

# Mirroring Europe

## *Ideas of Europe and Europeanization in Balkan Societies*

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## The Quest for Legitimacy: Discussing Language and Sexuality in Montenegro

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### Introduction

In the 2006 referendum, the majority of resident citizens of Montenegro voted in favor of the state independence. From the initial stages of the dissolution of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (hereon: SFRY) to 2006, two former Yugoslav republics, Montenegro and Serbia, constituted a joint state.<sup>1</sup> Morrison (2012, 448) argues that the issues of statehood in Montenegro should be observed from a broader regional and historical perspective: “the tumultuous events of the 1990s created a context within which Montenegro’s independence became possible.” During the 1990s and 2000s, the meaning of the terms “Montenegrin” and “Serbian” were intensely discussed and interpreted in conflicting ways in many spheres of life in Montenegro (cf. Brković 2009, 2013; Džankić 2013; Vujačić 2013; Zahova 2012a). Alongside the discussions about the possible forms of statehood and the meaning of the national terms, various other points of dispute emerged. This chapter maps the directions and key arguments of two such points of dispute—the standardization of the Montenegrin language and the recognition of minority sexualities. It is based on an ethnographic research I conducted in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, in 2007–2008 and again shortly in 2012, and in Ulcinj, a coastal town on the border with Albania, in 2012.<sup>2</sup>

The discussion about the language suggests that an attempt to fit Montenegro (and other post-Yugoslav states) into a separate national category

- 1 The state had two names: the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1992 to 2003 and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro from 2003 to 2006.
- 2 The 2007–2008 research was part of a three-year historical and anthropological project “New and Ambiguous Nation-Building Processes in South-Eastern Europe” led by the University of Graz and the Free University Berlin, supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung and the Austrian Science Fund. The 2012 research was conducted in cooperation with the University of Manchester and the Montenegrin nongovernmental organization Civil Alliance, and supported by the Centre for East European Language Based Area Studies (CEELBAS).

regularly leaves a residue, that is, experiences and practices which do not conform to the ethno-national classification. Furthermore, the discussion about sexuality suggests that an attempt to ground the struggle against homophobia in legal and medical arenas of the state also regularly leaves a residue, since it does not address the overwhelming denial of legitimate belonging of sexual minorities to the Montenegrin polity. However, the participants in these two discussions did not attempt to forge social and linguistic frameworks which could resolve the said residues. Instead, the two discussions reflect wider post-Yugoslav struggles over the politicization of culture (cf. Wright 1998). While the political legitimacy of the sense of belonging to a nation is undisputed, it is still being determined whether class, sexuality, gender, age, or some other power vector should be articulated as a political issue (cf. Jansen 2005). In both discussions, "Europe" and the European Union were predominantly perceived as the location of the future to which Montenegro was progressing. It seems to me that such a perception of Europe and Montenegro infantilizes the topics under discussion and erases the leeway for envisioning new arguments and new forms of political struggle. In this volume, Prica asks: "*What is this nation or social class, what is this society that is assumed in all these 'in the name of' speeches?*" Understanding the discussions about the language and about sexuality in Montenegro through the prism of "lagging behind Europe" abolishes the possibility to respond to such questions and to envision novel ways of resolving the discussions' residues.

In the first part of the chapter, I will present the dynamics of the discussion about the language and in the second part some of the key arguments in the discussion about sexuality.

I hope that approaching these two conversations as examples of the politicization of culture will explicate the need to rethink their vocabularies.

### Language Ideologies in the Discussion About Language

By language ideology, Gal (2006) refers to historically and socially specific metalinguistic ideas about how various linguistic practices are mutually positioned and how relations between the language practices, places, institutions, and social locations of speakers should be understood. Language ideologies forge and naturalize specific links between multiple social categories, including language, orthography, grammar, register, nation, gender, class, knowledge, tradition, and so forth (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, 72). The dominant language ideology in Western Europe has conceptual roots in Herder's and Locke's philosophical standpoints, both of which assume that "a viable polity must be

based on uniformity of linguistic practices among speakers, and the guidance or mediation of properly inclined and trained intellectuals" (Gal 2010, 35).

