

# The Patriarch and the Pride.

## Discourse Analysis of the Online Public Response to the Serbian Orthodox Church Condemnation of the 2012 Gay Pride Parade.

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### Introduction

This chapter tries to understand the complex field of lived religion, nationalism, and sexual (in)tolerance by analyzing the online public responses to the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Irinej's comments on the Belgrade Gay Pride Parade 2012. The aim is to identify discourse strategies of commenters of the most visited on-line multimedia portals in Serbian language responding to the news items published on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 concerning Patriarch Irinej's open letter to the Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, urging him to ban the upcoming Pride Parade. The discursive strategies found in the material are organized in two main categories. *Relational strategies* (focus on online intolerance) emphasize the direct interaction between speaker and audience, in this case between the Patriarch and the commenters. *Argumentative strategies* (focus on online lived religion) highlight the content of the interactions. The concept of lived religion will serve here as an analytical and epistemological tool for understanding online religious practice and its perspectives on the politics of intolerance in Serbia. Lived religion is understood as the patterns of meaning, experience, and action of religious and spiritual persons and groups that emerge from and contribute to their relation with (what they consider to be) the sacred. The focus of a lived religion-approach is neither on the canonical sources of a religious tradition nor on the doctrinal calibration of religious convictions but on the day-to-day ways in which religion is lived. Religion then is also understood in a broad sense, including the major traditions and denominations as well as postmodern spiritualities, indigenous cultural habits, and civil religion or implicit religion (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014). More specifically, in this chapter we will not be looking at the theological debates about religious diversity (*theologia religionum*) nor at those about sexual diversity. Instead we will focus on the ways the debates are played out in public discourse at the societal level. Recent developments in the study of lived religion mostly focus on the importance of lived religion in individual everyday religious-spiritual practices and experiences in specific sociocultural contexts; less effort is spent in grasping the complex subtleties of how religion is lived in the virtual spaces.

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For that reason, there is a clear shortfall in the existing literature in terms of analysing lived religion in the virtual (online) spaces.

### **Lived Religion and Sexual Nationalism in Serbia**

With the fall of Communism and the strengthening of the civil war in the Western Balkans, a revitalization of religion occurred in the Serbian public and political sphere, exemplified by the prominent place of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the public space (Drezgić, 2010). The rise of religious nationalism in Serbia today is partly attributable to current post-conflict and economic problems, notably the conversion from communism to nationalism, the establishment and expansion of religion as a new dominant ideology, and the failures of secular politicians to distance themselves from the church leaders. Despite the constitutional warrants for secularity and strict separation of church and state, in reality this separation does not exist. The Serbian Orthodox Church constantly blurs the boundaries between the ethnic or national and the religious, thus contributing to the process of “ethnogenesis and national jockeying” (Kalaitzidis, 2012, p. 67). Indeed, nationalism, especially in its ethno-centric and religiously driven manifestations, is certainly one of the greatest problems that Serbian Orthodox Church faces today (Džalto, 2013). In this context, sexual diversity has become a pivotal issue of contestation and a topic on which strong nationalist and religious identities amalgamate. A theologically Orthodox piety that seeks to protect traditional values and aspires national power sits uncomfortably within issues of sexual diversity. Moss (2002, p. 338) argues that nationalism in Serbia has “reaffirmed the traditional gender roles: men are macho warriors, women are at home, caring for the extension of the nation by giving birth to children; homosexuals are traitors to the nation.” Along the same lines of argument, Isanović (2007, p. 52) notes that in post-conflict societies of the former Yugoslavia gender differentiation was polarized to the extreme, in ways that “men are perceived as warriors and women as mothers and victims, thus contributing to the strengthening of traditional power relations, social and cultural roles and norms.” This polarized gender system is put to the test leading to a ‘crisis of masculinity’ in the post-socialist and post-conflict Serbia and an ensuing ambivalent attitude towards sexual diversity. Because of huge unemployment rate in Serbia and the devastating consequences of on-going transitions, men struggle to find a new sense of identity beyond the one that was defined by the socialist labor and the ‘warrior’ type of masculinity during the war (Zorgdrager, 2013). In a way, we can say that masculinity is in transition as well.

Religion and sexual diversity (and especially their problematic interaction) have gained great public importance in the last several years. Public debates have shown a high level of homonegative attitudes including hate-speech and strong discriminatory attitudes by leading religious leaders and politicians (Sremac et al., 2015). The interplay between traditionalism, nationalism, Orthodoxy, and homonegativity is confirmed by a research of the *Gay Straight Alliance* (2010), which showed that out of the total number of respondents who were categorized as traditionalists, only 5% are not homophobic and 76% are

homophobic, and that nearly eight out of ten nationalists have homophobic attitudes. This study unfortunately made no distinction between the sexes. Moss (2002, p. 337) describes how attackers of participants of the 2001 Belgrade Pride Parade chanted *Srbija Srbima, napolje sa pederima!* ("Serbia for the Serbs, out with the gays!"), implying that homosexuals cannot be Serbs. Moss points out another bias that is widely prevalent in Serbia in this context, which is also confirmed by the study of *Gay Straight Alliance* (2010), which reads that homosexuality comes from the West and as such, undermines traditional and patriarchal values. In a similar vein, church leaders interpreted homosexuality as a Western threat to the traditional and spiritual values of national and religious identity.

