heterosexualized national citizenship carry the potential for disruption and are able to open up a space for imagining new strategies of belonging that would lead towards non-exclusionary relations of solidarity.

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<sup>25</sup> Printed in Juras, S. (2006).

### Chapter 3: Towards a progressive identity politics

But is it really the case that no one can become the subject of speech without others' being silenced? Are there no counterexamples? Where such exclusions do exist, are they all bad? Are they all equally bad? Can we distinguish legitimate from illegitimate exclusions, better from worse practices of subjectivation? Is subject-authorization *inherently* a zero-sum game? Or does it only become one in oppressive societies? Can we overcome or at least ameliorate the asymmetries in current practices of subjectivation? Can we construct practices, institutions, and forms of life in which the empowerment of some does not entail the disempowerment of others? If not, what is the point of feminist struggle?

(Fraser, 1995, p. 68)

If feminism has one legacy to take forward here it is the legitimacy of using political criteria as the marker for the validity of social theorizing.

(McLaughlin, Casey, and Richardson, 2006, p.18)

But it is a false dilemma to suppose that we should *either* accept pernicious uses of identity *or* pretend they do not exist.

(Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006, p. 7, original emphasis)

The reality of identity appears at the juncture between experience and the social world, and can be known through careful and socially informed reflection upon experience.

(Wilkerson, 2007, p. 133)

In Chapter 2 I discussed contemporary debates on the global dominance of nationalism that postulate the nation as a primary site of belonging and solidarity. In my argumentation, I paid special attention to the way national identities are re/produced through conflicting heteronormalizing and homonationalist discourses and social practices that have emerged as relevant aspects of contemporary nation-building in Croatia. As my discussion reveals, these processes constructs national identities as a category of exclusion. However, the fact that national identities participate in the re/production of social hierarchies should not lead us to a hasty conclusion that all forms of identities are always already pernicious. In this chapter, I draw on Linda Alcoff's (2006) and William Wilkerson's (2007) postpositivist realist conception of identity and advocate the political potential of sexual identities for

emancipatory politics aiming at social transformation that may result in non-exclusionary social relations of belonging.

I will first discuss the main shortcomings of the ways in which the notion of identity, in the context of identity politics, has been conceived by gay and lesbian studies and queer theory, the two most influential frameworks for thinking about sexuality politically today. I will argue that neither gay and lesbian politics, with its essentializing and homogenizing conceptions of identity, nor queer approaches that exclude the notion of lived experience from their understanding of identity, provide a productive framework for an emancipatory politics of sexuality. Instead, I will discuss the understanding of identity articulated from the postpositivist realist perspective (in details in Section 3.4.). This model conceptualizes identity as a dynamic interplay between “public identity” and “lived subjectivity” mediated through an “interpretive horizon” (Alcoff, 2006). This model brings together a feminist emphasis on lived experiences and a queer destabilizing critique in a productive interplay. As I will argue in this chapter, this view of identity as a social practice situated at the interface between the personal and the social provides a productive framework for exploring the intersection of nationalism and sexuality in the context of the process of self-construction. I will suggest that with its conceptualization of agency, which is grounded in self-reflexivity, the postpositivist realist view of identity makes an invaluable contribution for assessing the political potential of sexual identity for emancipatory politics in Croatia.

Finally, in the last section of the chapter I will locate the political utility of the postpositivist realist model of identity in the potentiality of self-reflexive practice to bring about solidarity based on reflexivity and accountability towards differences, thus opening up a space for non-oppressive social relations (Dean, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

### **3.1. Sexual identity and politics: Gay and lesbian politics and queer theories**

In much of contemporary sexuality theory the notion of sexual identity is considered a necessary evil at best, and at worst relic of backward gay and lesbian studies, which has been successfully overridden. This is a result of queer theory critiques of sexual identity that have found their way into mainstream academic knowledge production in the past two decades. The negative assessment of sexual identity is a reaction to the homogenizing and exclusionary practices of the identity-centered politics that emerged in the U.S. and spreading globally from the early 1970s. Although I agree with this critique, I disagree with queer approaches

that completely reject the political utility of identity in so far as identity continues to be central in rendering meaningful the experiences of people who are marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality.

As Linda Alcoff and Satya Mohanty in their “Introduction” to *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (2006) argue, identity politics in contemporary social and cultural theory mostly refers to academic and activist practices related to different anti-oppression struggles such as women’s right, civil rights, and gay liberation movements that rely on the concept of a common identity in their claims for a more equal society.<sup>26</sup> According to Alcoff and Moya, the political significance of identities has been grounded in the view that identities are a legitimate source of knowledge, especially when it comes to social inequalities, and that the very subjects of exclusion should be the leading force in the struggle against oppression. This suggests that some forms of anti-colonial and anti-oppressive struggles grounded in nationalist assumptions about ethnic/national self-determination can be regarded as forms of identity politics as well. However, contrary to the nationalist discourses in the 1990s, the position of Croatia in the Yugoslav Federation does not contain the elements of oppression. On the contrary, on the eve of the break-up of Yugoslavia Croatia was one of the richest republics, benefiting greatly from economic, political and social autonomy (Malešević, 2006).

Sexual politics as a public political engagement against social stigmatization and exclusion on the grounds of sexuality started to emerge in the US in the 1950s. However, it was a series of riots in New York in 1969 commonly known as the Stonewall rebellion that paved the way for the larger and more influential Gay Liberation Movement to surface (Seidman, 1993). At the very beginning the movement was strongly influenced by utopian liberation theory, which argued for a universal androgynous bisexuality free from the constraints of the binary regimes of gender and sexuality. However, from the mid-1970s the political agenda of the movement started to change towards what Seidman (1993) calls an “ethnic” model grounded in community- and identity-oriented homogenizing presuppositions and activities. In their attempt to secure a commonality in relation to sexual practices and experiences of marginalization, the movement drew on “sexual-object choice” as an exclusive ground for sexual identity construction, while disregarding other types of marginal sexual practices and modes of self-identification, as well as experiences of multiply disadvantaged subjects. It is important to note that in this period, from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, gay and (feminist) lesbian movements were separated, but the “ethnicization of desire” that

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<sup>26</sup> Although Alcoff and Mohanty do not specify, these struggles have been mostly, but not exclusively, taking place in the context of U.S. since late 1960s.

informed homogenization and exclusionary practices were prevalent in both groups (Epstein, 1987; Phelan, 1993; Seidman, 1993; Gamson, 1995).

Although the anti-discriminatory activism and academic practices that utilize identity-based politics, including gay and lesbian movements, have achieved positive social changes pertaining to the social position of lesbians and gays, they often fail to acknowledge the heterogeneity within the particular marginalized group in whose name they act. In some cases identity politics, by referring to shared experiences of oppression, disregards particularities of individual experience influenced by different positions in relation to intersecting social divisions (Seidman, 1993; Gamson, 1995; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). What is more, the construction of a social group as a homogenized unity is based on the view that each member shares in a common, and as such unchangeable, identity which does not need further questioning. By essentializing and homogenizing individual and collective identities this way, identity politics often fails to address important issues related to differences and contradictions within the naturalized “common experience” (Mohanty, 2000).

One of the best examples of the pernicious effects of homogenization practices in the context of identity politics may be found in the relative marginalization of lesbians within both Gay Liberation Movement and women’s/feminist movements, which was pointed out by *Radicalesbians* as early as in the beginning of 1970s.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1980s, one of the most significant and comprehensive critiques of the homogenizing exclusionary identity politics of feminism was published in the collection *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981). In *This Bridge* women of color voiced their experiences of exclusion from mainstream U.S. feminism and lesbian feminism, both largely dominated by white urban middle-class feminists. *This Bridge* contains critical reflections that expose the ways in which white middle-class feminists regard their particular experiences as universal women’s issues, leaving the specific experiences of women of color unaddressed, which resulted in their relative marginalization within feminist movement(s) and research. Contributors to *This Bridge* insisted that feminism embrace an intersectional analysis that is grounded in different experiences of multiple forms of oppression. In other words, according to the authors in *This Bridge*, feminism could only become a truly critical emancipatory practice if it began

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<sup>27</sup> *Radicalesbians* were one of the first voices to point out the relative marginalization of lesbians within the Gay Liberation Front and feminist movements in the U.S. For further details see Karla Jay (1999) *Tales of Lavender Menace*, New York: Basic Books. The critique of exclusionary practices of US feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s is also present in the works of lesbian feminist Adrienne Rich and lesbian feminist of color Audre Lorde. On the marginalization of lesbians in the context of Croatian feminism today see Kahlina, 2008.

acknowledging different experiences of women constructed at the intersection of different social hierarchies (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981).

In the late 1980s postmodernist tendencies within feminism became more and more conspicuous and influential, criticizing the problematic overgeneralization of the particular experiences and issues of white, middle-class, heterosexual Western women. Postmodernist feminists argued for a feminist theory and politics that would account for the embeddedness of knowledge claims, bringing forth concepts such as embodiment, social location, cultural perspective (Bordo, 1990), situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), and the politics of difference (Young, 1990). Notwithstanding the different issues they have raised, what all these concepts have in common is the recognition of individual experiences constructed from a particular social location that a subject inhabits as important sources of knowledge about the workings of intersecting systems of oppression. I will get back to some of these concepts later in this chapter when I discuss positive aspects of identity as a source of knowledge about the social world and its emancipatory potential. Now I would like to turn to another body of literature – that of queer theory – which has also emerged as a critical response towards exclusionary practices of identity politics, and which in its critical practice explicitly focuses on the issue sexuality and sexual identity.

As Donald Hall (2003) argues, queer theories, rather than a singular queer theory, represent an increasingly diversified body of literature. On the one hand, there is a tendency in lesbian and gay scholarship to use the term queer as a common denominator for different sexual identities and practices not complying with (hetero)sexual and gender norms, such as lesbian, gay, transsexual, transgender, and intersexual, to name only the most common ones.<sup>28</sup> Within this framework, “queer” has often been referred to, ironically, as a kind of new identity position that is grounded in multiplicity and instability. On the other hand, the term queer has often been articulated as a synonym with a new epistemological position that rejects identity categories and the concept of the subject as a basis of politics altogether on the grounds of their inherently exclusionary and pernicious nature.<sup>29</sup>

Notwithstanding the differences, what all queer theories have in common in my reading is a view that the notion of sexual identity does not reflect some ahistorical “human nature,” or some inherent erotic desire, but represents an emerging product of particular social practices of Western modernity. In this regard, queer theories rely on Foucault’s (1988)

<sup>28</sup> See for example Higgins, P. (Ed) (1993); Seidman, S. (Ed) (1996); Whisman, V. (1996); Browne, K and Nash, C. J. (Eds) (2010).

<sup>29</sup> See for example Warner, M. (1993); Duggan, L. (1994); Jagose, A. (1996); Edelman, L (2004); Colebrook, C. (2009); Ruffolo, D. (2009).

assertions that the notion of *sexuality* itself is a historical product, and that homosexuality as a particular identity category is the direct effect of psychological, psychiatric and medical discourses of late nineteenth century when a shift from a concern with same-sex sexual acts towards the actor of the act occurred.<sup>30</sup> Following Foucault's argument, D'Emilio (1993) directly links the emergence of the social category of (homo)sexual identity with the development of the capitalist system of wage labor that brought about the changes in the constitution of the family in the second half of nineteenth century. Thus, starting from the premise that identity is a socio-historical formation – an effect of normalizing discourses of bourgeois respectability and capitalist modernity – queer theories unanimously advocate the view of sexual identity as unstable, contingent and changeable.

However, although the queer critique of identity politics resembles some of the feminist arguments about multiplicity and socio-historical embeddedness of subject positions discussed above, the positive aspects of identity as a facet of social reality for many people across the globe remain largely marginal in queer theories. The adoption of the Foucaultian argument that sexual identity is the result of (hetero)normalizing practices lead to a widespread conclusion that identities are inherently exclusionary and pernicious, thus almost completely neglecting their emancipatory political potential and their importance as valuable sources of knowledge about the social world. As Hall (2003) admits, “eagerness to explore the complex relationship between simultaneous forms of empowerment and disempowerment, and among vectors of oppression [...] would appear to be a clear corollary to the “queer” emphasis on coalition building. But certainly it is a path not yet fully taken” (Hall, 2003, p. 89). Instead, what we are still witnessing in queer theories today is a widespread prominence of a rejection paradigm that proposes the rejection of politics based on identity on the grounds of its inescapably exclusionary character. Since in my research I explore how and to what extent different experiences that form the basis of identities may represent a relevant source of knowledge resulting in progressive political strategies, in the next paragraphs I will look more closely into the assumptions and arguments underpinning the rejection paradigm.

The rejection paradigm, which is based on the view that identities are inherently harmful because always exclusionary, has been utilized and promoted in the work of the most influential queer theorists such as Diana Fuss, Judith Butler, Michael Warner and David

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<sup>30</sup> In his highly influential first volume of *The history of sexuality* (1988 [1978]) Michel Foucault claims that “sexuality” is a product of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century bourgeoisie, who, in order to achieve self-affirmation, started to cultivate the body, to take care of it, to make it isolated from others. In other words, the bourgeoisie employed the technology of sex or “sexuality” in the production of a respectable self. In this way, Foucault rejects the dominant interpretations of sexuality as repressed that presuppose the existence of sexuality as an essential, pre-given site of repression which promises the possibility of being liberated.



Halperin. While rejecting identity-based politics due to its exclusionary and normalizing tendencies, Warner (1993) and Halperin (1995) propose a politics that would be based on the broad opposition to the “regimes of the normal” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi), thus bringing together “*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62).<sup>31</sup> In Warner’s view, such general resistance to the practices that construct what is normal, and create hierarchical social relations between the “norm” and its “other,” could open up a space for broad alliances among those who are marginalized by the normalizing practices, sexual minorities being only one of them. As Warner clearly emphasizes, queer “defin[es] itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual” (p. xxvi).

The rejection of identities as possible grounds for politics in favor of the “universalizing utopianism of queer theory” is mostly based on the view that identity politics is “minoritizing” and exclusionary. According to queer theorists, identity politics more often than not relies on the logic of toleration that can only result in assimilation without social transformation (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). In other words, the utopian queer critique based on a broad resistance to normality in general is argued to carry a much stronger emancipatory potential than the politics which addresses “only” particular “minority issues” articulated in the framework of “national imagination” (Warner, 1993, pp. xix-xx; see also Halperin, 1995, 2003; Jagose, 1996; Hall, 2003; Sullivan, 2003).

With its critique of the assimilationist tendencies of identity-based politics and its subsequent demand for a broader social critique with the capacity of addressing different systems of oppression at the same time, queer critique positions itself as a promising source of emancipatory ideas. However, the constant emphasis on the exclusionary and pernicious character of identity and the equation of identity politics with assimilationism in much of the queer critique resulted in the marginalization of potentially positive aspects of identity together with the relevance of lived experience (Seidman, 1993). The relative marginalization of lived experiences of underprivileged subjects supports the equation of all identity categories as *equally* harmful and exclusionary. Likewise, it often leads to the conclusion that all sexually marginalized subjects are equally subversive (Green, 2002).<sup>32</sup> However, as Sandra Harding (2006), drawing on Manuel Castells’ observations, points out, resistance to the existing social order does not in itself entail pro-democratic social transformation. Hence,

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<sup>31</sup> Original emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, commenting on the ways queer theory has been domesticated in the US academic context, Halperin notes that part of this process ‘was to despecify the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or transgressive content of queerness, thereby abstracting “queer” and turning it into a generic badge of subversiveness, a more trendy version of “liberal”: if it’s queer, it’s politically oppositional [...]’ (Halperin, 2003, p. 341).

the following question emerges for my research: How can a broad alliance of subjects who experience distinct forms of oppression and exclusion be formed, which would neither result in further marginalization while opposing the broadly conceived “regimes of normal,” nor follow the logic of “democracy-resisting” nationalist groups (Harding, 2006, p. 249)?

These concerns about the possible negative effects produced by the formation of anti-normality alliance that does not properly acknowledge the importance of identity and experience as sources of valuable knowledge about differences are based upon two sets of literature: the queers of color critique<sup>33</sup> and postpositivist realism (Moya and Hames-García 2000; Alcoff, 2006; Alcoff, Hames-García, Mohanty, and Moya, 2006; Wilkerson, 2007), which I will discuss in more detail in *Section 3.4*. The queers of color critique has pointed out that, under the universalizing logic of de-contextualized anti-normality, which has been mostly concerned with heteronorms, there has been an unquestioned centrality of white queer sexualities that prevents queer theory from engaging with the racial dimension of sexuality and marginalizes the contributions of queers of color. In this way, while speaking against the homogenizing practices present in the act of categorization and identity politics, queer theory, through its resistance to de-contextualized “regimes of normal,” actually re-produces the same result – an undifferentiated (self-same) anti-normality (Seidman, 1993; Cohen, 1997; Hames-García, 2001).<sup>34</sup> In order to move beyond this underlying racism and be critical of whiteness as a norm, queer theory and practice should address complexities, multiple (often contradictory) positionings, and the interrelations of oppression (Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 1999; Hames-García, 2001; Ferguson, 2005; Haritaworn, 2007).

Finally, queer politics based on a de-contextualized concept of anti-normality appears to be rather unsuccessful in achieving its proclaimed goals, namely a social transformation that would bring about new social arrangements with less categories and more equality. In my view, the dominant approaches in queer theories (Warner, 1993; Duggan, 1994; Halperin, 1995; Jagose, 1996) fail to form broad coalitions for social transformation because they do not address differences in social inequalities but rather focus on attacking the very practices of categorization in general. We can try to move beyond this blindness by acknowledging the

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<sup>33</sup> I have borrowed the term from Judith Halberstam (2005) who uses it to emphasize the new tendencies in queer studies present in the works of the authors such as Jose Esteban Muñoz, Roderick Ferguson, David Eng, and Juana Maria Rodriguez among others. Since the central focus of the queers of color critique is the intersection of race and sexuality, I would add authors like Jasbir Puar, Michael Hames-García, and Jin Haritaworn to Halberstam’s list (Halberstam, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Similar comment about the erasure of differences in postmodernist thinking has been raised by Paula Moya (2000). In particular, Moya argues that postmodernists “reinscribe, albeit unintentionally, a kind of universalizing sameness (we are all marginal now!) that their celebration of ‘difference’ had tried so hard to avoid” (Moya, 2000, p. 68).

relevance of the social positioning of identities as a decisive structuring element in contemporary societies and as one that often plays an important empowering role in the lives of minorities (Moya, 2000; Alcoff, 2000, 2006; Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006). What is more, as Rogers Brubaker (2004), referring to George Lakoff's earlier writings points out, we also need to consider the discursive aspects of social positioning as pertaining to practices of classification and categorization. They are crucial not only in the context of political struggles, but also central to basic cognitive processes such as perceiving, understanding, thinking, and talking. According to Brubaker, "[w]ithout categories [...] experience and action as we know them would be impossible" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 71).

### **3.2. Politics beyond identity: Agency and resistance in Judith Butler's theory of identity**

Without much doubt, one of the main sources of influence for the rise of the rejection paradigm has been Judith Butler's conceptualization of identity and its questionable utility for political agendas in her early works (*Gender Trouble*, 1990; "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 1991; *Bodies that Matter*, 1993). As some authors explicitly argue, Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) is "perhaps the most important book in the brief history of "queer theory"" (Hall, 2003, p. 192; see also Sullivan, 2003). Butler's position on identity and identity politics in these three studies is to a great extent based on the poststructuralist view that sees identities as products of regulatory regimes whose political potential is thus very limited, if existing at all. Since similar articulations of identity forms the basis of the rejection paradigm, I would like to discuss Butler's arguments in more detail.

In the manner of postmodernist tendencies in feminism in the late 1980s *Gender Trouble* (1990) emerged as a justified critique of dominant feminist practices in the West that, as pointed out above, treated the category of "women" as a coherent, stable identity whose stability was assumed to be based on a "common experience." By naturalizing and stabilizing the category of "women" and grounding it in the heterosexual desire, argues Butler, feminism itself becomes a regulatory practice that excludes those "who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject" (Butler, 1990, p. 9). The paradoxical exclusion of certain women from the "women" that feminism supposedly represents results in the reification of the hegemonic gender division, which is one of the main weaknesses of identity politics (Butler, 1990).

When criticizing the tendency in Western feminism to construct the category of “women” as coherent and stable, Butler rightly argues instead that (gender) identities emerge at the “multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections” (Butler, 1990, p. 14). In fact, the assertion that identities are not coherent but heterogeneous and sometimes even contradictory is one of the main arguments against essentializing practices in feminism and one of the main contributions of *Gender Trouble*. In line with her attempts to destabilize the homogenized category of “women” Butler (1990) inserts the political potential of lesbian identities in disrupting the alleged coherence of this (heterosexualized) category. In other words, one of the central points of Butler’s analysis of essentializing practices within Western feminism is that identities are not coherent, unified, stable categories, but heterogeneous, contradictory, and changeable. The contingency that characterizes identities stems from the multiplicity of intersecting discourses and power relations that constitute identities in multiple different ways. The politics that disregards this complexity, it is argued, fails to acknowledge differences not only within the group, but also the heterogeneity within a multiply positioned individual self (Butler, 1990, 1993).

Hence, it can be said that what Butler sees as problematic is the particular *view* of identity as coherent, in the sense of a closed and uniform structure, which has been *institutionalized* in a particular socio-historical context and has become a means of normalization.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the politics that utilizes such an exclusionary perspective plays its own role in normalizing practices. However, there are also points in her work from the early 1990s where Butler expresses concerns about the whole notion of identity as *inherently* exclusionary and pernicious. In “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (1991), which is one of the most cited texts by queer theory scholars, Butler argues that every attempt at self-identification as a lesbian is always an act of exclusion, an act of “radical *concealment*,” in order to make coherence:

In the act which would disclose the true and full content of that “I,” a certain radical *concealment* is thereby produced. For it is always finally unclear what is meant by invoking the lesbian-signifier, since its signification is always to

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<sup>35</sup> In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler writes: “[...] the question here will be: To what extent do *regulatory practices* of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? To what extent is “identity” a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the “coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (Butler, 1990, p. 23, emphasis in the original).

some degree out of one's control, but also because its *specificity* can only be demarcated by exclusions that return to disrupt its claim to coherence.

(Butler, 1991, p. 15; emphasis in the original)

What underpins Butler's argument about self-identification as an inherently exclusionary practice enabled by a "radical *concealment*" is the tacit assumption that coherence represents one of the intrinsic characteristics of identity as such. This assumption about identity-as-coherence that is inevitably grounded in exclusion leads Butler to conclude that all identities are inherently pernicious "invariable stumbling-blocks" (p. 14) and "necessary errors" (p. 16) and that all kinds of identity politics inevitably comply with the notion of a coherent, stable identity. In other words, when speaking about her discontent with the term "lesbian theories, gay theories" in "Imitation" (1991, p. 14), Butler assumes that coherence is a fixed unchangeable structure that stands in the opposition to contingency. Based on such view of coherence, Butler sees the multiplicity, contradiction, and instability of identity categories as "a certain resistance to classification and to *identity as such*" (Butler, 1991, p. 16; my emphasis).

In addition to conceiving of identity as coherence in the sense of closure that inevitably results in exclusion, Butler views identities as "instruments of regulatory regimes, [...] as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (Butler, 1991, p. 13-4; see also Butler, 1990), grounding in this way her conception of identity in Foucault's theory of power developed in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*. There are two important aspects of Foucault's conception of power that are particularly important for Butler's view of identity: one is that power is productive and the other is that power generates multiple points of resistance.

Arguing against the dominant "juridico-discursive" views of power that see power as an essentially negative, repressive force accumulated only in one center – in the repressive institution of law – Foucault conceptualizes power in modern Western societies as a "moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable" (Foucault, 1988, p. 93).<sup>36</sup> Being

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault (1988) claims that in order to analyze power, its inner mechanisms and logic, we should abandon the "juridico-discursive" notion of power. According to him, such a conception of power is based on the assumption that power is essentially negative and repressive; it is the power that prohibits, says no and has no capability to produce anything. The pervasiveness of the "juridico-discursive" concept of power is based on a problematic assumption that conflates power with the figure of the king and which remains largely unchallenged in contemporary political thought. In opposition to the repressive hypothesis, Foucault proposes a concept of power which takes into account new mechanisms of power (emerging from the beginning of eighteenth century) that

omnipresent yet locally produced in “every relation from one point to another” (p. 93), power in Foucault’s view is a productive force generated through unstable constellations of the power/knowledge nexus. In other words, particular subjectivities and identities do not precede power as coherent identities, but are emerging products of normalization and regulation practices that operate through discourses as sites where “power and knowledge are joined together” (p. 100).

In her conceptualization of identities as “instruments of regulatory regimes,” Butler explicitly refers to Foucault’s view of discourse, which “can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1988, p. 101, cited in Butler, 1991, p. 14). This capacity of discourses to open up spaces for resistance stems from the “multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies,” which can produce effects that go beyond the simple binary division between dominant and dominated discourses (Foucault, 1988, p. 100). These effects are conditioned upon the position of a speaking subject and the constellations of power present in the context where an action takes place. Hence, instead of a unilateral top-down operation of repressive power, there is an intersubjective struggle over various discursive elements, which is enacted among diverse social actors within different institutional contexts.

However, although Butler utilizes Foucault’s conception of power as productive force which may open up a space for resistance, there is a tendency in her theory of identity to stress the negative effects of identities as normalizing categories at the expense of its empowering potential.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, being aware of invisibility and marginalization, especially that of lesbians, as an effect of dominant normalizing practices, Butler claims that identity-based politics is still legitimate and indispensable, but in the sense of a necessary evil (Butler, 1991). At the same time, the focus of her work in the early 1990s is on the perniciousness of identities and identity-based politics to which she juxtaposes the political potential of resistance towards “identity as such” (1991, p. 16).<sup>38</sup>

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cannot be reduced to the law and the essentially repressive, unidirectional effects of power. Foucault views contemporary society as imbued with a multiplicity of power relations, which could never be exactly localized through institutions and apparatuses. In such a dense web of power relations power can be exercised from countless positions, opening up space for multiple points of resistance to emerge.

<sup>37</sup> By referring to observations made in *Theorizing gender* (2002) edited by Alsop *et al*, Diane Richardson argues that “[i]n Butler’s work and that of many postmodern feminist and queer theorists, although both effects may be acknowledged, the focus is primarily on the disciplinary effects of discourse” (Richardson, 2006, p. 22).

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Fraser (1995) made similar observation in her response to Butler’s essays in *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange*. Fraser argues that ‘since she views identity as inherently oppressive’ Butler ‘understands women’s liberation as liberation *from* identity’ (Fraser, 1995, p. 71).

I believe that the predominant concern with the negative effects of identity may be better understood if we look at how both Foucault and Butler conceptualize social change as a more or less contingent product of the complex process whereby power is produced, reproduced, exposed and challenged in and through discourses. Subjects, being viewed as products of discursively articulated power-relations, have a very limited role in bringing about social change. To explain how subjects are constructed through normalization and regulation, Butler draws on the concept of performativity arguing that “identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (1990, p. 25).

Thus, while bypassing the capacity of self-reflection as an emerging discursive effect or facilitator in the process of identity formation, Butler locates the notion of agency in reiterative performativity that constitutes the subjects. In her own words, “there need not be a “doer behind the deed,” but [...] the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed” (Butler, 1990, p. 181). In her view, what may lead to the disruption of dominant social order are alterations occurring within the process of repetition that are enabled by diversity, complexity and inconsistencies of the intersecting discourses. Although Butler argues that identity is an “effect” of performative practices and this conceptualization should move beyond both strict social determinism and pure individual voluntarism, it still remains unclear who or what are the agents of disruptions. If, as Butler argues, “[t]he injunction *to be* a given gender produces necessary failures” (1990, p. 145; emphasis in the original), what exactly is the source of these failures, other than pure chance? How does re-signification and transformation occur? What are the particular factors that enable these variations in repetition?<sup>39</sup>

Steven Seidman (1993) poses similar questions in his critique of what he calls a “poststructural turn” in the critical literature on sexuality emerging at the beginning of the 1990s. There are two different, but to a certain extent related, issues that Seidman finds problematic in the poststructuralist perspective on sexuality and sexual identity. The first has

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<sup>39</sup> Two examples of variations in repetition that Butler discusses as stretching the boundaries of intelligibility are drag queens and the lesbian phallus (Butler, 1990, 1993). Interestingly, neither of these examples belongs in the sphere of contextually specific daily practices of doing identity. Discussing how the notion of identity is conceptualized in Butler’s *The psychic life of power* (1997) Alcoff argues that there are two main concepts underlying Butler’s model of identity in this later work – the concept of identity, which represents the ways in which we are perceived and classified, and the concept of subject as a lived self. Agency in this case is constituted as an excess that emerges as a result of naming, as a “disjuncture between the identity and the individual” which closely links the possibility of agency and the process of interpellation (Alcoff, 2006, p. 77). Thus, the notion of agency proposed in *The psychic life of power* is more linked to the level of individual subjectivity than what we have seen in Butler’s earlier thinking discussed above. However, identity is still conceptualized as “concealment” imposed on the otherwise heterogeneous self, thus making identities inherently exclusionary and harmful.

to do with the reduction of social practices to the cultural field of discursive struggles, which I will get back at the end of this section. The second point concerns the way the poststructuralist approach to sexual identity “ends in a refusal to name a subject” (Seidman, 1993, p. 132).

The relationship between the subject and resistance is the focus of Toril Moi’s (1985) discussion of the concepts of power and resistance in Foucault’s first volume of *History of Sexuality*. Moi points out that Foucault’s conception of resistance as an almost entirely contingent product of unstable constellations of power-relations stands in tension with the political project of feminism. As one of the main sources of this friction, Moi, by referring to an earlier observation made by Peter Dews, points to the problematic conflation of subjectification and subjection that results in the marginalization of the subject in Foucault’s theory of power and resistance.<sup>40</sup> Without referring to the role of individual agency in social change and without providing an answer to “What resists power?” Foucault’s theory, argues Moi, stands in a rather ambiguous relationship with the feminist project, which relies on the conscious work of an emancipatory social transformation and “necessarily posit[s] the positive existence of an agent of an action” (Moi, 1985, p. 99).

The concepts of the subject and agency in feminist theory were central issues raised in the “philosophical exchange” among Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser and Drucila Cornell published as a collection of essays under the title *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (1995). While critically reflecting upon Butler’s conception of performativity, as well as Joan Scott’s methodological choices in relation to researching history and historical change, Seyla Benhabib voiced her skepticism about the compatibility of Foucault’s theory of power and resistance with feminism. In her criticism, Benhabib claims that Foucault’s view – utilized by both Butler and Scott – implies that resistance emerges as a purely contingent product of the struggles between discourses and regimes of truth. Influenced by Foucault’s conceptualization of resistance, Butler’s theory of identity almost completely leaves out the notion of lived experience and individual agency from thinking about social change (ibid.).

In her response to Benhabib’s concerns, Judith Butler (1995) argues that the performative act through which the subject is constructed is a repetitive process that relies on the “sedimented iterability” in the Derridian sense of the term. The discursive construction of the subject through iterability does not preclude the notion of agency as such. In Butler’s

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<sup>40</sup> For more details on Dews’ arguments see Dews, P. (1984) Power and subjectivity in Foucault, in *New Left Review*, 144, pp. 72-95.



view, agency is enabled by the repetition itself and “is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed” (Butler, 1995, p. 135). Hence, as in the *Gender Trouble*, Butler sees agency as “possibilities of resignification opened up by discourse” (p. 135) without suggesting how exactly resignifications occur. Her logic forecloses the important political concern: Why do some performative acts end up in repetition and others in (progressive or otherwise) resignification? While rightly assuming that re-signification is enabled by the multiplicity of discourses, Butler does not provide much detail about what produces resignifications and why they occur in some situations and not others. I believe that in order to address these issues and bring Butler’s concept of re-signification closer to feminist emancipatory politics, we would need to explore the role of lived experience and interpretive practice in the process of re-signification without invoking the existence of a pre-social subject. After all, isn’t the very initiative for re-signifying the term “queer” that Butler (1993) takes as the example of the disruption of the dominant order grounded precisely in the particular lived experiences of subjects who do not comply with the heterosexual norm?

My suggestion that it is necessary to take into account the category of lived experience if we want to bring the process of re-signification closer to the feminist political agenda is informed by arguments put forward by William Wilkerson (2007) on the pertinence of experience for a theory of sexual identities. Wilkerson critically reflects upon the poststructuralist views, particularly Joan Scott’s devaluation of experience at the expense of socio-historical processes that “through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences” (cited in Wilkerson, 2007, p. 16).<sup>41</sup> According to Wilkerson, the fact that experiences are emerging products of processes taking place in the particular socio-historical and cultural context does not mean that we should abandon them altogether or consider them of less value as sources of knowledge and emancipatory politics. On the contrary, the social origin of experiences makes them even more significant as sites where power-relations are played out, reified, or contested through the process of re-signification (Wilkerson, 2007; see also Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006).

Let me now attend to the second concern that Seidman raises in relation to the “poststructural turn” in sexuality studies, which has to do with the reduction of social processes to culture. By ceasing to address the ways in which performative acts are constructed in relation to material inequalities created by gender, racial, class and other social hierarchies, and grounded in particular material context, Butler’s theory of identity reduces

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<sup>41</sup> For more details about Scott’s position on the value of experience as an object of critical inquiry see Scott, J. (1991). The evidence of experience. *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 773-797.

the concept of identity to the cultural as the exclusive site of identity re/production, thus remaining highly de-contextualized and removed from feminist emancipatory politics (Jackson, 1999, 2006; Hennessy, 2000; Richardson, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006). As Hennessy (2000) argues, this lack of the non-discursive material dimension of the social production of identities is the effect of Butler's conflation of the social with the cultural, which prevents Butler from incorporating the economic and political dimensions of identity construction in her conception of identity. In Hennessy's opinion, by failing to look at identities as not only products of cultural meaning-production practices, but also as results of economic and political processes in the particular historical context, Butler comes close to falling into the trap of "postmodern fetishizing of sexual identity" at the expense of critical practice (2000, p. 121).

Speaking from a sociological feminist perspective, Stevi Jackson also points to the lack of the material aspects of identity in Judith Butler's theory. Jackson (1999) particularly emphasizes the lack of an analysis of the role of material positions and daily experiences of doing identity in relation to the concept of performativity. In Jackson's view, Butler's theory of identity moves away from the sociological perspectives that so far proved to be successful in conceptualizing the social construction of subjects as a multilayered process "occurring at the level of social structure, meaning, interaction or practice and subjectivity" (Jackson, 1999). Jackson here refers to the concept of the "social self" that draws on the notion of self-reflexivity without assuming a pre-discursive subject as put forward by George Herbert Mead in the early twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> According to Jackson, the concept of the social self "does not assume an essential, inner, pre-social 'I', but an 'I' which is only ever the fleeting mobilisation of a socially constituted self" (Jackson, 1999). Thus, by incorporating some of Mead's thinking in a feminist-queer theory of identity, we would be able to conceptualize agency that is not exclusively linked to resistance (as Butler implies), but that is also present in the practices of reification (*ibid.*). I will discuss the possible link between agency that is grounded in socially embedded self-reflexivity and feminist and queer emancipatory politics in *Section 3.4.* below.

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<sup>42</sup> See for example Mead, G.H. (1934). Also, for a more detailed discussion of the usefulness of Mead's conception of "social self" for feminism see Jackson, S. (2011).

### 3.3. Intersectionality and subjectless critique

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, since the later 1990s, queer theory scholars have argued for an intersectional analysis that would speak to how sexuality is constituted by and, in turn, participates in the constitution of different social hierarchies (Muñoz, 1999; Hames-García, 2001; Ferguson, 2005). They warn that without attending to how subjects are constructed at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, queer theory faces to lose its emancipatory potential (Hames-García, 2001; Haritaworn, 2007). One of the central aims of the 2005 special issue of *Social Text* “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” edited by David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Esteban Muñoz is therefore to re-assess “the utility of queer as an engaged mode of critical inquiry” through emphasis on the critical potential of an intersectional approach (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005, p. 2-3).<sup>43</sup>

Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz (2005) try to move beyond the mere employment of queer as a new sexual identity category, on the one hand, and to challenge the de-contextualized anti-normality that marginalizes particular experiences of multiply underprivileged queer subjects, on the other. Therefore, they argue for identifying and putting social issues related to immigration, citizenship, national belonging, welfare, human rights, and neoliberal capitalism on the queer studies research agenda. This act of distancing from de-contextualized and highly abstract queer theory is already signaled in the title that introduces the term of queer scholarship in its plural form (*studies*), inviting associations with so-called “area-studies,” some of which, such as lesbian and gay studies and women’s/gender studies, generated powerful social critiques.<sup>44</sup>

Even though the editors of “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” invoke the potential of queer studies for a broader social critique that will engage with the various social hierarchies such as race, class, gender, citizenship and their intersections with sexuality, they fiercely defend the “subjectless” critique in queer scholarship largely grounded in Butler’s theoretical project. The major advantage of the “subjectless” critique in queer studies in their view is “disallow[ing] any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent” (p. 3; emphasis in the original). The “theoretical project” of queer studies, continue the authors, “demands that queer epistemologies [...]

<sup>43</sup> The editors of *Social Text* special issue “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” (2005) David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Esteban Muñoz, are one of the most prominent figures of queer studies today.

<sup>44</sup> For more details about the political effects of minority studies in the US see Alcoff, L. M., Hames-García, M., Mohanty, S. P., and Moya, P. M. (Eds.) (2006).

rethink the relationship between intersectionality and normalization *from multiple points of view*” (p. 4, emphasis added).

Thus, on the one hand, by insisting on the intersectional perspective that invokes “multiple points of view,” Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz want, justifiably, to move beyond the domination of white gay subjects as both objects and subjects of the knowledge production in queer studies. However by framing their project as a *subjectless* critique, the authors at the same time imply the rejection of the notion of the “subject” as a legitimate source of knowledge. The rejection of the subject from the knowledge production process that nevertheless aims at accounting for “multiple points of view” produces an implicit contradiction: How can we argue for a “subjectless” critique yet insist on “multiple points of view”? Even more to the point, how can a particular mode of oppression be seen as “subjectless” and yet a matter of concrete raced/ethnicized, gendered, classed, and sexualized subjects? If not grounded in lived experiences, where do these “multiple points of view” come from? Joshua Green makes an interesting and relevant point in relation to the “subjectless” critique in queer theory and its use of intersectionality that illuminates some of the issues at stake here:

Ironically, the same deconstructionist logic that would have sociologists do away with sexual classifications would also require the rejection of race, class, ethnic and gender categories – the very social contingencies that queer theory purports to foreground. Indeed, we can’t have our analytic cake and eat it too. If we want to incorporate social contingency in the study of sexuality, we cannot selectively dismiss from the outset the salience of those categories that don’t agree with our political sensibilities. Rather, we must capture contingency as it arises through the prism of distinct social standpoints.

(Green, 2002, p. 530)

Hence, in order to avoid the implied contradiction, it is important to engage in a self-reflexive discussion on how to theorize the political potential of identities emerging at the intersection of different social hierarchies without essentializing and homogenizing the categories of social division. This is a concern though, which is largely missing from the “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” volume. While utilizing the intersectional approach, most of the articles deal with the ways particular sexual subjects are at the same

time racialized, gendered, nationalized and classed,<sup>45</sup> some of them explicitly raising their concern about marginalization of queers of color within queer theory framework.<sup>46</sup> However, these contributions do not critically reflect upon the role identities play in relation to the process whereby the systems of oppression are negotiated.

It is beyond any doubt that queer critiques of stability and fixity of identities and the normalizing assimilationist tendencies present within lesbian and gay movement represent an indispensable productive exposure of differences and inequalities within often homogenized identity categories. What is more, by exposing how identity claims can be co-opted by normalizing mechanisms, queer theory brought the necessary caution to academic research on sexuality as well as into progressive identity politics. However, by grounding its critique on de-contextualized anti-normality and emphasizing instability, fluidity and endless change of subject positions without accounting for the particular individual experiences, queer theory so far has failed to address the intersecting social hierarchies thus unintentionally participating in the reproduction of the exiting social hierarchies.