Most of the discussions of appropriate language practices in post-Yugoslav states, including Montenegro, are positioned within or against the framework of linguistic nationalism, in which, as Gal writes, "language practices can be used to legitimate territorial demands, changed borders and new political arrangements" (Gal 2006, 166). According to this view, "social groups are thought to deserve a state or some kind of political autonomy exactly by virtue of their supposed linguistic homogeneity and distinctness" (Ibid.). Post-Yugoslav spaces mirrored this assumption, since changing the language was a constitutive part of rewriting state borders and sovereignties (cf. Kordić 2010). The languages were renamed, homogenized, and standardized within the newly established borders, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of the nationalist political cartography of the region. Since the groundwork for the construction of the state apparatus and corresponding national belonging in Western Europe was conducted in the nineteenth century, the standardization of the Montenegrin language at the beginning of the twenty-first century was occasionally interpreted as a case of "lagging-behind." The assumption that one language corresponds to one culture, and preferably to one nation-state, alongside the idea that the language can be separated from its speakers and codified in a single form, "were central in producing and buttressing European claims to difference from the rest of the world" (Gal and Irvine 1995, 967). Since the 1990s, Western Balkan countries invested enormous efforts in language re-standardization, rather than in attempting to intervene in standardizing and Herderian ideologies. These efforts to re-standardize according to the national criterion can be understood as a claim to Europeanness—an attempt to fit into the perceived European language order, and the ISO 639–3 classification,<sup>3</sup> with a delay. Thus, the discussion about the language in Montenegro shares the conceptual basis with the EU language policies. Gal writes that linguistic nationalism is itself a part of a wider ideology of standardized national languages on which the language policies of the EU are based:

It may appear that the complex language policies of the European Union are designed exactly to avoid this tradition of territorial disputes on the

3 ISO 639 is a set of standards of the International Organization for Standardization used for the representation of names of languages and language groups. ISO 639–3 attempts to represent all known languages, including living, extinct, ancient, and constructed languages, whether major or minor, written or unwritten, by specific identifiers. Details are available online at: <http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/default.asp>, accessed April 19, 2014.

basis of linguistic claims. [...] Yet, this emphasis on linguistic diversity is deceptive. To be sure, there is recognition of national language, minority and regional language, foreign, migrant and third country languages; mother tongues, sign languages, lesser used languages, ethnic minority, indigenous and non-territorial languages. Nevertheless, all the linguistic practices considered worthy of mention conform to standardising and Herderian assumption: *they are named languages with unified, codified norms of correctness embodied in literatures and grammars. No other configurations of speaking are recognised.* Significantly, the same is true of the highly influential political theories that comment on language rights and language planning in Europe (Gal 2006, 166, emphasis added).

The same ideas of what constitutes a proper language form the basis of the ISO 639-3 list, which includes the code *HBS* to refer to the macro-language called Serbo-Croatian. The individual languages recognized as constituting this macro-language are Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, while the Montenegrin language shares the ISO 639-3 code *srp* with the Serbian language as its variety.<sup>4</sup> The difference in the status of these four language names reflects the Ethnologue's criterion that

where there is enough intelligibility between varieties to enable communication, the existence of well-established distinct ethnolinguistic identities can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered to be different languages.<sup>5</sup>

There are no apparent linguistic reasons why the Montenegrin language could not be classified as a variety of the Bosnian or Croatian, or why some other combination of statuses of the four names would not be used. The Ethnologue's classification reflects "well-established ethnolinguistic identities" and compels looking at the post-Yugoslav linguistic situation through the ethno-national framework.

4 Many living languages included in ISO 639-3 were derived from the fifteenth edition of "Ethnologue: Languages of the World," a reference work cataloguing all of the world's known living languages. Details about the Montenegrin language are available online: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/srp>, accessed April 19, 2014.

5 The Ethnologue's brief explanation of the criteria for the identification of languages: <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification>, accessed April 19, 2014.

Since Montenegro (re)gained the status of an independent state in 2006, one of the ways of approximating an idealized image of the EU member-states was by renaming the language to Montenegrin and codifying the norms of linguistic correctness in orthographies and grammars. The process of language standardization was not smooth, but shaped by intense discussions and struggles among state-appointed experts and many others. The main points of dispute were appropriate linguistic forms, rather than the name of the language, as it had been before 2007. Calling the language Montenegrin was a controversial issue from the dissolution of the SFRY up until 2007, when it was defined in the new Montenegrin Constitution as the state's official language, with Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian being recognized as languages of official use. Accepting the name *Montenegrin language* without much objection, members of state-appointed bodies for language codification, followed by other actors, fought over its appropriate form.