The history of attempts to organize a Gay Pride Parade in Serbia highlights the tension. The first attempt was in 2001 with the slogan '*Ima mesta za sve*' ('There's room for all of us'). The parade was shattered. The second Parade was announced in July 2004, but canceled for security concerns. The 2009 Parade with the slogan *Vreme je za ravnopravnost* ('Time for equality') was banned one day before it was supposed to take place. The parade was officially organized for the first time in 2010 with the slogan *Možemo zajedno* ('Let's walk together'). It took place under strict police protection, suffered numerous attacks of nationalist organizations and hooligans, and barely managed to transfer participants of the Parade to a safer place. In 2011 theme *Podrška unutar porodice* ('Support from the family'), it was canceled. In 2012, the Parade was banned after a letter that Patriarch Irinej sent to the Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, only 6 days before the scheduled walk. The letter focused on the photo exhibition *Ecce homo* of a Swedish artist Elizabeth Ohlson Wallin. Here we present the patriarch's letter in Serbian and in English.<sup>1</sup>

"Nisam pretpostavljao da ću i ove godine biti primoran da vam se u ime SPC, njenih vernika koji predstavljaju dominantnu većinu Republike Srbije, kao i u ime brojnih članova drugih religija, obratim sa molbom i zahtevom, da autoritetom predsednika vlade, onemogućite skandaloznu izložbu fotografija švedske umetnice Elizabete Olson Valin.

Ovu dubokovređajuću izložbu propagiraju homoseksualci, organizatori gej parade, planirane za 3. oktobar ove godine". Na isti način, molimo i zahtevamo da se onemogućí i održavanje nagoveštene tragično-komično nazvane 'parade ponosa', a čije je pravo ime 'parada srama', koja baca tešku moralnu senku na naš grad, našu vekovnu hrišćansku kulturu i na dostojanstvo naše porodice, kao osnovne ćelije ljudskog roda."

"I did not assume that I would again be compelled, on behalf of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its believers who are the dominant majority of the Republic of Serbia, and on behalf of many members of other religions, to address you with the request that you, in the authority of the Prime Minister, prevent the scandalous photo exhibition of Swedish artist Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin.

This deeply insulting exhibition, promoted by homosexuals, organizers of the gay parade, is scheduled for 3 October this year. In the same way, we ask you to also prevent the above mentioned event, both tragically and comically called 'Pride Parade', better called by its real name 'shame parade', which casts a moral shadow on our city, our centuries-old Christian culture and the dignity of our family as the basic cell of the human race."

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rtk.co.rs/drustvo/item/4542-patrijarh-trazi-zabranu-prajdam/4542-patrijarh-trazi-zabranu-prajda>

The concoction of nationalism, ethnocentrism, religion, and anti-westernism targets homosexuality as an internally unifying enemy (Van den Berg et al., 2014). Sremac and Ganzevoort (2015) in their volume, *Religious and Sexual Nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe: God, Gays and Governments*, show that the debates about religion and homosexuality in Central and Eastern Europe are produced by much more multifaceted and multidirectional discursive framings of culture, nation, and gender. The interplay between religion and homosexuality, according to that volume is not only defined by specific moral, philosophical, or spiritual presuppositions. These positions emerge from discursive negotiations in a wider public arena, in which cultural and national identities play a crucial role. These negotiations are as much about sexual morality as they are about national identity, anti-EU sentiments, and the effort of religious institutions to regain power in post-communist societies. Thus the discursive negotiations of (homo)sexuality in Serbia not only rely on religious and/or theological arguments, but on a combination of religious, sexual, political and nationalistic discourses. This paper will contribute to the understanding of the complex field of lived religion, (in)toleration, and sexual diversity by analyzing the responses to the Patriarch's comments on the Gay Pride Parade 2012.

#### *Media Context*

Following cultivation theory, it is assumed that exposure to media presentation of homosexuality can lead to improved attitudes about homosexuality, but also to less acceptance. As the development of consumer attitudes about homosexuality matches those shown in the media, regular exposure to negative stereotypes dominating the consumed media, leads consumers to accept models of unfavorable impressions (Calzo & Ward, 2009). Individual beliefs and values (in particular the level of religious belief) and the use of certain types of media influence attitudes toward homosexuality (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Hicks and Lee, 2004). One of the factors correlated with homophobia is low frequency in reading newspapers (Hicks & Lee, 2004).