Finally, as one of the effects of queer theory, academic research on sexual identities as social realities and their political potential has been evaporating from studies of sexuality that now intensely tend to focus on the concepts like playfulness, pleasure, desire, body, and aesthetics (McLaughlin, 2006). If the notion of sexual identity is invoked, it is mostly in works that address the ways sexual identities are transgressed. In relation to the relative marginalization of the research on the empowering potential of sexual identities, identity categories like lesbian and gay are slowly vanishing from the academic discourse on sexuality on the grounds of their alleged essentialism and assimilationism (Halperin, 2003). Instead, a more theory-oriented queer perspective with its potential for exposing the mechanisms of normalization, but problematic blindness towards material realities and multiple oppressions of sexual subjects, almost completely dominates contemporary sexuality studies in the U.S. dominated queer scholarship (ibid.).<sup>47</sup> These tendencies to marginalize sexual identities in sexuality research also create a potential hierarchization between “enlightened” elitist

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<sup>45</sup> The intersection of sexuality and race is addressed by Chandan, R., Gopinath, G., Manalansan, M., Puar, J., R., Villarejo, A in their articles. For the intersection of sexuality, class, race, nationality, and gender see the articles by Ferguson, R., and Shah, N.

<sup>46</sup> See the articles by Peraz, H. and Halberstam, J. in the same volume.

<sup>47</sup> David Halperin makes an interesting point in his critical reflection on the status of queer theory in the US academy today: ‘There is something odd, suspiciously odd, about the rapidity with which queer theory – whose claim to radical politics derived from its anti-assimilationist posture, from its shocking embrace of the abnormal and the marginal – has been embraced by, canonized by, and absorbed into our (largely heterosexual) institutions of knowledge, as lesbian and gay studies never were. Despite its implicit (and false) portrayal of lesbian and gay studies as liberal, assimilationist, and accommodating of the status quo, queer theory has proven to be much more congenial to established institutions of the liberal academy.’ (Halperin, 2003, p. 341).

academia and “uninformed” activists practices.<sup>48</sup> In order to avoid widening the gap between academic knowledge production and pro-democratic struggles, we need to revisit the political potential of sexual identity by bringing together its empowering capacity and queer theory’s destabilization. Therefore, in the next section I will discuss some of the main arguments emerging within postpositivist realist conceptualization of identity that, by insisting on the political utility of identities, tends to push the debate beyond both exclusionary identity politics and subjectless critique.

### 3.4. Postpositivist realism and (sexual) identity

Postpositivist realist perspectives on identity started to emerge in the early 2000s partly as a reaction to postmodernist attempts at discrediting identities as sources of knowledge and a basis of politics. Their approach to the concept of identity is based on the assumption that identities are no less real and socially significant while at the same time unstable, complex, and changeable (Moya and Hames-García 2000; Alcoff, 2006; Alcoff, Hames-García, Mohanty, and Moya, 2006; Wilkerson, 2007). Postpositivist realists perceive identities as “social embodied facts” through which a (hierarchical) organization of social life can be accessed and explored (Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006). As Alcoff and Mohanty (2006) specifically point out “the theoretical issue concerning identities is not whether they are constructed (they always are, since they are social kinds) but what difference different kinds of construction make” (p. 6). Thus, arguing against the postmodernist (queer) assumptions that identities are inherently negative, exclusionary, and fictional categories imposed onto otherwise free individuals, realists emphasize the positive impacts identities often have, especially in the lives of the underprivileged. Instead of seeing identities as Butlerian “necessary errors,” they propose an intersectional, dialectical, and relational approach that will ask how identities function in the lives of people (Alcoff, 2006, Moya, 2006). That being said, we can trace the main difference between the rejectionist approach of queer and postpositivist realism not in social constructedness of identities, which underlies both perspectives, but in the different questions they pose about the notion of identity and its relation to the subject. With its focus on how identities are differently constructed and negotiated makes postpositivist realist perspective particularly relevant for my research into distinct practices of self-identification and their political potential in contemporary Croatia.

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<sup>48</sup> Linda Alcoff makes a similar argument in her critique of strategic essentialism (Alcoff, 2000).

One of the central premises that ground the postpositivist realist view of identity is that identities are social processes emerging at the interface between the social and the personal (Alcoff, 2006; Wilkerson 2007).<sup>49</sup> In order to argue for the dynamic interplay among the personal and the social in the construction of social identity Linda Alcoff (2006) makes an analytical distinction between public identity and lived subjectivity:

There are two aspects of selves that are involved in social identity. [...] This public identity is our socially perceived self within the systems of perception and classification and the networks of community in which we live. But there is also a lived subjectivity that is not always perfectly mapped onto our socially perceived self, and that can be experienced and conceptualized differently. By the term subjectivity, then, I mean to refer to who we understand ourselves to be, how we experience being ourselves, and the range of reflective and other activities that can be included under the rubric of our “agency.”

(Alcoff, 2006, p. 92-3)

Alcoff recognizes individual negotiations as an important part of identity construction and the site through which agency is enacted. However, these individual interpretations are not constructed separately from the ways we are perceived by others nor from the social institutions within which they are embedded (i.e. “perceived self within the systems of perception and classification and the networks of community in which we live”). The ways in which we are socially positioned through the practices of categorization that are interrelated with the institutions of wider social systems such as capitalism, patriarchy, (neo)imperialism, nationalism, and heteronormativity shape our life options and influences how we see ourselves. Thus, the differences that make public identities are products of particular socio-historical contexts and can vary significantly from context to context. In most contemporary societies, some public identities, such as gender and race heavily rely on visible bodily features and/or practices, which are inscribed with particular meanings. Identities can also be marked by name (ethnicity/nationality), sexual practices (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer), socio-economic position (class), etc. (Alcoff, 2006). As Foucault (1988) himself points out, one of

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<sup>49</sup> Postpositivist realists are not unique in this view. For similar conceptions of identities as processes that are located at the junction of personal and social see also Wilton, T (1995); Jenkins, R. (1996); Castells, M. (1997); Brubaker, R., and Cooper, F. (2000); Hall, S. (2000); and Jackson, S. (2011).

distinguishing features of modern societies is the prominent place that practices of categorization of individual subjects have in relation to governmentality. Hence, we should also assume that these public identities play an important role when it comes to individual sense-making practices.

According to Alcoff, there is a mutually constitutive relationship between public identity and individual lived subjectivity, which means that insofar as public identity influences the ways we construct our experiences and sense of self, our lived subjectivity is involved in the production of public identity. In Alcoff's view, "[i]ndividuals have agency over interpretations of their history but they cannot "choose" to live outside history" (p. 14-5). Hence, postpositivist accounts of identity acknowledge the socially produced subject as an instance in the process of identity construction, which resonates with Stevi Jackson's interpretation of Mead's concept of "social self" discussed earlier. As Stevi Jackson argues, although every act of (self)reflection and (self)interpretation is an emerging product of a particular socio-historical context, it nevertheless imbues subjects with the agency that reflects itself in practices through which the existing meanings are negotiated, reinforced or challenged. In this way, socially constructed, unstable subjects become agents in historical processes.

William Wilkerson (2007) argues that "identity emerges when an individual interprets his or her feelings in the light of socially available roles that society offers" (p. 24). He further asserts that changes in the meanings and social order are results of individual (self)interpretation and (self)reflection taking place in relation to existing social categories. Wilkerson especially emphasizes that individual interpretation, which provides a ground for agency, does not exist outside of a particular social context. In his own words:

Agency is no longer thought as the singular point of being from which action occurs, but the self-reflection into the process of our surging existence. The highest levels of freedom are attained when we can turn back into our ambiguous selves, see our connection to the cultural and social situation that defines it, and engage in the process of becoming without hope of liberating ourselves fully from it.

(Wilkerson, 2007, p. 95)

Thus, Wilkerson's argument also suggests that agency, in terms of self-reflexivity, does not necessarily presuppose transgression since complete elimination of the existing social



categories is not possible. This point is based on the firm rejection of the illusion of the pre-discursive subject, the master of his own destiny. Thus, total transgression of the social order is impossible precisely because the subject itself is a product of this order, always already in it. However, to the extent that self-reflexivity is always present in the process of identity construction, social norms are always subject to complex negotiations and change. Hence, contrary to Butler's (1990, 1993) arguments, it is possible to argue, as Wilkerson does, for self-reflexivity as the basis of identity and agency without affirming the essentialist assumption of a pre-discursive "I" as a source of agency.

As part of her conceptualization of identity as a dynamic interplay between public identity and lived subjectivity, Linda Alcoff points to the constitutive role of the interpretive horizon, which provides "a way to understand the effect of social location on the self, what is visible from this location, and thus what the self can know" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 88). The importance of one's social position for knowledge production represents one of the main contentions of feminist standpoint theory that argues against the ideological claim to scientific objectivity institutionalized in contemporary Western academia. In particular, feminist standpoint theorists point to the ways in which allegedly universal objectivity masks its own partiality stemming from its embeddedness in the "Western, bourgeois, white-supremacists, androcentric, heteronormative culture" while at the same time marking knowledge produced from other socio-cultural positions as subjective and thus less worthy (Harding, 2004, p. 5). Although there are differences in the ways feminist standpoint has been conceptualized, what all standpoint theorists agree on is that there is no such thing as an objective "view from nowhere" and that all knowledge is produced from a particular perspective.<sup>50</sup> In this way standpoint theorists opened up a potential space for the experiences of the oppressed to become valid sources of knowledge on the operations of power relations in a particular context (Harding, 2006).

Criticism of a standpoint theory has been mostly concerned with the conception of a "group standpoint" that is able to produce knowledge on the basis of a common experience of oppression. Such an assumption, present in the earlier versions of standpoint theory often results in the homogenization of diverse, and often contradictory experiences, stemming from intersecting axes of oppression, while at the same time assuming the existence of a pre-discursive critical subject (Harding, 2004). However, Alcoff avoids the homogenization and essentialism of earlier formulations of a standpoint by redefining the interpretive horizon as

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<sup>50</sup> For the differences in the ways feminist standpoint and its epistemological and political value has been conceptualized see Harding, S. (Ed) (2004).

complex, multifaceted and dynamic. In Alcoff's view, the horizon consists of different elements such as particular assumptions and categories that we adopt, our social position in relation to the existing social hierarchies, and the sedimentation of our experiences, which are brought together in a complex interrelation that grounds the ways we make sense of ourselves and the world. In this way, argues Alcoff, the concept of horizon

offers an account of knowledge that links experience and identity as constitutive features for understanding without making them all-determining, and thus provides a realistic approach to explaining the relevance of identity to understanding while allowing for the mediated nature of experience and the fluid character of identity.

(Alcoff, 2006, p. 96)

Finally, by joining the notions of social location, experience, and acquired assumptions into a productive interplay, the concept of interpretive horizon helps us to grasp the complexity of the negotiations through which identities are constructed as well as of differences in the ways people adapt to existing social categories.

It is important to note that there is no single standpoint from which we interpret the social world, since our social positionality never comprises of a single location. As we saw in the previous chapter when discussing the intersection of sexuality and nationalism, different social systems that organize people's lives such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, nationalism, race, and capitalism do not merely "cross and overlay in particular subject positions," but they "formatively and inherently define each other" (Barnard, 1999, p. 200). A similar point is made by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) when arguing against the additive approaches that only point out different forms of oppression without attending to the ways they mutually constitute each other. In order to avoid the reduction of intersectionality to a mere listing of distinct systems of social division, Yuval-Davis proposes the kind of intersectional approach that will "analyse the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205). In particular, Yuval-Davis argues for the intersectional approach that would focus on the intersections of social positions as well as on the interplay between the personal and the social in relation to identity construction. In Yuval-Davis' view, it is important not to conflate social positions and identities, because this might hide the ways in which the naturalized boundaries of social groups are being challenged. As

Floya Antias (2006) points out, to grasp the interplay among different social systems taking place at the interface between the social and the personal, we need to conceive of intersectionality as a *process* “giving rise to particular forms of positionality for social actors” (p. 27).

Although in her theory of identity Linda Alcoff (2006) differentiates between “public identity,” “lived subjectivity” and an “interpretive horizon,” it is important to note that such seemingly neat distinctions are made for analytical and conceptual purposes. In reality, these elements are enmeshed and it is precisely in their interaction that identity is constituted (ibid.). In the following paragraphs I will discuss the implications of postpositivist realist theory of identity for thinking about the concept of sexual identity.

In order to emphasize the constitutive role of the interplay among various elements, William Wilkerson (2007) conceptualizes sexual identity as an “emerging fusion.” In his discussion of sexual identities from the perspective of postpositivist realism, Wilkerson places sexual identity at the intersection of desire, individual experience, choice, and social context entangled in the ‘complex fused whole’ (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 30). In other words, being constructed on the grounds of desire and experience on the one hand, and social norms and categories on the other, the notion of sexual identity would not be possible without any of these factors that are mutually constitutive of each other. Finally, it is the socially embedded individual interpretative practice that relates what counts as the biological, individual, and social factors into the complex system of identity. In Wilkerson’s own words, *emerging fusion* is a dialectical process, which means

[...] that the elements of the process are all related to each other and do not stand alone, and that this relation among the elements is always developing and changing. [...] At the beginning of each dialectic stands an individual with a specific situation composed of feelings, desires, a specific social location, personal actions, and social responses, all within a generalized context that makes available specific ways of being a person through institutional and deviant roles.

(Wilkerson, 2007, p. 100)

In line with his merging model of sexual identity, Wilkerson revisits the act of coming out – a term that denotes a process of adopting a sexual identity and/or disclosing that identity to others in modern capitalist cultures – as a vigorous, processual and embodied process. He

sees coming out as a dynamic interplay among three important factors: “(1) subjective experiences of feelings and desires; (2) choice; (3) a specific social environment structured by sexual roles” (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 22). According to Wilkerson, these factors are often unevenly distributed in the way that one of them may seem to prevail in structuring individual self-identification practices. For example, in the self-narratives that draw on the allegedly always-present same-sex desire as a basis of identity, experiences of feelings and desire prevail. On the other hand, when it comes to the political lesbians who base their identity on the political choice, the aspect of choice represents the most significant feature of their story, thus directly challenging the idea of a stable sexual orientation based purely on innate desire (Wilkerson, 2007). However, as Wilkerson highlights, the domination of one source of influence in some forms of coming out by no means signals the absence of the other two factors. Thus, although experiences of same-sex feelings and desire do not necessarily precede coming out as lesbian, since in some cases lesbian desire and identity are claimed to be consciously chosen, it does not mean that experiences do not play any role in the formation of lesbian identity in these cases. As life narratives of political lesbians show, it is a personal experience of living as a woman in the patriarchal society that influences the formation of lesbian identity and even sexual desire (*ibid.*).

Thus, lived experience and choice play an important role in identity construction. However, it is important to note that Wilkerson relies on the specific postpositivist realist conceptions of lived experience and choice in the process of identity construction. In particular, Wilkerson’s conceptualization of experience builds upon a phenomenological approach that considers experience as mediated by the particular social position(s) and social context, while at the same time treating it as a valuable source of knowledge about this very context (*ibid.*, p. 33). This point can be best explained by referring to Wilkerson’s examples of identity formation presented above. What we can conclude from these examples is that experiences of sexual identity and desire may differ significantly, and thus, cannot count as proof of the fixed and uniform relationship between sexual identity and desire. What these experiences do tell us is that identity and desire are not stable categories, but products of socially embedded interpretive practice. Furthermore, if we include the category of social positionality in our analysis of these two coming out processes, we would see that in the contemporary Western cultures it is mostly lesbian women who form their identity and desire as a conscious choice, while at the same time the experience of an innate same-sex desire is more present in the stories of gay men (Wilkerson, 2007). Thus, in our case, lived experience that is the basis of identity construction proves to be a valuable source of knowledge about

sexuality, the unequal gender relations, and their intersection in the context of modern Western societies.

Although the “lesbian” or “gay” experiences would not be possible without having these categories available in the particular socio-historical context, experiences, in turn, give meaning to these categories in the process of negotiation whereby identity is constituted. As argued above, experiences constitute and shape the interpretive horizon which structure (self)interpretation and (self)reflection, while at the same time being produced through the actual interpretive practices involved. As Wilkerson points out, lived experiences are both the lenses through which we look at the social world and objects influenced by the social world (p. 47). In other words, previous experiences relative to social position(s) and acquired assumptions influence the interpretive practice through which the meanings of these experiences are (re)formulated. Thus, it is the interpretive practice through which both experiences and desire are constructed that represents one of the most important constitutive elements in the process of *emerging fusion*.

As Wilkerson argues, interpretation inevitably implies some kind of choice since it takes place in relation to multiple discourses and possibilities. These choices that shape experiences are thus also constitutive of desire: “[i]f a person makes choices when interpreting their feelings and experiences, and these interpretive choices partly determine these experiences themselves, choice must be involved in the formation of the feelings and desires that would make up sexual orientation” (p. 88). However, it is important to note that the choices that mediate the process of identity construction are not results of conscious deliberation by a pre-social subject. Rather, they are themselves products of the complex interplay among the elements that constitute the *emerging fusion*. This is what the *emerging fusion* model of sexual identity as a dialectical process is all about: “each element plays a part in a whole and conditions all the other elements” (p. 46). In other words, while being aware of different factors of influence at work in the process of sexual identity construction, we should always bear in mind that all these elements – experience, desire, choice, interpretive practice, social roles, and social context – get constituted in the interplay with each other.

From everything said so far about the postpositivist realist theory of identity, I believe that this approach is a productive framework for my research on the intersection of sexuality and nationalism in the process of self-narration that aspires to revisit the political potential of sexual identity. First, Wilkerson’s model of sexual identity as *emerging fusion* conceptualizes identities as unstable and changeable products of constant interaction among different social, individual, and biological factors, but also between sexual and non-sexual aspects of social

life, such as sexual identity and nationalism in this case. Second, postpositivist realism nevertheless conceives of sexual identities as real in the sense that they play an important role in people's lives and in the process of social structuring, which justifies the focus of my research on the sexual identity construction process as a significant source of knowledge about the existing social order. Third, such a conception of sexual identity clearly acknowledges the role of the subject in the process of identity construction. According to Wilkerson, subjects are constituted in the process of fusion, but at the same time they actively participate in this process as bearers of interpretive practice that are responsible for the multiplicity and instability of identities. In other words, Wilkerson locates individual agency in the process of (self)reflection and (self)interpretation taking place in the interface between the personal and the social, thus making it possible to account for different strategies of sexual self-identification without falling into the trap of de-contextualized endless fluidity, or complete social determinism. Finally, by placing individual interpretive practice and choice at the center of sexual identity construction, the concept of *emerging fusion* conceives of identities as possible sources for transformatory politics that resonates with my aim in this project of revisiting the political potential of sexual identity in contemporary Croatia. In the next section I will look more closely into the implications of the postpositivist realist conception of identity for emancipatory politics, defining in this way the perspective from which I will evaluate different strategies of self-identification emerging in the life narratives of sexually marginalized people in contemporary Croatia.

### **3.5. Toward a politics of solidarity and alliance**

As I pointed out in *Section 3.4.*, the concept of identity according to postpositivist realism is closely related to the notion of self-reflection that is a source of agency. However, although Wilkerson rightly recognizes the role of self-reflexivity in generating social change, he does not specifically address how the self-reflexive practice opens up a space for the emergence of non-exclusionary intersubjective relations and for an inclusionary collective identity. For the purpose of establishing the political potential of identities for emancipatory projects, in my project I utilize the conception of power as “potentially non-exclusionary exercise informing the non-exclusionary relational practices of classification” as proposed by Erzsébet Barát (1999, p.13). In order to argue for the possibility of non-hierarchical, non-stigmatizing meanings of identity categories, Barát conceptualizes knowledge as “located *and* discursively constructed” thus arguing for the possibility of positioned, non-arbitrary

contingency (p. 14, original emphasis). This move makes it necessary for her to re-conceptualize the notion of power that resides in both discourses and social structures. In this way Barát is able, in a Foucaultian manner, to argue against conceptions that locate power in structure only, which leads to the perception of power as inevitably repressive, while at the same time challenging Foucault's concept of social change reduced to mere chance. Barát argues that power is positive in the sense that it is productive of particular social formations that are mediated through discursive practices that are in turn shaped by the particular institution of a given social formation. This view, which locates power inhering also in discourses, opens up a space for the perception of power as a productive force "that works through multiple, often contradictory discourses [...] potentially opening up to non-oppression" (p. 14). Finally, the conception of power as potentially productive of non-exclusionary relations allows for the re-signification of classification practices in terms of "differentiation that is not reduced to domination" (ibid., p. 13). In this way it also allows us to view identity as a site in which the dynamic interplay between discourse and structure is negotiated through interpretive practice, resulting potentially in non-exclusionary relations and identities.

That being said, it is possible to argue that, by combining Alcoff's (2006) theory of identity as a product of negotiations among "public identity" and "lived subjectivity" mediated by "interpretive horizon," Wilkerson's (2007) notion of agency in terms of self-reflexivity and Barát's (1999) concept of productive power as a potentially non-oppressive force residing in discursive practice, we can locate the political utility of identity in the potentiality of the production of non-hegemonic knowledge about the social world. In other words, the understanding of identity as a product of dynamic interaction between larger processes of social structuring and individual self-identificatory practices mediated by the interpretive horizon opens us a space to recognize what Alcoff terms as "the Other within the self," in terms of "external elements that help constitute one's own identity" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 83).

The awareness of the presence of the other(s) within ourselves pushes us to re-evaluate lived personal experiences as important source of knowledge about social reality as relational formation. This relationality and the production of knowledge and relations that are non-exclusionary push us to think about the importance of reflexivity and accountability for difference, which may bring about the basis of a "reflective solidarity" as put forward by Jodi Dean (1996). Dean conceptualizes reflective solidarity as "*a mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationship*" (Dean, 1996, p. 29; original emphasis). Formulating

reflective solidarity against the modes of homogenizing solidarity grounded in the exclusionary “us” vs. “them” distinction present in much of identity politics from nationalism to liberatory movements, Dean proposes a form of solidary practice that is directed towards building new communities and spaces of belonging that would not invoke an opposition and exclusion of other(s). These new communities of reflective solidarity are based on the “communicative “we”” re-constructed through communication that includes discussion, critique, query, reflection, constant negotiation and compromises (p. 30). In other words, it is a communicative event in and through which differences within the group are voiced, acknowledged and negotiated and a common ground, which represents the basis for solidarity, is constantly re/established. As Dean argues

[T]hose who reflect on their solidarity ties seek to use their differences to come to a communicative agreement on their political goals. They no longer seek to shore up and consolidate identity categories, urging instead our attention to and accountability toward the ways in which differences are constructed.

(Dean, 1996, p. 41)

Thus, the central feature of reflective solidarity is accountability towards differences and exclusions, an accountability that is based on the awareness of multiplicity of experiences and subject positions that are emerging products of unequal social division, without a need to assimilate them. According to Dean, accountability can be achieved through taking responsibility for the exclusions and the ways our own privilege(s) have been re/produced. Appeals to solidarity based on accountability necessarily include the acknowledgement of the interconnection between privilege and oppression opening in this way a space for recognition that “we are all in this together” and pushing us to take “responsibilities toward each other and our life context” (p. 52). Finally, the reflective solidarity that makes use of differences to formulate its political goals, argues Dean, is a necessary prerequisite for democratic practice. In other words, it is constant communication, negotiation and taking responsibility for differences that should form the basis of communities directed towards liberty, equality and rights (Dean, 1996).

Interestingly, Dean finds this accountability in the queer perspective. In her view, by putting an emphasis on the ways that particular categories such as lesbian, gay, and heterosexual are re/produced through power relations in a particular context, the queer approach opens up a space for transforming the debate over recognition into a discussion on



accountability. However, as I argued throughout this chapter, by emphasizing the perniciousness of identities and arguing for a subjectless critique under the banner of de-contextualized anti-normality, queer perspectives often marginalized experiences of multiply oppressed subjects. As Sandra Harding (2006) in her discussion of the differences between pro- and anti-democratic political struggles argues, the mere resistance against the existing systems of oppression does not necessary results in a pro-democratic movement. Instead, in Harding's view, it is the "multiplicity of potentially progressive resisting identities and the cognitive diversity of their standpoints" that can bring about pro-democratic transformative politics (p. 258). Furthermore, as Harding emphasizes, in order to fulfill its democratic potential, progressive struggles should be grounded in (self)reflexivity and analysis of "the particular concepts and practices through which their distinctive forms of oppression are enacted and maintained" (ibid.).

In her attempt to conceptualize feminist politics beyond the shortcomings of de-contextualized universalism and homogenizing identity politics Nira Yuval-Davis proposes the notion of "transversal politics" as a positioned dialogue that makes use of the differences among feminists in a productive and empowering way (1997, 1999). In order to cut across differences and build upon their explanatory and empowering potential, Yuval-Davis argues for "rooting and shifting" as a form of communication that would open up a space for a non-oppressive cooperation among feminists worldwide. While rooting includes "reflexive knowledge of [our] own positioning and identity," shifting involves placing ourselves in the position of others whose situation differs from ours thus bringing our own and other people's experiences and positionalities into productive interplay (Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 95). Reflexivity, which underlies the process of rooting and shifting, ensures that differences are not fetishized like in the contemporary multiculturalism, but are used as valuable sources for conceptualizing emancipatory politics.

What we can see from this discussion is that both reflective solidarity and transversal politics provide productive insights into how to conceptualize communities based on non-oppression and non-exclusion, in which particular experiences and positionalities are acknowledged and valued as resources for transformatory politics and a democratic society based on equality. In the next paragraphs I will explore further the interconnection of postpositivist realist account of identity and solidarity based on reflexive accountability towards difference. I will argue that postpositivist realist view of identity as a complex negotiation between the personal and the social provides a viable resource for solidarity and non-exclusionary intersubjective relations.

First, the postpositivist realist theory of identity posits identities as important source of knowledge about the social world, especially when it comes to the intersection of different social hierarchies and mechanisms of their re/production. In this way, through identities, we can gain access to relevant knowledge and understanding of the re/production of social inequalities which can help us in taking accountability for differences and designing efficient political strategies. However, when assessing the political significance of personal experiences, as some postpositivist realists emphasize, we have to be careful to distinguish between experiences that are politically more valid – in that they are able to illuminate the mechanisms of re/production of unequal social relations – and personal accounts that do not hold such political validity, since their explanatory power is rather limiting (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). This distinction between more and less politically valid experiences follows from the dialectical concept of lived experiences, namely that experiences are theory-laden and as such “disguised explanations of social relations” (Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006, p. 5; see also Mohanty, 2000) that should be assessed in the same way as we evaluate the validity of different theories (Mohanty, 2000). To distinguish between different ways of constructing identities we should explore and analyze how identities are negotiated, which discourses they draw on, and what are the political implications of their claims. By doing so, we will be able to acknowledge the identificatory practices that represent a valuable source of knowledge and carry a potential for transformative change while criticizing those that reify the existing social order, instead of simply homogenizing identities as inherently harmful and rejecting them as productive frames of politics altogether, as queer theorists suggest (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000).

Second, the politics of solidarity and alliance necessarily includes the notion of social position as the material basis of experience, which represents an important component of “rooting” and informs the process of taking responsibility for differences. By using the term social position, or simply position, Anthias (2006) refers to the relationship between identity categories and a particular location in society that is produced by the interplay of economic, political, legal, and cultural practices. It is important to note that a person never inhabits only one location. One’s position in society consists of dynamic intersectedness of different locations stemming from the multiplicity and multidimensionality of social relations of power that position us in particular ways (Anthias, 2006; see also Sánchez, 2006). The interconnectedness of different social positions produces different ways in which people relate to their positions. Anthias terms the individual negotiations of one’s social locatedness “positioning” while using the concept of “positionality” to account for the dynamic interplay

between positions and positioning (Anthias, 2006, p. 27). Thus, the concepts of position, positioning, and positionality are closely related to the process of identity production. They represent an important bedrock for the politics of solidarity and alliance in that they help us to grasp differences across particular positionalities and allow us to see that “some people are more oppressed than others” to borrow from Cherrie Moraga.<sup>51</sup> Only then we would be able to build meaningful alliances based on reflexive accountability towards difference.

Speaking from a postpositivist realist perspective Rosaura Sánchez (2006) makes a similar distinction between one’s location in society and the individual practices of making sense of this location. However, her terminology slightly differs from the one that Anthias proposes. In particular, Sánchez uses the concept of positioning when referring to “one’s social location” while employing the term positionality to account for “reflexivity, understanding of, or subjective relation with regard to social location” (Sánchez, 2006, p. 38). In my view, the term *positioning* that, among other things, implies activity and even strategy may better indicate the agency that is present in the self-reflexive relating to social positions. By using the terms position, positioning, and positionality in my project I hope to emphasize the interconnectedness of material realities that we inhabit or cultural practices related to the production of meanings without falling into the trap of social determinism.

This brings us to the notion of self-reflexivity as the final point in my attempt to establish the importance of a postpositivist realist view of identity for the politics of reflective solidarity. As Wilkerson argues, the concept of identity that recognizes the role of interpretive practice allows us to see our own position in the process of identity construction and to become aware of social mechanisms and the dominant cultural assumptions facilitating this process. Hence, self-reflexivity not only provides a ground for agency and brings about multiplicity, but it also opens up a space to critique and question our own identities. In this way, it allows us to realize that the other is already within us as a constitutive part of identity formation in terms of internalized assumptions, common beliefs, and attitudes shared by a larger group (Alcoff, 2006). By so doing, it pushes us to take responsibility for the process of identity construction as a necessary prerequisite for building a community that would be based on a critical engagement with differences instead of fetishizing or erasing them, thus opening up a space for non-oppressive relationships. In Wilkerson’s words, “[l]iberation will not be an absolute return to an unconditioned or universal freedom, but generation of a more

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<sup>51</sup> Cited in Moya, 2000, p.79.

reflective community for each of us to live in, a community that knows itself to be in process” (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 173).

As we saw earlier, neither homogenizing identity politics nor subjectless queer critique provide a productive framework that could bring about solidarity based on a responsibility to differences. In fact, although starting from different theoretical and political positions, they both tend to result in the erasure of differences, either under the sign of unquestioned identity or de-contextualized anti-normality. Against the dominant discourses of identity, solidarity and community, and on the basis of insights about the social order emerging in the life stories of people othered on the grounds of their sexuality, I have identified three different discursive strategies of self-identification: assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning. In order to compare the underlying assumptions and arguments in these three strategies of identity construction, I draw on the postpositivist realist view of identity defined as *emerging fusion* that sees the construction of experience and self-identificatory practices as theoretically informed interpretations of social reality at the intersection of various interpretative horizons. By analyzing different ways in which sexually marginalized people in Croatia construct their belonging against the existing discourses of nationalism, I aspire to assess to what extent my participants draw on reflective solidarity as a basis for community. In doing so, I will examine whether and to what extent the position of “sexual minority” carries the potential for progressive social change, revisiting in this way the political utility of (sexual) identity.

### 3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which (sexual) identity has been conceptualized in relation to emancipatory political struggle. Specifically, I reflected on the Butler’s theory of identity that informs the rejectionist paradigm in queer theory. I showed that Butler conceptualizes identity as part of normalizing practices, inherently negative and exclusionary, while conceiving agency as a result of concealment of inner heterogeneity and/or a contingent effect of discourses. I argued that by drawing on Butler’s approach, queer resistance to de-contextualized “regimes of normal” often results in erasing the differences among distinctly positioned subjects on the grounds of overarching anti-normality. Without taking into account particular experiences of multiply oppressed subjects such as lesbians, queers of color, working class queers, etc. the rejection paradigm in queer theory tends to reify exclusionary social hierarchies.

As an alternative to the exclusionary rejectionist paradigm in queer theory, I argued for the political potential of postpositivist realist conception of identity, which views identities

as “fluid, complex, open-ended, and dynamic” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 112), but at the same time historically produced and contextually bounded. As postpositivist realists maintain, the multiplicity and instability that characterize identity is a result of (self)reflection and (self)interpretation through which public identities are negotiated. As a result of dynamic negotiations we have a self which is not coherent, but consists of multiple, often contradictory identities, themselves comprised of different, and even opposing, meanings that intersect with each other. Drawing on the postpositivist realist approach I argued that it is precisely the incoherencies and openness of categories, selves and horizons that open up a space for resistance and alternative modes of self-understanding and self-identification that may bring about social transformation, and not some core heterogeneous self that exceeds classification and normalization as Butler suggests.

In the Chapter 4 I will discuss methodological aspects of my research, including the choice of data and methods of data gathering and analysis. In line with my postpositivist realist feminist perspective, I will also reflect upon my own position in the research that emerges at the intersection of my social positionality and educational and theoretical background, accounting in this way for the situatedness of my own knowledge claims.

## Chapter 4: Researching the interface between the social and the personal: Methodological concerns

Research will never be an ideal process, but it can be a more accountable one.

(Pascale, 2011, p. 157)

[...] the feminist standpoint theorists' goal of an epistemology and politics of engaged, accountable positioning remains eminently potent.

(Haraway, 1988, p. 590)

In critical discourse analysis, language-as-discourse is *both* a form of action through which people can change the world *and* a form of action which is socially and historically situated and in a dialectical relationship with other aspects of the social.

(Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 62; original emphasis)

In Chapter 3, drawing on the postpositivist realist theory of identity, I argued that identities are socio-historical processes emerging as the products of dynamic negotiations between the personal and the social. The model demonstrates the constitutive role of language use that exists in the dynamic interplay between language and other (non-discursive) social practices in a particular socio-historical context (Fairclough, 1992, 2003). Thus, in order to explore the ways in which people othered on the grounds of their sexuality construct their identities and to see whether, in the course of negotiation, some do challenge the exclusionary nationalist discourses and practices of citizenship and belonging, in Chapters 5 and 6 I will analyze the self-narratives of fourteen sexually marginalized individuals. One of the main aims of this chapter is to account for the dynamic interplay between the empirical data I will analyze in Chapters 5 and 6 and the theoretical discussions presented in Chapters 2 and 3. This reflection on my approach is meant to support my arguments about the importance of individual experiences for feminist theory and (sexual) politics, which were put forward in the two theoretical chapters.

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss postpositivist realist insights on the decisive role of personal experiences in the process of knowledge production, especially about identities (Wilkerson, 2007), in relation to Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of "situated

knowledges” and Nina Lykke’s (2010) arguments on self-reflexivity as a requirement for the production of scholarly and politically relevant knowledge based on the limited “views from somewhere” (Haraway, p. 590). Acknowledging the importance of self-reflexivity in feminist knowledge production, I will reflect upon the ways in which my own positionality informs my research. I will then move on to a discussion of my methodological choices, including data as well as analytical categories. First I will reflect on my sampling strategy, then I will discuss the relevance of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main method of analysis of all the textual materials. In the final part of this chapter I will briefly present the main features of the three dominant strategies of self-identification identified in my analysis.

#### **4.1. On Critical Positionality: Siting and sighting the researcher in her project**

As contemporary social constructionist approaches that are largely inspired by the Foucaultian notion of the power/knowledge nexus claim, “truth” is an effect of power relations (Foucault, 1988). In other words, all we can know about the world and ourselves is always already imbued with the regimes of truth present in a particular socio-historical formation and so it is impossible for us to think outside of the discursive framework. However, Foucault’s conceptualization of “truth” as a result of power relations that produce the regimes of truth, does not assume a stable binary between “the dominant discourse and the dominated one” (Foucault, 1988, p. 100). Instead, Foucault conceptualizes power in terms of a multiplicity of power relations that produce unstable and contingent constellations of the power/knowledge nexus. The struggle over various discursive elements that is inherent to the operations of power opens up a space for resistance and new discourses to emerge (Foucault, 1988). Having said that, the immediate question arises: Is there such a thing as politically relevant knowledge production? Or, in the words of Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips: “If we accept that ‘reality’ is socially created, that ‘truths’ are discursively produced effects and that subjects are decentred, what do we do about the ‘truth’ that we as researcher-subjects produce?” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, p. 21-2).

In order to answer this question, I revisit the postpositivist realist theory of identity and experience, more specifically Wilkerson’s (2007) work on the possibility of a theory of sexual identity. Wilkerson refers to Heidegger’s notion of “hermeneutic circle” as an inevitable feature of all theory-making. Wilkerson points to two important aspects that

constitute the “hermeneutic circle.” The first relates to the issue of producing a valid general account from the perspective of one’s particular social positionality. This concern resonates with postpositivists’ attempt to move beyond both false positivist objectivism and postmodernist relativism. The second aspect concerns the validity of building a general(izable) account of sexual identity on the grounds of a limited number of distinctive individual experiences. As Wilkerson argues, we can not completely resolve the ambiguity inherent to a theory of sexual identity. No impartial, non-situated, general theory of sexual identity that will break the “circular aspect of interpretation” is possible (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 20-1). What we can do in order to be accountable for our positioned theory is to try to “enter [the hermeneutic circle] in the proper way” (p. 21). The methodological strategy includes two important acts. On the one hand, “we can select experiences that [in our reading] illuminate the formation of sexual identity;” and, on the other, “we can be self-conscious about how our selection affects our theory” (p. 21). In short, Wilkerson conceives of a theory as the product of a methodological process that is always already partial because positioned and mediated via different discourses resulting in the generalization of the concrete social phenomena, like sexual identity in his (and my) case.

Postpositivist realists’ requirement about experiences as the necessary starting point for valid knowledge claims comes very close to Donna Haraway’s (1988) notions of situated knowledges and critical positionality. Haraway devised the concept of “situated knowledges” to establish a politically relevant “feminist objectivity” in terms of responsible, critical and rational knowledge that is nevertheless historically contingent and partial. Through the notion of “situated knowledges,” Haraway describes the process of knowledge production as an act of “embodied objectivity” (p. 581) and “positioned rationality” (p. 590) that allow for objectivity that is grounded in the positioned (and thus partial) “view from somewhere.” Haraway’s “situated knowledges” signifies a break with positivist scientific objectivity on the one hand, and postmodern relativism on the other (Haraway, 1988, p. 590).

Haraway’s conception of situated knowledges is one of the main theoretical lynchpins in Nina Lykke’s (2010) attempt to establish feminist studies as a scholarly and politically relevant, while also “ethico-politically responsible” and “democratic,” process of knowledge production (Lykke, 2010, p. 6). In her discussion of Haraway’s theory of positionality, Lykke focuses on the requirement of self-reflexivity. To define it, she distinguishes between the act of “siting” and “sighting.” Siting is the demand for the researcher to reflect upon her material location in terms of “time, space, body and history and in terms of the context of intersecting power differentials” (ibid., p. 152). Sighting implies the act of reflection upon “research



technologies [involved] and their effects” (ibid., p. 152). In other words, Lykke argues that self-reflexivity involves both conscious awareness of our material positionality (siting) as well as our ideological and conceptual assumptions and methodological moves (sighting). As such, it plays a decisive role in producing critical and politically responsible knowledge based on the view from a particular position.

In Chapters 2 and 3, to meet Lykke’s requirement of sighting, I carve out the theoretical lenses through which I look at the intersection of sexuality and nationalism on the one hand, and the social relevance of identity and experience on the other. In order to meet the requirement of siting, I will now reflect upon my embodied location(s) and the biographical particularities that influence my partial vision in this research project. I will do so through the process of remembering my experiences of a lesbian with a Croat ethnic background during the break-up of Yugoslavia, coming of age in the mid 1990s and studying abroad (at CEU, Budapest) since the mid 2000s.

I was born as a citizen of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with Croatian republican citizenship.<sup>52</sup> I grew up in a small town on the Croatian side of the Slovenian-Croatian border. The meanings and function of this border significantly changed during my teenage years. After the two federal states, Croatia and Slovenia, gained international recognition within their “socialist” borders, the “soft” border between them became the “hard” border now separating two autonomous states. I experienced the process of “hardening,” to borrow Duara’s category (1995, p. 65-6), by way of bomb alerts and frightening news accounts about the military conflict raging on Croatian territory, which included images of devastated areas and masses of refugees. With the process of nationalization, my family and I came to be seen as “ethnic Croats” and entitled to citizenship in the emerging Croatian state.