Mass media have always striven to achieve interactivity with the audience. At the same time the audience showed no less interest to state its position on media content, especially about the event, occurrence, or the actors of social practices that are the subject of media engagement. Interactivity is a possibility that the Internet is giving the users, to directly, without the intervention of editors, influence the content and form of the new digital media. Users enter into a virtual dialogue with each other, whose outcome can be the creation of a virtual public opinion on a particular topic. If there is an administrator's intervention on a media portal, it is usually conducted after the publication of content and after an intervention by other users. This makes the Internet the most democratic type of media that fully meets the demand for freedom of thought, expression, reception and dissemination of information as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006, Article 46) on the basis of

international conventions and declarations. It is believed that this is its main feature and value. At the same time, it also makes the Internet an unregulated space that allows unlimited discrimination of those who are different.

Miller (2011, p. 16) identifies three models of interactivity. The first one is already there on the implicit level in the technical and technological structure of computer-mediated communication, the second one is sociological and takes care of the social context in which messages are exchanged and the third, psycho-socially oriented aspect of interactivity lies in direct relation to the perception of users and is related to taking a 'passive' or 'active' role in the participation in digital media content. Miller (2011, p. 25) further argues that new media are produced in the post-industrial information capitalism and facing "individual preferences, as opposed to mass consumption" of traditional media. They are in constant change (updates), in repeated re-design and "in a potentially infinite number of versions." This makes them timeless and spaceless in a constant process of changing where commenters of on-line media content are directly influencing this change. It is therefore necessary to consider the media message made by a media professional and the comments by individual users as a whole, as a unique content in the analysis because they are conditioned by each other. So the article that was published on-line depends directly on the context of editorial policy, is affecting Internet users to leave their comments below the text or to respond to someone else's comment. Also, in this sequence, the order is clear. The professional media text always comes first, and then the comments posted to this text come next. The text is provoking comments, whether we speak about the journalistic content or the event or occurrence or the people that are in the news article that is informing the public. Almost never do the authors of news articles engage in a virtual dialogue with commenters so the last comment is the last seen content in this interdependent thread. On-line audience is considering the text of the journalists and the accompanying comments as a unique whole. It has been observed that users often first look whether there are some comments on the text, and if their number is sufficient, they read the text.

The real impact of commenters on the formation of public opinion on virtual events, phenomena, and people is difficult to assess and has not been studied in Serbia to date. We can, however consider the contents posted on the Web, regardless of the message creators being professionals or commenters, as part of the public sphere and interpret the materials as such. The comments become part of the text and thus contribute to the formation of public opinion on certain issues that are of interest to a particular community.

Vesnić-Alujević (2011, p. 85) argues that the development of communicative technology could easily contribute to the development of (e-)democracy. This democracy implies the inclusion of Internet users in a public dialogue with policy makers and/or representatives of the centers of political power, not only them being informed about their activities, which was the main task of the traditional media. Therefore, the interactivity that the Internet provides in the

field of on-line multimedia portals is an extremely important subject for the study of new possibilities in the field of social interactivity.

### **Aim, Method, Corpus**

#### *Aim*

The aim of this chapter is to identify discourse strategies of commenters of the most visited on-line multimedia portals in Serbian language responding to the news items published on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 concerning the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Irinej's open letter to the Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, urging him to ban the upcoming Pride Parade.

The relevance of this investigation rests in the fact that three fundamental issues are at stake. First, the open letter implies a direct encounter between the church and the state, which according to some infringes upon the secular nature of the Serbian constitution. Second, the open letter challenges basic human rights: the right to self-determination and the right to publicly express opinions and freedom of movement and to assemble. Third, the open letter expresses a conservative lived religion and morality that can be read as intolerant, stigmatizing, and alien to the Christian message of love, peace, and acceptance. It is therefore worthwhile to establish the public opinion by looking at multimedia commenters' responses.

#### *Method*

The basic method used in this research is a critical discourse analysis that focuses on the abuse of power or domination of the centers of political and economic power and its consequences. The researchers are interested in: social inequality and how it is reproduced discursively, the relation of discourse and society, and the relation of discourse and power (Van Dijk, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

In the case of mass media it is important to explore the discourses that regulate power over the public domain. The investigations must answer the question who can produce news programs in print and electronic media and who controls the selection of events and the production of news powerful elites decide who can participate in a communicative event, when, where, and with which purpose (Van Dijk 2008, pp. 32; 36) and how the media disperses that in accordance with their editorial policies. Hung-Chun Wang (2009, p. 722) claims that the discursive style and content of news are often formed and determined by the audience. As a reflection of what the audience wants, "media can 'reflect "reality" ... "co-orchestrate" dominant beliefs ... [and] create "reality"".