An integral part of the nation-building process in Croatia was a systemic reconstruction of memories about people’s lives in Yugoslavia. The “official” nationalist discourse depicted life in Yugoslavia as the “dungeon of the nation,” while memories that implied a more complex picture of Yugoslav history carried the stigma of Yugonostalgia and Serbo-communism. Those expressing a more nuanced view, were portrayed as enemies of the new Croatian nation-state. Meanwhile, all things perceived as Yugoslav or Serbian cultural

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<sup>52</sup> Citizenship in the socialist federal Yugoslavia consisted in the distinction between federal and republican levels. The last Yugoslav Constitution in 1974 proclaims that citizens of particular republic automatically hold a citizenship of the SFRY. Moreover, the Constitution grants the same rights to citizens on the territory of another republic that citizens of that other republic enjoy (Štiks, 2010). As Igor Štiks argues, in this way “simultaneity of republican and federal citizenships was established,” which created the legal confusion and raised the issue of the primacy between the two levels of “bifurcated citizenship” (Štiks, 2010, p. 7).

products, such as different brands, films, music, and literature vanished from Croatian public spaces. Influenced by the new dominant narratives, and to avoid stigmatization, I started to silence my sense of belonging to Yugoslavia, gradually becoming a “Croat.”

Becoming aware of my affection for women forced me to face another form of stigmatization, this time much harder for me to deal with. It was not until after the first two Zagreb Pride Marches in 2002 and 2003, and the ensuing greater visibility of sexual minorities in public discourses that I felt safe and strong enough to come out of the closet, first to my closest friends and then to my Mom. Positioned as a lesbian, I became aware of the tremendous influence that different social positions and encodings have on individual lives, how much they affect our life opportunities and the ways we experience what we perceive as our reality. The lived experiences of social inequality in relation to my position as a lesbian in a heteropatriarchal context became a crucial source of influence for my decision to pursue my education in gender studies and, through work on my MA thesis and PhD dissertation, to produce knowledge that will contribute to emancipatory politics. At the same time, coming to Central European University in the mid 2000s and meeting colleagues from different parts of former Yugoslavia helped me gain a critical perspective on the process of nationalization and the erasure of memories I experienced. My experiences of the abrupt and violent break-up of Yugoslavia influenced my interest in social change and the ways it affects belonging and identities.

The above re/construction of my relevant memories, i.e. my “siting” of lived experiences as a Croatian citizen and lesbian woman in relation to this research, follows the postpositivist realist position that conceptualizes the process of remembering as a dynamic interplay between past events and the present situation mediated by individual interpretation (Wilkerson, 2007):

[e]ven though we think that our feelings were always there [...], we forget, in the very process of this remembering, that our memory reconstructs the previous feelings in light of what they become. We now feel this way, and this new context projects itself backwards into our past [...], and our very feelings change retroactively.

(Wilkerson, 2007. p. 49)

According to Wilkerson, the process of remembering is not simply the process of retrieving traces of past events. Remembering consists of the active construction of meanings

on the basis of what happened in the past in relation to the present situation discursively mediated by individual interpretation. The dynamic act of remembering links together what is seen as the past from within the present with an inevitable orientation to the future. In other words, remembering, according to Wilkerson's conceptualization, represents a missing link between self-reflection and the construction of experiences, constituting a crucial component in the process whereby identities are constructed. Thus, the process of remembering is an important source for research on and theories of identity (Wilkerson, 2007).

Motivated by my lived experiences, I have decided to approach sexual identities in the context of nationalization in Croatia through the life narratives of sexually marginalized people as primary textual sites of their identity construction process. I want to explore discursive strategies of re/imagining (national) citizenship from the position of people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. I look at individual self-identification practices, which appear in the life narratives of my research subjects. These life narratives are the product of oral history interviews that I conducted. The choice of life stories as a site through which to explore the process of sexual identity construction is based on the argument that it is precisely in the process of self-narration that people make sense of their experiences and articulate their identities (Linde, 1993; Lieblich and Josselson, 1994; Eakin 1999). In the next section I will reflect upon my selection of data, including the decision to focus on life narratives.

## **4.2. Data collection: Sampling strategies**

Self-construction in the context of self-narration is a complex and multifaceted process. Therefore, life narratives represent rich sources of knowledge production, especially when it comes to exploring the interplay among individual sense-making practices at the interface of the personal and the social. The significance of life stories for researching identity construction processes can also be argued by noting the influence of the narrative genre for organizing events in to some coherent text. Thus, life narratives can be seen as the structure regulating the practice of auto/biographical telling that demands coherence for the narrator's sense of self to be meaningful. However, this coherence is in the process of making and so always limited and temporary, which makes life stories particularly suitable for researching the intersection of potentially conflicting identities (Lanser, 1992, Stanley, 1992, Wood, 1999).

Since the aim of my research is to analyze the ways in which people othered on the grounds of their sexuality construct their identities vis-à-vis the dominant nationalist discourses of citizenship and belonging, the bulk of my data consists of personal accounts of non-heterosexual people who are Croatian citizens and are based in the country. For the same reason, I was not interested in collecting a representative sample as much as in achieving a “richness of textual detail” in relation to the phenomenon in question, to borrow from Fran Tonkiss (1998, p. 253). According to Tonkiss, the representativeness of a sample is not so relevant in research that aims at answering the “*how* question,” such as for example, “*how* particular attitudes are shaped, reproduced, and legitimized through the use of language” (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 253; emphasis added). In other words, it is the “richness of textual detail” that gives us insight into how language use participates in re/producing or transforming social relations of nationalism and sexuality. At the same time, I also collected other types of texts. In selecting the texts that inform my analysis of life narratives, I relied on Tonkiss’ (1998) conception of “interpretive context” as a socio-discursive context to which the particular discourses articulated together in a given text belong (p. 249) and Norman Fairclough’s (1992, 2003) argument that every text represents a social event that is dialectically related to discursive and social practices. In order to establish the “interpretive context” for the life stories, I relied on the existing scholarship on sexual politics and nationalism in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav Croatia. In addition to the secondary literature I gathered various sets of data such as legal documents, which include the Constitution and various laws securing particular forms of gender and sexual relations, articles from print media and internet portals, and texts produced by different lesbian, gay and queer groups and NGOs in Croatia.

My sample of life stories consists of fourteen life-span narratives that are results of semi-structured oral history interviews with people diversely self-identified as lesbians, gays, trans, and women-loving-women, as well as activists and non-activists, aged between twenty seven and sixty five.<sup>53</sup> In order to find potential participants for the interviews, I combined different methods of sampling. While targeting particular persons that I already knew (for example, activists), I also sent out a call for participants to all members of “gay.hr,” the most popular gay forum in Croatia at the time of my research in 2008. Additionally, as a particular form of the snowball method (Seale and Filmer, 1998) I asked my informants to disseminate the call for participants further through their e-mail contact lists. I combined these sampling methods because I was committed to finding the participants that were equally dispersed

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<sup>53</sup> For a short biographical note on each participant see the Appendix I.

along the lines of gender, age, and involvement in activism. I conducted interviews with six non-heterosexual women, of which three are activists (28, 26, and 26 years old) and three who are not involved in activism (48, 30, and 28 years old); seven non-heterosexual men, of which two are activists (34 and 32 years old) and five are not involved in activism (65, 30, 29, 28, and 25 years old); and one transgender activist (29 years old).

Since the researcher inevitably influences the process of self-narration by asking particular questions and not others, but also through the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and participant, I carefully prepared my questions (Temple, 1994). I wanted to take an active role in guiding the interview and address the issues that I considered relevant for my research. Yet, I was also tried to leave enough space for the participants to bring forth and address the themes and issues they found relevant for their experiences and wanted to share. All the interviews I conducted were semi-structured and started with the same invitation: “Tell me something about your experiences as non-heterosexual person.” In addition to the initial question, I had a list of issues that I wanted to know my informants’ opinions about. The list was established on the grounds of my own experiences as well as the existing literature on sexuality and nationalism in Croatia. The list included the following themes: the local LGBTIQ movement, gay and lesbian communities, Zagreb Pride, participants’ feelings about Croatia’s independence, their perception of the position of sexual minorities in the past 20 years, and their position on EU integration. During the interviews, I also came up with additional questions in response to the trajectory of each individual story.<sup>54</sup>

Twelve interviews were conducted in Zagreb, one in Labin and one in Rijeka. Although majority of my informants lived in Zagreb at the time of the interview, most of them grew up elsewhere (usually in smaller towns like Osijek, Vis, Kaštela, Krk, Zadar, and Split in Croatia, and Banja Luka and Zenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina) and came to Zagreb after finishing high school to study, or to search for a job. I conducted one interview with each participant. The only exception is Matija, a gay activist with whom I conducted a short second interview when he came to introduce me to another participant. All interviews were conducted in Croatian. The length of the interview varies between 26 minutes and 2 hours and 30 minutes, with an average duration of 75 minutes. They were recorded with the digital voice recorder and stored on my personal computer.<sup>55</sup> I transcribed the interviews in Croatian. These transcripts consist of life narratives that I will analyze in Chapters 5 and 6. In the course of my analysis I will present the English translations of the original excerpts. The

<sup>54</sup> For a complete list of questions see the Appendix II.

<sup>55</sup> The digital recordings of the oral history interviews are available upon request.

Croatian original will be included in the footnote. It is important to note that all quotations from the interviews are my translations. With the exception of Gordana, who wanted to be presented with her real name, I changed the names of my informants, thus respecting their wish to remain anonymous.

An important aspect of the textual analysis of life stories will be to draw connections between the textual production of meaning and the interpretive context, establishing in this way a link between larger processes of categorization and individual self-identification practices. In order to establish the interpretive context as part of the analysis of sexual identity production in life narratives, I collected different types of data. First, in light of the argument that law is an important site of meaning production, normalization, and the constitution of subjects (Stychin 2003, Cossman, 2007), I gathered different legal documents to explore the order of discourses of sexual citizenship in state practices of democratization, nationalization and EU accession. The documents I collected include *Ustav Republike Hrvatske* [Constitution of the Republic of Croatia] promulgated in 1990 and its modified version from 1997 and *Zakon o istospolnim zajednicama* [Same-Sex Communities Act]. I referred to some of these documents in my discussion of the intersection of sexuality and nationalism in Croatia in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.).

Second, relying on Benedict Anderson's (1991) argument about the function of print media in the formation of "imagined communities" and Dubravka Žarkov's (2007) findings about the decisive role of print media in constructing the ethnic/national clashes on the eve of war in the former Yugoslavia, I also collected print media productions for analysis. In particular, in order to examine the prevailing discourses on sexuality and nation-ness and their intersection in print media, I traced the articles from one of the most influential Croatian dailies *Jutarnji list* [Morning paper], which has been voicing the dominant pro-EU, liberal agenda since the 2000s. I traced the articles published in its printed edition from 2000 to 2009. In addition to *Jutarnji list*, I traced the articles published during the period of my research on a number of Croatian web-portals and on-line editions of popular dailies and weeklies such as *Index*, *Večernji list*, *Novi list*, *Poslovni dnevnik*, and *Nacional*.

To establish the order of discourse when it comes to citizenship, nationalization processes, and sexuality, and to account for their intersection, I will also consult secondary literature, especially studies that address the ways in which nationalism was managed in socialist Yugoslavia together with the literature that focuses on the intersection of gender, sexuality, and nationalism in the context of nationalization processes in the 1990s.

As part of the interpretive context, especially because one of my variables was involvement in activism, I looked at Croatian LGBTIQ activist practices and discourses on sexuality/sexual identity, nation-ness and citizenship. I accessed them through visual and textual materials produced by different gay, lesbian and queer groups and NGOs: *Kontra* [Against], *LORI* [Lesbian Organization Rijeka], *Iskorak* [Step Forward], and *Zagreb Pride*. The activist materials posted on their websites include annual reports on the position of sexual minorities in Croatia, announcements and (self)assessments of different campaigns, and various texts relating to Zagreb Pride, such as theme announcements. In my research I also made use of *YouTube*, a video-sharing website, where I found video-clips of Pride Marches. I will also look at discourses that are produced globally, such as discourses on sexuality and visibility generated by the global LGBTIQ movement, and EU discourses on sexuality, nation-ness, and regionalism. I will access these global discourses mostly through secondary literature.

#### **4.3. Critical Discourse Analysis: Categories of analysis**

If we perceive identities as products of a dynamic interplay between social structuring and individual sense-making practices enabled by self-reflexivity, how can we explore the textual specificities of the processes of identity formation? One of the most effective methods for analyzing the interface between the personal and the social is critical discourse analysis as proposed by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 1992, 2003), and Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002). In particular, one of the main premises of critical discourse analysis, which is highly relevant for research on identity construction, is that language is a social practice that is dialectically interrelated with other, non-discursive, social practices in a given context. In other words, although language is a site for the construction and communication of knowledge and meaning, language is also constituted by and may change under the influence of practices that are not primarily discursive, such as the economic order, the political structure, or various other (institutionalized) practices and relations (Fairclough, 1992, 2003).

Theorizing the dialectical interplay between discourses and social practices led Fairclough (1992, 2003) to propose a three-dimensional model of discourse. It consists of the interplay between (1) particular texts that are embedded in social events, (2) discursive practices of signification as part of social practice, which refers to the ways the text relates to the discursive context in which it is produced, distributed and consumed, and (3) social

practices that constitutes the wider social context for both texts and discursive practice. By establishing the three dimensions – text, discursive practice, and social practice, and linking them in a dynamic interplay, Fairclough brings together linguistic analysis, a macro-sociological perspective on social structuring, and micro-sociology of daily practices, each playing a decisive role in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992).

The three dimensions of discourse that constitute language use as a social practice are conceived as mutually constitutive. Each of the three aspects influences and, in turn, is influenced by the other two dimensions of meaning making. Hence, the process of identity formation can be seen and examined as part of the discursive practice that links personal narratives with the larger social context of sexualized/gendered national belonging. In order to trace the self-identification processes in the self-narratives as temporal and contextual attempts of constructing an intelligible self, I will analyze the discursive practices emerging in the life-narratives as an “actual instance of language in use” in Fairclough’s three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3).

Discursive practices are also rendered into patterns. Fairclough’s notion of the order of discourse captures this structuring. Conceptualized as “the relatively durable social structuring of language which is one element of the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices” (Fairclough 2003, p. 3), the order of discourse provides the more or less sedimented recourses of available representations for the actual discursive events and conditions the use of representations (Fairclough, 2003; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). In this way individual narratives can not be seen as matters of individualistic, purely accidental choices, but dynamic articulations of the available representations.

The order of discourse in terms of social conditions of meaning brings me to Fairclough’s concept of agency, one of the main concerns in/for my project that is concerned with the political significance of identity formation. The order of discourse with its emphasis on the process of structuring of language may capture the discursive aspect of hegemony. Therefore, the reifications or transformations of the order of discourse play an important role in the hegemonic struggle over meaning (Fairclough 1992). Fairclough’s notions of hegemony and hegemonic struggle mainly rely on the conception of hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci. In Fairclough’s own wording: “Hegemony is leadership as much as domination across the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of a society. [...] Hegemony is never achieved more than partially and temporarily, as an ‘unstable equilibrium’” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 92). The linguistic aspect of the notion of hegemony in Fairclough’s CDA is captured by the concept of ideology defined as “representations of



aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9). The ultimate aim of critical discourse analysis based on the three-dimensional model of discourse, is to explore and assess whether, and to what extent, a given discursive practice reifies or reshapes the order of discourse, reproducing or challenging the social order (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

Arguments about hegemonic power struggles, which consider struggles over meaning to be one of the most important social aspects of discursive practice, emphasize the role of the individual as a language user who participates in the “communicative event.”<sup>56</sup> According to Fairclough (1992), one of the main factors that contributes to creativity in negotiating meaning is the presence of different, and even contradictory, discourses within the order of discourse. Such a plurality of discourses and orders of discourse opens up a possibility for the individual people to articulate various elements of distinct discourses together and to speak from different and even conflicting positions. It is precisely through this practice of bringing together discourses in new and non-prefigured ways that discursive and social change can happen (Fairclough, 1992, 2003; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). By conceptualizing individual language use as both shaped by discursive practices and a creative act of negotiating meaning, critical discourse analysis is built on the assumption of a dialectic relation between discursive practices, seen as the element of social structuring, and the subject structured through language. In this way, CDA’s theoretical take on agency, subjective, and identity construction corresponds to Wilkerson’s (2007) model of “emerging fusion” discussed in in Chapter 3 (*Section 3.4.*).

Let me now discuss how the central ideas of critical discourse analysis inform the categories, as well as the particular steps, in my analysis. In so far as it is in and through actual discourses that people constitute themselves as subjects, it is not an authentic self that can be captured in the course of my analysis of the narrated stories. The self is always re-constructed in the context of narrating – in the course of the oral history interview in my case – in relation to actual or imagined others, the researcher (me) and any characters mentioned or implicated in the stories. This intersubjective story-telling always draws on the repertoire of stories present in the socio-historical context people live in (Harré and van Langenhove 1991; Eakin 1999). Therefore, I have to establish the interpretive context as part of my analysis of the life narratives.

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<sup>56</sup> Referring to Fairclough’s theory of discourse Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) conceptualize the “communicative event” as “[e]very instance of language use” that always includes all three dimensions of discourse (text, discursive practice, and social practice) (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 67-8).

As a way of analyzing the discursive practice, Fairclough (2003, pp. 191-4) proposes several different categories of linguistic analysis and argues that the choice of categories is always relative to the actual text types. In the analysis of the life narratives I will focus on the following analytical questions and categories: 1) How are particular social events, such as the establishment of an independent Croatian nation-state, the armed conflicts (1991-1995), and the Zagreb pride events represented in the text? 2) What kinds of assumptions (in the sense of “common sense,” taken for granted, knowledge) about sexuality/sexual identity, ethnicity/nation, and citizenship are drawn on in the text and to which value systems may they be related? 3) What particular values and truth systems are present in the text? 4) What are the discourses and texts that the informants draw on? What texts/voices are excluded? How are different discourses related to each other?

Drawing on these four questions, in my analysis I will look at how the above specified events are represented with a focus on the particular assumptions about nation, citizenship, and sexuality/sexual identity expressed in relation to these events. Furthermore, I will link these assumptions to existing truth and value systems and establish the meanings in relation to difference/sameness, commonality, solidarity, and belonging that are implied by these systems. Finally, I will identify the particular discourses that these systems, together with their assumptions, belong to (Fairclough, 2003, p. 58). By relating the truth and value systems to particular discourses, both dominant and non-dominant, I will analyze how the dominant nationalist heteropatriarchal discourses of citizenship and belonging are negotiated – reinforced or challenged – in the life narratives, as well as what alternative discourses my informants draw on. The ultimate aim of my analysis is to see whether, and to what extent, the emancipatory non-exclusionary politics of reflexive solidarity is articulated in the narratives.

#### **4.4. Narrative strategies of self-identification: Assimilation, queer disposition and strategic positioning**

The majority of my samples, collected through the oral history research, consist of life-stories of people who are positioned according to the existing citizenship regime as members of the Croatian national majority, regardless of their personal self-identification. In my analysis I will look at the ways in which the contradiction between their position in relation to nationality on the one hand, and sexuality on the other, is negotiated through the narrative strategies of self-identification. I am particularly interested in finding out to what degree sexually marginalized people, in their life-narratives, subvert the nationalist minority-

majority logic, and whether this subversion, if it exists, opens up a space for a non-exclusionary politics of solidarity and belonging. Thus, I will look at the ways in which people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality draw on reflective solidarity as the basis of community. My main concern is to see whether, and to what extent, the position of “sexual minority” carries the potential for progressive social change, revisiting in this way the political utility of (sexual) identity.

Since my informants repeatedly referred to visibility and commonality regardless of their involvement in activism or their self-identification strategy, the analysis is focused on these two particular points as discursal sites that bring together sexual identities and national citizenship in a dynamic interplay. There are three exceptions to this tendency, though. In three out of the fourteen life-narratives sexuality does not represent a decisive point for the articulation of citizenship and belonging, and thus, it was not possible to identify a consistent strategy of self-identification in relation to the intersection of sexuality and nationalism. Without articulating a particular strategy of belonging, these narratives do not provide what Tonkiss calls a “richness of textual detail” (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 253) for exploring how the dominant nationalist discourses of solidarity and belonging are negotiated from the position of people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. Thus, in my analysis of the ways in which citizenship and belonging are re/imagined in self-identification practices I will focus on the rest of eleven narratives divided among the three consistent strategies of self-identification.

In the course of the analysis I will be reading the narratives against the dominant discourses of identity, solidarity and community to be able to differentiate the ways in which visibility and commonality are imagined and articulated in the life-narratives. By comparing the underlying assumptions and argumentations, I will identify different discursal strategies of self-identification: *assimilation*, *queer disposition*, and *strategic positioning* in the life narratives.

Assimilation is the most frequent narrative strategy of self-identification in the narratives I collected, present in seven life-stories. All of them draw on the discourses of privacy, normalcy and tolerance that I will define as the assimilationist strategy of inclusion into the dominant (nationalist) logic of citizenship and solidarity. At the same time, the strategy of assimilation tends to reiterate the exclusionary forms of belonging and solidarity grounded in the essentializing and homogenizing logic of descent. While the interface of “privacy” and “normalcy” is the dominant strategy of self-identification in the life-narratives of one self-identified lesbian and two self-identified gay men who are not involved in

activism, “normalcy” that is not linked to “privacy” is the main strategy of self-identification and belonging in the stories of four gay men, two of them being activists.

In contrast to assimilation, the other two strategies, namely queer disposition and strategic positioning, represent a break with the homogenizing nationalist logic of citizenship, solidarity, and belonging. However, there are significant differences in the logic of self-identification underpinning these two strategies. I will identify what I call the queer strategy in the narratives of two activists, one of them a self-identified woman-loving-woman and the other a self-identified trans person, born as male. Their commonality is articulated through the rejection of the existing categories of identification. In line with this logic, nation is rejected and openly criticized as a dominant form of solidarity and belonging. However, being articulated from a privileged position when it comes to national citizenship – both of them being seen as members of national majority – the un-reflexive rejection of categorization can easily end up in an exclusionary homogenization (similar to nationalism) that is blind to different positionalities, thus often leaving the power-relations intact.

In comparison to assimilation on the one hand, and queer on the other, a more promising narrative strategy of self-identification is present in the life-stories of two self-identified lesbian activists. Since their narrative strategy contains elements of self-reflexivity and positioning that are results of conscious political strategy with clearly articulated political goals, I termed this strategy strategic positionality. Although in their narratives there are elements of the queer perspective, the two lesbian activists nevertheless argue for a positive re-claiming of a lesbian identity through strategic “outing.” At the same time, they are critical of discriminatory nationalist politics and the EU integration process. It is reasonable to argue, as I will in the next two chapters, that it is precisely the activist lesbian position that opens up a space for conceptions of solidarity and belonging based on a more reflexive accountability for differences.

In the next two chapters, in order to explore and assess the different ways in which citizenship and belonging are re/imagined from the position of people othered on the grounds of their sexuality, I will analyze how the notion of visibility (Chapter 5) and commonality (Chapter 6) is articulated, resulting in the three strategies of self-identification. By placing these narrative strategies in a dynamic interplay with each other and with the social and discursive context, I will account for both the potentials and shortcomings of each strategy from the perspective of reflexive solidarity.

## Chapter 5: Sexual identities, visibility, and the politics of belonging

In our excessively materialist society, only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth. What I can see for myself is what is real; all else that vies for the status of the real must be inferred from that which can be seen [...]

(Alcoff, 2006, p. 7)

The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century.

(Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71)

In the past century marked by the emergence of sexual identities and the global spread of sexuality as a political issue, (in)visibility has represented a central aspect of lesbian and gay life and politics. Stigmatization, discrimination, and verbal or physical abuse have depended largely on visibility of one's sexual preferences. In a context where one's visibility have mostly been related to the risk of being hurt, privacy has gained the status of a safe space for sexual minorities. Starting with the Stonewall Rebellion in the late 1960s in the U.S., the struggles for equality resulted in the widespread "coming out" from invisibility into the space of public. In the decades to follow, visibility became the key strategy in struggles against sexual marginalization and stigmatization that gained the global dominance over other forms of resistance. Transnational prevalence of the politics of visibility is especially noticeable in popularity of Gay Pride Marches that, with the help of Western domination, installed the figure of the visible gay subject as an ideal of successful politics and gay liberation (Manalansan, 1997). Although the politics of visibility has achieved some positive changes regarding the discrimination of sexual minorities, hiding one's sexual preferences and passing as heterosexual continues to be an important aspect of lesbian and gay existence even in the so-called "West." The partial success that has been achieved in the past three decades can be argued to be related to the unquestioned centrality of national space within which visibility is to be achieved (Ritchie, 2010). In addition to leaving the exclusionary nationalist discourses and practices intact, the assimilationist tendencies informing the politics of visibility often argue for a "normalization" of homosexuality in terms of a "privatized, depoliticized" model of homosexuality" (ibid., 560).

In Croatia over the past decade, the politics of visibility have constituted one of the most important means in the struggle against discrimination of sexual minorities, with Zagreb Pride (2002-2012), and recently Split Pride (2011-2012), as central events of LGBTIQ activism. The dominance of the politics of visibility is reflected in the life narratives of sexually marginalized people where (in)visibility figures as one of the most important constitutive aspects in the process whereby the people I interviewed make sense of their lived experiences and their sense of self. What is more, (in)visibility functions as a key site through which not only sexual identity, but national belonging, is articulated in the process of self-narration. The recurring theme of (in)visibility makes the intersection of sexuality and nationalism on the level of self-identification accessible, providing an insight into how the notion of citizenship is re-imagined from the different positions of sexual minorities.

In order to explore and assess the value and limits of politics of visibility emerging in relation to self-identification in the narratives of people who are othered on the grounds of their sexuality, in the first section of this chapter I will critically reflect upon the ways in which the notion of visibility has been articulated in relation to the emancipatory politics of sexuality in the scholarly literature. After that, in the second section I will examine the dominant discourses emerging in relation to the rise of the sexual politics of visibility in Croatia in order to establish the “interpretive context” to which the particular discourses in the self-identification process belong. In Sections 5.3., 5.4., and 5.5. I will analyze the ways in which the dominant discourses of (in)visibility are negotiated from the perspectives of the three strategies of self-identification, namely, assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning.

## 5.1. Visibility and sexual politics

One of the most important modes of perception in Euro-American culture, upon which the modern systems of power and knowledge rely, is vision, representing a key aspect of the re/production of difference (Alcoff, 2006). This does not mean that contemporary social divisions, like gender and race, for example, are based on some objective, literally perceivable differences and are thus justified. As Alcoff reminds us, perception itself is influenced or shaped by “sedimented contextual knowledges” (p. 185). This embeddedness implies that “the process by which human bodies are differentiated and categorized by type is a process preceded by group oppression, rather than one that causes and thus “explains”

racism as a natural result” (p. 185). This means that visibility represents the source of differentiation that results in stigmatization, oppression, marginalization, and sometimes even death, and so, non-dominant subjects often draw on the strategy of “passing,” hiding the “truth” about themselves. At the same time, in order to become recognized as political subjects, marginalized groups must become visible. In this way, visibility operates as a means of both stigmatization and empowerment (Alcoff, 2006). Dynamics between invisibility and visibility, stigmatization and empowerment, represent a central feature of lesbian and gay existence in the past century and has been commonly articulated through the metaphors of the “closet” and “coming out (of the closet)” (Sedgwick, 1990).

The metaphors of the closet and coming out reflect the specific position of sexual minorities when it comes to visibility that often results, especially in the Croatian context, in stigmatization and discrimination. Heteronormativity as the dominant sexual order plays a significant role in the re/production of the private/public dichotomy through the workings of the practice of passing (Sedgwick, 1990). The very potential of closeting distinguishes differences based on one’s sexual preferences from the more visible identity categories such as race, for example. Without necessarily being visibly inscribed on the body, sexual non-conformity allows the subjects enacting the dominant modes of femininity and masculinity that are assumed to be in line with their sex to pass as heterosexual in the public domains of life. In addition to gender conventionality, the strategy of passing requires that sexual preferences are kept in privacy, away from the view of others. This space of privacy is referred to as the closet.

The practice of passing as heterosexual was commonly present and more easily achieved in the pre-Stonewall period, which was marked by the relative absence of lesbians and gays from the public discourses in the West. One of the key strategies of sexual minorities in the context of the Stonewall Rebellion was “coming out” in the struggles for equality. Following the widespread “outing,” the notion of (in)visibility went through a significant transformation in relation to political organizing, as well as in the context of self-perception and self-fashioning of sexually marginalized people in the West (Sedgwick, 1990; Plummer, 1995). As of the 1990s, the act of coming out refers to a range of different processes. They typically include the acquisition of sexual identity; disclosure of one’s sexual preferences to a circle of close friends, relatives, and colleagues; revelation of sexual preferences to many others; and as a conscious political act directed towards social transformation (Plummer, 1995, p. 58). Drawing on the logic that posits individual and group visibility as a dominant means of becoming a recognizable subject entitled to rights, coming

out is often perceived by LGBTIQ activists in the West as productive way of addressing discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. In other words, being grounded in visibility, sexual politics is informed by and, in turn, appeals to the notion of the individual equipped with rights who is central to the Western liberal-democratic notion of citizenship. The positive changes brought on by the sexual politics that relies on the strategy of outing includes, among others, the introduction of the anti-discriminatory measures and the presence of positive images of sexual minorities in mainstream media discourses and popular culture.

At the same time, contemporary politics of visibility have come under criticism for its elitist Western basis and assimilationist tendencies. In the center of the various criticisms lies a concern with the commodification of sexual identities under the logic of global capitalism. As feminist and sexuality studies scholars argue, commodification of now visible sexual identities functions as a way of substituting social equality with consumer equality (Evans, 1993; Hennessy, 2000). The equality that is achieved by the means of the “pink dollar,” goes the argument, is not only limited, but also appeals only to members of the upper classes who can afford to buy themselves a way into commodified citizenship. What is more, due to the different social hierarchies in contemporary late-modern societies, the strategy of coming out can cause more harm to people who are multiply disadvantaged on the grounds of class, race, gender, and other modes of oppression. Thus, the politics of visibility often participates in the re/production of the existing social hierarchies of discrimination (Manalansan, 2003; Ritchie, 2010).

The strategy of disclosing one’s sexual preferences is often seen by the New Left as antipode to the social struggles aiming at radical social transformation. In her famous essay “From Redistribution to Recognition?” (1997) Nancy Fraser conceptualizes the sexual politics of visibility as an assimilationist endeavor towards cultural recognition in the dominant terms of commodification that stands in conflict with more radical class struggles concerned with material redistribution that would inevitably result in thorough transformation of the contemporary social and economic system. Thus, Fraser’s distinction between the sexual struggle for recognition and the class struggle for redistribution is marked by a hierarchical relation between the two social movements. While class struggle is presented as the social critique that opens up a space for social transformation, it is argued that the sexual politics of visibility lacks such potential and ineluctably results in assimilation into the existing socio-economic order (Fraser, 1997).

Similarly, speaking from the perspective of queer theory, Matti Bunzl (1997) argues that politics based on coming out inevitably results in the reification of an exclusionary



minoritizing logic. Bunzl grounds his argument on the assumption that the act of coming out invokes the notion of a fixed and stable sexual identity (coming out as a lesbian for example) that is part of regimes of normalization. The reification of lesbian and gay identities through coming out, argues Bunzl, further reinforces the existing hetero/homo binary, which participates in the re/production of the public/private distinction (Bunzl, 1997). In other words, both New Left and queer perspectives conceive of the sexual politics of visibility as a strategy that lacks emancipatory potential since it leaves social and economic inequalities intact.

Responding to Fraser's concerns about the redistribution/recognition binary, Iris Marion Young (1997) criticizes the hierarchical distinction between cultural and economic forms of oppression and modes of resistance when assessing contemporary social movements. In Young's view, the different forms of social division – from capitalism and racism to heteronormativity and gender binary – are inextricably linked. Therefore, a critical theory that stresses the irreconcilable differences over commonalities will work against potential solidarities among different social struggles for equality. As an alternative to Fraser's dualistic model, Young puts emphasis on the inseparability of cultural and economic systems of oppression arguing that, in most cases, the politics of recognition does not represent the goal in itself but serves as a means for achieving larger socio-economic equality.<sup>57</sup> According to Young, instead of reifying the alleged dualism between recognition and redistribution, a powerful social critique should “conceptualize issues of justice involving recognition and identity as having inevitably material economic sources and consequences” (Young, p. 154). In Young's view, this will allow us to see that the two struggles are based on some common discontent with different modes of oppression, and the recognition thereof opens up a space for a more promising politics of solidarity and an alliance based on a responsibility for differences to emerge.

As we saw earlier, the postpositivist realist theory of identity stresses ambiguity when it comes to sexual identity and identity-based politics. In particular, William Wilkerson (2007) argues that “[b]ecause our current social ideals regard homosexuality and bisexuality as perverted forms of identity, accepting this identity for oneself becomes an essentially political act of both contesting and maintaining social norms” (p. 9). Thus, according to

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<sup>57</sup> It is important to keep in mind that not all forms of struggles for recognition are progressive, such as cases where recognition represents the goal itself. As an example of such movements one can use the nationalization process in Croatia in the 1990s. At the moment of proclaiming independence from the Yugoslav Federation, Croatia counted as one of the most economically prosperous Yugoslav republics enjoying political equality with other five republics. Therefore, it can be argued that the struggle for national recognition was not motivated by experience of inequality. It rather represented a goal in itself.

Wilkerson, coming out in a context such as the contemporary U.S. for example, where the figure of “lesbian” or “gay” is a stigmatized, but nevertheless available social role, should be regarded as an ambiguous practice that at the same time preserves and contests the existing social setting. In other words, we should not fall into a determinist trap and evaluate the sexual politics of visibility as either inherently emancipatory, or inherently assimilationist and exclusionary. Instead, we should focus our assessments on different aspects and practices taking place in the particular context and generating outcomes which can be more or less transformatory, depending on the context. In order to overcome its assimilationist tendencies and effects of commodification yet keeping the empowering and politically useful position of marginalized identity, which is especially important to lesbians who are often more invisible than they gay counterparts, Shane Phelan suggests that sexual politics of visibility should embrace continuous (self)reflexivity, responsibility and humbleness (Phelan, 1993). Reflexivity and caution about the way in which the notion of identity is employed will diminish the possible negative consequences, such as exclusion and assimilation, and turn the sexual politics of visibility into an important ally in the emancipatory struggle aiming at larger social transformation.

## **5.2. “From this day on we won’t be invisible anymore:” The visibility of sexual minorities in Croatia**

In this section I will address the ways in which the discourses and practices of (in)visibility have functioned as the means of silencing and stigmatizing on the one hand, and a means of empowerment of sexual minorities on the other, over the past two decades in Croatia. Regarding the 1990s, the period “before” the Zagreb Pride, sexual non-conformity in Croatia was rather ambivalently handled in mainstream discourses. On the one hand, as I already argued in Chapter 2, the tendency was to keep homosexuality as much invisible as possible on the grounds of its alleged threat to proclaimed Christian morality and Croatian tradition. One of the best examples of how this silencing looked in practice is the case of the 1990 BBC Series “Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit,” an adaptation of Jeanette Winterson’s novel, whose broadcasting on national television was abruptly terminated in the middle of an episode after a lesbian love-sexual scene was shown.<sup>58</sup> The national broadcasting house subsequently excused itself with reference to “technical problems,” but the remainder of this

<sup>58</sup> As I observed from my interaction with my lesbian friends and acquaintances from Zagreb, the abrupt termination of “Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit” became one of the most frequent stories about the silencing of lesbian identities in the 1990s that is repeatedly told in lesbian circles.

and the following episodes were never shown. It was later revealed that the decision to remove the series from the program was made by the Croatian national television director after a request coming from local Catholic Church officials (Vuletić, 2004).

At the same time, as we saw in Chapter 2, in the 1990s sexual non-conformity in general, and homosexuality in particular, were occasionally invoked as constitutive other in the discursive production of the Croatian national self (Vuletić, 2008). By depicting homosexuality as an unacceptable counterpart to the heterosexual prolific family, media discourses contributed to the social stigmatization and marginalization of sexual minorities in the 1990s.<sup>59</sup> These nationalist discourses referred mostly to gay men, leaving lesbians almost completely invisible. Given the unfavorable homophobic media discourses and nationalist heterosexist socio-cultural climate, sexually marginalized people were mostly closeted and stayed away from activism. The two activists that were visible and present in the public in this period fled Croatia in the late 1990s after experiencing verbal and physical assaults (Sagasta, 2001; Vuletić, 2004).

Sexual minorities became more visible after the political changes in 2000 when the Social Democrats-led coalition formed a government. In line with their liberal democratic orientation and tendencies towards EU membership, the new government introduced the politics and rhetoric of multiculturalism and pluralism that opened up some space for sexual minorities to voice their issues. From the beginning of 2000s we can find the proliferation of NGO activism, lobbying campaigns, and public actions directed towards increasing the visibility of sexual minorities. With the new discourses of plurality and tolerance the issues of discrimination of sexual minorities for the first time started to enter mainstream cultural production.<sup>60</sup> The year 2002 represents a turning point when it comes to organized and continuous engagements towards increasing the visibility of sexual minorities in Croatia. It is

<sup>59</sup> For example, the activists of LIGMA (Lesbian and Gay Men Action), the first group in Croatia after the break-up of Yugoslavia working on issues of sexually-based discrimination, were depicted as “militant activists” in the article published in 1993 in *Globus*, one of the most popular weeklies. The article was structured as a review of a comedy playing in one of Zagreb’s theaters, which provoked discontent among LIGMA activists due to its homophobic content (Sagasta, 2001).

<sup>60</sup> For example, in 2002 a young Croatian director Dalibor Matanić shot *Fine Dead Girls* [Fine mrtve djevojke], which became the first Croatian feature film with the issue of discrimination and violence against lesbians in Croatia as its focus. Depicting the traumatic story of the young lesbian couple that tragically breaks under the heteropatriarchal nationalist violence, *Fine Dead Girls* presents a broader social critique of contemporary Croatian society, targeting especially the devastating impacts of war and military nationalism on social relations. It is important to note that the film reached a significant audience and won numerous awards at the Pula Film Festival, including the Grand Prix for the best movie, audience award, and the critics’ award. It also became the Croatian candidate for the Academy awards. In addition to *Fine Dead Girls*, in the beginning of 2000s Croatian cultural space became richer for the translations of two renowned lesbian-themed novels – Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Erica Fischer’s *Aimée & Jaguar*. According to Sanja Sagasta, both novels gained much popularity among reviewers and audience (Sagasta, 2001).

marked by the organization of the first Gay Pride in the capital as well as by the appearance of *Iskorak*, an organization for the “rights of sexual and gender minorities,”<sup>61</sup> whose name, if literally translated means “Step Forward,” and could so easily be understood as the act of “coming out.” The quote from the title of this section comes from a speech given by Damir Hršak at the first Gay Pride march in Zagreb in 2002.<sup>62</sup> Hršak is a Croatian leftist intellectual and at that time was a member of *Iskorak*. Hršak’s speech demonstrates the perceived importance of visibility of sexual minorities by the organizers of the first Zagreb Pride march. This self-evaluation of the first Zagreb Pride as a historic event inevitably suggests that the source of legitimacy of the Pride lies in its meaning as a landmark, dividing history into the period of relative invisibility of sexual minorities in Croatian society “before” that is followed by public visibility “after” the event.

Although founded as a non-governmental organization for the “rights of sexual and gender minorities,” ever since its inception *Iskorak* has mostly been the association of and for gay men. It is important to note that in the years preceding the emergence of *Iskorak* there were two lesbian organizations. One of them is *Kontra* [Against] that has existed as an informal lesbian organization since 1997. In 2001 it was officially registered as a non-governmental organization (Kajinić, 2003). In 2002 as part of *Kontra*’s activities, a lesbian library (*LezBib*) was established.<sup>63</sup> The other one is *LORI* [Lesbian Organization Rijeka] founded in 2000 in the coastal city of Rijeka.<sup>64</sup> Both organizations, in addition to being support groups for lesbian women, organized activities towards greater visibility and equality of sexual minorities. In 2002 *LORI* launched its *Ljubav je ljubav* [Love is love] campaign with the aim of bringing to the spotlight the discrimination of sexual minorities. The campaign consisted of billboards, posters, educational brochures, flyers, short television clip, a press conference, and exhibitions. Subsequently, Croatian national television refused to broadcast the clip without providing any official statement.<sup>65</sup> Notwithstanding their activities, the visibility of *Kontra* and *LORI* in the mainstream media could not be compared with the media attention gained by *Iskorak* upon its emergence. In their public appearance during the

<sup>61</sup> The quote taken from <http://www.iskorak.hr/iskorak/o-nama/>, last retrieved in July, 2012. My translation.