This analysis is particularly appropriate when analyzing basic human rights, in this case, a violation of the rights of LGBT population in the media, because who controls the media discourse can indirectly control public opinion. Domination of media discourse is essential to power in society, which in this case includes

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<sup>2</sup> See also: van Dijk 1987, 1991,1992,1998, 2001, 2005

not only professional posts in the on-line editions but also the responses by commenters.

### *Corpus*

A scan of multimedia sites in the Serbian language for entries dated October 3, 2012 and mentioning Patriarch Irinej's demand to ban the Pride yields 16,500 hits. For this study we selected 500 of the most popular ones. Out of this number, a corpus of 64,193 words was selected, which existed of 16 published texts and 892 comments. These comments referred to 682 unique signatures. See Table 1 for an overview of multimedia portals and comments.

*Table 1: Multimedia portals and comments*

	Nr of comments
www.rtk.rs	0
www.vesti.rs	0
www.b92.net	331
www.republikasrpska.net	0
www.politika.rs	32
www.b92.net	43
www.novosti.com	97
www.politika.rs	3
www.b92.net	137
www.rtv.rs	1
www.danas.rs	11
www.news-online.com	41
www.kurir.rs	26
www.telegraf.rs	1
www.blic.rs	198

## **Results**

The analyzed texts essentially contain the open letter written by Patriarch Irinej addressed to the Prime Minister of Serbia, processed by journalists, and the statements of the main stakeholders for the occasion. Only two of the 16 articles were signed by name of the journalists; the others were signed by the source media agency (Tanjug, Beta, FoNet, Reuters). The texts are very similar, differing only in length and very sporadically in choice of quoted persons. Therefore, we have not observed them as separate entities, but chose to focus on the user comments posted on the Internet to these journalistic interpretations. Due to space limitations in this chapter, we cannot provide extensive examples of all the discursive strategies found in these comments, but we present enough content to corroborate our categorization.

The overall response in the comments was relatively favorable towards the Patriarch's open letter. Only every tenth user of the multimedia portals that was analyzed in this corpus, condemned the act of the Patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church, whereas 70.9 % of online public explicitly supported the Patriarch. This may come as a surprise to those who would expect the constitutional secularity of the nation and its State-Church separation to imply that the prelates should not interfere with the work of state bodies, nor influence decision-makers. More than being an incorrect interpretation of State-Church separation in Serbia, this expectation is falsified by the apparent support of the most frequent internet users for the Patriarch's letter.

This is an important finding because of the discrepancy between the letter's intolerant, homonegative, and anti-modern perspective of exclusion of the 'Other' (in this case the LGBT population) on the one hand, and the modern, highly educated, urban nature of frequent Internet users.<sup>3</sup> The question raised is to what degree Serbia has embraced the discourse of tolerance and human rights as part of European values, or is still more a traditionalistic, patriarchal, exclusivist society, loaded with nationalism and religious intolerance rooted in the late twentieth century Western Balkans wars. The analysis will therefore attend to indicators of sexual and religious nationalism in order to better understand how lived religion plays into the politics of (in)tolerance.

#### *1. Relational discursive strategies: Online intolerance*

In the analyzed corpus several relational discursive strategies were observed. Most widely used is a direct condemnation, which is present in 29.1% of all user comments (260 of 892). This condemnation in many cases takes the shape of disqualification, either of the Church and the Patriarch, or of the State.

##### *1.1. Intolerance and disqualification toward the Church / Patriarch*

Of the 260 posts with direct condemnation, 67.3 % disqualify the Patriarch and/or the Serbian Orthodox Church. These disqualifications don't aim at serious critical responding to the content of the Patriarch's letter but question his authority to even write this letter. In some comments this disqualification and intolerance are given without further reasoning:

Shame on you and your gray beard! You should be ashamed! *RKoma*<sup>4</sup>

Sexual orientation is a choice, you either feel as a homosexual or you don't. It's a scandal that the Patriarch is responding. Like we are in the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Vukmirović, Pavlović, Stic (2012, pp. 14-18), the largest representation of Internet connections is in Belgrade (60.5%), followed by the northern province of Vojvodina (49.3%), and it is the lowest in central Serbia (40.6%). The share of computer users, according to the level of education is: 83% of those with tertiary education; 71.8% of those with secondary education; 29.7% of people with education lower than secondary.

<sup>4</sup> The signature of the author of the comment is stated in the text. All comments are presented in their original form, that is except for the English translation, no other intervention in terms of spelling, style and shortening, were made.

middle Ages. Human rights are violated because we are narrow-minded, intolerant and uncivilized. *Miško*

The Patriarch is not a Christian because he is not committed to the protection of the oppressed, but he leads their persecution! *Zaki*

Using the beard as *pars pro toto*, Rkoma addresses the Patriarch directly not using his title nor the monastic name but only the basic attribute to the function. The beard becomes the identification mark and the icon for shame. In other comments the disqualification is based on the Church's or Patriarch's actions in completely unrelated issues. The effect is that the Patriarch is framed as untrustworthy and consequently his letter should be disregarded.