<sup>62</sup> In the original: “Od danas prestajemo biti nevidljivi.” Cited from Gay Pride Zagreb 2002 short documentary produced by *fade in*. The clip available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxDEtna4fwI>, last retrieved in July 2012. English translation is taken from the subtitles which appear in the shorter version of this documentary, retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFF1rAWf3pQ> in July 2012.

<sup>63</sup> See *Kontra*’s webpage at <http://www.kontra.hr/cms/>, last retrieved in July 2012.

<sup>64</sup> See *LORI*’s webpage at <http://www.lori.hr/>, last retrieved in July 2012.

<sup>65</sup> See *LORI*’s webpage at <http://www.lori.hr/>, last retrieved in July 2012. The clip is available for viewing at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCzNSNB0zuQ>, last retrieved in July, 2012.

first half of 2000s *Iskorak* was represented by Dorino Manzin who soon became the unofficial spokesperson of the Croatian homosexual population.

It is reasonable to assume that the greater visibility of gay activists in the media is closely related to the unequal gender relations that remained largely unchallenged in this period. The hierarchical gender binary informs media discourses and practices, which, in turn, participate in the re/production of gender inequality. As Danica Minić (2010) points out, in mainstream television programs in Croatia in 2000s, women are systematically sexualized and defined through their roles in the private sphere. Thus, for example, in the evening talk-show *Latinica* in the episodes that deal with topics that are conventionally perceived as “political,” such as economic affairs, corruption, media, and armed conflict in Croatia in the 1990s, women make only around 30% of participants (Minić, 2010). As I argued in Chapter 2, the gendered distinction between public and private spheres not only defines the private sphere of marriage and family life as *non-political* but it also constructs men as the only “proper agents” of politics, law, and decision-making in the public sphere. It can be argued that the dominant “sexist treatment of female participants in the programmes” (Minić, 2010, p. 147) informs the greater visibility of gay men in the media in 2000s.

The first Croatian Gay Pride was organized in Zagreb as an act of solidarity with the first Belgrade Pride held a year earlier, in 2001, which was violently attacked and disrupted before it even started in the main square. The organization of Gay Pride Zagreb was initiated by a group of lesbians, mostly from *Kontra* and *LORI* who witnessed the violence in Belgrade as guests of *Labris*, the lesbian group from Belgrade who organized the first Belgrade Pride (Kajinić, 2003). The first Pride in Zagreb was organized by an ad hoc organizational committee jointly supported by *Kontra* and *Iskorak* with the slogan “*Iskorak KONTRA predrasuda*” [*Coming out AGAINST Prejudice*]. In addition to expressing solidarity with the activists from Belgrade, some of whom participated in the Zagreb Pride, the obvious inspiration for the Zagreb Pride was the legacy of Stonewall Rebellion and the empowering energy generated by the numerous Pride Marches held in the Anglophonic West (Kajinić, 2003). The form of the Pride march, which remains largely unchanged until the present day, consisted of a short march through the city center finishing with political speeches and a short entertaining program.

The first Zagreb Pride that attracted around 300 participants is mostly remembered for the violence coming from the numerous anti-Pride protesters.<sup>66</sup> In spite of the strong, and

<sup>66</sup> According to Sanja Kajinić, one of the organizers, Zagreb Pride 2002 attracted around 300 participants (Kajinić, 2003). The same estimation is presented in media reports: see for example the articles published in the

mostly successful, police protection of the first Zagreb Pride the marchers were verbally assaulted by groups of skinheads, football fans, and visually unmarked “ordinary” citizens. During the march, the crowd called for physical violence and the extermination of sexual minorities by shouting slogans such as the fascist Ustaša salute “Za dom! Spremni!” [For home(land)! (We’re) Ready!] “Ubi, ubi, ubi pедера!” [Kill, kill, kill the faggot!], “Pedere u logore” [(Put) Faggots in the camps!] together with doubly-coded expressions of hatred “Idite u Srbiju” [Go to Serbia] and “Odite u Europu” [Go to Europe]. The threats soon materialized when tear gas cans were thrown on the Pride participants gathered on Zrinjevac square and with physical attacks on individual participants after the Pride, during which around 20 people were injured (Kajinić, 2003).<sup>67</sup> Although in the following years the violence became less present, in 2009 and 2010 the Croatian pro-fascist party *Hrvatska Čista Stranka Prava* [Croatian Pure Party of Rights] organized the official anti-Pride protests, which were granted a permit by the local authorities in the name of the freedom of speech and public assembling protected by the Constitution.<sup>68</sup> In this way fascist rhetoric and homophobic hate speech were officially legitimized by the state.

Direct threats and physical attacks as the dominant mode of enacting discontent with the Zagreb Pride were gradually replaced by more mediated, verbal assaults and various homophobic discourses including voices of limited tolerance for sexual minorities. By arguing that it is not homosexuality per se that is problematic but the public “parading” which represents “unnecessary irritation” and a threat to public morality, such discourses offer an alleged tolerance in exchange for staying in the closet.<sup>69</sup> These discourses of “normalization

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daily *Večernji list* [Evening Paper] “Suzavac na gay povorku,” June 30, 2002, p. 5), and *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper] “Po Gay Prideu jajima, bocama i suzavcem,” June 30, 2002, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> See also Gay Pride Zagreb 2002 short documentary produced by *fade in*. The clip is available on the YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxDEtna4fwI>, last retrieved in July 2012.

<sup>68</sup> See the article in the daily *Večernji list* [Evening Paper] “Borovec: Nema zabrane, mirno okupljanje ustavna je kategorija,” June 18, 2010, online edition, available at <http://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/borovec-nema-zabrane-mirno-okupljanje-ustavna-je-kategorija-clanak-157064>, last retrieved in July 2012. See also press releases issued by Dota, F., and Jurčić, M. Osuda policijskog postupanja, osuda nasilja i ocjena Povorka Ponosa [Disapprobation of the police behavior, disapprobation of the violence, and the evaluation of the Pride March]. (2009, Jun 15). *Organizacijski Odbor Zagreb Pridea*. Retrieved from [http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=71&lang=hr&limitstart=52](http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=71&lang=hr&limitstart=52), last retrieved in July 2012) and 2010 Kvaic, A., Duhaček, G., Čajdo, M., Farina, M., Ercegović, S., Ježić, ... Tihomirović, G. Povorka ponosa 2010. unatoč opstrukciji Grada i policiji. Povorka Ponosa LGBTIQ osoba 2010. Hrvatska to može progutati! [Pride March 2010 inspite the obstructions of the City and the police. Pride March LGBTIQ persons 2010. Croatia can swallow that!]. (2010, Jun 18). *Organizacijski Odbor Zagreb Pridea*. Retrieved from [http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=71&lang=hr&limitstart=40](http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=71&lang=hr&limitstart=40)

<sup>69</sup> Discourses on privatization of sexuality reached the public space mostly through individual comments placed on internet forums, under the on-line articles covering the Zagreb Pride events, or through the comments made by people who did not participate in the Pride that were included in the news reports on Pride marches. For

through privatization” were also taken up by some members of *Iskorak* in their arguments against the 2005 Pride. In an interview published in one of Croatia’s dailies *Novi list* Dorino Mazin, a member of *Iskorak*, justified the decision of *Iskorak* not to proceed with organizing the event arguing that Zagreb Pride, with the high number of police forces and the interruption of the traffic in the city center, would only antagonize citizens, thus doing more harm than good for the sexual minorities.<sup>70</sup>

However, the assimilationist tendencies voiced by some members of *Iskorak* represented an impetus for some lesbian and gay activists to rethink the meaning of visibility in general and the concept of Pride in particular. Against the discourses of “normalcy,” the organizing committee of the 2006 Pride organized the so-called *Internacionala Pride* [Internationale Pride]. The 2006 Pride is also known as the first “Eastern European Pride” since it was organized by the Zagreb Pride Organizing Committee in co-operation with LGBTIQ groups and activists from Yugoslav successor states and Albania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. As Sanda Brumen, one of the organizers, points out, the idea was to express solidarity with the activists and the members of the collective in countries where Pride events are banned or exposed to severe violent attacks. At the same time, the transnational organization was also meant to point to the interconnectedness of homophobia with other forms of discrimination in the context of capitalist patriarchy, thus calling for wider alliances (Brumen, 2006).<sup>71</sup> In other words, by drawing on discourses of the international workers movement, *Pride Internationale* promoted solidarities that exceed both the borders of the nation and the boundaries that distinguish LGBTIQ community from other marginalized groups.

Anti-assimilationist meanings of visibility in relation to the Pride march were emphasized further in the following years. With the slogans “Everybody go to Pride” (*Svi na Pride! Sve na Pride!*) in 2007,<sup>72</sup> “You have the courage” (*Imaš hrabrosti*) in 2008,<sup>73</sup> and

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example, a report on Zagreb Pride 2007 shown on the first channel of national television included the view of a person who did not participate in the march and who argued that “everybody has the right to his own private life, but this private life should not be presented in the street” (my translation). The report is available via YouTube on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usn8O1q5u7U>

<sup>70</sup> See the article in the daily *Novi list* [New Paper] “Dorino Manzin odlazi s čela ‘Iskoraka’,” June 10, 2005. While describing Zagreb Pride as “radical,” Manzin claimed that some other types of protests would be more suitable, but during the traditional Pride period (second half of June and beginning of July) *Iskorak* did not offer any alternative.

<sup>71</sup> See also “Invitation to participate in the first Eastern European Pride in Zagreb” available at Zagreb Pride’s webpage: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070210033724/http://www.zagreb-pride.net/oprajueng.htm>, last retrieved in May, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> See press release issued by the organizing committee in 2007 Piponska, A., Šurjan, D., Marko Jurčić, M., and Dota, F. Zagreb Pride 2007. 7. srpnja na Cvjetnom trgu! [Zagreb Pride (will be organized) on June 7<sup>th</sup> at the Cvjetni Square]. (2007, May 15). *Organizacijski Odbor Zagreb Pridea* retrieved from <http://www.zagreb->

“Participate!” (*Sudjeluj!*) in 2009,<sup>74</sup> these Pride marches articulated the notion of visibility as a means for empowering other sexually marginalized people, inviting them to join the struggle against discrimination and stigmatization. At the same time, by emphasizing the powerful potential of coming out for the politicization of sexuality, Pride marches since 2005 were directed towards challenging the notion of sexuality as a matter of de-politicized privacy. For example, in 2008 the organizing committee presented a short clip entitled “You Have the Courage” (*Imaš hrabrosti*) that speaks against the practice of “closeting” and calls for cooperation and solidarity among marginalized individuals in breaking the gay closets.<sup>75</sup>

Reflecting upon the first decade of Zagreb Pride, Gordan Duhaček and Franko Dota, members of the organizing committees since 2007, explicitly emphasize the anti-assimilationist politics of visibility that underpins the Zagreb Pride in the second half of 2000s.<sup>76</sup> According to Duhaček (2011), in this period Zagreb Pride simultaneously drew on the notions of *pride* and *coming out*, avoiding in this way the traps of “normalizing” discourses that inform the assimilationist politics of visibility. As Dota (2011) points out, Zagreb Pride is based on the assumption that every act of coming out is inevitably a political enactment of resistance to the dominant heterosexist order that privatizes sexuality and discriminates against the non-normative sexualities. According to Dota, another important assumption that informs Zagreb Pride has to do with the interconnectedness of sexuality with “class, race, gender, economics, war and peace, political elections, the way in which the modern media function, [resistance to devastation of] Varšavska [street], and accessing the European Union” (p. 25).<sup>77</sup> Embracing an intersectional perspective, Zagreb Pride rejects the “minority politics” and “defines itself not as first and foremost a group for the rights of LGBT

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pride.net/web/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=99%3Azagreb-pride-2007-7-srpnja-na-cvjetnom-trgu&catid=39%3Apriopenja&Itemid=71&lang=hr, last retrieved in July 2012. My translation.

<sup>73</sup> Izvještaj s pressice Pride 2009. Zagreb Pride 2008: Snaga zajedništva. Izvještaj s konferencije za medije održane u ponedjeljak 23. lipnja u Centru za Ljudska Prava u Zagrebu [Report from the press conference Pride 2009. Zagreb Pride 2008: The power of community. The report from the press conference held on Monday, June 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Center for Human Rights in Zagreb]. (2008, June 23). *Organizacijski Odbor Zagreb Pridea*. Retrieved from [http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=71&lang=hr&limitstart=63](http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=71&lang=hr&limitstart=63), last retrieved in July 2012. My translation.

<sup>74</sup> Dota, F. Najava Zagreb Pridea 2009 [The announcement about Zagreb Pride 2009]. (2009, May 25). *Organizacijski Odbor Zagreb Pridea*. Retrieved from [http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=87%3Anajava-zagreb-pridea-2009&catid=39%3Apriopenja&Itemid=71&lang=hr](http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=87%3Anajava-zagreb-pridea-2009&catid=39%3Apriopenja&Itemid=71&lang=hr), last retrieved in July 2012. My translation.

<sup>75</sup> The clip is available via YouTube at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cVIdI\\_7gSY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cVIdI_7gSY), last retrieved in July 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Their reflections were published in the special issue of *Zarez* [The Comma], Croatian bi-weekly magazine for literature and culture, in June 2011. The special issue was dedicated to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Zagreb Pride.

<sup>77</sup> My translation.



people but as an anti-fascist, feminist, and laicist organization” (ibid., p. 25), opening in this way a space for wider coalitions for social equality to emerge.<sup>78</sup>

In the past decade, Zagreb Pride has gained the support of numerous members of the civil sector as well as some high state officials and members of the ruling elite who participated in the annual Zagreb Pride events. Several members of ruling elite, including Vesna Pusić, Member of Parliament and president of HNS (*Croatian People’s Party*) and Šime Lučin, Minister of Interior Affairs from SDP (*Social Democratic Party*) participated in the first Zagreb Pride march in 2002.<sup>79</sup> Vesna Pusić, together with Mirela Holy from SDP and Gordana Lukač-Koritnik, Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, continue to participate in the annual Pride marches.<sup>80</sup> However, as Tea Škokić (2011), Croatian scholar and ethnographer, observes, it was not until radical right-wing HČSP (*Croatian Pure Party of Rights*) started to organize the resistance against the Pride that larger numbers of supporters showed their solidarity with Pride by participating in the march. The antagonization of public that the right-wing violence against the Pride provoked is even more visible when it comes to the first Pride in Split in 2011. The march was severely attacked by a great number of fans of football club *Hajduk* and other, mostly male, protesters. Several participants in the Pride were injured during the attacks. However, the severe violence taking place in Split motivated many sympathizers to take part in the 2011 Zagreb Pride that took place only a week later,<sup>81</sup> attracting a record number of participants<sup>82</sup> Simultaneously, with its political campaigns that include posters, political slogans and speeches, Pride marches attract vast media attention. The focus on the discriminatory position of sexual minorities brought by Zagreb Pride have resulted in subsequent change in media discourses that started to pay attention to the issues experienced by sexual minorities.

<sup>78</sup> My translation.

<sup>79</sup> See the articles from daily *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper], “Rekreativni liberali i liberalni narodnjaci,” p. 7, June 29, 2002; and *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper], “Po Gay Prideu jajima, bocama i suzavcem,” p. 3, June 30, 2002

<sup>80</sup> See for example the press release on the political support given to Zagreb Pride issued by Zagreb Pride and available on the their webpage. *Politička podrška Zagreb Prideu 2008* [Political support of Zagreb Pride 2009]. (2008, Jun 26). *Organizacijski Odbor Zagreb Pridea* retrieved from [http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=83%3Apolitika-podrka-zagreb-prideu-2008&catid=39%3Apriopenja&Itemid=71&lang=hr](http://www.zagreb-pride.net/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=83%3Apolitika-podrka-zagreb-prideu-2008&catid=39%3Apriopenja&Itemid=71&lang=hr), last retrieved in July 2012.

<sup>81</sup> See the comments of participants of 2011 Zagreb Pride in the article by H.A., and J. Š “Brojne javne osobe stigle na Pride: ‘Izlazak na paradu je pitanje slobode’” published on the Croatian internet portal Index.hr, June 18, 2011. Available on-line at <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/mirela-holy-na-zagreb-prideu-dosla-sam-jer-se-tu-borimo-za-ljudska-prava/557293.aspx>, last retrieved in July 2012.

<sup>82</sup> See the article in *Večernji list* [Evening Paper] *Zg Pride prošao u miru, povorka na cilju ponosno: Pobjeda je naša* [Zagreb Pride was peaceful, the procession (stated) proudly at the aimed destination: The victory is ours!]. (2011, June 18) Retrieved from <http://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/zg-pride-prosao-miru-povorka-cilju-ponosno-pobjeda-je-nasa-clanak-302159>

As we can see from the above discussion, the order of discourses on the Pride marches is made up of multiple, complex positions. It is possible to argue that although Pride marches represent the presence of the Western liberal ideal of an “out and proud” politically active sexual citizen as a universal measure of sexual emancipation spread around the globe with the help of Western neo-imperialism (Manalansan, 1997, Stychin, 2003), the marches can also generate discourses of positive changes towards less exclusionary relations. The intention to express solidarity with the 2001 Pride in Belgrade in the aftermath of the nationalist military conflict and the *Pride Internationale* in 2006 demonstrates that the Pride also has the potential for generating discourses of solidarity within and beyond the newly founded nation-states in the region.

At the same time, the increased visibility and the newly emerging non-stigmatizing discourses of human rights, solidarity, equality, and social transformation are confronted by explicitly exclusionary homophobic rhetoric and physical violence. The ambiguity created by the presence of conflicting discourses has been differently negotiated by the people I interviewed, who are marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the perceived role of (in)visibility in the attempts made by my informants to resolve the dilemma created by the intersection of nationalism and sexuality. I will analyze the ways in which (in)visibility of sexual minorities has been articulated in these life narratives, I will explore and assess the ways in which the notion of citizenship has been differently articulated from the positions of assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning.

### **5.3. Privacy, normalcy, and the image of the “good gay citizen” in the strategy of assimilation**

Assimilation represents the most common narrative strategy of negotiating citizenship and belonging in the process of self-identification in the life narratives I collected. It is present in the life stories of seven participants. They all articulate the same ideal of assimilating homosexuality and making it part of national citizenship. Yet they invoke different tactics for achieving this goal. On the grounds of different meanings of the notion of visibility in relation to the ideal of national citizenship, it is possible to distinguish the two main patterns of assimilationist narratives in these stories: that of privacy and normalcy. In particular, three of my informants, two gay men and one lesbian woman, define invisibility of sexual non-conformity in the public spaces as a matter of “privacy” and as the way to become assimilated

into the nation. In contrast to privacy, four gay interviewees, two of them activists, argue that public disclosure of their gayness may represent “proof” of their “normalcy,” of their “sameness” with other members of the nation. In the *Section 5.3.1* I will explore and assess the main arguments informing the assimilationist strategy of invisibility that relies on the appeal to privacy. In *Section 5.3.2* I will discuss the ways in which visibility is perceived as the test of normalcy and so can function effectively for assimilation. I will show that despite the apparent differences, the two patterns of self-identification belong to the same assimilationist logic.

### *5.3.1. My room, my freedom: Claiming national belonging through privacy*

The strategy of self-identification that utilizes the private/public distinction as a way of assimilation into the existing framework of citizenship is present in the narratives of Damir (30), and Ivan (65), and Marija (48). They all responded to my call for participants placed on the popular internet forum gay.hr. It is interesting to note that two of them, Marija and Ivan, are the oldest participants in my research. It is possible to assume that their long-term exposure to discrimination in a Croatian context where sexual minorities were almost completely invisible influences their strategy of self-identification. At the same time, as we can see in the case of Damir (30), age does not represent the sole factor in affecting the assimilationist strategy of invisibility. The presence of homophobia and unchallenged heteronormativity in Croatia influences the centrality of invisibility in the narratives of younger people as well. The three life-stories rely on two interrelated assumptions. One assumption is that privacy represents the only “proper” sphere of sexuality that is unconnected to the public sphere of politics and public morality, while the other is concerned with the unquestioned status of the nation as the main ground for solidarity and belonging.

The most comprehensive articulation of the right to privacy, which is seen as protection against discrimination and a means of integration into the nation, is present in the life story of Ivan (65), a middle class, educated gay man. His story reveals a very interesting detail – Ivan is an active member of the local branch of the leading Croatian central-right party HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) that has been in power for sixteen years since the formation of the post-Yugoslav Croatian state. His membership in HDZ makes him an excellent example of a subject inhabiting conflicting social positions. His active role in the explicitly homophobic party that was in the forefront of the nationalization process in the 1990s is in contradiction with his gayness. In his lengthy response to my initial question to tell me about his experiences as a non-heterosexual person, Ivan constantly emphasizes the

importance of privacy.<sup>83</sup> Thus, for example when he speaks about the time when he was married and describes his relationship with his ex-wife, Ivan emphasizes the need to keep his innermost thoughts and desires away from the eyes of others, including his wife, as a universal human condition:

Maybe she [his ex-wife] does things that I don't know about, and that's okay that she does these things, she has her own privacy, and I have mine. She is a person as given by God with all her attributes and those secondary desires she was either born with or, should I say, she assumed from the social environment. These things are hers and mine are mine. What gives me the right to get into your privacy?<sup>84</sup>

This excerpt not only shows the decisive role of privacy in Ivan self-narrative, but it also reveals the way Ivan perceives his gayness in terms of God-given personal attributes. His reference to God as a supreme moral authority, a creator of people with their particular features and desires, including homosexuals, implies that Ivan sees nothing wrong with desiring and/or having sex with another man. As he asserts elsewhere: “[i]f we do something because we feel the need to satisfy something that is in us, this counts as our attribute, and there is probably a reason why God made us all with all these attributes.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, Ivan's strategy of making sense of his sexuality is based on the Christian belief in God as the creator of everything that exists. At the same time, his view of homosexual desire stands in a direct contrast to the official position of both the Croatian Catholic Church and his party, HDZ, whose authorities Ivan highly respects.

As we saw in Chapter 2, since the beginning of the 1990s the Catholic Church has been vigorously promoting its exclusionary views when it comes to sexuality and non-heterosexual practices (Vuletić, 2008; Škrabalo and Jurić, 2005). The Church's official position, shared by HDZ, includes the assumptions that life begins with conception, and that

<sup>83</sup> The previous version of the analysis presented in the following paragraphs appeared as a part of Kahlina, K. (2011) 'Nation, State and Queers: Sexual Identities in the Interface between Social and Personal in Contemporary Croatia' in Anna G. Jónasdóttir, Valerie Bryson and Kathleen B. Jones (eds) *Sexuality, Gender and Power: Intersectional and Transnational Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, pp. 30-44.

<sup>84</sup> At the time when the interview took place Ivan was divorced. In the original: Možda radi stvari mimo mene, ne znam ja i u redu je da radi, ona ima svoju intimu, ja imam svoju. Ona je osoba po Bogu dana sa svim svojim osobinama i onim sporednim htijenjima pa bila ona urođena ili da kažem koje je poprimila iz okruženja. Te stvari su njene, a moje su moje. Otkud meni pravo da ja idem u tvoju intimu?

<sup>85</sup> In the original: Ako mi nešto činimo iz potrebe da zadovoljimo nešto što je u nama, to je naša osobina, a Bog nas je svih stvorio sa svim tim osobinama valjda iz nekog razloga.

reproduction-oriented intercourse within the monogamous heterosexual marriage is the only acceptable sexual practice (Škrabalo and Jurić, 2005). In line with its official doctrine, non-heterosexual identities and practices have often been denounced as sinful, evil, unnatural, and in contrast to Christian morality (Vuletić, 2008). Despite its dogmatic and exclusionary views, the Croatian Catholic Church has gained significant media attention and is recognized as an important moral authority when it comes to different issues related to sexuality, from the legal status of abortion and assisted reproduction to the social position of sexual minorities (Škrabalo and Jurić, 2005). However, the emergence of a more organized sexual politics of visibility with its emphasis on the libertarian values and human rights brought about a powerful alternative to the exclusionary discourses of the Catholic Church and right-wing parties. In order to confront the public performances of Church officials, the political agenda of Zagreb Pride 2004 directly addressed the pernicious effects of the homophobic discourses of the Catholic Church.<sup>86</sup>

That being said, it is possible to argue that the appeal to privacy in Ivan's narrative functions as a way of reconciling the gap between the official stance of the Catholic Church and HDZ on the one hand, and his sexuality on the other. At this point Ivan's logic conceives of (homo)sexuality as a desire that belongs exclusively in the bedroom, a legitimate private space behind shut doors, away from the eyes of others. In this way privacy becomes a kind of guarantor of invisibility that serves as a protector against judgmental discrimination and condemnation from others, including his party comrades and the Church. In the context where the public image of "Serb-faggot" functions as a constitutive other in the process of nationalization, the appeals to privacy enable Ivan to feel included in the nation.

Substantiating this hypothesis there is a systematic presence of transphobia throughout Ivan's narrative. Thus, in the context of elaborating his conception of the nation that he sees as a fundamental community grounded in common descent, Ivan refers to trans people as the "other" undermining his claim to belonging:

Everybody should make their own judgments, and leave me alone. But in any event nobody, nobody, not even my social environment, has the right to point the finger at me, to say no. It's not my fault when a man walks down the street, and he wants to be a woman in a male body [...], or, for example, he wears

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<sup>86</sup> Explaining the theme of 2004 Zagreb Pride Sanja Kajinić, one of the organizers, said to the press that "Croatian society is still homophobic and transphobic, which is visible in statements of public figures, most notably representatives of [Catholic] Church" (my translation). Kajinić's statement is available on the webpage of *Kontra* at <http://www.kontra.hr/zgpride04/site/press.html>, last retrieved in July 2012.

make-up and so on. This always implies some kind of illness. What is not in harmony with the environment that you live in, be it your behavior, the way you look, speak... some general manners have to exist after all.<sup>87</sup>

This excerpt shows that for Ivan rights and privacy of sexuality are interrelated within the framework of rationality (“some general manners have to exist”) that should grant belonging to a particular community. According to him, behaving “rationally” means to be in harmony with the rules of the social environment and so that should grant his entitlement to membership in the desirable collective of the nation. Hence, if the social setting condemns his sexual practices, they are wrong. Unlike transsexuals, he is entitled to refuse the condemnation because he as a rational (not sick!) being and is capable of assessing the situation and keeping his sexuality away from the eyes of other people. He differentiates his own rational healthy behavior from that of the “sick” transgender/transsexual person who exposes his desires in the public where everybody can see him and express their disapproval of his behavior. The “sickness” of a transgender/transsexual people in Ivan’s example mostly consists of their lack of rationality about the social environment. In other words, trans people are denounced by society not because they are “sick” (as Ivan said in the first excerpt, it is okay to have hidden attributes and desires) but because they disregard the status quo when they publicly expose their desires. The public visibility of trans people, according to Ivan’s logic, results in unjustifiable (further) stigmatization of sexual minorities.

These points suggest the right-to-privacy discourse enables Ivan to feel free to act upon his erotic desire in the privacy of his home, and that no one should care about what he does in his room as long as that does not “disturb” the public order. In other words, his gayness does not make him less of a good citizen if he cares about the feelings and attitudes of other citizens. If nobody knows what he does in his home, he can not be recognized as an outcast and he can not be excluded from the national corpus. Thus, the logic of privatization of sexual desire entails the process of self-policing whereby the normalized figure of a “good gay citizen” who is granted the limited tolerance is reinforced under the condition of giving up the politics of visibility. The process of normalization through privatization reinforces the heteropatriarchal private/public distinction that depoliticizes the space of home and, at the

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<sup>87</sup> In the original: Ali to svatko neka računicu za sebe kalkulira, mene neka pusti. Ali u najmanju ruku na užrb mene nema pravo nitko, nitko, ovaj, pa ni sredina da mi pruže prst, da kažu ne. Tko je kriv onome kad hoda ulicom, želi biti žensko u muškoj osobi [...], ili na primjer ne znam, našminkan i tako dalje. To je u pitanju uvijek neka bolest. Ono što nije iole u harmoniji okruženja u kojem živis, pa bilo ponašanje, izgled, bilo govor, bilo.. neka opća kultura mora biti, ipak, ipak.

same time, de-sexualizes the sphere of the public (Berlant and Warner, 2003; Gopinath, 2003). As a result, the public/private division conceals the normativity of heterosexuality in the public sphere and the “sexualization of national membership” (Berlant and Warner, 2003, p. 170), thus playing a decisive role in the re/production of heterosexualized citizenship. Therefore, it is possible to argue that appeals to privacy leave the heteropatriarchal order intact, and can only bring about a limited degree of toleration that is far from social equality.

Assumptions about sexuality as a matter of privacy that is closely related to the view of the nation as the unquestioned ground of solidarity and belonging are also present in the stories of Marija (48) and Damir (30). The process of normalization and self-policing as a strategy of assimilation is more explicit in the narrative of Damir, an educated self-identified Catholic who was born and lived in Bosnia. Damir’s logic of assimilation through the privatization of sexuality is especially obvious when he reflects on the Pride marches through the theme of visibility, seeing the event as an unnecessary disturbance of the “normal” public order. His discontent with the Zagreb Pride Marches is informed by transphobic arguments that resonate with the assumptions that underpin Ivan’s narrative above. It is not the march per se that Damir finds problematic but the visible presence of “half-naked” and trans bodies that, with their alleged “hideous extravaganza,” are said to debauch the image of the “good gay citizen:”

[...] if you want to be accepted as normal, if you are a gay person and you want to be accepted by others, why are you going out in public and showing something that is not interesting or normal even for the majority of homosexual population? As I have told you earlier, I think that sexuality belongs within the four walls. [...] Kiss is okay, holding hands is okay, but taking your clothes off, showing the naked bodies, almost having sex on the street, and you want to be accepted by others, by some family people with children, who try to raise their children in some way. [...] And then, usually, in the gay parades you can see transvestites and transsexuals who should supposedly represent the gay population.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> In the original: [...] želis da te ljudi prihvate kao normalnog, gay si osoba i želis da te ljudi prihvate, kako ćeš ti izaći među ljude i pokazati nešto što prvo večni homoseksualaca baš i nije zanimljivo ni normalno. Onako, ja sam ti rekao moje mišljenje da je seksualnost za četiri zida. [...] Poljubac je u redu, držanje za ruku je u redu, ali to neko skidanje, pokazivanje golotinje pa maltene seksanje na ulici i ti onda želis da te ljudi prihvate, neki porodični, familijarni ljudi koji imaju djecu, koji pokušavaju tu djecu ono odgojit na neki način. [...] Onda najčešće na tim gay paradama vidiš transvestite i transseksualce koji kao predstavljaju gay populaciju.

As we can see from the excerpt above, assimilation into the existing normative framework is seen as the main goal of struggles against discrimination in Damir's narrative. The assimilationist tendencies that underpin Damir's self-narrative are based on the unquestioned private/public divide that secures the compliance of gay people with the social environment. Thus, the visibility of non-normative bodies and practices that conventionally do not belong in the public sphere in the context of the existing heteropatriarchal citizenship is perceived as a threat to successful assimilation. At the same time, gender conformity that makes gay people invisible constitutes one of the main characteristics of the figure of the "good gay citizen" in Damir's life-story. In other words, by denouncing the practices that challenge the privatization and normalization of (homo)sexuality as "indecent," the logic of Damir's narrative subscribes to the notion of gay normativity in terms of invisibility, thus reinforcing the exclusionary public/private divide.

However, at the same time, Damir's logic of belonging allows for partial gay visibility, but only to the degree that it serves as an evidence of "normalcy," that is, as a "proof" that gay people are just like everybody else in all "visible" aspects except sexuality in the privacy of the bedroom. In this way, the normative framework is reestablished together with its exclusionary practices such as unequal gender division that is based on the prescriptive forms of masculinity and femininity. As a consequence, gay normalization produces further exclusions of subjects who do not comply with the image of a "good gay citizen" (Richardson, 2004), most notably, transsexual and transgender people. Finally, with its exceptionalism, the logic of normalizing assimilation prevents wider alliances on the grounds of reflective solidarities to be formed. A more explicit and systematic use of visibility in terms of the dominant hetero-patriarchal logic as a means of assimilation is present in the narratives of the four gay men (two of them activists) that I will analyze in the next section.

### *5.3.2. We are here and we are normal: Visibility in the service of assimilation*

The articulation of visibility as a promising way of achieving assimilation to the national citizenship is present in the narratives of two gay men who are not involved in activism, Filip (25) and Vedran (28), and two gay activists, Josip (34) and Matija (32). Matija is a gay activist who used to be visibly present in the public space. Therefore, I asked him to participate in my research. Matija further connected me with Josip, while I introduced to Filip and Vedran by a friend, who arranged my interviews with them. According to the logic of belonging present in these narratives, public visibility should enable sexual minorities to



“prove” that they are just like everybody else. The newly gained public visibility could allow them to break the existing prejudices that are said to be in the basis of stigmatization and discrimination. As Josip (34), a journalist and gay activist, who used to be an active member of the pro-Fascist, openly homophobic HČSP [Croatian Pure Party of Rights], when speaking about his motives to join activists in the struggle against heteronormative exclusionary practices, points out:

And I wanted to be active as much as I can and do whatever I can. What I wanted to do [...] is to act affirmatively in relation to society, to show that homosexuals are normal people who can function in all segments of society, and that they don't differ in anything from the majority of population.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, according to Josip's logic, the goal of the politics of visibility is to reveal a supposed “sameness” of sexual minorities with others who are seen as the heterosexual majority. The visible “normalcy” should provide enough evidence to argue that their exclusion from the national citizenship is without grounds. By appealing to the “normalcy” of sexual minorities, the logic of gay normalization reifies the existing normalizing practices.

Speaking about the differences between his view of what should be the goal of gay activism and the views of other lesbian and gay activists, Matija (32), another gay activist and graduate of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, explicitly argues against the intersectional perspective that could provide the basis for the politics of solidarity and alliance:

Thus, [a struggle for] gay rights is something completely different [from other emancipatory struggles] and I don't like to mix them with other things. And this is the point where I disagree with them [other activists]. Hence, I don't support the argument that the goal of gay activism should be, how to put it, the deconstruction of patriarchy. I mean, it is, to a certain extent, but... Or, for example, [when it comes to] general deconstruction of particular values that are in the basis of our society. Instead, the only goal should be toleration of gay people and [we should] let the other people take care of other things. Or, we

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<sup>89</sup> In the original: I odlučio sam se angažirati maksimalno koliko god mogu napraviti, ovaj, što god mogu napraviti. Ono što je bilo moje [...] je da djelujemo afirmativno prema društvu, da pokažemo kako su homoseksualci normalne osobe koje mogu funkcionirati u bilo kojem segmentu društva i da se po ničem ne razlikuju od većine.

can do it, but in cooperation with others, and not through the prism of gay activism.<sup>90</sup>

This excerpt clearly shows that for Matija the goal of gay activism is reduced to achieving relative tolerance and the assimilation of sexual minorities into the existing national citizenship. He resolutely rejects the potential of a wider social critique that can be addressed from the position of sexual minorities and explicitly states that gay activism should only focus on the issue of discrimination on the grounds of sexuality (“I don’t like to mix them with other things”). Thus, the logic of sexual politics of visibility present in Matija’s narrative completely ignores the ways in which social inequalities, including marginalization in relation to sexuality, are re/produced at the intersection of capitalism, nationalism, Catholicism, racism, patriarchy, and other systems and forms of exclusion. By assuming that discrimination on the grounds of sexuality is a product of heteronormativity that is completely detached from other sources of oppression, such politics can only result in assimilation into the existing heteronormative nationalist citizenship.

The type of normalizing toleration invoked in the excerpt from Matija’s narrative above is similar to what Jason Ritchie (2010), in his analysis of the politics of visibility in contemporary Israel/Palestine, calls the “right of queer citizens to ‘come out of the closet’ and into the space of the nation” (Ritchie, 2010, p. 560). As Ritchie points out, without attending to the intersection of different forms of oppression, the logic of assimilationist visibility depoliticizes the position of sexual minorities by reducing gayness to monogamous relationship and misses the occasion to challenge the heterosexual nationalist values (ibid., p. 560). Thus, although it utilizes the politics of visibility, the strategy of normalizing assimilation in fact results in the privatization of homosexuality. In this way, the heteropatriarchal private/public distinction goes unchallenged also in the narratives that do not explicitly appeal to privacy.

However, what is most surprising in Matija’s narrative is the explicit reference to patriarchy as something that is completely detached from discrimination of sexual minorities. It has been persuasively argued that heteronormativity constitutes a part and parcel of patriarchal social structure (Rich, 1980; Wittig, 1992; Hennessy, 2000; Wilton, 2004). As I argued in the Chapter 2, lesbian feminists have been particularly persistent in pointing out the

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<sup>90</sup> In the original: Dakle gay prava su nešto drugo i jednostavno ne volim kad se to miješa. I tu se ja s njima obično razlikujem. Zato ja nisam za ono da je cilj gay aktivizma, kak se kaže, dekonstrukcija patrijarhata. Ona je, u jednoj mjeri je ali.. Ili recimo dekonstrukcija uopće nekakvih vrijednosti na kojima ovo društvo počiva. Nego samo tolerancija prema gay osobama, a ovo neka radi netko drugi. Odnosno možemo i mi ali u suradnji s drugima, ali ne kroz prizmu gay aktivizma.

ways in which coercive heterosexuality functions as a means of securing the unequal gender binary, and how the re/production of the hierarchical gender relations, in turn, relies on compulsory heterosexuality. Given the importance of individual positionality in the process of identity construction, it is reasonable to assume that it is Matija's privileged gender, ethnic, and class positionality as a male university graduate living in the capital that contributes to the logic of self-identification that makes him insensitive to the intersectionality of oppression. This assumption is further grounded in the fact that the assimilationist strategy predominantly emerges in the narratives of gay men of Croat ethnicity. Thus, we can push our assumption further and argue that it is their dominant position in relation to gender and ethnicity that constitutes a decisive factor in shaping their aspirations for the de-politicized, privatized, and gender-normative gayness embedded in the figure of a "good gay citizen."

Finally, the presence of assimilation, mostly in the self-identification practices of gay men in my data, can be explained by the gendered position of gays and lesbians in the nationalist homophobic discourses and practices that explicitly target gay men by constructing them as a threat to the national order in greater degree than their lesbian counterparts. Thus, in the context of exclusionary nationalist discourses where gay men are already visible as threats to the nation and therefore legitimate targets of stigmatization. It is reasonable to assume that the position of gay activists who are visible yet stigmatized may influence their wish to become less visible on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to challenge the stigma of threat by appealing to the dominant value of normalcy.

#### **5.4. Queer visibility**

As I pointed out in Chapter 3, queer perspective emerged as a theoretical response to the "ethnic" model of sexual identity that supported much of the activist engagements against sexual discrimination in the U.S. in the late 1970s and 1980s (Phelan, 1993; Seidman, 1993; Hall, 2003). In its critique of the exclusionary tendencies in feminist and lesbian and gay movements, queer theory draws on postmodernist assumptions about multiplicity and heterogeneity in relation to particular identity categories such as "woman" or "gay." As an alternative to the exclusionary "ethnic" principle present in the identity politics of the time, queer theory proposed a politics that would mobilize different marginalized groups against the normalizing practices of classification and hierarchization. The model of transformative politics envisaged by queer theory conceives of identity categories as parts of the systems of categorization and classification that regulate the production of subjects in the way that

conceals inner heterogeneity in the service of stabilization and the production of docile subjects. Thus, queer theory considers identity claims to be a part of the problem and, consequently, rejects any potential usefulness identity categories may have in the struggle against social inequalities. In my understanding, the view that sees identities as inherently harmful has gained much prominence within queer studies and has become almost the epitome of the queer position in general.

This anti-identity position, the assumption that every categorization is always already a violent act of exclusion is present in some of the life-narratives I collected. Sexual identity as a stable and unified category is in different ways challenged in several life-stories. However, sexual identity as a meaningful category of self-identification and as such a useful ground for political organizing is rejected only in two narratives – that of Marko (29), a self-identified trans person, and Ana (28), a self-identified woman-loving-woman. Ana was my acquaintance, while one of my friends connected me with Marko. In 2008 when the interviews took place Marko was a student at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, while Ana, a graduate of the same university, was working for a non-governmental organization.

Knowing about her long-term relationship with a woman I started the interview with Ana with the request to tell me something about her life as a lesbian. In response to my initial question Ana immediately challenged my assumption about her identity.