So this guy wants to ban the gay parade, but he was not able to purge his own ranks of genuine illness ... Let us remember the reverent and sublime pedophile, Pahomije. *DueSu*<sup>5</sup>

Not naming Patriarch Irinej by his title and/or monastic name that he carries (Irinej), but calling him by a colloquial term 'this guy' which has a pejorative slang meaning 'insufficiently competent but despite cocky' which challenges his authority to speak out. This is made more explicit through the reference to sexual abuse cases (as we will see in more comments).

Wow dude, I do not support the parade itself, I'm not a homophobe, but this is too much. Priest, mind your own business and shame on you as long as you are not paying taxes. *Pedu*

O, good day, priest! Where have you been, priest, to make a proclamation to ban the rape of children by your colleagues? After that, you failed to ask for the ban of the shameful rehabilitation center in Crna reka<sup>6</sup> ... So you should be ashamed! I am ashamed that you are our Patriarch! *Nemanja*

Calling the patriarch 'priest' is particularly insulting in Serbian language. This goes back to the communist era when clergy of all religious communities were completely marginalized and condemned as 'reactionary social forces' and when religion was called 'the opium of the people' which had to be 'eradicated' by hook or by crook. In the same vein, 30.4 % of the comments contain more general disqualifications of the church – especially the Orthodox Church and its servants – as a negative actor in the public life of society.

It's time for the marginalization of the church. They are just sowing hatred and by that, aggression. It wouldn't hurt to ban churches, at least their public appearances. *Hm*

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<sup>5</sup> Pahomije is a bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church who had been charged with the sexually molesting five teenage boys.

<sup>6</sup> The commenter refers to priest Branislav Preranović – a former director of the Orthodox drug rehabilitation program, Crna Reka – who killed a drug addict by hitting him in the head with a bar. The part of the centre's treatment involved outright violent beatings of patients to help cure them of their substance addiction.

Here, my dear buddy patriarch, we will immediately forbid it, you just say what you like and what you do not like and who you like and who you do not like, we will immediately prohibit all that is not in your taste. We can incorporate your taste into the Constitution, just say the word.  
*LLL*

The commenter M.N. Lazar is asking a question that the Serbian Orthodox Church failed to answer in the last decade, they have not only deprived the public this answer, but have even protected the controversial bishop Kačavenda.<sup>7</sup>

But, your Holiness, why haven't you taken away bishop of Vranje Pahomije's rank? *M.N. Lazar*

Is it all right that the church went and consecrated rifles and guns that sowed death on the battlefields? Is it all right that the church finances the *Obraz*<sup>8</sup>, the 1389 and others similar to them from donations and other sorts of church racket? Are priests supposed to sanctify the scum above and go with them to ruin and burn the cities with all the crosses and cassock? Is it all right for the Patriarch that the churches are protecting abusers that are priests, pedophiles, and not abusers of female children but of small boys? Is that gay or is it "it just happened"? Dear Patriarch, is it okay for the church to support and protect Kačavenda who is charging consecration of churches 5000 Marks and is driving expensive cars, motorcycles and owns brothels and casinos around Brčko? *Shame on the church*

In this example, "Shame on the church" lists all the problems plaguing the credibility of the Serbian Orthodox Church through questions that also the Serbian public has been denied of getting answers.

### *1.2 Intolerant and disqualification toward the State/society*

Disqualification and intolerance of the State and/or society were found in only 9.6% of the condemnation posts. These disqualifying comments targeted either the opponents of the Pride Parade (8.5 %), its supporters (6.5 %), or more specifically the attackers of the Patriarch (3.9 %).

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<sup>7</sup> Kačavenda is an influential bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church who had retired after a sex scandal and video appearing to show him engaged in sexual activity with young men. Kačavenda was also endorsing violence against Muslims civilians during the Bosnian war of 1992-95.

<sup>8</sup> The *Obraz* and the SNP NAŠI 1389 are the right-wing nationalist groups that organized protests against the Pride participants. One of the main program principles of the SNP NAŠI 1389 is the protection of family values. On their website can be found a vivid example of militant hate speech against LGBT: "The family is the sanctuary and the first unit of society in which every individual is formed, so that is why our Orthodox tradition plays a major role in forming the personality of the child, in order to be protected from the invasion of anti-culture coming from certain western countries, and which is embodied in sectarianism, drug addiction, materialism, individualism, the ideologies of the gay movement, and other deviant groups." (SNP 1389).