(Katja): Can you please tell me something about your life as a lesbian in Croatia in the past few years.

(Ana): What attracted my attention when you asked me this question is that I don't really perceive myself as a lesbian. I have never perceived myself as a lesbian and I still don't. I find that terribly confining and aggressive, and because of that I have the feeling that I've been rejecting to identify myself with this category for a long time. It sounded to me like a road without return. And especially, you know, when you define yourself as a lesbian then you have to be a lesbian, there is no going back, [and] you have to be that. I have to admit, I think like that because this was the way other people around me used this term. You know, she is a lesbian and this is it. Like, she is a vegetarian, as if she will never eat meat again, I mean, Jesus Christ! [...] Even today when I use this term more often, when I sometimes say for myself that I'm a lesbian

even though I don't think that, I notice that it is easier for people to accept that than, for instance, when you tell them that you are, I don't know, that you are a bisexual woman, or that (sight) [that] you don't want to categorize yourself. That is something that, as a teenager, I believe I understood exactly as it is, that is, as a violent act, a categorization.<sup>91</sup>

Expressing her discontent with the categorization that my question makes use of, Ana critically reflects upon the existing practices of classification and naming that are seen as a violent process whereby diverse sexual preferences are being stripped of their complexity and, most importantly, their changeability. Ana prefers to conceptualize her sexuality in terms of temporary preferences, or even taste, which is substantiated in the parallel that she draws between sexuality and one's food preferences, namely vegetarianism. Interestingly, although lesbianness and vegetarianism in addition to being matters of life-styles could represent particular political categories, their political utility goes unrecognized in Ana's narrative. Thus, the frequent use of "lesbian" as a category of self-identification is not discussed for its political value (or rather the lack thereof) but is repeated only as a discursal strategy of avoiding further explanations.

As we can see from the above, Ana's life narrative draws on an implied queer logic that sees categorization as perniciously deterministic and limiting. The assumed antagonism between inherent multiplicity and unequivocal self-contained identity categories is further implied by the reference to bisexuality as an example of an ambiguous identity that creates confusion due to its indeterminacy. The very demand for identification is perceived as a violent act that directly negates personal experiences of complexity, changeability, and ambiguity ("when you define yourself as a lesbian then you have to be a lesbian, there is no going back"). Thus, the logic of Ana's self-understanding assumes the inner self that exceeds categorization and sees "the other" as a threat to her claim to fluidity. In other words, in the

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<sup>91</sup> In the original: K: Kaži mi nešto o svom životu kao lezbijke u Hrvatskoj u zadnjih nekoliko godina.

A: Prvo što mi je upalo u uho kad si mi postavila to pitanje je da se ja ustvari ne doživljavam kao lezbijka. Ja se nikada nisam doživljavala kao lezbijka i još uvijek to ne činim. I to mi je užasno definirajuće i agresivno i zbog toga imam osjećaj barem da sam jako dugo odbijala uopće imalo identificirati se s tim pojmom jer mi je to zvučalo kao ne znam onak put bez povratka bla a naročito.. znaš ono, sad se ti definiraš kao lezbijka sad ti moraš bit lezbijka, nema sad nazad, sad moraš to bit.. zbog toga što je to bio način na koji su drugi ljudi u mom prisutstvu koristili taj pojam moram priznate. Znaš ono, ona je lezbijka i to je to. To je ko, kao ona ti je vegetarijanka, kao ona više nikad neće jesti meso, mislim Jesus Christ. [...] Ovaj, i danas kada češće koristim taj pojam, kada znam reći za sebe da sam lezbijka, unatoč tome što to ne mislim, primjećujem da, ovaj, ljudi lakše podnose to, nego da im kažeš, ne znam, ili da si biseksualka, ili da (uzdah) se ne želis kategorizirati. To je nešto što mislim da sam prepoznala kao tinejdžer točno onakvim kakvo to jest a to kao nasilan čin, kategorizacija.

logic of Ana's self-narrative "the other" is perceived as a hostile agent who would reduce the complexity of sexuality to unequivocal, stable, and fixed categories. In this way, Ana's logic extends the harmful effects of categorization to "the other" as a sole bearer of meaning in the process of categorization.

However, later on, Ana reveals that her rejection to self-identify as lesbian is partly related to the stigma that this category carries in contemporary Croatia:

I had a feeling, and I still have a feeling that, umgh, how shall I put it, that my self-identification in front of others increases the probability that, in my absence, they will tell jokes about me. [...]. This means that people think that they have the right to make comments about me and this is the part that I still don't handle well.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, the discomfort with the category of lesbian in Ana's narrative is partly resulting from her social positionality as a lesbian in the homophobic environment. It is a product of Ana's realistic assessment that, in the context where the category of lesbian is predominantly imbued with negative and degrading meanings, stigmatization might be reduced if non-normative sexual practices are represented as flexible and temporary, that is, as something that may also have the potential to change in the direction of "normalcy" in the future. In this way, the logic of Ana's narrative represents an example of how the arguments about fluidity and playfulness of sexuality popularized by queer theory may easily be turned into another kind of de-politicized invisibility.

In contrast to Ana's narrative where the queer logic is utilized in relation to the presence of lesbian stigma, the rejection of political potential of sexual identity in Marko's narrative is grounded in a slightly different logic. Marko (29) is a male-born self-identified trans person who continues to use grammatical forms that signify male gender when referring to himself. Marko's preference for a queer perspective is best visible in the part of his narrative when he responds to my request to clarify his argument that queer, by bringing together different sexual practices that do not comply with the sexual normative framework, carries a greater political potential from the existing identity categories such as lesbian or gay:

<sup>92</sup> In the original: Imala sam osjećaj i još uvijek imam osjećaj da ovaj, kako bi to rekla, da deklariranje drugim ljudima povećava vjerojatnost da će oni u tvojoj odsutnosti pričati viceve na tvoj račun. [...] To je da si onda ljudi uzimaju za pravo da me komentiraju i to je taj dio koji ja još uvijek teško podnosim recimo.

(Katja): What do you think the advantage is of using a wider term instead of more concrete terms?

M: It is, I think that separatism is stupid because it is exclusionary. During the Femfest [feminist festival] I had a fight with Lepa over this. I mean her performance... She starts every speech with “I am a lesbian,” “I am a radical lesbian.” And she is actually a separatist. She believes that the road to empowerment, not the only road, but the best possible one, is through a strict differentiation of people on the grounds of identities, which automatically excludes some other people. [...] So these are the individuals who don’t fit in any of the given groups, or they fit better in one, and less in the other. And where to put these people, what to do with them, why should we exclude them?<sup>93</sup>

The excerpt above reveals Marko’s critique of the so-called “ethnic” model often invoked in sexual identity politics, although not necessarily by Lepa, who is a prominent lesbian activist from Serbia. According to Marko, by identifying herself as a lesbian, or radical lesbian, Lepa implies the exclusionary identity politics that assumes clear and strict boundaries of homogenized groups. Although the logic of group identity that is grounded in homogenization and essentialization indeed results in exclusion, the mere coming out as a lesbian does not necessarily imply the exclusionary identity politics. In other words, not every instance of claiming one’s positionality represents the alleged act of pernicious “separatism.” It can be a part of the progressive politics of identity that is based on reflective solidarity and accountability of differences, in which different positionalities play an important role in forming non-exclusionary alliances.

However, the potential of the politics of reflective solidarity goes on unrecognized in Marko’s narrative. Instead, as an alternative to separatist identity politics Marko places the politics of queer which, in his view, has the potential to bring about powerful non-identitarian

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<sup>93</sup> In the original: K: a koja je prednost jednog šireg termina naspram nekih malo užih?

M: pa zato što mislim da je separatizam glup zato što je isključiv. Na jednom Femfestu sam se bio posvađao sa Lepom oko toga. Mislim njen nastup.. ona počinje svaki svoj govor sa “ja sam lezbijka,” “ja sam radikalna lezbijka” i ona je zapravo separatist. Ona vjeruje u to da kao put do osnaživanja je moguć, ne jedini moguć, ali najsnažniji, kroz strogo odvajanje ljudi po identitetima što automatski isključuje neke ljude. [...] Znači to su osobe koje se ne uklapaju niti u jednu skupinu, ili se možda u jednu uklapaju više, u drugu manje i onda gdje staviti te osobe, što s njima, zašto njih isključiti?

alliances formed on the grounds of common resistance to the regimes of normal. Thus, continuing his argument presented in the quotation above, Marko argues:

That's why I like queer, because it allows everyone, whoever can identify herself/himself with it, I mean, with any of these definitions, to agree with others, to join this group based on affinities, and start with some activist actions for improving the situation in society. That's why I think it's great.<sup>94</sup>

The politics of solidarity based on the common affinities for social transformation is not without potential. However, without accounting for differences across particular positionalities that would also include the responsibility for (our own) privileges, such alliances could easily end up in further marginalization and exclusions. In particular, as we saw in Chapter 3, the proposed anti-normality of queer resistance often results in marginalization of multiply oppressed queer subjects, not only lesbians, but trans people like Marko as well.

The lack of awareness for differences across positionalities in the degree and/or mode of oppression is also present in Marko's narrative. Born as a male, Marko refers to himself as a trans person, although there were no signs that would make his trans identity visible during the period of the interview. In fact, aware of his visible masculine physiognomy that included mustaches and conventional male dresscode such as dark shirt and trousers, Marko describes his lived experiences as "draggy kingish" and argues that he feels as a masculine woman or FTM in the process of sex reassignment: "at the moment I dropped the idea to change the sex. But that is because I feel like FTM (laugh), especially with these mustaches, they make me very femme, I feel very femme (laugh)."<sup>95</sup> As an example of his unstable and playful gender identity, Marko talks about the shame he felt when he decided to grow his mustaches as part of his FTM image. In other words, while arguing against the hegemonic binary of gender, Marko sees his gender identity as a subject of parody, playfulness and conscious intervention, which puts into question the gender/sex binary and stability of its parts, namely male masculinity and female femininity. However, at the same time, Marko does not account for the differences between his positionality and the positionalities of the actual FTM, or female-

<sup>94</sup> In the original: Zato mi se sviđa queer, zato što dozvoljava svim ljudima tko god sebe može svrstati u to, znači u bilo koju od tih definicija, da se složi s drugima da uđe u tu neku grupu afiniteta, krene u neke aktivističke akcije za poboljšanje stvari u društvu. I zato mi je super.

<sup>95</sup> In the original: trenutno odustajem od toga da promijenim spol. Ali to je zato što se osjećam kao FTM (smijeh) pogotovo s ovim brkovima, oni me čine užasno femme, osjećam se jako femme (smijeh).



born masculine women. On the contrary, he speaks about his “butch” image as if equally marginalized and stigmatized, as if a structural position within a logically possible matrix. He does not reflect critically upon his own social and cultural privilege as a male-born person embodying non-hegemonic masculinity and sees all gender-bending practices as self-fashioned playful fun. In this way Marko’s narrative silences different experiences that anybody who embodies “male femininity,” to paraphrase Judith Halberstam (1998), has in relation to their visible distance from the norm.

Thus, both Ana and Marko base their self-narratives on the view that sees identities as inherently oppressive categories that inevitably result in the violent and exclusionary act of categorization. Instead, they both propose the rejection of identities as a meaningful way of making sense of sexual practices and a promising ground for transformatory politics but without attending to any actual political aspect of the position they hold instead. As an alternative to the exclusionary practices of identity politics, Marko explicitly argues for the potential of wide queer alliances based on resistance to oppressive normalizing practices. However, as I have pointed out throughout my analysis, without accounting for differences across particular positionalities, the proposed queer discourse of anti-normalcy can easily end up in an un-reflexive sameness as the basis of solidarity, similar to one that we saw in the assimilationist narratives. Let me now turn to the self-narratives of two self-identified lesbians whose narrative strategy contains elements of self-reflexivity and positioning that are results of conscious political strategy. This reflexivity may result in a break with the un-reflexive logic of solidarity present in the assimilationist and queer narratives, carrying the potential for a progressive politics of visibility.

## 5.5. Strategic positioning: Lesbian identities and the politics of visibility

Progressive moments are present in the life narratives of two self-identified lesbians Maja (26) and Gordana (26).<sup>96</sup> They happen to be partners at the time of the research. When Maja responded to my call for research participants, I did not know anything about her or her two-year partnership with Gordana. I met them for the first time in the autumn of 2008 in their flat. What I also did not know before interviewing them is that they are self-identified activists who participated in the coordination of the Zagreb Pride 2008 as members of the organizing committee, which was their first engagement in organizing the Pride. Although I

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<sup>96</sup> As part of her activist engagements and political stance regarding lesbian visibility, Gordana wanted to be represented under her real name.

interviewed them separately, their life narratives reveal significant similarities, especially in relation to self-identification, activism, and “outing.”

Both Maja and Gordana strategically identify themselves as lesbians, and consider their identification to be an important element of their activism. Maja, responding to my initial question to tell me something about her life as lesbian in Croatia, explained:

[...] That’s why at the beginning I didn’t define myself as a lesbian. Now I’m defining myself as a lesbian only to promote this term. Usually I don’t like definitions because they, I dunno, they are limiting. But too many people uses “gay” and “queer,” so we need to promote lesbianness, it needs to be promoted, it needs to somehow... we need to materialize it somehow and make it more tangible, closer to people in this way [...]<sup>97</sup>

One of the first things that can be noticed in the excerpt above is Maja’s consistent use of the term “define” (Croatian *definirati*) in her attempts to make sense of her sexual experiences and practices. The verb “define” in Maja’s story is inextricably linked to the term “definition” (Croatian *definicija*) suggesting that Maja understands social categories in terms of definitions that, in her view, are limiting. According to the Croatian language portal, the Croatian term *definicija* refers to 1) a concise, clear and as precise as possible interpretation (description) of a particular concept; 2) an exact explanation of meanings of a word by using terms that are perceived as familiar. *Definicija* is of Latin origin, derived from the Latin verb *definire* which means to limit, to determine.<sup>98</sup> These dictionary references suggest that the notion of *definicija* in Croatian is closely related to the set of meanings that implies exactness, preciseness, conciseness, and limitation, as is the case with the English term “definition.” Thus, a systematic use of the terms “defining” and “definitions” when referring to the process of self-identification, reveals Maja’s stance on identities that she sees as something that is too narrow, or, in her own words too limiting, to capture the complexity of one’s sexuality. The assumption that concealment is always involved in self-identificatory practices points to the

<sup>97</sup> In the original: Tako da ono u početku ja sebe nisam ni definirala kao lezbijku. Mislim sad se isto definiram kao lezbijka samo zato da promoviram taj pojam. Ono, u pravilu ne volim definicije jer ono šta ja znam, ograničavaju. Ali ovaj al eto nekako previse ljudi koristi “gay” i koristi “queer” i tako ono da treba promovirati lezbijstvo, treba ga nekako, ono nekako možda materijalizirati da bude ljudima nekako opipljiviji, bliskiji [...]

<sup>98</sup> Definitions are taken from Croatian language portal (Hrvatski jezični portal)

[http://hjp.srce.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=f1lgWhI%3D](http://hjp.srce.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=f1lgWhI%3D) and are translated by me. Last retrieved in April 2012.

similarities of Maja's position on self-identification with one of the main premises of queer theory.<sup>99</sup>

However, despite the obvious elements of the queer perspective on sexual identities, the process of self-identification in Maja's story significantly departs from the queer strategy. In particular, even though Maja conceives of sexual identities as limiting and pernicious, she at the same time recognizes the importance of positive re-affirmation of lesbian identity. The emphasis that Maja puts on coming out as a lesbian is closely interrelated with the issue of visibility and her perception of lesbian activism. At the end of the interview session she returns to this topic and clarifies her need to re-affirm lesbianness through visibility:

I would like that we function as straight people, that I wake up and don't care, that I can go out on the street and that I ... that I don't think about this at all. But obviously it is important because people first have to understand this [lesbianness] so that it can become completely normal to them and then it'll be irrelevant. Because, we're now on that first level when we, including me, are trying to make it more visible.<sup>100</sup>

What these arguments suggest is that, for Maja, the act of coming out as lesbian is to a large extent motivated by her activist goals that include materializing the "lesbian" and making lesbians more visible and tangible.

The interplay of activism and visibility that is achieved through coming out as lesbian is even more explicit in the following excerpt taken from Gordana's narrative:

(Katja): How do you identify yourself when you think about your sexuality and [how do you identify yourself] when you speak to others, is there any difference between the two situations?

(Gordana): Well, there is a difference in that I [...] I don't think about myself as definitely being a lesbian. I can't say that, I really can't. Because I have been

<sup>99</sup> The assumption that an act of self-identification implies concealment and suppression is by no means an exclusive feature of queer theory. According to Linda Alcoff, both modernist and postmodernist theories of identity maintain that "what comes to the individual from the social is necessarily constraining and pernicious" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 79-80).

<sup>100</sup> In the original: A tila bih da funkcioniramo tako kao straight ljudi, da se probudim i da mi nije bitno ono, da ono izađem na ulicu i da mi nije ono.. da uopće ne osjećam to. Al očito je bitno zato što ljudi moraju prvo to skužiti da im to postane totalno normalno pa da im postane nebitno. Jer sad smo mi na onom prvom stupnju gdje tek činimo to vidljivijim pa i ja isto tako.

in relationships with guys for my whole life and I can't say that I'm lesbian, you know, completely. I can't say that to myself. I really don't know what will happen in the future. I'm with a woman now, but who knows what will happen later. I don't want to define myself in this way. But when I talk to other people, I always say that I'm a lesbian because this is simply a kind of activism.<sup>101</sup>

These excerpts from Maja's and Gordana's narratives suggest that for both of them self-identification is closely related to coming out and, through emerging increased visibility, means active participation in changing the existing social imaginary about sexuality. Furthermore, what strikes me in their narratives is the ease with which they speak about coming out as lesbian, which, on the other hand, is accompanied with a firmness to pursue their activist goals of re/affirming "lesbian" in contemporary Croatian discourse. It is important to note that the way one experiences the closet is significantly influenced by the socio-historical context and intersecting social positions that a person occupies (Manalansan, 2003; Seidman, 2004). Having said that, it is possible to find some explanations for such willingness to come out expressed in Gordana and Maja's stories in the changing context in which they live and in the idiosyncrasy of their social positions.

Both Gordana and Maja were 26 at the time of the interview in October 2008, living in Zagreb. Coming of age at the beginning of 2000s when the discourses and the state and social practices around (homo)sexuality started to change to the point that the politics of sexuality was visible in the public space, they certainly encountered a different social and discursive context from the one in which older generations of lesbians and gays in Croatia were coming of age, like Marija (48) or Ivan (65). After Zagreb Pride had been established as a central annual event of the politics of visibility in Croatia, it opened up a space for the coming out as one of the most popular activist strategies. What is more, the process of globalization of sexualities that is largely rooted in the global popular culture and in the discourses of human (sexual) rights (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan, 2002; Binnie, 2004), together with availability of the Internet provided a viable set of influences that had an impact on Maja's and Gordana's experiences of the closet and on the formation of their need to come out as lesbians.

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<sup>101</sup> In the original. K: Kako ti sebe identificiras kad razmisliš o sebi u smislu svoje seksualnosti i kad to govoriš drugima, da li tu ima neke razlike ono?

G: Pa ima razlike utoliko što sebe osobno ne smatram kao definitivno lezbijkom, ne mogu to reći, fakat ne. Zasto što sam bila u vezama s tipovima cijeli život i ne mogu reći da sam lezba ono kao u potpunosti, sama sa sobom ja ne mogu to sebi reći, fakat ne znam što će biti, sad jesam s curom a ko zna sto će biti kasnije. Ne želim se na taj način definirati. Al kad govorim drugim ljudima onda uvijek kažem da sam lezbijka jer to je čisto neki aktivizam.

However, as I argued above, although the beginning of 2000s represents a critical moment for the sexual politics of visibility in Croatia, and the lesbian organizations Kontra and LORI were actively involved in the politics of visibility, they were unequally represented in the media in relation to their male counterparts.

In this context, where the figure of the “lesbian” is a stigmatized but nevertheless available social role, coming out should be regarded as an ambiguous practice that preserves and contests the existing social setting at the same time (Wilkerson, 2007). The positive effects of the politics of visibility are particularly emphasized in relation to the social position of lesbians who in their struggles against stigmatization and discrimination first have to make their experiences visible to the wider public (Phelan, 1993).

In her re-assessment of the essentialist view of “lesbian” in terms of “lesbian-ness” that envisages lesbian identities as social practices emerging at the intersection of social, biological, and individual influences, Tamsin Wilton (1995) specifically addresses the particularities of the lesbian position and its political potential. By conceptualizing *lesbian-ness* as a space from which the oppressive patriarchal mechanisms of heteronormativity and gender hierarchy and their intersection are the most visible, Wilton sees its strong political potential in the complexity of its social and political position in the heteropatriarchal contexts. In particular, by representing a perspective which reveals how the discourses of the gender binary and coercive heterosexuality function together in re/producing patriarchal power relations, *lesbian-ness* constitutes an important source for unpacking the fictional unity of gender, sex, and sexuality. Furthermore, as Wilton highlights, it is not just the experience of “double oppression” that complicates the location of *lesbian-ness* in heteropatriarchal societies. Its positionality is also based on its relative marginality within feminism on the one hand, and lesbian and gay studies and LGBTIQ movements worldwide on the other. Wilton’s assertions prove to be accurate when it comes to Croatian context as well. As I pointed out above, media coverage of the Croatian LGBTIQ movement tends to focus on gay men. At the same time, as I argued in my earlier work, contemporary practices of Croatian feminism tend to silence lesbian experiences (Kahlina, 2008).

What follows from Wilton’s discussion of *lesbian-ness* is that not all sexually minoritized positions are of equal potential for progressive social change. The lesbian position carries more of a potential for an intersectional approach to oppression in contemporary Croatia precisely because of the multiple exclusions that lesbians in Croatia experience. The potential of lesbianness is present in the narratives of Gordana and Maja who, by critically reflecting upon their positionality, recognize the political value of lesbianness. The strategic

positioning is particularly visible in the excerpt from Maja's narrative quoted above when she critically reflects upon the invisibility of lesbians in relation to their male counterparts by stating that "too many people uses 'gay' and 'queer,' so we need to promote lesbianness, it needs to be promoted, [...] we need to materialize it somehow and make it more tangible, closer to people." In other words, it is reasonable to assume that their positionality and experience of lesbian-ness constitutes a decisive factor influencing the need for strategic outing as lesbian that underpins the construction of identities in Maja's and Gordana's life stories. Their will to accountability for the difference of their experiences represents a break with the queer logic in that it perceives visibility as a means of voicing the particular experiences of differently oppressed subjects.

However, although the strategy of self-identification in Gordana and Maja's stories shares a lot of similarities with both Wilton's notion of *lesbian-ness* and postpositivist realist view on identity, there are also elements of "strategic essentialism" in the way lesbian identity is used only for the activist purposes in these narratives (Spivak, 1988). According to Gayatri Spivak who first coined this term, strategic essentialism signifies "*strategic* use of positivist essentialism in scrupulously visible political interests" (Spivak, 1988, p. 205; original emphasis).<sup>102</sup> In her critical assessment of strategic essentialism Alcoff (2000) points to some of the pernicious effects of this approach. In particular, Alcoff argues that the recognition of the importance of using identities in the political arena while at the same time negating its reality and salience in every day lives can easily result in "politically pernicious elitism" that creates a gap between the "'knowing theorists' and 'unknowing' activists who continue to believe in identity" (Alcoff, 2000, p. 323). What is more, she points to the potentially de-politicizing and unsustainable contradiction between the theoretical stand and political practice that underpins strategic essentialism (ibid., p. 323).

The contradiction that Alcoff points to is present in Gordana and Maja's narratives as well. This contradiction comes about as a gap between personal and political. The logic of their self-identification entails the strategic silencing of their experiences of feelings and desire, which become completely irrelevant for their activism. By emphasizing the aspect of *choice* when speaking about self-disclosure and by considering their decision to publicly identify themselves as lesbians in terms of their activist goals, it appears that coming out for Gordana and Maja is purely a political act. Thus, what becomes visible is the process of

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<sup>102</sup> In her analysis of Subaltern Studies, Spivak conceptualizes the notion of "strategic essentialism" precisely as an intermediary site between post-structuralism and essentialism (Spivak, 1988).

separating feelings, desire, and sexual practices on the one hand, and coming out and activism on the other in their narratives. Moreover, once they are separated from the act of coming out, sexual practices and desire are confined to the de-politicized sphere of private, personal life where there is no place for categorization and identification, the sphere that in their views, exceeds the meanings attached to particular social categories.

Gordana and Maja seem to reject every notion of categorization unless it represents a useful political tool in their struggle for social transformation. In other words, according to the logic of the two narratives in question, categories that generate the set of meanings that differentiate between distinct sexual practices and selves do not have any function outside of the field of direct public political struggle. Once the discrimination on the basis of sexual practices is eliminated, every categorization in relation to sexuality will be redundant and even harmful. It is possible to argue that the disjunction of the private sphere of feelings, desire, and non-identities from the public sphere of political engagement, lesbian identity, and coming out in Gordana's and Maja's life stories may be regarded as a strategy of self-identification that enables them to reconcile their views of identities as limiting and pernicious with their political goals of making lesbians more visible. However, grounded in the unquestioned separation of private and public where public is seen as the only "proper" sphere of politics, the discursive strategy of separating the intimate sexual experiences from political acts reifies the heteropatriarchal public/private divide.

In contrast to strategic positioning that, in the name of strategic essentialism, distinguishes between personal experiences and political coming out, postpositivist realists maintain that lived experience, which is constructed at the intersection of social context and individual interpretation, plays a decisive role in emancipatory politics (Alcoff, 2006; Wikerson, 2007). According to this view, taking lived experience as a ground of self-identification, political action does not necessarily lead into exclusionary essentialism that is often evoked by identity politics. On the contrary, the view of experience as a product of self-reflexive practice that consists of intersubjective negotiation embedded in multiple meanings puts emphasis on the differences within the allegedly monolithic categories and exposes the multiplicity of lesbian practices. Therefore, the view of lived experience as a basis of political action will open up a space for emancipatory politics to be grounded in the very concrete yet multiple experiences of lesbian subjects without falling into the trap of exclusionary homogenization. However, the political potential of postpositivist realist view of identity for the struggles for social equality goes unrecognized in Maja and Gordana's narratives. Although it breaks with the assimilationist status quo on the one hand, and homogenizing

queer logic of anti-normality on the other, the logic of strategic positioning, by invoking the elements of strategic essentialism, still carries only limited emancipatory potential.

## 5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I pointed out the ways in which the notion of (in)visibility, which constitutes a decisive feature of the emancipatory politics of sexuality, is negotiated from the perspectives of three narrative strategies of self-identification, namely assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning, that emerge in the life-stories of sexually marginalized people in Croatia. By placing the narratives in a dynamic interplay with each other, and with the wider social and interpretive context, I have pointed out the implications of their positions in relation to the transformative politics of reflective solidarity. In particular, the strategy of assimilation consists of the two main patterns of articulating visibility in relation to heterosexualized national citizenship – privacy and normalcy. However, as I pointed out in my analysis, both narrative strategies are grounded in the exclusionary logic of normalized, privatized sexuality epitomized in the figure of the “good gay citizen” who is granted limited tolerance in the nationalist heteropatriarchal framework of citizenship. In contrast to the strategy of assimilation, queer and strategic positioning break with the discourses of normalizing privatization of sexuality. The queer strategy constitutes itself against the “ethnic” model of identity politics that is invoked in the logic of assimilation and is grounded in the view of identities as inherently oppressive categories that inevitably result in exclusions. However, without incorporating accountability for differences across positionalities, the anti-normality of queer ends up in uncritical sameness that marginalizes multiply oppressed subjects.

In comparison to strategies of assimilation and queer disposition, strategic positioning represents a more promising narrative strategy of self-identification present in the life-stories of two self-identified lesbian activists. Being grounded in critical reflection upon the particularities of a lesbian position, strategic positioning articulates the notion of visibility as a means of voicing different experiences of marginalized subjects. Within this logic the politics of visibility becomes a useful tool for progressive identity politics based on the accountability for differences. However, with its strategic use of coming out as lesbian for particular political purposes only, thus strictly dividing the de-politicized private sphere of feelings, desire, and non-identities from the public sphere of political engagement, strategic positionality still carries only a partial political potential.



As seen in the analysis of the ways in which the issue (in)visibility is articulated from the perspectives of three strategies, visibility represents a key site that brings together the notion of sexuality and belonging in a dynamic interplay. In the next chapter I will specifically focus on how the national framework of belonging is negotiated from the position of people marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. By examining the ways in which citizenship, belonging, and solidarity is imagined in the course of self-identification, I want to further explore the political potential of sexual identity in relation to the intersection of sexuality and nationalism.

## Chapter 6: Re-imagined communities: Solidarity and belonging at the intersection of sexuality and nationalism

Crucially, differential resources give people differential capacities to reach beyond particular belongings to other social connections – including very broad ones like nations, civilizations, or humanity as a whole. Not only options, but needs for solidarities are unequally distributed.

(Calhoun, 2003, p. 537)

When reading and re-reading my interview data I found that the notion of visibility functions as a major concern for the construction of a sense belonging for the non-heterosexual participants in my project. In particular, I noted that my interviewees either argue for public visibility as a precondition for inclusion and greater equality, or they invoke invisibility as a main prerequisite for not feeling excluded from the existing national context. In this chapter I explore the particular ways in which the dominant framework of nationalist belonging is negotiated in the process of self-identification of these sexually marginalized people. I am particularly interested in analyzing the assumptions underlying their imagined solidarities and belongings. I believe that insight into the different ways in which solidarity and belonging are conceived in the process of self-identification will enable me to explore and assess the political potential of sexual identity for moving beyond the nationalist ideas of homogenized sameness as the dominant ground for solidarity.

In order to explore the differences and similarities of the perspectives from which national(ist) belonging is negotiated, reified or challenged in the life narratives, I will first discuss the dominant discourses of community, solidarity and belonging in Croatia from the 1974 Constitution onwards, thereby establishing the order of discourse of nationalism, Yugoslavianness, and Europeanness that my informants draw on. By reading the life narratives against the dominant discourses, I will analyze how solidarity and belonging are re-imagined from the perspectives of assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning in the process of self-construction. Furthermore, by examining the prevailing discourses of solidarity and belonging in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav period that inform the life narratives of my participants I hope to expose a multiplicity of often contradictory discourses existing together in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Croatia. The analysis of how ethnicity and

nationhood have been constructed and institutionalized in different ways in the past few decades, I hope, will provide arguments against prevailing approaches that posit ethnicity, nation, and ethnic animosities as an unchangeable, naturally given order of things.

### **6.1. From “people of Croatia” to “Croats:” Nationalism and belonging in socialist Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav Croatia**

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, nationalism represents a prevailing ideology that postulates the nation as the primary site of belonging and solidarity through its homogenizing practices epitomized in the position and the concept of the citizen. Although in the past few decades globalization processes have reduced the sovereignty of nation-states, thus opening up a space for counter-nationalist and transnational discourses and practices like that of cosmopolitanism and EU enlargement, the homogenized nation as the dominant category of social division has hardly been challenged. In this and the following section I will trace the process of nationalization in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Croatia from the early 1970s when de-centralization of the Yugoslav Federation took place to the present. In particular, I will look at how discourses of the Croatian nation have been negotiated in the context of changes from the multinational federal Yugoslav state to the struggles for an independent nation-state followed by the armed conflict in the early 1990s. The other focus of analysis (*Section 6.2.*) is concerned with the changes brought about by the EU accession process, especially the EU politics of regionalization that dominant discourses in Croatia present as an attempt to restore Yugoslavia.

In the multinational Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, constituted on the basis of partisan struggle against the Nazi and fascist occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in WW2 and their local collaborators like the Ustaša movement, one of the main political concerns of the ruling League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) was managing national diversity. The main discourses regarding the rights and equality of different ethnic and national groups were brought together on the grounds of the “brotherhood and unity” principle. The principle was formulated against the idea of Yugoslavism and its related principle of “unitarism” that produced ethnic and national marginalization in the pre-WW2 Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Jović, 2003). In order to secure the equal position of all existing ethnic and national groups, post-WW2 Yugoslavia was structured as a federation of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia) and two autonomous provinces within Serbia (Vojvodina and Kosovo) whose status and degree of

autonomy changed during the years. Although at the beginning of the 1960s the nationalist construct of “national minorities” (*nacionalne manjine*) was replaced with the de-minoritizing term “nationalities” (*narodnosti*) as part of the ongoing struggles against ethnic inequality, this change in naming did not erase the hierarchical distinction between “constitutive” nations (*narodi*) of Yugoslavia, namely Slovenes, Croats, Muslims (since 1971), Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians on the one hand, and numerous non-Slavic nationalities on the other (Budding, 2008; Jović, 2011).<sup>103</sup>

One of the main features that distinguished constitutive nations (*narodi*) from nationalities (*narodnosti*) can be found in the institution of sovereignty. In Yugoslavia, six nations along with six republics were conceived as bearers of self-determination (Budding, 2008). Although the names of the six republics suggest that they were exclusively based on a nationalist principle and more or less nationally homogeneous, this was not entirely the case.<sup>104</sup> Given that none of the Yugoslav republics were nationally homogeneous, the equation of the nation, which was defined in ethnic terms, with the republic when it comes to self-determination created a particular paradox that was never addressed by the communist elites (Budding, 2008).<sup>105</sup> As Audrey Budding (2008) points out, by repeatedly locating the capacity of self-determination in both nations and republics, the central government embodied in the League of Communists of Yugoslavia conflated two concepts of nationhood – the so-called “civic” one that tends to define nation in terms of territory, such as “people of Croatia” and the “ethnic” one that defines nation in terms of ethnicity, like “Croats” as an ethnic group.<sup>106</sup> As a result, the ethnic majority in a given state came to stand for the whole territorial political unit, thus reifying an ethno-nationalist framework of belonging.

The ongoing conflation of the nation as a multi-ethnic territorially bound constituency and the nation as the dominant ethnic group in each republic (except Bosnia-Herzegovina)

<sup>103</sup> At the same time Ramet (1992) points out that the treatment of nationalities in Yugoslavia was admirable especially during the 1970s, with the notable exception of the exclusion of the Roma people.

<sup>104</sup> As Budding (2008) points out, communist elites used different and even competing criteria ranging from economic, political, historic, and ethnic/national when determining the borders of republics after WWII.

<sup>105</sup> It is important to note that immediately after WWII, the LCY was the only sovereign power. Although nominally the right to self-determination was included in the Constitution, in reality this right could not be exercised without the approval of the LCY (Budding, 2008).

<sup>106</sup> In particular, according to the document “Decisions about Building Yugoslavia on the Federal Principle” issued by the Yugoslav Communist Party “Yugoslavia is being built and will be built on the federal principle, which will ensure the full equality of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins, that is to say [*odnosno*] the peoples of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina” (cited in Budding, 2008, p. 96). The conflated meanings of ethnic and territorial definitions of the nation are particularly evident when it comes to the positioning of the Serb population in Croatia (around 12% before the war). On the one hand they were doubtlessly “the people of Croatia,” while at the same time they were also “Serbs.” The far reaching implications of this conflation started to emerge at the beginning of the 1990s when the interests of “the people of Croatia” and “Serbs” were set in sharp contrast (Budding, 2008, Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).

started to have more serious implications during the 1970s when the de-centralization of the country took place, which was in favor of the individual republics (Budding, 2008).<sup>107</sup> The process of de-centralization reached its peak in the 1974 Constitution that, by explicitly referring to the rights of ethnically defined nations, constituted the republics as almost independent states having decision power over everything except military and foreign policy (Budding, 2008; Wachtel and Bennett, 2009). As Malešević (2006) argues, the 1974 Constitution reinforced further the notion of nation in terms of ethnicity.

The shift towards a more ethnic definition of the nation can be best understood if we compare the ways in which the Socialist Republic of Croatia was defined in the 1963 and 1974 Croatian republic Constitutions. While in 1963 SR Croatia was established as “a state socialist democratic community of the people of [the republic] founded on the power of the working people and on self-management” (cited in Malešević, 2006, p. 173), in 1974 the definition of SR Croatia is as follows: “the national state of the Croatian nation, the state of the Serbian nation in Croatia and the state of the nationalities that live in it” (cited in Budding, 2008, p. 106). Thus, in the 1970s we can see the insitutionalization of the nation primarily grounded in ethnicity that, together with the ongoing conflation of nation and republic when it comes to self-determination, provided the grounds for the secessionist nationalisms emerging in the late 1980s followed by the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia (Malešević, 2006; Budding, 2008; Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).

In order to grasp the complexity of the “national question” in the multinational Yugoslav federation, we also need to consider the role of economics in the process of de-centralization. The demand for greater autonomy of the six socialist republics was initiated in the 1960s by Slovenia and Croatia, the two most economically developed constitutive states. As a percentage of their national income, Slovenia and Croatia contributed the most money to the federal solidarity fund. The money from the solidarity fund was, in line with the ideals of socialist solidarity, further re-distributed to the less wealthy parts of Yugoslavia with the aim of gradually diminishing economic inequalities within the country (Malešević, 2006). As Malešević (2006) interestingly observes, the dominant ideology of a socialist society that nurtures solidarity as the highest value, prevented Slovenia and Croatia from addressing their discontents with the solidarity fund *per se*, and pushed them to articulate their demands for greater autonomy in the sphere of culture instead. Consequently, the national(ist) mass movement in Croatia, led by the Croatian Communist Party elites who later on explicitly

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<sup>107</sup> An interesting point is made by Malešević (2006) who argues that de-centralization was actually a means to avoid democratization in the former Yugoslavia.

demanded greater economic autonomy, started with the Declaration on the Status and Name of the Croatian Literary Language issued in 1967 which argued for the equality of the Croatian national language in relation to the Serbian language.<sup>108</sup> Although the movement was fiercely ended by the federal government, the main requests put forward by protesters were adopted in the 1974 Constitution that placed greater economic, social, and cultural autonomy at the republican level (Malešević, 2006).

Running parallel to the paradoxical constitution of the nation as both territorial and ethnic, legislation and the various public discourses of “brotherhood and unity,” of self-management, and of the commonality of working people opened up space for different modes of self-identification, and even non-identification, when it came to nation or nationality (Budding, 2008).<sup>109</sup> Although the Yugoslav political elites consciously undermined the creation of the Yugoslav nation in nationalist terms (Ramet, 1992; Jović, 2003; Budding, 2008),<sup>110</sup> the ideas of commonality and solidarity among the people of Yugoslavia, which did not necessary lead to essentialist Yugoslavism based on the view of a common origin of South Slavs, were also present in socialist multinational Yugoslavia (Budding, 2008). Thus, many surveys from the late 1960s and early 1970s show that it was not uncommon for people in Yugoslavia to simultaneously self-identify along both national and supranational lines (Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).<sup>111</sup> However, in a context where six nations are constituted as bearers of sovereignty, and in which the “Yugoslav nation” did not formally exist, categories of nation and nationality were still important categories of self-identification (Žarkov, 2007) even if the surveys show a very low, almost nonexistent, level of animosity among the nations and nationalities (Malešević, 2006). This discrepancy may be interpreted as a sign of a widespread feeling of cross-national commonality and solidarity among the citizens of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

From everything being said so far, it is clear that ethnic/national, republican, and supranational aspects of collective membership existed together in a complex interplay in

<sup>108</sup> A popular slogan used by the Croatian Communist Party elites at the beginning of the 1970s reads as “Croatian money in the Croatian wallet.”

<sup>109</sup> As Budding points out, it was a constitutional right not to identify oneself as member of a particular nationality [*narodnost*]. According to Article 41 of the 1963 Constitution “The citizen shall be guaranteed the freedom to express his nationality [*narodnost*] and culture, as well as the freedom to speak his language. No one shall have to declare himself as to nationality or determine himself for one of the nationalities” (cited in Budding, 2008, p. 101).

<sup>110</sup> According to Jović (2003), the idea behind the prevention of Yugoslav nationalism has to do with the vision of a stateless society of self-managing communities/units as an ideal towards which the multinational Yugoslavia was headed (Jović, 2003). However, the category of Yugoslav was present in census reports after 1953 (Budding, 2008).

<sup>111</sup> In the 1981 census 1 216 463 people declared themselves as Yugoslavs out of the total population of around twenty million (Ramet, 1992).

multinational Yugoslavia. This interplay between national, republican, and federal dimensions in dominant discourses and legislative practices created a particular mode of individual self-identification and sense of belonging at the junction of national, federal, and supranational. Things started to change at the end of the 1980s when political elites began to enforce national divisions as a means of political mobilization, most significantly in Serbia, which inevitably came to influence the sense of belonging of the self-identifying Serb population in Croatia as well (Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).<sup>112</sup>

In Croatia the rise of nationalist discourses in the wake of the 1974 Constitution can be identified in the first multiparty elections in 1990 (Malešević, 2006).<sup>113</sup> As I have argued, the 1974 Croatian republic Constitution replaced the term “people of Croatia” with the awkward construction of a list: “Croatian nation, Serbian nation in Croatia, and nationalities that live in it” (Budding, 2008, p. 106). It signals the politico-juridical importance of the category of nation in multinational Yugoslavia while indicating a clear and hierarchical distinction between members of the “constitutive” nations, namely Croats and Serbs in Croatia, and various “non-constitutive” nationalities. The victory of the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in the multiparty elections in 1990 brought with it the prevailing notion of Croatia as the “republic of Croats” (Malešević, 2006; Budding, 2008). The new Constitution promulgated by HDZ in 1990 defined Croatia as a “national state of the Croatian nation and the state of the members of other nations and minorities, who are its citizens.”<sup>114</sup> By constructing Croatia as a *national* state in which the Croat ethnic group is the sole bearer of self-determination, the 1990 Constitution institutionalized the ethnic/national division and hierarchization that continues to be one of the main principles of social structuring in Croatia today.

The Constitution particularly degraded the status of Serbs living in Croatia.<sup>115</sup> While recognized as a constitutive nation fully equal with Croats before 1990, now they were confined to the position of a “minority.” The actual social position of Serbs in Croatia also started to deteriorate despite the fact that, as Croatian citizens, they were constitutionally

<sup>112</sup> Slobodan Milošević was one of the first political leaders to articulate his politics around the concept of the (Serbian) nation in the late 1980s (Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).

<sup>113</sup> Nationalist arguments in the Socialist Republic of Croatia first emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the context of a movement that is commonly called ‘Croatian Spring’, asking for greater economic and cultural autonomy for Croatia within the Yugoslav federation. LCY banned the movement in 1971 and imprisoned the main leaders, which silenced the nationalist demands in Croatia (Malešević, 2006).

<sup>114</sup> Ustav Republike Hrvatske [Constitution of the Republic of Croatia], *Narodne novine*, 56, December 22, 1990. Last retrieved in November 2011 from: [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1990\\_12\\_56\\_1092.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1990_12_56_1092.html). My translation.

<sup>115</sup> The number of Serbs, the second largest ethnic group in Croatia in 1989, was around 12 per cent (Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).

guaranteed equality and protection from discrimination.<sup>116</sup> The nationalization process introduced by the newly elected Croatian government motivated some Serbs in Croatia to produce alternative interpretations of the paradoxical conflation of nation and republic. Since Yugoslav legislation was still in existence in SR Croatia they made claims to the right of self-determination on the grounds of being members in one of Yugoslavia's constitutive nations (Budding, 2008). Enjoying support from the Serbian government, they started a rebellion against the Croatian state that subsequently led to an armed conflict in 1991 (Malešević, 2006, Wachtel and Bennett, 2009).

The 1990 constitutional changes, which were followed by a change of public discourses in Croatia, opened up a space for the transformation of one's individual sense of belonging. As Ramet (2008) points out, a national state, such as the one that Croatia was increasingly becoming at this time, creates a sense of community and solidarity among the members of one nation regardless of their actual place of residency, while at the same time excluding from equal belonging other citizens who live within the borders and under the laws of the state. In other words, according to the logic of the Croatian nationalist state, Croats living outside of Croatia are considered as part of Croatian community while, for example, Serbs who live in Croatia are constructed as a "foreign body" (Ramet, 2008, p. 162).<sup>117</sup> The process of constructing the "state of Croats" is particularly reflected in the emergence of the notion of "homeland" (*domovina*). It almost completely substituted terms like state or country, evoking strong emotional attachments with the particular "nation-family." In line with this new nationalist terminology then, the armed conflict (1991-1995) was articulated as the "Homeland war," and the day which celebrates the victory of the Croatian army in the conflict is called "Victory and Homeland Gratitude Day," while one of the first and most famous Croatian "patriotic" songs performed by Croatian Band Aid is called "My Homeland." All these examples are meant to demonstrate the widespread use of the nationalistic term "homeland" not only in contemporary political discourse, but in discourses of (popular) culture as well.

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<sup>116</sup> In particular, some of them were removed from their jobs in state institutions, the Cyrillic script lost its status as an official script in Croatia, and explicit anti-Serb discourses started to enter public spaces (Malešević, 2006; Wachtel and Bennett, 2009; Baker, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> As Ramet (2008) points out, the Constitution plays a decisive role in creating the national communities. Ramet gives the example of Article 10 of the 1990 Constitution stating that "Parts of the Croatian nation [living] in the other states shall be guaranteed special concern and protection by the Republic of Croatia" (cited in Ramet, 2008, p. 162). This was accompanied by the illegal military aggression of Croatian armed forces on Bosnian territory during the war in Bosnia, where a large group of ethnic Croats live. Finally, the new election law in 1995 opened up a voting right to all "ethnic Croats" regardless of where they live (*ibid.*).



As I argued in Chapter 2, during the armed conflict (1991-1995), homogeneity within the notion of the Croatian nation was further reinforced. This entailed practices of homogenization which heavily relied on the categories of gender and sexuality in constructing (hetero)sexualized boundaries of the nation (Žarkov, 2007). Furthermore, as part of the political project of making a homogeneous one-nation state of Croats, the end of armed conflict saw the exodus of the Serb population from the Croatian state territories previously occupied by the Serbian army.

In addition to Serbs, the whole former Yugoslavia came to be depicted as the ultimate other against which the Croatian nation was constructed as “civilized” and “democratic” in the nationalist rhetoric that started to dominate media discourses from the beginning of the conflict (Razsa and Lindstrom 2004; Žarkov, 2007). In the dominant public discourses, former Yugoslavia was often referred to as “Srboslovakia” and was argued to be an artificial creation that suppressed the freedom of Croats and their right to have an independent nation-state (Jansen, 2005).<sup>118</sup> In the context of this strong anti-Yugoslav campaign, positive memories of Yugoslavia, especially those evoking any form of belonging that implicate a common Yugoslav space, which existed only few years before, were considered as illicit and utterly anti-Croatian (ibid.). That there existed a fear of the presence of pro-Yugoslav alternatives to the nationalization process can be seen in a constitutional amendment from the late 1990s. Article 135 explicitly forbids Croatia to enter in any prospective “Yugoslav” or “Balkan” associations.<sup>119</sup>

In the context of strong homogenization and nationalization, national belonging that is based on unified ethnicity became the “ultimate ground of identification that is more important than other criteria” (Jansen, 2005, p. 46).<sup>120</sup> It also functions as the dominant model for individual self-identification practices and one’s sense of belonging. The hegemony of ethno-national belonging in the 1990s is particularly evident in the almost complete lack of any political resistance in the context of a rapid deterioration of living standards in the midst

<sup>118</sup> Stef Jansen points out that the break with Yugoslavia has been so radical that it may be described as a “specific combination of catharsis and exorcism” (Jansen, 2005, p. 26). What is more, the involvement of the former Yugoslav national army on the Serb side in the conflict, to a certain extent, silenced oppositional arguments against such a radical break (Jansen, 2005).

<sup>119</sup> See also Bechev, 2004, and Razsa and Lindstrom 2004. The amendment to Article 135 of the Croatian constitution states that “It is forbidden to initiate the procedure of entering [of Republic of Croatia] in the associations with other states that would end, or that could end, in the renewal of Yugoslav state collective, that is, some Balkan state union in any form. Ustavni zakon o izmjenama i dopunama Ustava Republike Hrvatske [Constitutional law about the changes and additions to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia] In *Narodne novine*, 135, December 15, 1997. Last retrieved in November 2011 from: [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1997\\_12\\_135\\_1944.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1997_12_135_1944.html)

<sup>120</sup> My translation.

of transitional plunder, widespread corruption, and war crimes, to name but a few burning social issues of the time (Jansen, 2005). One of the rare public protests in the 1990's was a strike by employers in the educational sector, who opposed changes that were perceived as diminishing the quality of education and of workers' rights. The strike was accompanied by a peaceful march in the Zagreb city center, which was interrupted by police barricades. The reactions of the HDZ government and the general public were compatible: the general public showed no solidarity with the demonstrators and the HDZ government called the protest anti-Croatian (*ibid.*).

In this context, dominated by a nationalist logic that equates a democratically elected political body with the nation, every political disagreement with the decisions made by that body is framed as a matter of belonging or non-belonging in the nation. On the one hand, interpreting criticism towards political elites as hostility towards the nation, and by extension even towards Croatia's independence, functions, rather successfully, as a way of political demobilization. At the same time, the process of "Croatization," to borrow the term from Vjeran Katunarić (1999), whereby the existing social conflicts were nullified through homogenization, made the heterogeneity within the socio-political category of "Croatian nation" unthinkable, thus imposing "national solidarity" as the only possible and legitimate form of solidarity (Katunarić, 1999, Jansen, 2005).

Against the homogenized ethno-nation, which became the dominant framework of belonging during the 1990s, alternative discourses of solidarity and belonging emerged. On the grounds of their clear opposition to the national homogenization imposed by the ruling elites, Stef Jansen (2005) uses the term "antinationalism" as a common denominator for the set of multiple alternative discourses in the two capitals, Zagreb (Croatia) and Belgrade (Serbia). They include feminism, pacifism, anti-war campaigns, Yugoslavianness, urbanity, and Europeanness. However, Jansen identifies an important difference between the non-hegemonic discourses of solidarity and belonging in the two capitals. It has to do with the presence/absence of Yugoslavianness and Yugo-nostalgia as forms of solidarity and belonging. Although fairly common in the self-identification practices of people involved in the anti-nationalist discourses in Belgrade, the sense of belonging to Yugoslavia is rarely present in stories of people from Zagreb (Jansen, 2005). According to Jansen (2005), people from Zagreb mostly draw on the discourses of cosmopolitanism and evoke their belonging to Europe against so-called "Balkan primitivism." What is more, they also identify themselves along the national line as Croats far more often than their Belgrade counterparts who generally avoid the category of Serb in the context of self-identification.

Jansen (2005) offers a few contextual distinctions to explain the differences in the antinationalist stories of people from Zagreb and Belgrade. The first has to do with the involvement of paramilitary units from Serbia and the former Yugoslav national army on the Serb side of the armed conflicts in Croatia but not the other way around. Second, the role of Serbia in the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina led to Serbia's international isolation, which triggered a sense of "better past" in Serbia, particularly among those who opposed Serbia's military involvements. Finally, the widespread use of derogatory meanings of Yugoslavism and Yugo-nostalgia in Croatia, which almost exclusively serves as a means of discrediting somebody or something, resulted in the lack of Yugoslavianness on the one hand, and a stronger presence of Croatianness on the other (Jansen, 2005).

It is important to note that the NGO scene also emerged in the context of the antinationalist discourses and practices in Zagreb and Belgrade (Jansen, 2005). In spite of the violent separation of Croatia from the Yugoslav space, since the beginning of the 1990s, Croatian NGOs have been in communication with similar organizations across the former Yugoslavia, especially in the field of feminist politics. A similar pattern of cooperation and networking across the ex-Yugoslav space between organizations that deal with the rights and issues of sexual minorities was pointed out in Chapter 5 when I discussed the trajectories of Zagreb Pride, which first emerged as an act of solidarity with the violently disrupted Belgrade Pride. These connections that emerged in the 1990s and continue to the present day have been for the most part dependent on, and sometimes even initiated by, the financial support of Western donors (Jansen, 2005).

In addition to transnational connections, the presence and productive influence of the international community in re-establishing connections in the former Yugoslavia became stronger when Croatia started the EU accession process in the beginning of the 2000s. In the next section I will specifically address changes in the dominant nationalist discourses brought on by the EU accession process, with special attention to the EU politics of regionalization that is of particular relevance to the region of former Yugoslavia.

## **6.2. A leader in the region: Nationalism and regionalism in the context of the EU accession process**

The Orientalizing rhetoric that articulated "Yugoslavia," "Serbia," and the "Balkans," interchangeably, in the role of the "constitutive other" against which the Croatian national identity was constructed in the 1990s, went through significant changes during 2000s. In

particular, mainstream Croatian politics in the second half of 2000s made a major shift towards what can be regarded as the politics of regional cooperation. This move was closely related to the pro-European rhetoric and politics, which has been dominant over the past decade (Solioza and Stubbs, 2009).

As most scholars agree, the EU played a crucial role in reestablishing broken connections and enhancing closer cooperation in former Yugoslavia (Bechev, 2004; Pond, 2006; Solioza and Stubbs, 2009). Stronger EU initiatives towards regional integration started with the launch of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in 1999 as a “coordinating body ‘aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity’” (cited in Solioza and Stubbs, 2009, p. 5). Only a year earlier, in 1998, the concept of Western Balkans emerged in the EU as a working term referring to the former Yugoslavia minus Slovenia plus Albania, thus connecting the territory that used to make up Yugoslavia into a meaningful whole (Pond, 2006).

The term became particularly prominent in Croatian public discourses in the second half of 2000s as a working title for a possible new trade union in (South)Eastern Europe after most of the members of CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement) entered the EU. Although at first the notion of Western Balkans provoked a lot of discontent in Croatia fearing the alleged renewal of Yugoslavia, the process of regionalization was gradually accepted as a condition for joining the EU and NATO (Bechev, 2004; Pond, 2006; Solioza and Stubbs, 2009).<sup>121</sup> That being said, one can observe a peculiar contradiction in relation to the dominant position toward the EU on the one hand and to the Yugoslav successor states on the other. The partial loss of sovereignty that comes with EU accession was not seen as problematic in the dominant political discourses. At the same time, even basic communication with the neighboring former Yugoslav states provoked intense controversies and was suspiciously perceived as an attempt at bringing back to life the ultimate evil called Yugoslavia.

To avoid controversies that terms such as Western Balkans provoke, yet at the same time trying to comply with the requirements for EU membership, in the second half of 2000s less specific terms such as “the region” and “regional cooperation” became buzz words in the Croatian political vocabulary. However, the incorporation of the idea of regionalization in the political discourses in Croatia did not necessarily mean a break with the nationalist

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<sup>121</sup> See for example newspaper article published in *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper] “Premijer Sanader griješi jer stvara CEFTA-u bez kriterija,” March 05, 2006 and articles published in *Poslovni dnevnik* [Business daily]: “Kao najjača Hrvatska bi od balkanske zone mogla izvući najviše koristi,” January 30, 2006 and “Sanader: Proširenjem CEFTA-e izbjegle bi se špekulacije o stvaranju nove Jugoslavije,” January 31, 2006.

Orientalizing logic of the 1990s. On the contrary, the Orientalizing discourse that separates Croatia from “the rest of the Balkans/Yugoslavia/Serbia” by placing it in the circle of “European civility” (Razsa and Lindstrom, 2004) was only imbued with new meanings. The gist of the new Orientalism in Croatia can be best detected in the repeated emphasis on Croatia’s alleged “leading role in the region” that became almost like a mantra in pro-European political discourses.<sup>122</sup> In particular, presenting Croatia as “the best of the Balkans,” Croatian political elites placed Croatia at the forefront of the “civilizing process in the Balkans,” thus repeating the old myth of Croatia’s superiority in relation to its neighboring countries in the “backwarded” East.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the appropriation of European Orientalizing constructions in Croatia had a twofold effect: it reinforced the Croatian national borders against other Yugoslav successor states while at the same time it reiterated the alleged “natural Europeanness” of Croatia. However, in spite of the Orientalizing assumptions, the move towards regional cooperation could still represent a break with the earlier attempts to erase all connectedness with the other Yugoslav successor states.

The direct outcome of the new regionalization can be detected in the rapid growth of communication and exchange among the Yugoslav successor states ranging from trade to culture and security, as well as in the civil sector. The partial renewal of connections that were abruptly cut off with the break of Yugoslavia inspired the *Economist* reporter for SEE Tim Judah (2009) to coin the term “Yugosphere” that depicts the geo-political space of former Yugoslavia embedded in the EU regionalization process. In detecting the various domains of exchange among the countries of former Yugoslavia, Judah rightly points out the role of common language and that of the demands of global capitalist markets as two main factors facilitating this new trend of re-storing the broken communication. What is more, Judah is also right in emphasizing the role of the EU in creating the Yugosphere, especially its distributive funds that are not available to individual countries but intended to cover common projects “in the fields like energy, infrastructure and economic cooperation” in the region (Judah, 2009, p. 18).<sup>124</sup>

The process of re-establishing cooperation among the Yugoslav successor states, which is identified as a formation of the Yugosphere, is closely connected to the process of

<sup>122</sup> See for example newspaper articles published in *Jutarnji list* [Morning Paper] “Polančec: Hrvatska je regionalni lider,” October 16, 2007, *Poslovni dnevnik* [Business daily] “Sanader: Hrvatska je postala lider jugoistočne Europe,” August 03, 2006, and *Nacional* “Za Busha je Hrvatska lider regije,” March 17, 2008.

<sup>123</sup> The process whereby Orientalism has been re/produced in the former Yugoslavia is thoroughly discussed by Milica Bakić-Hayden who coined the concept of “nesting Orientalisms.” It depicts the practice of appropriation of Orientalizing discourses in the already Orientalized contexts of the former Yugoslavia (Bakić-Hayden, 1995).

<sup>124</sup> For points about the regionalization process in the EU see also Solioza and Stubbs (2009).

European regionalization, and, more importantly to the process of “Europeanization” of Southeastern Europe. According to Judah, “the emergence and identification of the Yugosphere does not imply uniqueness for the region of the former Yugoslavia, but rather a kind of *maturity*, in the sense that the postwar Balkans is becoming again, more like any other part of Europe” (Judah, 2009, p. 20, my emphasis). Thus, the conceptualization of regionalization in former Yugoslavia captured in the concept of Yugosphere represents yet another instance in the process whereby the catching up model of development in the name of democratization has been imposed onto Eastern Europe, reproducing the West/East hierarchy.

So far I have discussed how the notion of the nation has been framed by dominant nationalist discourses in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav context. I have argued that, with the notable exceptions, especially regarding supranational entities such as Yugoslavia and the EU, the concept of nation has been imposed as the primary site of commonality and solidarity. In addition to the powerful presence of homogenizing nationalism, there has been a variety of supra- and anti-nationalist discourses such as Yugoslavianness, Europeanness, and cosmopolitanism that constitute important sources of influence for practices of belonging in contemporary Croatia. In the following three sections I will explore how the dominant nationalist framework of belonging is negotiated from the three dominant strategies of self-identification – assimilation, queer disposition and strategic positioning. I want to assess their particular implications for the politics of reflective solidarity and investigate the political potential of sexual identity for moving beyond the dominant nationalist framework of belonging. The analysis will explore to what extent my informants appropriate or reject the homogenizing nationalist discourses and the ways in which existing supra- and anti-nationalist discourses influence the narrators’ sense of solidarity and belonging. I will draw on Spivak’s concept of “critical regionalism” (Butler and Spivak, 2007; Spivak 2008) that goes beyond both exclusionary nationalism and “easy postnationalism” and on Dean’s notion of reflective solidarity to examine whether and to what extent regionalization as facilitated by the EU produces meanings other than Orientalizing normalization.

### **6.3. Quest for origins and national patriotism: Assimilation into the nation**

In Chapter 5 I discussed the particular ways in which the notion of (in)visibility is utilized by my informants in their attempt to articulate a sense of belonging in relation to the heterosexualized nation. My analysis revealed that the strategy of assimilation consists of two

different, but to a certain extent interrelated concerns: namely privacy and normalcy. I argued that although there are significant differences in the way (in)visibility is conceived in relation to these two concepts in their narratives, there is a common motive that brings them together in the strategy of assimilation. The articulation of privacy and normalcy intersect around the figure of the “good gay citizen” who is argued to be “in compliance” with the existing order, as Ivan explicitly put it.

In this section, I revisit the narratives by Ivan, Matija, and Josip to trace their articulation of the other concern they have in common, namely solidarity and belonging in relation to the nation. I also want to outline how the ways in which solidarity and belonging are articulated in their narratives can be pulled into the same assimilationist strategy of self-identification. To remind the reader, Ivan (65) is a member of the local branch of HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) who has never been involved in activism. Matija (32) is a gay activist who used to be more involved in activism in the beginning of the 2000s. He is a formal member of SDP Social Democratic Party (SDP), but does not have any active role in the party. Josip (34) is also involved in activism and he used to be an active member of extreme rightist HČSP [Croatian Pure Party of Rights].

The nation, the main category of commonality across all three narratives is perceived as the natural order of things. This naturalization, which constructs the nation as ahistorical, as something that has always been there, is explicitly expressed in the life narrative of Ivan (65), while it is present as an unquestioned assumption that is not explicitly expressed in Matija’s (32) and Josip’s (34) narratives. Responding to my request to elaborate further on how, in his view, nationalism and sexuality are related, Ivan presents his conception of nation:<sup>125</sup>

Katja: Can you please explain further how, in your view, nationalism operates in relation to the daily realities of the gay population.

Ivan: Certainly! First I would like to say that I perceive nationalism as an expression, as something that exists from time immemorial. I consider nationalism, it seems to me, I might be wrong, but I’m happy to perceive it in this way, as something, which is at the basis of my origin, my roots, as natio [Latin], which means to breed. And the consequence is that there are more of

<sup>125</sup> Parts of the analysis presented in the following paragraphs have appeared in Kahlina, K. (2011) “Nation, state and queers: Sexual identities in the interface between social and personal in contemporary Croatia” in Anna G. Jónasdóttir, Valerie Bryson and Kathleen B. Jones (eds) *Sexuality, Gender and Power: Intersectional and Transnational Perspectives*, New York: Routledge. pp. 30-44.

us who differ from each other. But why should we denounce this word, why should we denounce this argument and perceive it as something bad? This [nationhood] is something that every person is proud of, should be proud of.<sup>126</sup>

As I pointed out in Chapter 5, when it comes to discussing sexuality, Ivan leaves the ambiguity about the social or biological origins of his desire undecided. For him it is irrelevant how he came to desire men. What is important for him is to make sure that his feelings and sexual practices remain in secrecy to avoid disturbing the social order. However, when Ivan speaks about his national belonging, there is no room for ambiguity any more. For him nationness is a matter of birth, it is something that is inherited by being born into a particular nation hence membership in it is indisputable and unequivocal. Ivan justifies this view by referring to the Latin word *natio* and its meaning of breeding. By using Latin, widely considered the language of the educated, Ivan appeals to some additional authority in order to support his arguments. What is more, drawing on a language that has not been in use for centuries, Ivan's statement further implicates the modern notion of nation as some ancient truth, which associates the contemporary political formation with a naturally given fact that does not need further questioning.

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, the emergence of modern nationalism is closely connected with the industrialization and the rise of liberal democratic tendencies in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe (Giddens, 1987; Calhoun, 1997, 2007; Butler and Spivak, 2007). It was strengthened during the last decades of the twentieth century to the point that it represents one of the major ideologies of collective belonging in contemporary global capitalism. The notion of national sovereignty has been naturalized to the point that it is commonly conceived as the most "natural" political demand and organizational principle, thus reinforcing the concept of nation as one of the main categories of social division and the backbone of state formation. As I pointed out in *Section 6.1.*, the principle of national sovereignty was particularly complicated in the context of socialist multinational Yugoslavia. By simultaneously locating the capacity of self-determination in the constitutive nations and

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<sup>126</sup> Original: K: jel biste mogli mozda malo pojasniti nacin na koji funciona nacionalizam s obzirom na svakodnevne potrebe gay populacije.

I: Najprije bih želio kazati moje gledanje na nacionalizam kao izraz, kao nešto što (po)stoji od pamtiviljeka. Ja nacionalizmom shvaćam, čini mi se ili ja možda griješim ali ja sam sretan da ja to tako shvaćam, nešto po čemu se raspoznaje moj iskon, moje korijenje, ono nacio – po rođenju. I sad se događa nas više koji smo različiti. Čemu tu riječ servirati, čemu taj stav servirati i crno ga gledati. To je nešto što se ponosi svaka osoba, treba se ponositi.



federal states, the political elites in the 1970s created a source of constant ambiguity that paved the way for the violent conflicts of secession in the early 1990s.

The new political elites in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, in order to legitimize their fight for the national state of Croats within the already existing federal republican borders, conflated the territorially bounded government in the form of Socialist Republic of Croatia with Croats as its largest ethnic group, categorized as one of the Yugoslavia's constitutive nations (*narod*). In the context of the struggle for a Croatian nation-state, dominant nationalist discourses that found institutional support in the 1990 Constitution constructed the alleged continuity of "statehood" starting from the medieval feudal Croatian Kingdom, which was far from being based on the sovereignty of the people-nation.<sup>127</sup> Such nationalist logic of "invented traditions," to borrow from Hobsbawm (1992), explicitly drew on the discourses of breeding as a way of preserving the continuity and homogeneity of the nation.<sup>128</sup>

It is precisely this complex order of discourses of nationalism within which we can easily locate Ivan's position on a pre-historically existing nation. This order is intersected with the normative discourses of heterosexuality. As we saw in Chapter 2, the marginalization and exclusion of non-heterosexual people from the national community was precisely grounded in the logic that posits breeding as the basis of commonality. Once reproductive sexuality becomes closely linked with the transmission of the nation's essence, sexuality may come to be a subject of state policing practices with the highly influential Catholic Church playing a prominent role in defining "proper" sexual behavior. Establishing human reproduction as the only purpose of sexual intercourse, nationalist discourses and practices constructed all subjects who did not comply with the normative reproductive sexuality, from women who had an abortion to non-heterosexual people, as enemies of Croatian nation (Vuletić, 2008).

Hence, Ivan's view of belonging that is grounded in a shared lineage pertains to nationalist discourses that draw on heterosexism and homophobia in the process of constructing the nation as a self-evident ground of solidarity and belonging. At the same time, Ivan's view of belonging does not conform fully to the homogenizing nationalist logic. In particular, contrary to the logic of nation-as-procreation that supports the nationalist

<sup>127</sup> The first paragraph of the 1990 Constitution explicitly refers to the "*millennial* national independence and state viability of Croatian nation" and "historical right of Croatian nation on the full state sovereignty" (my emphasis; Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, *Narodne novine*, 56, December 22, 1990, last retrieved in November 2011 from: [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1990\\_12\\_56\\_1092.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1990_12_56_1092.html)). My translation.

<sup>128</sup> The construction of false continuity with a medieval kingdom was even present in popular culture. One of the most popular songs in the early 1990s was Dražen Žanko's "Od stoljeća sedmog" [From the seventh century] with the following refrain: "We are here from the ancient time everybody has to know/this is our land, this is where the Croats live" (© 1992 Croatia Records, Zagreb).

homogenizing practices through which differences among nationals are rendered insignificant, Ivan uses the same discourse to argue for diversity within the national community. His use of the logic of a shared lineage in a way that confronts the dominant meanings of a homogenous nation enables Ivan to (re)inscribe himself (back) into the nation, as a person classified as Croat(ian), while arguing for the legitimacy of his “difference.” However, the logic of diversity underpinning Ivan’s life narrative by no means represents a challenge to the hetero norm, nor to the exclusionary nationalizing practices. Albeit it opens up a space for diversity within the nation that is still grounded in progeny, such a model of belonging reinforces the idea of national community-as-lineage, and, indirectly, the normalizing role of heterosexuality in the re/production of nation. Thus, as far as belonging is concerned, the assimilationist strategy follows the exclusionary “us” vs. “them” logic that fortifies strong boundaries towards those who do not share the imagined origin.

This view of the nation as a central ground for solidarity and belonging based on the exclusionary dualistic logic is also present in the narratives of Matija (32) and Josip (34), the two activists who, as I pointed out in Chapter 5, by drawing on the notion of “normality,” explicitly argue for the integration of lesbians and gays into the Croatian nation. Here I would like to discuss in more details the specificities of the logic that underlies the view of the nation in their stories in order to account for different lines of argumentation that underpin the nationalist framework of solidarity and belonging in the context of an assimilationist strategy. Responding to my question to tell me more about his feelings and perceptions of Croatia’s separation from Yugoslavia, Matija starts with a more theoretical reflection on the distinction between nationalism and patriotism:

Katja: Nationalism is also part of my interest in this study, so do you maybe remember the period of the beginning of the 1990s, the time of [Croatia’s] independence, what were your feelings in relation to those changes, how did you perceive them then?

Matija: First I would like to say that theoretically I really think that patriotism is nothing retrograde, nothing backward, nothing anachronistic. I think that patriotism is a very positive emotion. [...] for me *homeland* is precisely this – this stone, this building, creeks, woods, sea, and rivers, thus something that is real and that’s what I like. [...] Thus patriotism ends with loving your country. When this love for your country is so big that it gets transformed into the hatred towards other countries, then this is called nationalism, xenophobia,

chauvinism, racism. [...] I identify myself as a nationless person because I don't have a sense for nationality. But I'm a Croatian patriot.<sup>129</sup>

The distinction between patriotism as a good and harmless “feeling” and nationalism as its ugly and pernicious variation to a great extent resembles the hierarchical binary that places the “civic” form of nationalism against and over its “ethnic” counterpart, which was discussed in details in Chapter 2. In particular, the positive view of “civic” nationalism is based on assumptions about its democratic, voluntaristic, and non-exclusionary character, while “ethnic” nationalism is depicted as tribal, backward, and exclusionary. Put differently, it has often been argued that “civic” nationalism reflects the positive political ideal of free choice to belong to a particular *political* community in contrast to the “ethnic” pre-political, involuntary belonging to a community based on common descent (Brubaker, 1999; Yack, 1999; Calhoun, 2007). Similarly, in the above excerpt patriotism is regarded as the ideal form of (national) belonging, the one that is based on positive feelings of attachment to the spatial materiality of a “real homeland” that rejects its symbolic, mythical content and generates respect for other countries. In her dualistic logic, Matija places allegedly non-exclusionary patriotic feelings in opposition to inherently pernicious nationalism, which is imbued with harmful exclusionary practices that often end with aggression towards other countries.

However, as I argued earlier both “civic” and “ethnic” forms of nationalism stem from a homogenizing “us” vs. “them” logic, which renders the hierarchy between them ideologically motivated (Brubaker, 1999, Yack, 1999). To be able to assess the transformative potential of the patriotic belonging that Matija invokes, first we have to determine whether there is something else in addition to spatial materiality that provides the basis for the community that Matija refers to as homeland (*domovina*) or country (*zemlja*). How does that additional aspect provide the grounds for the relative distinction between patriotism and nationalism? It is clear from the quote above that, according to this logic, patriotism allows for the possibility to be a Croatian patriot without necessarily being a Croat in the sense of an ethnic identity, or even Croatian, in the sense of a Croatian citizen. At first it seems that in

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<sup>129</sup> In the original: K: meni je i nacionalizam jedan od fokusa tako da me zanima da li se možeš prisjetiti početka 90-ih, samostalnosti, koji je bio tvoj osjećaj prema tome, kako si ti to tada doživljavao?  
M: ja ću prije svega reći ovo, dakle ja doista mislim teoretski, teorijski da domoljublje nije niša retrogradno, ništa nazadnjačko, ništa ono anakrono, dakle ja mislim da je domoljublje jedna vrlo pozitivna emocija. [...]za mene [je] domovina upravo to – ovaj kamen, ova zgrada, potoci, šume, more, rijeke, znači nešto što je realno, dakle nešto.. i to ja volim. Dakle domoljublje se zaustavlja na tome da ti voliš svoju zemlju. Kada to prelazi u to da ti toliko voliš svoju zemlju da mržiš drugu zemlju onda je to nacionalizam, ksenofobija, šovinizam, rasizam.[...] Ja se izjašnjavam kao nacionalno neopredijeljena osoba jer nemam, ja nemam osjećaj za nacionalnost. Ali sam hrvatski domoljub.

Matija's narrative the state that constitutes the space of belonging is conceived beyond the exclusionary notion of nation, which is further explicated in the rejection of nation as a meaningful category for self-identification and belonging. However, a few moments later in the narrative, Matija directly links state formation with the ethnic principle and concludes that all separatist movements worldwide should result in the formation of a (nation-)state. As examples of such separatism he mentions Kosovo, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Corsica, Basque Country, Catalonia, Scotland, Wales, Flanders, and especially stresses the "thirty million Kurdish people who do not have their own state."

Thus, the notion of patriotism invoked in Matija's narrative eventually reinforces the logic of a nation-state that is based on the exclusionary ethnic/national sameness. For Matija, patriotism plays an important role in anti-imperialist struggles that he defines as "alter-globalism" (*alterglobalizacija*). However, the multiple global inequalities that are re/produced by the Anglo-American cultural, political, economic, and military domination are articulated mostly as a problem of linguistic and cultural diversity in his narrative: "Thus for me patriotism represents an imperative in preserving the culture, history, and heritage of a nation, which has been endangered by the domination of English language and Anglo-American culture."<sup>130</sup> At the same time, the notion of Croatian (national) culture that is said to be in need of protection against the "Anglo-American global domination" is framed in essentializing, anachronistic terms. It is described as a monolithic "millennial, or centurial, culture of one nation," thus exposing the nationalist underpinning of patriotism. In my view, the kind of cultural patriotism that Matija proposes at this point in his life-narrative is based on positive appeals to struggles against Anglo-American neo-imperialism. However, by being grounded in the homogenizing, anachronistic notion of national culture, the struggle against global inequalities reinforces the exclusionary nationalist logic of solidarity and belonging, while simultaneously reducing the struggle to the sphere of culture.

Through the notion of patriotism, community and belonging are conceptualized in terms of a spatial materiality that relies on the category of ethnicity/nation in its exclusionary non-transformed form as its primary organizing principle. Based on the essentialist view of culture, patriotism brings forth the idea of a multiplicity of monolithic "millennial" national cultures. Instead of perceiving of any given culture as a contradictory and dynamic field of interaction that is forged both within and outside of the existing nation-state borders this discourse of patriotism results in the form of multiculturalism that assumes strict boundaries

<sup>130</sup> In the original: Dakle domoljublje je sada za mene imperativ naprosto da se obrani kultura, povijest, baština jednog naroda koja je u velikoj opasnosti od dominantnog engleskog jezika i anglo-američke kulture.

between different “cultures.” What is at stake in this articulation of multiculturalism is the hierarchical distinction between the dominant “majority” culture and marginal(ized) “minority” culture(s) (Fortier, 2007). This discourse of multiculturalism was explicitly invoked in the process of self-narration during my second meeting with Matija:

(Matija): The problem is that a lot of my fellow activists get irritated when I speak about sexual and gender minorities. [...] For me this is a sign of phobia, a fear of being a few. And it’s also a sign of a minority complex. What is wrong with being a minority? If we speak about ethnic minorities, is a person less worthy because he is a Serb in Croatia or Italian, for example? Aren’t they also citizens of this society? But it is the matter of fact that the person is a Serb and there is a smaller number of Serbs than Croats in this country, and thus they are minority. I don’t see anything problematic in that.<sup>131</sup>

The distinction between “majority” and “minority” in Matija’s self-narrative is constructed on the grounds of the quantity of members of particular ethnic, national, or sexual groups in the particular national context, naturalizing ethnic and national differences as given, closed, indivisible, and unified. As recent examples of multiculturalist tendencies in the UK for example show, such a logic that conceives of ethnic/national groups as separate homogenized entities often fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity within as well as the power relations among these historically produced groups (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Fortier, 2007). The view of a “minority” that is based on numbers significantly differs from the way in which the notion of “minority” is conceptualized from the perspective of postpositivist realism. As Alcoff and Mohanty (2006) particularly emphasize, the concept of “minority” is one of the key terms in postpositivist realist theory and the politics of identity, which primarily refers to the existing power relation(s) that construct and position groups differently on the power scale. Thus, instead of referring to numbers, it signifies the non-hegemonic position that is formed on the grounds of its unequal relation to the dominant group (Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006, p. 7-8). Throughout this research I use the term “sexual minorities” precisely in such power-focused sense in order to stress the power relations through which unequal social positions when it

<sup>131</sup> In the original: Problem je baš u tome, mnoge iritira kad ja govorim o seksualnim i rodnim manjinama. [...] Dakle to je po meni čisto psihološki gledano je fobija, jedan strah od toga da sam u manjini. I kompleks manje vrijednosti. Što je loše u tome biti manjina? Ako govorimo o nacionalnim manjinama, da li je, je li osoba manje vrijedna zato što je Srbin u Hrvatskoj ili Talijan na primjer ili je on građanin ovog društva. Ali činjenica je da je on Srbin a da Srba ima manje nego Hrvata u ovoj zemlji prema tome je manjina. U tome ja ne vidim ništa loše.

comes to sexuality and citizenship are re/produced, as well as to account for struggles towards social transformation. However, by putting an emphasis on the quantity without attending to the power relations among the groups, the concepts of “minority” and “majority” in Matija’s self-narration are based on the exclusionary homogenizing logic that confirms the status quo through an indirect appeals to mere toleration. Instead of taking accountability for differences, multicultural liberal pluralism conceives the unequally positioned groups as equal players in the contested field of democracy. Consequently, such logic entails limited transformatory potential in that it takes the minority position not as a starting point, but as its political goal, leaving the practices of marginalization almost intact.

In addition to securing the dominant position of some social groups, the nationalist logic naturalizes and reifies group boundaries and prevents the formation of meaningful alliances beyond and across the groups. This effect is particularly visible in the self-identification process of Josip (34), who is a gay activist and a former member of the extreme right-wing HČSP (Croatian Pure Party of Rights). This party, in addition to their explicitly neo-fascist nationalist politics, acted as the main organizer of the so-called “anti-gay protests” against the Zagreb Pride March in 2008, 2009, and 2010, and against the Split Pride March in 2011. The central assumption that underlies Josip’s narrative concerns the equation of the individual and the nation when it comes to rights. Although this equation re-appears in different parts of the interview, it is most explicitly articulated in the argument that “every nation has the right to freedom in the same way as a human being,” whereby the modern concept of the nation is universalized in the same way as the notion of the human in modern liberal thought. In this way, the nation as a particular historically produced form of social division is taken out of the context of its production and constructed as a natural order of things, a universal formation with the associated “human rights.” Such naturalization of the nation and its comparison with the individual is in line with modern nationalist discourses that construct both the individual and the nation as unified, complete, closed, and indivisible (Calhoun, 1997). Resulting from this logic, a person without a nation becomes almost like an error, perceived as if lacking a “proper self” (ibid., p. 46). Simultaneously, the naturalization and personification of the nation supports the construction of the nation as the primary framework for solidarity, making trans- and inter- national alliances almost unimaginable and a threat to the imagined national unity.

The rejection of solidarities beyond the borders of the nation is especially visible in Josip’s critique of the 2006 Zagreb Pride, commonly called the *Internacionala Pride* (Internationale Pride). The Zagreb Pride is also known as the first “Eastern European Pride”

since it was organized by the Zagreb Pride Organizing Committee in co-operation with LGBTIQ groups and activists from Yugoslav successor states as well as Albania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The idea was to express solidarity with activists and members of the collective in the countries where Pride events are banned or exposed to severe violent attacks. At the same time, the transnational organization was also meant to point to the interconnectedness of homophobia with other forms of discrimination in the context of capitalist patriarchy, thus calling for wider alliances (Brumen, 2006).<sup>132</sup> The critique emerges in the final part of Josip's answer to my question about his experiences with verbal and/or physical violence. Instead of sharing his lived experiences of violence when participating in the march, Josip turns his attention to the feeling of shame that he felt in relation to the Internacionala Pride:

(Josip): What you have said earlier, that they [anti-pride protestors] perceive homosexuals as Serbs, like ... well, homosexuals themselves [invoke these images] with that Pride they organized, Pride Internationale. And they [organizers] were writing [the name] half in the Cyrillic and half in the Latin letters, with [playing] the anthem *Down with coercion and injustice*. What can I say to them [organizers]? I was ashamed. [...] That's not who we are, that is the abuse of an ideal – ideal of freedom, human rights, [rights of] sexual and gender minorities.<sup>133</sup>

Voicing his discontent with the 2006 Pride's political agenda, Josip emphasizes several particular elements: the name of the event for its reference to the international workers movement (Internationale), the presence of Cyrillic script in the promotional materials, and the popular anti-capitalist, anti-fascist song associated with the Partisan movement in WW2.<sup>134</sup> Although he does not explicitly state so, we can speculate that Josip associates these

<sup>132</sup> See also "Invitation to participate in the first Eastern European Pride in Zagreb" available at Zagreb Pride's webpage: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070210033724/http://www.zagreb-pride.net/oprajueng.htm>, last retrieved in May, 2012.