Ouch, brother Serbs, why did we come down from the trees when we belong there? *Banana*

Keeping people in uncertainty so that everyone is disgusted by everything for as much as them to give up ... :) What a crappy 'state'.  
*ELAFITI*

Disqualification sometimes comes under the guise of an expression of support for the opposite position. The following example starts as a message of support for the Pride but turns into a vehement disqualification of society:

Full support to the parade, which is the last cry for sobering up, a protest against murderous fascism and oppression to which we condemned ourselves. *Angry worm*

Another comment clearly distinguishes between different actors in the political realm, thereby personalizing the support and intolerance:

Bravo Tadić, should have done it earlier, and as for Dačić, there is no justification and excuse. *Kiki*

Kiki supports the president of Serbia and condemns the Minister of Interior Affairs, who accepted the recommendation of the Patriarch and banned the parade. Since they are very well known and highly visible in the media, the commenter believed that their functions do not have to be stated, but he/she takes a model of 'private' direct communication, addressing the President of the country as if they were acquaintances.

In other comments, the church is seen as the more trusted party:

If our church was in the government, we would live better than with these politicians that spit on the church when it interferes and when they need it, when elections are coming they kiss their clothes. Bravo to the Patriarch Irinej, you are a great man and I would just like to ask you to in the name of our people to appear more when important decisions need to be made because you are the only one we believe, not the politicians. *What kind of people are we?*

To underscore the text of this comment, the commenter has chosen a signature in the form of a question ("What kind of nation are we?") to make sure that his critique not only applies to the state but to society as a whole. This type of comments reflects the present levels of trust that various societal institutions entertain. According to Strategic Marketing research (Blic, 2013), the most trusted institutions in Serbian society are the army (42 %) and the Serbian Orthodox Church (41 %). It is worth noting that people don't recognize the institutions of democratic society as most trustworthy (the judiciary, the education system, the parliament), but the institutions of direct force (the army) and ideological power (the church).

### 1.3. Intolerance and disqualification of the Pride

Some disqualifications are focused neither on the Patriarch nor on the state but target the Gay Pride itself. In an example of what has previously been described as a 'hot-and-cold'-strategy (Valić- Nedeljković, 1998), we find an alternation of positive and negative attitudes that offers a more layered intolerance and condemnation:

I am in favor of the exhibition not being forbidden! My faith cannot be shaken by every artist or quasi-artist. I personally do not want to see the Lord Jesus Christ as a transvestite and I consider it to be a pretty cheap trick aimed only to provoke. *Janko*

The commenter first gives a general affirmative statement about the controversial photo exhibition *Ecce homo* (Elizabeth Ohlson Wallin), which should not be forbidden according to him. 'To avoid being categorized as pro-pride, however, he changes 'position' ('footing' – Goffman, 1979). He disqualifies the 'quasi-artist' and states that his view is not based on sentiment or hurt. In fact, he claims to have a strong personal faith that 'cannot be shaken'. Finally he is outspoken in his condemnation of the exhibition that he defended and of the artist's 'pretty cheap trick'. This way the commenter blurs the lines between the opposing perspectives and claims moral superiority towards both sides.

#### *Relational strategies: discussion*

The relational discursive strategies use condemnation and support to strengthen or disqualify the parties involved in the conflict. This is sometimes personalized by focusing on one of the representatives, and sometimes generalized by targeting the church, state, or society as a whole. The personalized strategy supports or attacks the Patriarch, the President or the Minister of Interior Affairs, and the artist. If it becomes a personal attack, it easily functions as a degrading of personal integrity and values. The generalized attack turns it into a more systemic critique. In the end these are minor differences as the person symbolizes the institution or the group. The Patriarch represents the church; the politicians the state, and the artist the pride.

On the level of relational strategies the controversy does not center on the moral debate between the Church and the gay activists. Instead it focuses primarily on the relation between church and state. The conflict as it appears from the analysis of this corpus involves a partnership between church and state that is closer to a Byzantine theocratic state than to a modern secular one (Valić- Nedeljković, 2010). Notwithstanding the formal state-church separation, there is a clear and direct influence of the Serbian Orthodox church on the policies of the – officially neutral – state. Many comments containing relational discursive strategies in fact negotiate these changing church-state relations, claiming either support for a stronger influence of the church or for a clearer demarcation.

## *2. Argumentative discursive strategies: Online Lived Religion*

These discourse strategies, focusing on content as a strategy of persuasion, have been observed in other corpora (Valić-Nedeljković, 1998; 2014). Argumentative lived religion discursive strategies, including *Authority claims*, *Comparison*, *'Facts'* and *Thesis replacement* imply explicit references to content, which commenters use in their interaction on multimedia platform. In each of these four models the commenters used either a citation of an indisputable source, or quotation of material data ('facts'), or comparison with other relevant examples. Also they set up - by their opinion - more relevant topics for the public discussion on the Internet platforms. Therefore, *conversational implicature* does not have to exist at the implicit level for the message to be deconstructed entirely. These strategies are based on the strength of factuality, where 'facts' speak for themselves. In this way, recipients of the message and other commenters do not dispute these 'facts' because they are undeniable, but rather their selection, although this happens also infrequently. As we will show, discursive strategies prove to be very effective and for that reason commenters use them very often.

### *2.1. Authority claims*

The most frequently quoted authority was God, then the holy books, notably the Bible, followed by prominent public figures from literature, philosophy, or – less often – famous statesmen. The commenter is posting his or her own opinions in the guise of the words of a person with undisputed authority, aiming at better acceptance of these opinions. The quoted text is always pulled out of a person's memory, so it is in fact a direct transposition of the citations into a text that has a task to accomplish a particular goal of the arguers. The exact reference for the quote is rarely stated; only the author is mentioned, either in the comment itself or in a signature below the comment. When the exact source is specified, the credibility of both the citation and the impact of the message on the audience is significantly enhanced on an implicit level. It has been observed that when an Internet user names the source for the quote, he/she is usually signed his full name, which again lends more credence to the whole comment in comparison with anonymous comments.

When it comes to unquestioned authorities from religious histories, most common was Jesus Christ and never Muhammad, for example, even though the Islamic religious community supported the public attitude of Patriarch Irinej to ban the Pride.

What did Jesus Christ say "let him who is without sin cast the first stone" on these sinners. What kind of traditions and Serbs and Orthodoxy?? All this is a large nebula for the Serbs. Do any of these advocates of this madness and know at all anything about the history of Orthodoxy and the Serbian state? Somebody should have a seriously talk with the Bishop; he really is not completely normal. *Non-party individual*

The reference to God as the authority in settling of this controversial situation is present in this corpus but also in other corpora with religious content (Valić-Nedeljković, 1998).

All these quasi-Christians should better pray that God does not exist. Because if he does, and he is as he is presented in the Bible, they will all be taking the first train to hell. *Clyde*

In this example the commenter refers to an extreme phenomenon in everyday life from all over former Yugoslavia. In the late eighties, the sudden opening of the state to the church and the church to the state after 70 years of aggressive atheism in the service of the awakening nationalism led to the explosion of new-believers (as a counterpart to the new-rich). Suddenly, they all turned to their traditional churches, began to be baptized and married in the church in later years, they started cherishing rituals, going to churches and monasteries for the holidays, etc. This upswing of lived religion doesn't necessarily reflect a deep spiritual revival as many proved their belonging to their nation by blind belief and they distanced themselves from others (other nations and another faith). The uncritical, violent secularization has now received a counter movement in a uncritical de-secularization that can be seen in the populist and nationalist overt practice of religion for political purposes. Therefore, the interplay between ethnic and religious identities in the Western Balkans shows how religion can become "the fabric of ethnicity" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 1141) and the main catalyst of nationalism.

I, like the vast majority of citizens of Serbia, feel very vulnerable. Not because we doubt our sexual identity, but because this threatens our security, our religious and national feelings. *Medo Brundo*

Most people in Serbia do not support this 'walk' and parading, it does not mean they do not support these people, but they do not support the parading and the desecration of what is sacred – the family! A family is made up of mums, dads and kids! If the government allowed the "parade of shame" it would have violated all rules of what is holy! *Jelica*

Of the religious books, the Bible is referred to most frequently, either in indirect mentions or in direct quotations.

Open the Bible, Leviticus 20:13 that reads: If a man also lies with a man, as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them. *Vukosava Makarin*

This statement, phrased in biblical language – including a reference to Leviticus 20:13 – refers to an explicit call for violent punishment. Whether or not this is intended to justify violence against the contemporary LGBT community is not clarified. Other references to the Bible allow for much more ambiguous or even positive perspectives:

According to the Bible, a great sin is separating man from God and other men and also his own over-valuation. That is a danger to all man in

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general, not specifically to the homosexuals. The Bible does not even mention homosexuality because the term had not yet been introduced at the time, that is why the Church decided to formulate the words in its own way, the way it suits them, so if some people think that by listening to the 'statements' by some of these figures they are doing the 'right thing' then they are sadly mistaken. It should be the 'patriarch' who is a little more abiding what their religion preaches ... *Mim*

Apart from the holy book as the undisputed authority, commenters have referred to another undisputable document, the Constitution, albeit with contradictory interpretations.