<sup>133</sup> In the original: A ono što si isto bila rekla ne znam da gledaju homoseksualce ko Srbe ko ove ko one pa to i sami homoseksualci s onim Prajdom kad su organizirali Prajd Internacionalu i pisali pola ćirilicom pola latinicom sa himnom *Padaj silo i nepravdo*. A šta bih njima rekao, mene je bilo sram. [...] To nismo mi, to je zloupotreba jednog ideala – ideala slobode, ljudskih prava, seksualnih i rodnihi manjina.

<sup>134</sup> The song *Down with coercion and injustice* ("Padaj silo i nepravdo") originated during the first half of the twentieth century in Dalmatia, on the island of Hvar which is part of the same region where Josip was born and lived. The lyrics of the song itself do not explicitly refer to socialist Yugoslavia, since it was established after the composition of the song. However, in so far as it was written and performed mostly by the members of Communist Party from Hvar and by the members of lower social classes sympathizing with the cause, the

elements with the former undemocratic Yugoslav regime and thus a political formation that, in spite of its alleged multiculturalism, prioritized Serbian interests and suppressed the freedom of the constitutive nations. In several places in his narrative Josip even equates the undemocratic Yugo-socialism with Nazism and Fascism. Thus, in line with the dominant nationalist rhetoric and politics in contemporary Croatia, multicultural socialist Yugoslavia, conflated with historically and politically non-specified “Serbia,” represent the main “constitutive other” against which the new Croat(ian) national self is constructed in Josip’s narrative. What influences Josip’s critique of solidarity beyond the national borders and among different disadvantaged groups is the dominant nationalist perception of internationalism and inter-group solidarity as an articulation of Yugo-communist and non-Croatian values. What is more, the construction of “we” in dominant nationalist terms that articulates the category of (Croatian) nation and/or national sexual minorities as a homogenized group is put forward by homonationalist discourses (Puar, 2007). Although he argues against one exclusionary normative framework of belonging, Josip’s narrative ends up drawing on another through appeals to the liberal values of individual freedom and human rights that are grounded in yet another particular form of universalizing discourse.

The analysis of the quotes from Ivan, Matija, and Josip’s narratives show different ways in which the contemporary Croatian nation-state, whose territory corresponds with that of the former Yugoslav Socialist Republic of Croatia, is constructed as a universal category, as always already there, providing the unquestioned basis of solidarity and belonging in the life-narratives of people who are marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. Such naturalization is further supported by the assumption that we are first and foremost national beings. The nation is conceived as a universal category of social division and the ultimate marker of difference, which constructs other forms of difference as secondary and less relevant. In line with the homogenizing nationalist logic, the narratives construct solidarity and belonging on the basis of an exclusionary “us” vs. “them” logic, while closing off the possibility of alliances that exceed the categorical boundaries within and beyond the borders of the nation. The desire to be assimilated, even if in different ways, leaves the existing power relations intact through appeals to the homogenized nation as the main framework of

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song became popular during WW2 among the members of the partisan movement from Hvar, and then became a popular revolutionary song of the People’s Liberation War against the Nazi occupation (Anić, 1977). Its lyrics refer to class inequalities, sending a call for rebellion against the exploitation of workers and peasants. It explicitly mentions Matij Ivanić, a well-know leader of the four-year long rebellion against the feudal inequalities taking place on Hvar at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The genealogy of the song *Down with coercion and injustice* constructs the values of freedom and social equality as universal ideals for the dispossessed.



solidarity and belonging. In the next section therefore I will analyze the political potential of the queer strategy that rejects altogether the nation as a category of self-identification.

## 6.4. Queering the nation

As we saw in the Chapter 5, narratives from the queer perspective conceive of self-identification as a violent act inevitably resulting in exclusions and unproductive, even harmful, separatism. Ana (28), a self-identified woman-loving-woman and Marko (29), a male born trans person, who both associate themselves with activism, argue for a flexible conceptualization of sexuality beyond identity categories. Based on the assumption of the inherent exclusionary character of “sexual identity,” Marko explicitly rejects politics that is centered on particular identities. In his view, such politics prevents the formation of wider alliances among differently positioned subjects, and is therefore inadequate for challenging the minoritizing assimilationist logic that, in their understanding, dominates the Croatian activist scene. In line with their view that sexual identities are exclusionary, there is a strong anti-nationalist agenda present in these two narratives.

Marko tells a story about a man who lived in the former Yugoslavia, in Sarajevo, and who refused to take a “national” side after the war broke out, which eventually cost him a job. He sees this man as a figure of a “man without religion and nation” that represents an ideal that, although being almost unimaginable now, existed as a reality in the not so distant past. Depicting the “man without nation” as a positive example of resistance to the exclusionary nationalization practices from the beginning of the 1990s, Marko argues against the nation as the primary framework of identification and belonging. In a context where, in the words of Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulić, “there is nothing else to wear” apart from the tight and itching national cloths, “where no one is allowed not to be a Croat,” the rejection of the nation as the framework of self-identification and belonging certainly carries a great transformatory potential, especially when it comes from a person who is himself targeted by the homogenizing heterosexist practices of nationalism (cited in Brubaker, 1996, p. 20). However, there is a danger that the rejection of the nation as identity is motivated from within a nostalgic position, which may leave the protester’s legal status and rights intact, and result in some de-contextualized protest in the name of an idealized flexibility blind to different positionalities. In order to avoid potential exclusions, it is extremely important not to lose sight of one’s own privileged position, namely the fact that Marko is already positioned as a member of the national majority when refusing to accept it. The acknowledgment of one’s

differences is a prerequisite for building non-exclusionary alliances, including the understanding that the very capacity to reject particular identities is dependent upon one's position in the social hierarchies. Thus, for some, especially those who experience multiple forms of discrimination, identities, even ethnic/national one, may have empowering potential (Alcoff and Mohanty, 2006). The unconditioned rejection of identification may easily end up in a form of liberal cosmopolitanism that is blind to its own relative privileges in the social and economic inequalities produced by globalization (Calhoun, 2007).

Thus, the nation is rejected and openly criticized as a dominant form of solidarity and belonging from the perspective of queer strategy. The main principle that underpins the construction of "we" in queer stories is closely linked with the activist milieu that is placed either in the city of Zagreb in Marko's narrative, or, in Ana's case, in the context of Croatia. One of the central recurring motifs in Ana's narrative is the feeling of non-acceptance that determines her relationship with Croatian society and which gives her the impulse for activist engagements. Speaking about her experiences as a non-heterosexual woman Ana explains her involvement with activism in the following way:

(Ana): [...] actually now I start to perceive how society actually perceives me. [...] And now I'm starting to have problems with that, I don't feel accepted, I feel that resistance, I would like to change certain things and I'm doing that with activist engagements.<sup>135</sup>

Marko's motivation for involvement in activism is articulated in response to my question that invites him to assess changes in the Croatian's government's minority politics in the past decade. He identifies himself with the activist community comprising of diverse groups including anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, feminist, lesbian, gay, and queer, of which he is an active participant in some. What brings these groups together is the ongoing fight against existing social inequalities:

[...] we can never sit down and say hah, there, we made it, now we can, I don't know, retire. And that is actually very bad, because we cannot take longer pause and get some rest.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> In the original: [...] sad ustvari počinjem doživljavati kako mene društvo ustvari doživljava [...] I sad već lagano imam problema s time, ono, ne osjećam se prihvaćeno, osjećam taj revolt, htjela bih promijeniti neke stvari i to rješavam time što se bavim aktivizmom.

<sup>136</sup> In the original: [...] tako da nikad ne možemo ono sjest i reć hah evo uspjeli smo, sad možemo ne znam u mirovinu. I to je ono što je zapravo grozno, jer si ne možemo uzeti dužu pauzu da ono odahnemo.

It is a shared experience of struggle against hegemonic power that is seen as the grounds for building alliances, which is to be constantly rebuilt in accordance with the changing scene. This is a potential break with the exclusionary logic underpinning the dominant meanings of solidarities on the grounds of homogenizing binaries. However, the logic of belonging in Marko's narrative is not completely deprived of the elements of othering. Thus, while discussing the achievements of activist engagement in these ongoing fights, Marko expresses his view saying that "rights have improved, *until the mountaineers flow into the city.*"<sup>137</sup> Marko's view of Zagreb as an "open," "tolerant," and "European" city is contrasted by the non-urban rural "other" epitomized in the figure of the "mountaineer" (*gorštak*) that represents a threat to the hardly achieved rights of sexual citizenship. This is a textual slippage that points in the direction of exclusionary stigmatization

As a direct negative effect of this logic of harmful homogenization, the hierarchial binary between urban and rural, intersecting with the European/non-European binary, stands in the way of the contingent logic of queer coalition building. As Jansen (2005) in his study of antinationalism in Zagreb and Belgrade points out that the urban/rural dichotomy was quite common in antinationalist discourses in Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s, exposing their Orientalist logic. In addition to the urban/rural distinction, this discourse of Orientalism relies on a whole set of specific binaries such as modern/backward, civilized/primitive, and rational/irrational (*ibid.*). Especially appealing in the post-Yugoslav context was a hierarchical distinction between urban natives as bearers of local virtues and rural newcomers as intruders that represent a threat to cultural achievements (*ibid.*). A similar concern is reflected in Marko's narrative. These elements of exclusionary Orientalism that construct hierarchical binary oppositions between tolerant urban population and wild, intolerant rural newcomers prevent the logic of non-nationalist belonging in Marko's story to move beyond the uncritical homogenization of differences.

There are elements of this Orientalist logic in Ana's story as well. However, in her case it is a different variety of the ideology of political geography. Instead of the "internal" division of the country into the urban/rural spaces, we find discourses of "Balkanism" (Todorova, 1997; Bjelić and Savić, 2002) in her narrative. These discourses depict the Balkans as a region of unruliness, aggressive ethnic nationalism, and disorder, implicating the

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<sup>137</sup> In the original: Ali mislim da su se ono prava poboljšala osim što se ono kad se gorštaci sliju u grad, mislim na neke evente tipa Thompsonov koncert, pa onda rade sranja.

values of orderly and civilized associated with “(Western) Europe.” When I asked Ana about her memories of the early 1990s and Croatia’s independence, she critically reflected upon the re/production of extreme nationalism by governmental structures. She expresses her astonishment at the fact that a war crimes suspect can act as Member of Parliament. It is in this context that she legitimizes her concern through reference to the “Balkans:”

(Ana): I mean, that is horrible, we had a man who was accused, I mean in the process of a trial, for war crimes, sitting in the Parliament. *This can happen only in the Balkans!* And no, I don’t think this will change, I think it will continue, I think it will only get worse.<sup>138</sup>

The case of the war criminal as an MP that Ana refers to is embedded in several failures of the democratization process. She singles out the moral, procedural, and/or legal failures and the government-supported nationalism, which are all seen as something that inherently pertains to the “Balkans” where Croatia is assumed to belong and the listener is expected to know that. The logic of Ana’s narrative thus falls into trap of Balkanism that secures the Western Europe/Balkans hierarchy, setting up a limit to her queer perception of contingent group formation.

Inspired by Said’s conceptualization of “Orientalism” Maria Todorova (1997) develops the notion of “Balkanism” that posits the Balkans “as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the “European” and the “West” has been constructed” (p. 188). Albeit deploying the similar Orientalist logic of homogenized binary hierarchies between West and East as a central discursive and political practice through which the Western (European) self is constituted as superior, Balkanism includes new meanings such as “cruelty, boorishness, instability, and unpredictability” emerging in relation to the Southeastern European region (ibid., p. 119). The Balkanist discourses have (re)gained much prominence in the West since the beginning of the 1990s in relation to wars in the former Yugoslavia and the EU enlargement process in the Southeastern European region. As I argued earlier, the EU integration process in the former Yugoslavia incorporated the Balkanist discourse as a means of reinforcing the alleged moral and political superiority of the Western EU members, thus securing their leading role in setting up and

<sup>138</sup> In the original: Mislim pa to je strašno, pa nama je u Saboru sjedio čovjek opušten, mislim u procesu tužbe za ratni zločin. Pa to, ono, to može bit samo na Balkanu! I ne, ne mislim da će se to promijeniti, mislim da će se to nastaviti, mislim da će biti sve gore i gore.

defining the “requirements” for the successful completion of negotiations. The implementation of the “rule of law” that is supposed to mirror the existing practices in the Western member states and that the accessing countries of Southeast Europe supposedly lack represents one of the central features in the EU conditionality. Thus, as Rastko Močnik (2002) argues, by setting up a distinction between “civilized Europe” and “unruly Balkans”, Balkanism, ironically, functions as a mobilizing force in the struggle for EU membership (Močnik, 2002).

We can regard Balkanism as a framework of intelligibility that is re/produced not only in the center of power, that is, in the EU, but represents the common sense knowledge in the “Balkans” as well (Močnik, 2002). By becoming the dominant framework through which the “Balkans” see themselves, the logic of Balkanization functions as an effective means of subjectification that “finally transforms “the Orient” into the *object* of domination” (Močnik, p. 95, emphasis in the original). Western domination cuts across the economic, social, and political fields bringing together the “Western European center” and the “Balkans” in one totality based on the structural inequality between these interconnected units (ibid., p. 79-80). Finally, as Močnik emphasizes, accepting the Western model of neo-liberal democracy as an ideal for the aspiring countries, the Balkanist logic brought about the destruction of “the strong egalitarian ideology of social solidarity” that had been especially solid in the former Yugoslavia and could be a potentially useful legacy to mobilize for new political projects (p. 86).

It is possible to conclude that while rejecting the nation as a category of identification that is regarded as part of harmful classification practices, the queer logic of belonging in contemporary Croatia does not escape the dominant exclusionary group relations. Although the rejection of nationalist solidarities and belonging opens up a space for the construction of different modes of belonging beyond the homogenizing practices, the imagined solidarities in the queer narratives, due to the lack of (self)reflexivity and accountability for differences, remain caught either within the elitist liberal discourse of “urbanization” or in the Orientalist, Balkanist logic.

However, the notion of “the Balkans” can also be constitutive of a strategy of solidarity and belonging in a favorable way. In the next section I will analyze and assess the transformative political potential of a positive re-appropriation of the category of “the Balkans” that underpins the politics of solidarity and belonging present in the stories of two self-identified lesbians in their mid-twenties, Gordana and Maja. The re-appropriation takes place from within the logic of strategic positioning.

## 6.5. Strategic positioning: Towards Yugo-regionalism

In Chapter 5 I pointed out how the critical positioning that characterizes the process of self-identification in Gordana's (26) and Maja's (26) life stories significantly departs from the de-contextualized anti-normality invoked in queer narratives on the one hand, and the normalization and privatization of sexuality present in assimilationist stories on the other. There is another important aspect that radically differentiates the strategy of self-identification in these two life stories from all the other self-narratives I collected, and which is directly related to the politics of belonging – it is the articulation of new regionalism, Yugo-regionalism, evoked from within the logic of strategic positioning. The logic of strategic positioning rejects the category of the nation as a meaningful ground for solidarity and positively re-claims the geo-political concept of “the Balkans” as a substitutive term for “the region of former Yugoslavia” thus articulating a trans-national space of productive belonging and solidarity. Before I look at the main assumptions and arguments that Yugo-regionalism is premised upon, let me first shortly explain my decision to use the term *Yugo-region(alism)* for this particular form of belonging to the geo-political space of former Yugoslavia.

### 6.5.1. *Yugo-regionalism: In favor of the concept*

The politics of belonging put forward in Gordana and Maja's self-narration invokes the notion of “the Balkans” which, in their stories, is actually reduced to the territory of former Yugoslavia. It may be argued that, by expressing their belonging to the socio-cultural space of the former Yugoslav Federation, Gordana and Maja come close to the idea of Yugoslavism that has dominated this region during the past century. Although, as Djokić (2003) rightly points out, the concept of Yugoslavism has shifted in meaning among different social groups during its almost century long history, it has, nevertheless, always been closely related to pan-Yugoslav, or simply Yugoslav, nationalism and to the idea of bringing together people of different ethnicities in the multi-ethnic south-Slavic state (Bulatović, 2003; see also contributions in Djokić, 2003 and Djokić and Ker-Lindsay, 2011).<sup>139</sup>

However, I feel reluctant to identify Gordana and Maja's sense of belonging as an instance of Yugoslavism for several important reasons. First, the political project of Yugoslavism is heavily imbued with different ideological assumptions underpinning its

<sup>139</sup> Even though from its early conceptions the notion of Yugoslavism referred to the unity of South Slavs (in Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian the word for south is *jug*), Bulgarians, another South Slavic ethnic group, have never been part of the Yugoslavist movements. The discourse of Yugoslavism has been of formative power in the territories of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia (see the contributions in Djokić, 2003 and Djokić and Ker-Lindsay, 2011).

practical enactments in the past century.<sup>140</sup> Second, and related to the first point, the particular conceptions and interpretations of Yugoslavism are inextricably linked with the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s with which the two women disassociate themselves. Third, there is a lot of ambiguity about belonging in Maja and Gordana's narratives, and although the elements of Yugoslavism are undoubtedly present, their stories also reveal a departure from the ideas of Yugoslavism(s). Finally, grounding their sense of belonging in a strong anti-imperialist sentiment, the logic of Gordana and Maja's self-identification comes close to what Spivak calls "critical regionalism" (Butler and Spivak 2007; Spivak, 2008). Therefore, in order to emphasize the ambiguity in their narratives and their divergence from the contested ideas of Yugoslavism, I decided to refer to the logic of belonging in these two narratives as Yugo-regionalism.

### 6.5.2. *Language and "mentality" as markers of both commonality and difference*

Let me first discuss the main logic underpinning the politics of belonging expressed in Maja and Gordana's stories by presenting an excerpt from Maja's self-narrative that brings to light some of the most important elements of her Yugo-regionalist identification and belonging. After talking about her experiences of lesbian-ness, coming out, and activist involvements, I asked Maja to tell me more about her sense of belonging to the (national) social environment she lives in.

(Katja): I am also interested in learning more about the sense of national belonging, about how you feel living in a particular social environment, how you identify with this environment – do you remember the time when Croatia became an independent state and all the euphoria created around that? How did you feel back then?

(Maja): Yes, yes, I remember it well because I hated what was going on from the very start, I didn't understand why, and I simply liked the Yugoslav flag more (laugh) [...] I don't know, I hated it at that time. Then, of course, when the war started, some kind of awareness about some national belonging arose. Until then I didn't think about it at all, who and what am I. Only then I started to realize, aha, we are Croats and these are Slovenes, these are Bosniaks, these

<sup>140</sup> For example, Yugoslavism was the central ideological project of the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia and, at that time, it was closely related to Serbian hegemony within the first formation of Yugoslavia (Bulatović, 2003).

are Serbs.<sup>141</sup> And in the time of the war, of course, we were all... I mean, the way it was presented to us what was going on, it was unavoidable that I, in a way, sort of start to like my country. But this lasted only for a while, and I actually still love Yugoslavia. Because, I don't, I often go to Serbia, and Slovenia, but especially Serbia. I mean, these are all the same people, we speak the same fucking language. I mean, we have different mentalities, but this [difference] is similar to the differences between Slavonians and Dalmatians, or Istrians. I feel very sad for what has happened.<sup>142</sup>

This excerpt from Maja's self-narrative reveals a considerable degree of self-reflexivity that is visible in the way Maja relates the changes in her self-perception to the changing socio-political context and her own life practices. What makes her logic of belonging particularly interesting is the explicit reference to the former Yugoslavia, which, in the context of contemporary Croatia, whose recent nation-state building process heavily relies on the stigmatization of former Yugoslav federation, represents a radical break with the dominant state discourses.<sup>143</sup> What is more, the construction of her belonging to the former Yugoslav Federation through reference to it as her place of *birth*, Maja's politics of belonging

<sup>141</sup> The terms *Hrvati*, *Srbi*, *Slovenci*, and even *Bosanci* in Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian language are almost exclusively used for denoting people of Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, and Bosniak ethnicities regardless their actual citizenship. Hence, in order to emphasize the ethnic dimension of these terms, I translate them as "Croats" "Serbs," "Slovenes," and "Bosniaks" while using the terms "Croatian," "Serbian," "Slovenian," and "Bosnian" when referring to inhabitants and citizens of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina regardless of their ethnic affiliations.

<sup>142</sup> In the original: K: S obzirom da mene osim seksualnosti zanima i nacionalna pripadnost, odnosno osjećaj života u određenoj sredini i identificiranje s tom sredinom, pa me zanima sjećas li se onih trenutaka kad je Hrvatska postala nezavisna, pa onda te euforije u 90-im i kakav je tvoj osjećaj svega toga bio tada

M: da, da točno se sjećam, ja se baš sjećam jer sam u pravilu mrzila to što se desava od samoga početka upravo nisam kužila zašto, jednostavno mi se više sviđala jugoslavenska zastava (smijeh) [...]Ne znam, ja sam tada to mrzila, onda sam naravno kad je počeo rat da mi se javila nekakva svijest o nekakvoj nacionalnoj pripadnosti, do tada nisam uopće o tome razmišljala, ono šta sam ja, šta, tek tada sam pocela shvaćati aha ono mi smo Hrvati a ovo su Slovenci, ovo su Bosanci, ovo su Srbi, ne znam uopće nisam razmišljala o tome. I ono dok je bio rat, naravno kako smo bili ono svi jako.. ono.. mislim bilo nam je predstavljeno ono što se dešava.. neminovno je bilo da ja ono na neki način počnem kao volit svoju zemlju. Al to je ono trajalo neko vrijeme, u pravilu sad i dalje ono volim Jugoslaviju jer šta ja znam dosta idem tako i u Srbiju i u Sloveniju.. a pogotovo u Srbiju. Mislim, to je sve isti narod ono, govorimo jebeni isti jezik ono, imamo totalno..mislim jesmo mi po mentalitetu različiti ali to je isto ko da uspoređuješ ne znam Slavonce i Dalmatince isto su različiti, ili Istrane ono. I onda mi je jako tužno što se desilo.

<sup>143</sup> The stigmatization of Yugoslavia continues to be present in the Croatian political imaginary even twenty years after the break up of the Federal State and fifteen years after the war ended. Recent examples include the 2011 election campaign in which the anti-Yugoslav rhetoric was deployed by right-wing party leaders, including the former leader of HDZ Jadranka Kosor who was acting as a prime minister during the campaign. See for example the article in *Večernji list* [Evening Paper] Šarić, F. (2011, October 12). Kosor u Zadru: Neki nas mrze jer smo im unistili san o Jugoslaviji [Kosor (stated) in Zadar: Some people hate us because we have ruined their dream about Yugoslavia]. <http://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/kosor-zadru-neki-nas-mrze-jer-smo-im-unistili-san-jugoslaviji-clanak-335730>, last retrieved in May 2012.



also troubles the nationalist logic based on the essentializing link between the people-as-nation and the state as territorially bounded government legitimized in the concept of nation as “breeding.” One of the factors facilitating this double disruption in Maja’s narrative may be that, albeit in terms of citizenship she is recognized as member of the Croatian nation, Maja comes from a Croatian-Slovenian so-called “mixed marriage.” Popularly called “mixed marriages,” (*miješani brakovi*) marriages between the members of different nations (*narodi*) were common practice in the former Yugoslavia. However, starting with the nationalizing process in the beginning of the 1990s, “mixed marriages” between members of the Croatian and Serbian nations, together with the children of such families, were perceived as a direct threat to the Croatian nation and this fear came to be articulated as an explicit identity category of stigmatization (Jansen, 2005). Although the stigmatization of Slovenia and Slovenes did not constitute part of this nationalist discourse, it is possible to see how it resonates in Maja’s account of her relationships with her relatives in Slovenia, a factor that influences the politics of belonging in her narrative.

In addition to the “mixed family” background, there are at least three more factors that may underpin Yugo-regional belonging in the excerpt above. These factors include a common language, which is a potential cultural resource that can facilitate communication among the people of former Yugoslavia. The second factor is the sense of belonging developed in Maja’s early childhood before the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the third is her frequent movements within what used to be the space of Yugoslavia. It is interesting to note that Maja’s regular travel to Serbia is mostly motivated by her activist engagements, which include intensive cooperation among activists throughout former Yugoslavia. I will get back to the issue of the regionalization of activism later. First I would like to discuss Maja’s argument about a common language that, according to her, represents one of the most important unifying factors. Given the centrality of claims about the specificity of the Croatian national language and its distinctiveness from the Serbian language in the context of nation-building, which was accompanied by a process of “purifying” the national language in the name of the “standard language,” I find her angry note on the commonality of the Serb and Croat languages (“speak the same fucking language”), and the subsequent implication of seeing them as a shared “Yugoslav” language, of particular importance for assessing the transformative character of the politics of belonging in Maja’s narrative.

In *Imagining the Balkans* Maria Todorova (1997) argues that in the context of nineteenth century nationalist movements in the Balkans, language and religion were deployed as important markers of difference, playing a key role in legitimizing the demands

for national sovereignty and nation-state formation in the name of the one nation, one language ideology. However, the argument about the centrality of language as a distinguishing symbol of alleged ethnic/national specificity in the Balkans inevitably gets complicated when it comes to the idea of Yugoslavism that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalist movement in Croatia. It explicitly relied on the argument of a common language of south Slavs (Korunić, 1989). In other words, in the case of former Yugoslavia, shared language was always a strong argument in favor of the inter-ethnic/national connectedness. However, it was highly contentious for a supportive argument in that it could easily expose that language and culture, against the logic of nationalism, do not coincide (Barát, forthcoming). This contested relationship of language and culture may also explain the decisive role of religion as a key marker of difference when it comes to ethnicity/nation-ness in Yugoslavia. Thus, Croatian nationalist intellectual and political elites in the 1990s argued for a distinctive Croatian national identity as the legitimizing ground for separation from Yugoslavia by “proving” the uniqueness of Croatian language and its distinctiveness from Bosnian and Serbian languages (Jansen, 2005; Kordić, 2010).<sup>144</sup>

It is important to note that from the perspective of the international linguistic community, there is very little doubt that what we nowadays call Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, and recently, Montenegrin are one and the same language (Kordić, 2010). One of the main arguments about a common Croatian/Bosnian/Montenegrin/Serbian language is that the level of understanding among the people who apparently speak four different languages is just a little less than one hundred percent (ibid.).

On the one hand, by emphasizing that the linguistic distance among the people of former Yugoslavia is non-existent, the logic of belonging in Maja’s self-narration obviously challenges the exclusionary nationalizing practices that include the construction of a Croatian national language on the grounds of its distinctiveness from other “Yugoslav” languages. On the other hand, by using the argument about a shared language to establish the ground for belonging to a socio-cultural space of former Yugoslavia, Maja actually employs a principle that is very similar to nationalistic claims about language as a marker of difference from others and homogeneity within the boundaries of the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991). The marginalizing effect of the logic that relies on a common “Yugoslav” language is even more obvious if we take into account that the claims about a common South-Slavic

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<sup>144</sup> One of the most telling evidences that supports this argument can be found in the publication called “Dictionary of Differences between Serbian and Croatian Languages” (*Razlikovni rječnik srpskog i hrvatskog jezika*) by V. Brodnjak that has been published in 1993.

language are based on similarities among what is known today as Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian languages at the expense of other languages spoken by Yugoslav's constitutive nations (Slovenian, Macedonian) and non-constitutive minorities (Albanian, Hungarian, Italian, Romany, etc.). Hence, the practice of establishing Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian language as the "official language" in socialist Yugoslavia can be regarded as a hegemonic practice that marginalized not only people of non-South Slavic backgrounds, but also Yugoslavia's constitutive nationalities, namely Slovenes and Macedonians. By relying on the assumption of a "common language" while failing to acknowledge the inequalities that are implied by this assumption, the logic of Yugo-regional belonging in Maja's narrative reifies the hierarchies produced through the language policy in former Yugoslavia.

The binary logic of categorization that is grounded in the marginalizing distinction between "us" who speak the language and "them" who do not, is also present in the notion of "mentality" that is constructed as a marker of national differences among the Yugoslav nations (*narodi*). This use of the concept of mentality stands in stark opposition to the notion of "Balkan mentality" constructed by Jovan Cvijić in order to argue that a "deeper layer of often non-verbalisable assumptions and ways of understanding the world" is shared among the South Slavs (excluding Bulgarians) (Kitromilides, 1996, p. 165). Criticizing the concept of "Balkan mentality" for assuming that there is something that is "specifically 'Balkan' in nature" (p. 168), Kitromilides argues that every attempt to construct difference in terms of distinct mentality can be regarded as "unverifiable speculation and generality of discourse which can be misleading as well as simplifying" (p. 169). The deployment of the concept of mentality in a way that connects particular assumptions and worldviews with the de-contextualized and de-historicized notion of nation represents another instance of uncritical homogenization in the logic of Yugo-regionalism that is present in Maja's self-narration when she draws on the notion of "mentality" as a marker of difference in the former Yugoslavia ("I mean, we have different mentalities, but this [difference] is similar to the differences between Slavonians and Dalmatians, or Istrians").

Even though Maja's assertions about common language as a marker of commonality to a certain extent resemble nationalist views of the one language, one nation ideology, Maja's arguments also reveal a significant departure from the homogenizing logic. In particular, there is no evidence of a yearning for strong national homogenization or the creation of a single Yugoslav nation in her narrative. On the contrary, it is visible from the discussion above that Maja explicitly acknowledges, though in a rather essentialist fashion, the differences along the historically produced national lines without aligning herself with the

usual minoritizing multiculturalist logic. That distinguishes her story from the dominant nationalist practices. Taking these two sides together, Maja's Yugo-regionalism actually shows more similarities with the form of Yugoslavism that, by its constant emphasis of *unity and equality in difference* among the constitutive national groups, underpinned the idea of "brotherhood and unity" in state-socialist Yugoslavia (Jansen, 2005; Jović, 2011), which is different from the official discourse of the new Croatian state.<sup>145</sup> Yet, the decisive point of departure from the hegemonic nationalism of the 2000s may be found in two further elements: one is the strong, explicit anti-Eurocentrism and the other is her resolute anti-imperialist stance, which I will discuss in the next section.

### 6.5.3. Yugo-regionalism: "Re-Balkanization," anti-Eurocentrism, and regional solidarities

After the arguments about the commonalities that connect the people of former Yugoslavia in the quote above, Maja goes on to explain her politics of belonging in relation to her perception of the EU and Europeanness:

(Maja): I think that we could have stayed in some kind of union, and this would have definitely made us stronger and *these Westerners* would not be able to hassle us. Because I really think that they are the ones who fucked up the whole state because it was too strong and it was too much of a threat. I mean the united Balkans, hey, that's... [...] I think that it is more in the interest of Croatia to unite with the Balkans than with Europe. We are somewhere at the borderland, but we are *Balkanaci*,<sup>146</sup> at least I feel that I am. Forget about Europe, somehow I really think that it is better to be where you are and to empower your position than to catch up with completely different worldviews, mentalities or to aspire to some kind of state that we actually can't have and won't have, and in which we will always be the last in the line and I think that

<sup>145</sup> Given its characteristic management of difference, it is possible to argue that socialist Yugoslavism departs from the usual homogenizing and minoritizing projects of nationalisms, including multiculturalism. Since so far nobody has explicitly addressed the questions of differences and similarities between socialist Yugoslavism and Western-style multiculturalism, this still remains to be assessed.

<sup>146</sup> Croatian word *Balkanaci* is not easily translatable to English. The literal translation would be "the people from the Balkans." However, as Maria Todorova (1997) points out, terms related to the Balkans are most always imbued with negative connotations representing in this way the "constitutive other" to the "civilized" Europe. The term *Balkanaci* carries much of the stigma related to the Balkans.

sucks. [...] I mean, I am a Croat, but I can't say that I'm very proud of that at the moment. I rather say that I am *Balkanka*<sup>147</sup> (laugh).<sup>148</sup>

What we first notice by reading this excerpt is that the term Yugoslavia is completely missing and is replaced with the notion of the "United Balkans" instead. However, it is important to note that the substitution of Yugoslavia with the more generic term (the Balkans) does not necessarily mean a divergence from Yugo-regionalism into some kind of pan-Balkanism. Although Maja uses the term Balkans as a signifier of a particular geo-political territory (United Balkans) as well as a category of self-identification (*Balkanka*), in her narrative there is no evidence of claiming belonging to a territory exceeding the borders of former Yugoslavia as pan-Balkanism should have it. In other words, while referring to the Balkans, the logic of Maja's belonging actually invokes the former Yugoslavia. A similar paradoxical move is also present in Gordana's narrative. Here is an excerpt taken from the part in which Gordana talks about her memories in relation to Croatia's independence at the beginning of 1990s:

(Gordana): Especially in the past few years I've spent a lot of time in the former Yug[oslavi]a, a lot, especially in Serbia, and now especially after all these experiences of being there I can say that I feel not as a Croat, not even as Yugoslav, but as belonging to this region that, let's say, includes Slovenia, and Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Kosovo, and whatever you want. I can't limit myself in relation to these borders, it feels somehow strange, it feels actually awkward that somebody is even imposing that I am from here and they are from there. It's all somehow the same to me.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>147</sup> The literal translation of *Balkanka* would be "a woman from the Balkans." See the previous footnote.

<sup>148</sup> In the original: Smatram da smo mogli ostati u nekoj uniji i da bi definitivno bili snažniji i da nas ne bi sad svi ovi zapadnjaci toliko šikanirali jer u pravilu ustvari smatram da oni jesu razjebali cijelu tu državu zato što je bila prejaka i prevelika prijetnja. Ono, ujedinjeni Balkan, ej to je.. [...] mislim ja smatram za Hrvatsku više da se ujedini s Balkanom a ne s Eurom. Mi jesmo tu negdje na razmeđu ali mi smo Balkanci, bar se ja tako osjećam. Ma kakva Europa, nekako baš ono, smatram da je bolje biti tu di jesi i to osnažit nego ići loviti totalno drugačije svjetonazore, mentalitete i ono stremit nekakvoj državi koju mi ustvari ne možemo imat, niti nećemo imat i u pravilu biti zadnji u nekakvom nizu, to mi je ono bez veze.

<sup>149</sup> In the original: I pogotovo zadnjih par godina ja sam dosta provela u bivšoj Jugi, dosta ovaj, pogotovo u Srbiji i sad pogotovo nakon svih tih iskustava što sam tamo bila i to mogu reći da se osjećam ne kao Hrvatica ne ni kao Jugoslavenka nego kao da pripadam ovom području ajmo reć što uključuje i Sloveniju i Srbiju, Bosnu, Makedoniju i Kosovo i što god hoćeš ono. Ne mogu opće se limitirati na te granice, to mi je nekako strano zapravo, baš mi je zapravo čudno da mi netko to uopće nameće kao da sam ja odavde a oni su od tamo. Meni je sve to nekako isto.

Unlike Maja who explicitly self-identifies as *Balkanka*, the logic of Yugo-regionalism in Gordana's narrative is based on the gesture of dis-identifying, on the rejection of categorization and explicit naming of the geo-political space to which Gordana refers to. It is possible to argue that Gordana's choice is to express her connection with a particular space in terms of *belonging to* rather than *identification with*. This distinction has a lot to do with her perception of identities as limiting and harmful (see the analysis in *Section 5.5.* in Chapter 5). However, taking into account the extent to which Yugoslavia, Yugoslavism, and Yugo-nostalgia have been stigmatized since the beginning of the 1990s, we should also assume that the conflation of Yugoslavia and the Balkans in Maja's story and the rejection of identification and naming in Gordana's narrative is inevitably influenced by the public discourses on Yugoslavia and the Balkans present in the Croatian context over the past two decades.

Although in these public discourses stigmatization persistently adheres to both former Yugoslavia and the Balkans, the basis of stigmatization and the contexts in which it takes place are somewhat different. As I already pointed out, the negative stereotypes that construct the Balkans as traditional, backward, dirty, brutal, violent, corrupt, misogynist, and inferior to the West, have positioned the Balkans in the role of the constitutive other against which the European "civilized" self has been established (Todorova, 1997; Bjelić and Savić, 2002). At the same time, there is no evidence that former Yugoslavia, geo-politically belonging to the Balkans, has ever been stigmatized in a similar way. We can witness the resurgence of Balkanist discourses at the beginning of 1990s starting to frame the violent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia as a "typically Balkan" outburst of "ancient hatred."<sup>150</sup> Taking into account the meanings that construct the Balkans as a space of eternal conflicts among tribes, it is possible to argue that socialist Yugoslavi,a as a symbol of multiethnic state based on the close cooperation and coexistence of different ethnic and national groups, challenges the dominant meanings related to this region and actually represents a direct opposite to the Balkans.<sup>151</sup>

However, the notion of "Yugoslavia" remains highly stigmatized in Croatian public discourses. Denunciation of Yugoslavia is based on different assumptions associated with it. They range from the "totalitarian regime" paradigm to the "dungeon of the nations." These clearly uni-dimensional categories of stigmatization of past Yugoslav experiences also opened

<sup>150</sup> In relation to such essentialist explanation of the socio-political context that had actually been dominated by the Western-style nationalism, we have also witnessed a (re)emergence of the terms like "Balkanization" and "to Balkanize," which refer to breaking up (of a territory) into smaller, hostile units (Todorova, 1997).

<sup>151</sup> We can find a similar argument in Todorova (1997).

up a space for alternative signifiers such as “the region” but also “Western Balkans” to flourish. Situating their narratives in this order of “yugo” discourses, it is possible to argue that the conflation of Yugoslavism with Balkanism in Maja’s story and the rejection to explicitly claim belonging in Yugoslavia in Gordana’s narrative are partly influenced by the process of replacement of the loaded category of Yugoslavia with some more generic terms like “region” and the recently rehabilitated “(Western) Balkans” in the mainstream discourses in Croatia.

The conflation of “Yugoslavia” with “the Balkans” does not completely deprive the Yugo-regional politics of belonging of its emancipatory potential. Exploring why and how the “we, Yugoslavs” changed into “we, people from the Balkans” Rada Drezgić (2003) explains that due to the prevailing stigmatization of Yugoslavia throughout the whole (post-)Yugoslav space and to the efforts to prevent any manifestation of Yugonostalgia, the notion of the Balkans has been widely promoted as a replacement for Yugoslavia. What is even more important for our discussion of the political potential of Yugo-regional politics of belonging is Drezgić’s observation that the term Balkans plays a significant role in expressing discontent with “real capitalism” and formal institutions of democracy established after the break-up of socialist Yugoslavia. In other words, by referring to their “Balkan identity” people of former Yugoslavia are able to criticize the negative aspects of “transition” without necessarily rehabilitating widely denounced Yugoslavia (Drezgić, 2003).

According to Katerina Kolozova (2006), the process of “re-Balkanizing Identity” in the Balkans and, especially, in former Yugoslavia, also carries a strong anti-colonizing character that she locates in its potential to disrupt the hegemony of Europeanness. By analyzing this new “wave of cultural criticism” (p. 191) against the dominant pro-European politics, which is based on the assumption of a European socio-cultural superiority, Kolozova detects the emancipatory subversiveness of re-Balkanization in its resistance to both homogenizing nationalisms and imperialist Eurocentrism. In particular, for Kolozova re-Balkanization is a counter-hegemonic practice that, by affirming the lack of supposed Europeanness, attempts to challenge the inequalities embedded in the pro-European-yet-nationalist politics that has been dominant in this region in the past decade. What is more, according to Kolozova, to the extent that this new criticism goes beyond essentialist assumptions about some pre-existing “Balkan identity” and establishes itself as a self-reflexive project that acknowledges the multiplicity within, it has the potential to be a transformative practice that will open up a space for “Alterity which undermines the Project

to construct an Unequivocally Recognizable Europeanness” instead of a mere reproduction of a “politically correct Affirmation of Difference” (ibid., p. 193).