The Patriarch "overlooked" the assumption of a democratic civil society: all citizens have the right of free association. *Nikola Andric*

When so many of you are referring to the Constitution, at least read it. Article 54 of the Serbian Constitution states that freedom of assembly can be restricted if that is necessary to protect public health, morals, safety, or rights of the Republic of Serbia. So the prohibition is legal under the Constitution. *Jovan*

## 2.2. Facts and Comparisons

Commenters' use of referring to 'facts' fits well in the context of responding to a journalist's article. Their comments, however, usually come without much preparation but are based on a spontaneous response and available knowledge. It is aimed at the on-line audience rather than at the journalist. Therefore, in referring to 'facts' they usually do not quote specific sources or discuss the credibility of the quoted information.

Anthropological studies explain that the rise of homosexuality is correlated with an increase in general promiscuity [...] and that most sexually semi-mature teenagers lose their benchmark to sexual orientation. This is unfortunately associated with for example, child pornography on the Internet or lowering the age of consent for sexual relations. This phenomenon should be viewed from more sociological aspects and not through an ideological prism of the fight for the 'rights and freedoms' as is usually imposed on us. *Milunkadottir*

Similarly, the comparison with other countries provides a 'factual' interpretation of the situation that soon turns out to be moral rather than factual:

When I think about the differences between Iran and Serbia I see there are none! We are narrow-minded idiots and that is what we will always be! *Tanja*

In Serbia, the stereotype of a closed, religiously intolerant and very religiously conservative society is Iran. A comparative discourse strategy is very picturesque. Serbia is compared to Iran using the common denominator of

religious conservatism. Commenter 'Tanja', expresses it in implicit hate language: "We are narrow-minded idiots".

### 2.3. Thesis replacement

Thesis replacement strategy is used very often. The implicit meaning of messages formatted in this discourse is the minimization of the problem by stating another problem that challenges a society, one which is in the opinion of the commenter far more important. Basically, this strategy also represents a kind of hate speech. Refusing that the issue exists, the denial of the problem, is away to denigrate the problem and actors, in this case, the organizers of the Pride and the LGBT population. A demonstration of their identity is qualified as totally "inappropriate" at a time when the country is faced with, for example, a serious economic crisis, unemployment, poverty and so on.

It is a disgrace for a country where a huge number of the population is literally starving, where hospitals lack basic tools for care for the sick, in which patients suffering from cancer (children) do not have medication, which runs hundreds of soup kitchens so that people would not die from hunger. Now we want to pay the police to secure a shameful exhibition of some perverted freak Swede who is insulting millions of believers and admirers of Jesus in her 'works of art'! And you, gay provocateurs should take a hoe in your hands! Disgrace. *Sanja*

#### *Argumentative discursive strategies: discussion*

The argumentative discourse is a discourse of performance with a certain religious persuasive strength capable of placing it in the matrix of proof and authority. Persuasive strategies are important in allowing arguers to pursue their rhetorical goals (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 93). As such, the argumentative discursive strategies are persuasive strategies that discriminate on an implicit level. In our corpus, the rules of argumentative performance and its logic structures manifest themselves as 'pragmatic effects' of the argumentative intervention that aim to discriminate. From a lived religion perspective, the argumentative discursive strategies serve to negotiate the collectively shared religious perspectives and – even more perhaps – to position oneself firmly in those negotiations. Whether one takes the stance of defending traditional values or of promoting equality and tolerance, the argumentative strategies are examples of identity politics: they define a powerful ideological enemy (be it "immoral secularism" or "conservative bigotry") over against which one defends and performs a virtuous cultural or religious identity. To protest against this "enemy" then serves to bolster one's own identity.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing we can see that discursive strategies represent prototypical methods of sending out additional meanings of messages on an implicit level, i.e. those meanings that are not expressed in an explicit way, openly. Some of these strategies are unique and make the hallmark style of individual communicators, and they are typical for their way of communicating. Others

are used by different communicators and are prototypical for a specific cultural and social context. Deconstruction of the discourse strategies provides a thorough understanding of the text, with its hidden meanings that the author has constructed consciously or subconsciously. It helps us to not just to realize the processes of denotation but also of connotation of messages and it also helps to avoid communication noise. If communicators share similar or same values, knowledge, information, experience, personal opinion on certain matters of communication, that deconstruction will be more successful. In addition, there is also a form of communication with the basic intent to influence others to change their opinions. Such communication is achieved primarily through the design process of messages in a certain way, by choosing the appropriate discourse strategies, which will load the additional meaning of the message, but on an implicit level, except for the ones that will be clearly stated on the explicit level. Discourse analysis using deconstruction of discourse strategies in communication suggests persuasive intentions of communicators that are often motivated by a desire for manipulation, persuasion and indoctrination.

The application of discourse analysis on this online corpus of public debate about homosexuality, lived religion, and the nation state highlights the ways in which religious and antireligious arguments are used to fortify one's own perspective and undermine the position of the opponent. Lived religion in the context studied here functions as a powerful language of intolerance. At the same time, the activation of intolerance and opposition bolsters the identity politics of the participants and can therefore also be a powerful expression and reinforcement of lived religion.

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