Articulating a critical view of the EU enlargement process from the position of “the Balkans,” the Yugo-regional politics of belonging that we just saw in the excerpt from Maja’s narrative above clearly contains the elements of a self-reflexive “re-Balkanizing” identity as argued by Kolozova (2006). In particular, imagining the “united Balkans,” to use Maja’s own words, as a tactical assemblage against the imperialist project of EU enlargement, which is based on the hierarchical distinction between Western and Eastern, or Southeastern Europe, Maja’s Yugo-regionalism can be regarded as a strategy against the domination of the Western European center (Močnik, 2002).

A critical stance in relation to the Europeanization process is particularly interesting from the position of the intersection of sexuality and nationalism. The European Union, through its policies and accession procedures, sets up and promotes the anti-discriminatory politics that also includes the protection of sexual minorities, which the member and joining states are expected to adopt. The implementation of European anti-discrimination politics has been one of the main triggers for the introduction of legal changes that grant more rights and better protection to at least some members of lesbian and gay population in Croatia. An explicit anti-EU position in the personal account of a lesbian-identified person from Croatia, as is the case in Maja’s narrative, can be interpreted as a divergence from what may be called the “expected” sexual politics of belonging.

However, we should not be satisfied with such simplistic and hasty conclusions. If we look at the textual production of self-identification and belonging in Maja’s narrative from the perspective of postpositive realism that places the notion of experience in the center of the self-identification process, we may find that anti-Eurocentrism is not inherently antithetical to lesbian-ness. In particular, it may be argued that Maja’s experience of discrimination in relation to her sexual preferences and/or practices allows Maja to be more attentive to other forms of discriminatory practices, such as those embedded in the project of a united Europe whereby the hierarchical distinction between the Western European Center and Eastern Europe has been re/established.<sup>152</sup> Following this argument, anti-Europeanism in Maja’s story then does not come as surprise, but is very much in line with what one may expect to find

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<sup>152</sup> For further discussions of the hierarchical divisions immanent to the process of EU enlargement see for example József Böröcz (2006) and essays collected in *Empire’s new clothes: Unveiling EU enlargement*, Böröcz, J. and Kovács, M. (eds) (2001).



when taking into account the importance of experience and how it gets constructed at the intersection of different systems of oppression.

Finally, the last important factor that facilitates the sense of Yugo-regional belonging in Maja and Gordana's narrative is closely related to the existing cooperation and solidarity among the various groups that deal with the issues of sexual minorities in the spaces of former Yugoslavia and in which they both actively participate. The travels in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina Maja and Gordana mention are, partly, the expression of support for local struggles against the discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. They are argued to have contributed to the feeling of regional belonging and solidarity. In Gordana's narrative the need for stronger connections among the activist groups in the former Yugoslavia is explicitly addressed at the very end of the interview:

(Gordana): I think that really, really there is a stronger need to get together, like, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia, definitely. I think that Zagreb... I thought that Zagreb is not safe and that it is homophobic. But this [violent attacks against the organizers and visitors of Queer Sarajevo]... Complete disaster! Horror!<sup>153</sup>

As we see from this excerpt, a desire for more powerful forms of solidarities among the activists in the former Yugoslavia is based on the view that the situation of homophobia, discrimination, and violence against sexual minorities is much worse in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina than it is in Croatia. A few moments later Gordana explicitly articulates this view:

(Gordana): I feel sorry for what I'm about to say... I think that... It probably has to do with politics, but I have to say that given the previous events, and my experiences in Bosnia and Serbia... Although I didn't want to admit, but Croatia in general, as a nation, is really more tolerant. [...] After these *Vehabije* in Sarajevo and after the massacre in Belgrade in 2001, I think that really we

<sup>153</sup> In the original: A mislim da baš, baš postoji kao veća potreba da se povežemo, kao, Hrvatska, Srbija i Bosna, definitivno. Mislim da Zagreb.. ja sam mislila da Zagreb nije siguran i da kao tu postoji homofobija. Al ovo.. totalna komu! Užas!

are a generally more tolerant environment as such. People don't participate in such organized violence. Simply, these violent groups don't exist [here].<sup>154</sup>

In order to support her argument that Croatian society is more tolerant in comparison with Serbian and Bosnian society, Gordana refers to two events: Queer Sarajevo Festival in 2008 that was canceled after the first day mainly due to violent attacks and threats coming from the members of the conservative Islamist group called *Vehabije*, and the notorious Belgrade Pride in 2001 that was left without police protection against extremely violent attacks by radical nationalist, religious, and football fan groups. The mention of the events of homophobic violence in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina should serve as evidences of a less violent and more tolerant climate in Croatia. At the same time, the organized violence against the participants of the first Zagreb Pride in 2002, which was in fact organized as an act of solidarity and support for the Belgrade Pride (Kajinić, 2003), goes completely unacknowledged in Gordana's argumentation. The only things that were different in Zagreb were the explicit support of the ruling elites, which came in the form of the participation of the government and Members of Parliament, including the Minister of Interior Affairs, in the march, and the strong police protection. The potential of greater violence that is usually expected to escalate in relation to the Zagreb Prides can also be evidenced by the large number of police officers that are usually commissioned to secure the Pride each year. Finally, the violent attack organized mostly by HČSP (Croatian Pure Party of Rights) and fans of the football club *Hajduk*, and which involved several thousands of people throwing stones and other heavy objects at the participants of the Split Pride in 2011 directly contradicts Gordana's views that organized homophobic violence does not exist in Croatia.

As a direct result of her arguments about the more tolerant environment in Croatia, Gordana argues for the leading role of the activist groups such as Zagreb Pride in the regional alliances and cooperation, especially with the groups from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina:

And I really think that... that it is necessary that we support each other, that is, that we support them since in this situation we are a bit stronger, we have more potential to bring this towards a positive end.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> In the original: Žao mi je što ću ovo sad reć.. mislim da.. vjerojatno ima neke veze kao politički ali moram reć s obzirom na prethodna događanja, i na malo tih iskustava u Bosni i Srbiji... Iako nisam to baš htjela priznati ali Hrvatska općenito kao nacija fakat je tolerantnija. [...] Mislim da, nakon ovih vehabija u Sarajevu i nakon pokolja 2001. u Beogradu, mislim da smo fakat općenito tolerantnija sredina kao takva. Ljudi nemaju toliko organizirano nasilje. Jednostavno te grupe ne postoje.

At the very end of the interview she adds:

[...] all the time we think that it is bad here and that we have to fight for our rights with all our forces and then you turn around and you see what kind of shit is there, how it is bad there, and I really see us as some kind of positive side that can pull up this thing [struggle against discrimination].<sup>156</sup>

What we can see from these last two quotes is the way in which the alleged differences in the degree of tolerance towards sexual minorities serves as a means of establishing regional alliances – under the leadership of Croatian activists. By (self)positioning Croatian activists as role models and a decisive force in the struggle against discrimination on the grounds of sexuality in the Balkans, Gordana's logic of solidarity reinforces the dominant Orientalist Balkanist discourses that construct Croatia as the "leader in the region." The inequality among activists that is implied in Gordana's narrative thus falls into trap of "nesting Orientalism" that consists of the appropriation of Orientalizing discourses in the already Orientalized contexts of the former Yugoslavia (Bakić-Hayden, 1995). The solidarities based on the logic of "nesting Orientalism" invoked in Gordana's narrative can be regarded as counterproductive in that they result in oversimplifying and disregarding different problems that exist in Croatia, while at the same time re/producing the unequal relations among the activists in the region. They may also prevent critical engagement with differences existing both on the national and regional levels as a crucial prerequisite for reflexive solidarities that form the basis of emancipatory politics.

#### 6.5.4. *Yugo-regionalism: Potentials and shortcomings*

With its strong anti-EU stance Yugo-regional belonging articulated in Maja's narrative departs not only from the adopted Balkanism that we saw in the queer strategy, but also from the mainstream lesbian and gay politics in Croatia that keeps pressuring the Croatian government to implement EU policies and directives, trying to take advantage of the Croatian accession process. At the same time, the Yugo-regional politics of identity moves beyond the Yugoslavism that emerged in the 1990s as a resistance to both the war and mainstream

<sup>155</sup> In the original: I mislim da fakat to..da je potrebno da se međusobno podržavamo, to jest da mi njih podržimo s obzirom da smo u ovoj situaciji ipak tu negdje jači, imamo više potencijala da se to prije nekako završi na nekoj dobroj priči.

<sup>156</sup> In the original: [...] mi stalno brijemo da nam je loše i moramo se kao boriti za svoja prava ono rukama i nogama i onda se ono okreneš i vidiš kakvo je tamo sranje, kako je tamo loše i totalno tu nas vidim kao neku pozitivnu stranu koja može i to potegnut.

nationalisms. Constructions of Europeanness and European belonging as parts of the Yugoslav past that were abruptly interrupted by regressive, traditionalist nationalisms at the beginning of the 1990s represent one of the key elements in the antinationalist discourses in Zagreb and Belgrade. Such nostalgia for Europe as the epitome of modernity and refinement that used to be part of Yugoslavia's social reality is closely interrelated with elements of Yugonostalgia as a specific longing in relation to a common Yugoslav cultural space that once existed (Jansen, 2005).

Most scholars agree that the actual political significance of different kinds of Yugonostalgia lies precisely in their persistent resistance to the widespread erasure of memories about Yugoslavia that have been imposed by the dominant nationalisms in Yugoslav successor states (Jansen, 2005; Lindstrom, 2005). On that account we may agree that Yugonostalgia, which is based on strong Eurocentrism, might have had some positive effects as an antinationalist counterdiscourse in the context of the violent break up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. However, in my view, by replacing the proclaimed Yugoslav anti-imperialism<sup>157</sup> with Eurocentrism, antinationalist discourses of Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia lost part of their critical potential.

Maja's Yugo-regionalism significantly diverges from such Euro-centric antinationalist Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia in that it integrates a pro-Balkanist anti-Eurocentric position. What is more, by taking the position of an anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist strategic regionalism, Maja's narrative opens up a space for a stronger version of critical potential of Yugo-regionalism, one that comes close to what Gayatri Spivak (2007) calls "critical regionalism." The position of critical regionalism entails a polity and a mode of belonging beyond both elitist "easy postnationalism" and nationalist nation-states (Butler and Spivak, 2007, Spivak, 2008).

In Spivak's view, in the contemporary context of neoliberal global capitalism with its uneven distribution of labor and capital where states are losing their redistributive functions in favor of servicing the global capital, we must "reinvent the state as an abstract structure," that is completely free from nationalisms (Butler and Spivak, 2007, 77). "The reinvention of the state," continues Spivak, "goes beyond the nation-state into critical regionalisms" (ibid., p.77). One of the primary functions of this new nation-less and porous state should be redistribution and the protection of the most endangered groups against global capital (ibid.). Spivak's arguments in favor of critical regionalism are in line with Calhoun's point (2007)

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<sup>157</sup> The anti-imperialist stance is most obviously reflected in Yugoslavia's leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

about the important role that states play as “organizations of power through which democratic movements have the greatest capacity to affect economic organization” when responding to global economic inequalities (Calhoun, 2007, p. 80).

It is obvious that critical regionalism is first and foremost a critical practice that calls into question global hierarchies produced in the context of neoliberal global restructuring. It is also important to note that the strong anti-imperialist stance that is at the basis of critical regionalism clearly distinguishes it from one of the most vigorous contemporary experiments in regionalization and de-nationalization – the project of building the European Union. As Spivak rightly points out, the EU started as an economic association, as a very practical economic consolidation that in fact works in favor of the globalization of capital and thus significantly differs from projects such as critical regionalism. It is within the logic of this argument, argues Spivak, that we should also perceive and critically reflect upon Eurocentric appeals to cosmopolitanism and world citizenship – such as Habermas’ arguments on de-nationalization of citizenship in relation to the project of the EU – that rely on conceptualizations of “cosmopolitan democracy” and “world citizens” from the Eurocentric perspective (Butler and Spivak, 2007).

Defined as a “position without identity” that is grounded in differences and pluralities within the porous boundaries of a region (Spivak, 2008, p. 243), the notion of critical regionalism resonates with the logic of reflexive solidarities and transversal politics that take differences as a starting point in building solidarities and in ongoing negotiations and communication towards the goal of formulating common political aims. Although we can find elements of self-reflexivity and accountability for differences in Maja’s Yugo-regional strategic positioning, the logic of Yugo-regional solidarity remains caught up in the essentialization of differences. This limit is particularly visible in the way in which the commonalities and differences are articulated through the notions of language and mentality. The use of language as a ground for establishing a common space beyond the national state implies the construction of firm boundaries and can easily lead to exclusion, or marginalization, of people who do not speak the given language as well as the exclusion of potential areas that would become part of the Yugo-region for lack of speaking the language. What is more, the recognition of the differences within the imagined entity of Yugo-region in Maja’s narrative is also argued in terms of the essentializing category of mentality that follows the lines of the dominant conceptualization of ethnicities as homogenized categories. Hence, even though this kind of (Yugo)-regionalism does not assume a stable dominant

identity, it is still grounded in the rather exclusionary articulation of commonalities and differences mediated by “language” and “mentality.”

Finally, the replacement of Yugoslavia with the Balkans carries some negative aspects that need to be highlighted. By using the more generic term “the Balkans” when invoking the commonality and shared experiences of the people of former Yugoslavia, past and present, one necessarily de-politicizes the politics of remembering instead of confronting the dominant nationalist politics of amnesia and historical revisionism. It also moves the focus from a critical evaluation of the armed conflicts in the region. Such critical reflection is much needed in the context dominated by nationalisms that are hostile to each other and foreclose any attempt at post-conflict reconciliation. Furthermore, in the course of dealing with the different aspects of the socialist multiethnic Yugoslav context, there is the possibility that some practices as (positive) examples may serve as grounds future emancipatory political projects. As I already pointed out, one such example may be found in the proclaimed anti-imperialism and the leading role of Yugoslavia in Non-aligned Movement. Another practice that is yet to be thoroughly assessed in future research projects is the politics of ‘brotherhood and unity’ as a mode of multiethnic coexistence.

## 6.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I showed the ways the dominant and non-dominant discourses and practices of citizenship, solidarity and belonging present in various orders of discourses in Croatia in the past four decades, mostly in the order of discourses of nationalism and the order of “yugo” discourses, are negotiated in the life narratives of people who are marginalized on the grounds of their sexuality. As my analysis reveals, the process of negotiation opens up a space for modes of solidarity and belonging that are relatively different from the nationalist one. Thus, while there is an unquestioned assumption about the nation as a dominant framework of belonging invoked by the assimilationist strategy of self-identification, the strategies of queering and strategic positioning represent a departure from the exclusionary nationalist framework. Nevertheless, although the nationalist tendencies are overridden in these two strategies, we can find the elements of exclusionary logic in these self-identification practices as well. In particular, although they reject the notion of firm and stable identity, and, in the case of Yugo-regionalism, even containing the elements of self-reflexivity and accountability for unequal power relations, the strategies of queer disposition and strategic

positioning also include the essentialization of difference and the exclusionary (“nesting”) Orientalism.

By looking at the ways in which the multiple, often contradictory, global and local discourses open up a space for practices of self-identification whereby the new forms of solidarity and belonging are re-imagined from the position of sexual marginality, I aimed at exploring the political potential of sexual identity in bringing about the non-exclusionary relations. We can conclude that insofar as they challenge the exclusionary nationalist logic of belonging together with the imposed amnesia when it comes to the Yugoslav past, both queer and critical positioning represent a valuable source for emancipatory social change. What is more, with the anti-imperialist stance strategic positioning articulates a need for larger, transnational solidarities against the multiple systems of oppression. However, in order to be truly emancipatory, especially the assimilationist and queer strategies of identity construction should move beyond the essentializing tendencies towards a more reflexive approach and assume accountability for one’s own and others’ multiple positionalities.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In my PhD research I explored the intersection of nationalism and sexuality in the context of self-identification. Drawing on the postpositivist realist conception of identity as a product of dynamic interplay of the social and the personal that opens up a space for individual agency, I examined how the notion of citizenship is re/imagined from the differential positions of people who are “othered” on the grounds of their perceived sexuality in contemporary Croatia. For that purpose I gathered fourteen life-stories that are products of oral history interviews with the individual people diversely positioned as gay, lesbian, and trans in relation to the existing social order that is imbued with different systems of “vision and division” (Brubaker, 2001, p. 236) such as unequal gender relations, heteronormativity, and nationalism. In my analysis I focused on the ways in which people who have been denied access to national belonging due to their sexual non-normativity negotiate the dominant nationalist framework of belonging in and through the process of self-identification and self-understanding emerging in their life narratives. On the grounds of my analysis, I identified three main strategies of self-identification. Based on the dominant logic that underpins each strategy, I call them assimilation, queer disposition, and strategic positioning.

In my analysis I focused on the ways in which my informants articulate the notions of visibility and commonality as the main points in the narratives where sexual identity and national citizenship are brought together in a dynamic interplay. My analysis revealed that the assimilationist strategy turns out to reinforce the dominant nationalist ideas of citizenship by articulating the meaning of visibility either in terms of privacy, or visible normalcy. As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, this strategy also reinforces the dominant meanings of commonality as intra-national sameness argued to originate from the “common descent,” taking the nation as an unquestioned framework of solidarity and belonging. Against the assimilationist strategy that reifies the existing nationalist relations, I pointed out elements of re-signification present in the other two strategies. In particular, queer disposition subverts the dominant meanings of visibility and commonality through the political project of de-contextualized anti-normality that challenges the notion of identity as such without making any difference between national and sexual identities. In contrast to the queer disposition, I found some moments of strategic positioning that contain the elements of self-reflexivity and



accountability for differences, functioning as a potentially more progressive way of addressing the issue of discrimination, leading towards social equality.

As I argued in Chapter 4, my sample, the fourteen life narratives, is conditioned upon my research aims. As Wilkerson (2007), reflecting upon the possibility of a theory of sexual identity, argues, “the experience we select [to analyze] shapes the theory we create” (p. 20). What this argument also suggests is that our sample, in addition to being conditioned by our research questions, will always be limited, since it is not possible to include all the particular experiences of each and every sexually marginalized individual in our study. This argument further implies that the knowledge we come up with will always be partial because it is positioned, i.e. conditioned upon our particular perspective and constructed on the grounds of a limited number of distinctive individual experiences. Since it is not possible to create an impartial, universal theory, it is important to perform a high level of self-reflexivity “about how our selection [of data] affects our theory” (p. 21). Given that gender and its interplay with sexuality represented an important element of the nationalist discourses and politics of the 1990s in Croatia, in my research I wanted to include experiences of sexually marginalized individuals who are differently positioned when it comes to their gender. At the same time, in order to account for the influences that the nation-building in the 1990s and the process of EU accession and the subsequent emergence of sexual politics of visibility in 2000 may have had on the individual experiences, I also included the stories of individuals of different age and activist involvement.

What I wanted to achieve with my sampling is the “richness of textual detail” (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 253) that would give us an insight into how the dominant meanings of nationalist belonging are negotiated in and through the discursal processes of self-identification of the people who have been “othered” on the grounds of their sexuality. I wanted to explore in details different forms of logic underpinning the strategies of self-identification. At the same time, although my sample is limited, it reveals a great diversity in the ways in which sexually marginalized people make sense of their sexual practices and engage with nationalist citizenship. The multiplicity of the ways in which people construct their identities, especially in the context of a small sample, should prevent us from making a hasty conclusion that all identities are pernicious and exclusionary, and as such inadequate as organizing principle in emancipatory struggles, as it has often been the case within the framework of queer theory. Instead, this diversity in the ways in which people adapt to and adopt social categories in the process of identity construction demonstrates that there are

different meanings that people attach to their identities. It also suggests that not all of these meanings are *equally* harmful and politically counterproductive.

In order to argue for the different degrees of reification and subversion of the dominant order pertaining to the process of identity construction, I explored the particular meanings of sexuality and belonging constructed from differential social positions in and through the practices of self-identification in the fourteen life narratives. The ultimate aim of my research was to see whether and to what extent the identity claims of people who are marginalized may represent a productive element in the struggles for social equality.

With its focus on the distinct ways in which nationalism is negotiated in the life narratives of sexually marginalized people and the new meanings of citizenship and belonging constructed in this process, my project directly contributes to the existing studies of nationalism, gender, and sexuality intersection as well as to the debates over the political utility of (sexual) identity. Bringing the two scholarly fields into complex interplay in my research enabled me to make important contributions to both of these fields. In the rest of the Chapter I will first account for the contributions of my research to the existing studies on the political utility of identity in the struggles for social equality (*Section 7.1.*). Then I will discuss the particular insights about the intersection of nationalism, gender, and sexuality brought in my project (*Section 7.2.*).

## **7.1. The political potential of identity**

The main aim of my analysis of the ways in which sexually marginalized people negotiate nationalism in the process of self-identification was to see whether and to what extent the position of sexual minority opens up a space for alternative notions of belonging. Therefore, in my research I utilized the postpositivist realist theory of identity that argues for the multiple and potentially progressive ways in which people negotiate and construct their identities. In particular, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, postpositivist realists contend that identity is a product of dynamic negotiations between the social and the personal aspects of life mediated through the interpretive horizons (Alcoff, 2006). Postpositivist realism thus conceives the individual as agentive subject in the process whereby identities are constructed. However, it is important to note that neither the notion of agency nor the concept of subject in postpositivist realist theory of identity are conceptualized as pre-given. On the contrary, postpositivist realists maintain that agency and the subject are social kinds, and as such, have no pre-social, pre-discursive existence. Therefore, in his theory of sexual identity William

Wilkerson (2007) argues for the explanatory power of the *emerging fusion* model of sexual identity. As I showed in Chapter 3, the emerging fusion model enables us to see the ways in which different factors, such as available social role, sexual desire, one's previous experiences from within their social positionality, and the interpretive practice are all enmeshed together shaping each other in the process of identity construction.

The postpositivist realist theory of identity thus locates individual agency in a socially embedded act of self-reflexivity that is shaped by and shapes our interpretive practices. It maintains that these interpretive practices play an important role in bringing about the multiplicity of meanings that people attach to their identities. However, given the role that the other factors play in the process of identity construction, the number of the possible variations is at the same time limited by the particular socio-historical environment. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of meanings entails that some identities are less exclusionary than others. What is more, as Satya Mohanty (2000) points out, since they emerge at the intersection of various systems of oppression, and they always involve the production of meanings, identities represent an important source of knowledge about social world. Yet, given that they are theory-laden processes in that they are informed by the existing explanatory systems, there are significant differences in the way the meanings generated in the identity construction process illuminate the functioning of mechanisms of oppression. This position directly challenges the de-contextualized assumption that identities are always already harmful underpinning much of the queer theory scholarship.

As my analysis of the self-identification practices in the context of the life-narratives I gathered in this research shows, there are at least three distinguishable strategies that can be identified. Furthermore, I also revealed that there are significant differences among these strategies when it comes to their emancipatory political potential. One of the main contributions of this research to the debates on the political utility of identities therefore pertains to the role of social positionality in shaping our experiences that are basis of identity, and thus allowing for the situated contingency of identity construction process to emerge at the intersection of various systems of "vision and division."

In particular, in my research I revealed that the strategy of assimilation is predominantly present in the life-narratives of gay men, both activists and non-activists. As I argued in my study, the link between the assimilationist strategy and the social position of the non-heterosexual male that my interviewees occupy can be explained if we take into account the gendered position of gays and lesbians in the nationalist discourses. I showed that the nationalist ideology in Croatia in the 1990s explicitly targeted gay men who were argued to be

a threat to the newly emerging nation. The image of the “Serb-faggot” that functioned as a double object of hate in the right-wing nationalist discourses explicitly stigmatized “gay men” as enemies of the new Croatian state. The nationalist discourses thus generated a negative publicity when it came to gay men, making them visible as targets of stigmatization, while leaving lesbians largely invisible. It is thus possible to assume that their lived experiences – pertaining to their particular position imbued with public stigmatization and directly carrying the negation of their “Croatianess” – influence the wish of most of my gay informants to become less visible, and, in the case of activists, to re-inscribe themselves “back” to the nation by appealing to their normalcy. At the same time, I argued that some of the influences that shape the aspirations for the assimilationist status quo present mostly in the stories of gay men may have come from their dominant positionality in relation to gender, ethnicity and race that affects their blindness for the (intersection of) multiple forms of oppression.

Likewise, the strategy of strategic positioning that encompasses the elements of politically progressive self-reflexive accountability for social differences is present in the stories of two self-identified lesbian women. As my analysis reveals, their need for public re-affirmation of their lesbianness is articulated through references to the relative invisibility of lesbians in the public sphere in general and in the context of the movements for social equality in particular. I argued that, by reflecting upon the lived experiences of invisibility, silencing and marginalization, be it their own or that of other lesbian women, these two women voice the particularities of lesbian position. These particularities, as Tamsin Wilton (1995) argues, carry a great political potential since the lesbian position represents the point from which the intersection of heteronormativity and gender binary in the reproduction of patriarchal social relations is most visible. In this regard, *lesbian-ness* may provide an important source of knowledge about the intersectional nature of oppression.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, the aspect of self-reflexivity may be the most visible when it comes to Yugo-regional belonging as invoked particularly in Maja’s narrative. I argued that the strong anti-imperialist perspective that underpins her claims of belonging to “the Balkans,” which in her story pertains to the region of the former Yugoslav Federation, can be related to her lesbian experiences of marginalization and stigmatization. With its anti-Eurocentric but at the same time anti-nationalist perspective resulting from a self-reflexive practice, Maja’s Yugo-regionalism is in accord with the critical political project of “re-Balkanizing Identity” (Koložova, 2006). According to Katerina Koložova, the project of “re-Balkanizing Identity” entails an anti-colonial and anti-nationalist social and cultural critique addressed from the position of stigmatized “balkanist” identity. As such, it represents a

constructive political response that, on the one hand, exposes the inequalities produced within the EU accession process in Southeast Europe, and, on the other, social hierarchies resulting from the nationalisms in the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, I argued that its strong emphasis on the regional belonging places Yugo-regionalism in line with the anti-imperialist anti-nationalist leftist project of “critical regionalism” as proposed by Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 2008). The project of “critical regionalism” challenges the existing nationalist divisions institutionalized in the form of nation-state, while at the same time preserving “the state as an abstract structure” whose function is primarily related to re-distribution that should secure social equality.

As I pointed out in my analysis, when assessing the political potential of Yugo-regionalism it is necessary to take into account the ambiguous meanings of Yugo-region in Croatia. On the one hand, everything that has the label of “Yugo” is highly stigmatized as the legacy of some “communist” past and as such articulated as one of the biggest threats to the new Croatian nation in the dominant discourses. At the same time, Yugo-regionality that brings together Yugoslav successor states represents an important point of reference, signaling the powerful potential of lived experiences of the life in Yugoslavia that were suppressed during the nationalization process in the 1990s. These experiences represent an important part of self-identification in Maja and Gordana’s narratives, constituting the ground for a counter-discourse of Yugo-regionalism to emerge in their narratives.

Thus, as my research reveals, there is a multiplicity of sexual selves emerging at the intersection of sexuality and nationalism in post-Yugoslav Croatia. This multiplicity reflects the heterogeneity within particular social categories of self-identification. It also shows that the process of identity construction has the potential to become an important source of knowledge about the social world. In particular, I exemplified in my analysis how particular lesbian experiences may expose that there are different mechanisms of oppression operating together in the re/production of the existing social relations. By so doing, lesbian identities play a great role in raising the awareness about various forms of exclusions existing beyond our immediate experiences. In this way, they also open up a space for reflective solidarities and different non-exclusionary modes of belonging to emerge. My findings thus contribute to the debate on the political utility of identity in the struggles for social equality by revealing the “complex relationship between simultaneous forms of empowerment and disempowerment” (Hall, 2003, p. 89) pertaining to identity construction processes.

## 7.2. The intersection of nationalism, gender and sexuality in relation to self-identification

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, gender and sexuality play a decisive role in the re/production of (nationalized) citizenship. However, this intersection has mostly been addressed from the macro perspective on social structuring. With the notable exception of “queer anthropologists” (Boellstorff, 2007) like Lisa Rofel, Tom Boellstorff, and Martin Manalansan, little attention has been paid to the ways in which this intersection is negotiated in the practices of self-understanding and self-identification. In my research I drew on the studies that argue for a re-definition of the dominant meanings of citizenship in terms of proscribed rights and duties towards more dynamic conceptions that would also include the ways in which the relationship of the state and the individual is negotiated in the individual struggles over inclusion and exclusion. In this regard, I argued for the relevance of Rofel’s (2007) notion of “cultural citizenship” that brings the individual negotiations into the studies of citizenship, opening up the concept for the dynamic processes whereby meanings of citizenship are re/constructed (Rofel, 1999, 2007; Manalansan, 2003). With its focus on the different ways in which sexually marginalized people in Croatia engage with nationalism in their self-narratives, my research contributes to the existing studies of sexual citizenship, showing how the image of “good gay citizen” is being re/produced and contested through the individual negotiations.

“Queer anthropology scholars,” although they inscribe the notion of lived experiences into the studies of sexual citizenship, do not explicitly address the role of sexual identity in the course of discursive negotiation of the meanings of citizenship. Thus, I also contributed to this body of literature by putting the notion of sexual identities in my research of the intersection of sexuality and nationalism and assessing its transformatory political potential.

In order to explore and assess different strategies of self-identification at the intersection of sexuality and nationalism, I established the interpretive context that informs the life narratives I gathered. The interpretive context consists of the orders discourses of nationalism, Europeanness, and Yugoslavianness. My analysis shows a dynamic interplay among nationalism, gender and sexuality amidst the political changes taking place in Croatia in the past two decades. These changes include the nationalization process in the 1990s and the process of democratization and EU accession in 2000s. By exposing the variety of different ways in which my informants engage with these changes, sometimes even opposing each other, my study brings the new insights into the lives of sexually marginalized people in

the region of former Yugoslavia. My research not only brings the new insights about the role that sexuality plays in the processes of nationalization and EU accession in the former Yugoslavia but it also challenges the oversimplifying Western discourses of sexual non-conformity in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. These discourses often disregard the complexity when it comes to the intersections of nationalisms and sexualities as well as variety when it comes to lives of sexually marginalized people in the Eastern and Southeastern Europe, re/producing the West/East geopolitical hierarchy.

The prominent role that discourses of sexuality play in the context of the EU accession process emerged as an important issue at the time of my research. However, the scope of this research did not allow for a more systematic engagement with this issue. In my future research I will explore further the ways in which sexual citizenship figures in the process of “Europeanization” in the Yugo-region. I am considering to carry out a comparative research that would focus on several Yugoslav successor states that gained the status of “candidate states,” like Serbia and Montenegro vis-à-vis the specificities of the Croatian tendencies. Moreover, in my research I also started to draw the contours of a critical political project of *Yugo-regionalism*. As a next potential step in the affirmation of the explanatory power of this concept I see the exploration of the existing practices of meaning production in which the critical perspective of Yugo-regionalism is enacted. I would also suggest a further theoretical grounding of its political potential.

Finally, many things have happened since I conducted the interviews in 2008. Since these events emerged after the moment of recording of my interviews, they did not fall within the scope of my research. They are not part of the interpretive framework for the life-narratives I collected in 2008. However, these new tendencies bring new insights into the political potential of sexual identity and thus they need to be further investigated. In particular, the first Split Pride in 2011 can be argued to be the new critical moment in the sexual politics of visibility in Croatia. The violence of the anti-Pride protesters comprised of right-wing nationalist and football fans groups triggered some heightened solidarity with the LGBTIQ movement in general and with Zagreb Pride taking place only a week after in particular. The discourses of solidarity that entered the mainstream media directly related LGBTIQ struggles to the legacy of anti-fascist struggles, thus emphasizing the intersectional perspective that connects the rights of sexual minorities with other political movements for social equality and freedom.

# APPENDIX I

## Biographies of Interviewees

With the exception of Gordana, who emphasized that she wants to be presented by her real name, all names below are fictive. I changed the names of my informants in order to respect their wish to remain anonymous.

### **Ana, female, 28**

Ana was my co-worker in Ženska infoteka [Women's Info-center], an NGO based in Zagreb, when I asked her if she would be willing to participate in my research. She graduated from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. She grew up on one of the islands in Kvarner Bay. She came to Zagreb when she started high school. Ana was a member of Zagreb Pride organizing committee in 2008. The interview took place in my apartment on August 28, 2008.

### **Damir, male, 30**

Damir responded to my call for participants placed on the web forum called *gay.hr* and we agreed to meet in the cruising-bar *Denis* where he worked as a waiter at the time of interview. The interview took place on April 27, 2008 in the morning hours when *Denis* is closed for the public. Damir grew up in a small industrial city in Bosnia-Herzegovina where he lived during the armed conflict. He spent a short time in a Catholic Seminary in Croatia in his adolescence. He was studying at the Faculty of Humanities in Mostar but he never graduated. Damir used to work as a free-lance actor in Sarajevo and Zagreb. He has never participated in LGBTIQ activism.

### **Filip, male, 25**

I came to know Filip through a common friend who told me that Filip is interested in participating in my research. Filip just graduated from the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb at the time of the interview. He grew up in a town in Istria, western coastal region of Croatia. After he finished the high school, he came to Zagreb to study. At the time of the interview Filip was holding an internship position in a law firm in Zagreb. The interview took place in a café in Zagreb October 19, 2008 on DATE. He has never participated in LGBTIQ activism.

### **Gordana, female, 26**

I met Gordana for the first time when I came to do the interview with her partner, Maja in their shared apartment on October 4, 2008. I conducted separate interviews with them. At the time of the interview Gordana was not employed and she was finishing her first degree studies



at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. She grew up in Zagreb. She was a member of the Zagreb Pride Organizing Committee in 2008.

**Goran, male, 29**

Goran responded to my call for participants in spring 2008. I visited him in his hometown in the Kvarner region to make the interview with him on April 4, 2008. Goran was learning towards a degree in tourist management at the time of the interview and he also worked as a bank clerk. In 2007 Goran participated in Croatian version of *Big Brother* show as the first openly gay participant. He has never participated in LGBTIQ activism.

**Ivan, male, 65**

Ivan responded to my call for participants in spring 2008. He was living in a small industrial town in Istria at the time. I interviewed him in his apartment on April 3, 2008. Although he was born in Istria, during his life Ivan also lived in the Slavonia region and shortly in Western Europe. He is divorced and has children. He holds a degree in Economics from the University of Rijeka. At the time of the interview, Ivan was working in a private company. He was also a member of a local branch of right-wing party, HDZ (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* [Croatian Democratic Union]) that had the parliamentary majority in 1991-2000 and 2004-2012. He has never participated in LGBTIQ activism.

**Ivana, female, 28**

I worked with Ivana on the project of establishing a digital archive in Ženska infoteka [Women's Info-center] and I asked her if she would be willing to participate in my research. Ivana gladly accepted my invitation. I conducted an interview with her on October 17, 2008 in her apartment. Ivana grew up in a small city in northern part of Croatia and she came to study in Zagreb. She holds a degree from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. At the time of the interview Ivana worked as an IT specialist in a private company. As a specialist in web-design Ivana has closely worked with a number of women's organizations including lesbian organization *Kontra* [Against], *Ženska soba* [Women's Room] and *Centar za ženske studije* [Women's Studies Center] helping them with the construction and maintenance of their webpages.

**Josip, male, 34**

I was introduced to Josip by Matija, one of my interviewees. I met him in the fall of 2008 for the first time. Josip grew up on one of the islands in Central Dalmatia. He spent some of his adolescent years in a Catholic Seminary. He used to be an active member of HČSP (*Hrvatska čista stranka prava* [Croatian Pure Party of Rights]), especially in the early 2000s when he moved to Zagreb. In the first half of 2000s he joined *Iskorak* [Step forward], an NGO based in Zagreb for the rights of sexual and gender minorities. He was member of *Iskorak* until 2006 when he and Matija established a centre for social integration of sexual and gender minorities called *Drugi korak* [Second Step]. At the time of the interview, Josip worked as a free-lance writer, poet, and journalist. I made the interview with him in café in Zagreb on October 16, 2008.

**Maja, female, 26**

My first contact with Maja was in fall 2008 when she responded to my call for participants. We arranged to meet and do the interview in her apartment where she lived with her partner Gordana. The interview took place on October 4, 2008. Maja is a highly educated young woman, working in the IT sector. She grew up in a small town near Split in the coastal Dalmatia region, Croatia. She came to study in Zagreb where she was living and working at the time of the interview. Maja was a member of the Zagreb Pride Organizing Committee in 2008.

**Marija, female, 48**

Marija responded to my call for participants placed on the web forum called *gay.hr* and we agreed to conduct the interview in my apartment. It took place on March 15, 2008. She grew up in one of the Dalmatian cities, in a coastal region of Croatia. Marija holds a university degree in Architecture. She lived in Western Europe during the 1990s and 2000s. She was married for several years while living abroad. At the time of the interview Marija was divorced from her husband and she has been living in Zagreb where she worked as an architect. She has never participated in LGBTIQ activism

**Marko, transgender (MTF), 29**

After I explained my research to a group of my acquaintances, Marko volunteered to participate in the research. We met in a café in Zagreb on October 15, 2008. At the time of the interview, Marko was not employed and he was finishing his first degree at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. He grew up in Zagreb. At the beginning of 2000s he participated in anti-war activism in the local branch of *Food Not Bombs*. Marko was one of the founding members of *Queerilica*, a queer discussion group formed in Zagreb in the mid-2000s. He was also member of the Zagreb Pride Organizing Committee in 2007.

**Matija, male, 32**

Heaving learned about Matija's political stance and his activist history from the media, I decided to approach him to participate in the research. I met him for the first time in the fall of 2008 when I interviewed him in one of Zagreb's cafés. The interview took place on October 14, 2008. Matija grew up in a city in the Slavonia region. He holds a degree from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. In the beginning of 2000s Matija was a founding member of the LGBT organization *Iskorak* [Step Forward]. In 2006 together with Josip he established a new organization called *Drugi korak* [Second Step]. Matija used to be a member of SRP (*Socijalistička radnička partija* [Socialist Workers Party]), a left-wing political party, and SDP (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske* [Social Democratic Party of Croatia]), a centre-left party. He was one of the first people to openly speak about his gayness and fight discrimination against sexual and gender minorities in Croatia. In the first half of 2000s Matija was very visible in the media. At the time of the interview, Matija was a director of an alternative centre for self-help and self-development.

**Sandra, female, 30**

Sandra was present together with Marko and some other acquaintances when I was discussing my research in Zagreb in fall 2008. She expressed her willingness to be interviewed. The interview took place in one of Zagreb's cafés on October 14, 2008. Sandra grew up in Zagreb. She holds a degree from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. After earning her diploma in the mid-2000s, Sandra moved to Russia to continue her education. At the time of the interview she was visiting her family and friends in Zagreb.

**Vedran, male, 28**

I came to know Vedran through a common friend. Vedran was born in a small city in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He moved to one of the cities in Slavonia, Croatia, during the armed conflict. Vedran holds a degree from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb. At the time of the interview, he was pursuing his doctoral degree at the same Faculty where he was also teaching. He has never participated in LGBTIQ activism. I made the interview with him in a café in Zagreb on October 22, 2008.

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Questions about lived experiences:**

1. Can you please tell me something about your experiences as lesbian/gay/trans?
2. Have you experienced any sort of discrimination? Can you please let me know more about the situations you mentioned?
3. How do you perceive the position of sexual minorities in the past twenty years? How did you experience this?
4. What, in your view, are the main milestones when it comes to changes introduced in the past two decades?

#### **Questions about LGBTIQ politics in Croatia – questions for activists:**

1. When did you start to be involved in activism?
2. Can you please let me know more about your activist engagements?
3. Do you think about yourself as a member of lesbian/gay community?
4. How do you perceive Zagreb Pride?
5. What, in your view, would be a productive political strategy against discrimination?

#### **Questions about LGBTIQ politics in Croatia – questions for people who were not involved in activism:**

1. Have you ever participated in Zagreb Pride?
2. How do you see Zagreb Pride?
3. What other events have you heard of?
4. How do you perceive the politics of visibility in Croatia?
5. What, in your view, would be a productive political strategy against sexual discrimination?
6. Have you heard about the term ‘queer’? What do you think of it?

**Questions about Croatia's independence:**

1. How did you feel when Croatia was established as an independent nation-state?
2. What else do you remember from that period?
3. How did you feel during the armed conflict in Croatia?
4. How do you see yourself in terms of ethnicity?
5. Have you ever come across the expression 'Serb faggot'?

**Question about the accession to European Union:**

1. What do you expect from EU membership?

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