Some of the conflicting ideas of how to standardize the Montenegrin language follow the Ethnologue's criteria for language identification, while others do not. During the standardization, one of the leading groups claimed that the Montenegrin language has a well-established ethnolinguistic identity, that it was oppressed by the Serbo-Croatian standard, but that today it can be easily differentiated from all the other post-Yugoslav languages. While strongly disagreeing with the classification of Montenegrin as a variety of the Serbian language, the proponents of this view fully adopted the Ethnologue's logic. According to other ideas, the standard of the Montenegrin language should reflect the contemporary linguistic practices of people who live in Montenegro, whether or not they correspond to the ethnonational boundaries and state borders. The proponents of this idea claimed that the everyday linguistic experience of Montenegrin inhabitants should constitute a backdrop of the Montenegrin language, rather than a well-defined ethnonational identity. In that way, their criterion for language identification did not correspond to the Ethnologue's. There were also voices which claimed that the Montenegrin language is just a political construction under which is essentially the Serbian language (a view which largely fits with the Ethnologue's classification), but since these voices were not particularly strong during the process of standardization, I will not discuss them further. The process of standardization produced many inconsistencies, not least because the institutionalization of the language in education started before the agreement over the appropriate language form was reached. The final product of the standardization reflects multiple linguistic solutions and leaves the creation of a singular standard to the future. Let us take a closer look at how this discussion was developed.

### Standardization of the Montenegrin Language

Language standardization simultaneously aims to create a *universal* language norm in relation to which regional, class or minority language practices are evaluated and a *particular* language norm, authentic to its “nationally specific” culture (Gal 2010, 40). The standardization of the Montenegrin language followed this direction. Since language standardization is an “institutionally orchestrated semiotic process” (op. cit., 33), the Montenegrin government formed the *Council for the Codification of the Montenegrin Language* in early 2008 and selected thirteen members whose task was to create the orthography, grammar and vocabulary of the Montenegrin language. The members quickly divided themselves into two groups and initiated a media-covered dispute. One of the groups aimed towards an archaization of the language by arguing for the linguistic forms and vocabulary of the literature written in Montenegro during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the (re)introduction of three letters. They promoted the view of the Serbo-Croatian as an imposed language standard which avoided authentic Montenegrin linguistic forms “in order to suffocate Montenegrin national being” (Banjević in Čirgić 2010). Consequently, they aimed to standardize the linguistic forms of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and those recognized as folk language forms during the SFRY. The other group argued for the (re)introduction of one additional letter and codification of the “Montenegrin variant of the polycentric Serbo-Croatian language” (Glušica 2011, 272), that is, the contemporary language of educated speakers in Montenegro. They argued that there was no point in attempting to correct the alleged wrongs of the past language politics and they wanted the standard to “realistically acknowledge the existing language situation” (Glušica 2011, 274).

The core of their disagreement revolved around different conceptions of authenticity. The proponents of the archaic forms aimed to create a norm which would reflect something specific to Montenegrin past and against which not only regional, but also Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Serbo-Croatian language standards could be evaluated. In their conception, authenticity was located in the distant past: the language was evaluated as authentic if it corresponded to the past enough linguistic forms. Here, “past enough” refers to the forms used in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, that is, the age in which language standardization largely occurred in Western Europe. In this view, being linguistically in tune with ‘Europe’ meant drawing from the same historical era as Western European countries did when introducing their national language standards, rather than from the Yugoslav past. Drawing on the widespread European imaginary of native struggles for independence

against the colonizers, this group represented the Serbo-Croatian language standard as a “death sentence” to the Montenegrin language, executed primarily in order “to transform rich Montenegrin tradition, history, statehood, and culture to the Serbian one” (Đurović 2009, 248). A similar kind of desire to fit into the “national order of things” (cf. Malkki 1995) on the basis of the rediscovered vibrant national past is reflected in a comment of the president of the Council:

The language contains the characteristics of the people, its relations to the world and if we were to depart from the principles of the Orthography, we would come to a position of self-negation and disrespect of Montenegrin specificity. Self-negation cannot be accepted as a scientific stance! (Banjević in Čirgić 2010, 19)

The other group located authenticity in the present, and thereby did not need to reinvent language forms. They did not try to create the linguistic standard according to the past enough linguistic forms through which Montenegro could, presumably, clearly differentiate itself from its neighbors and thus claim legitimate membership in the European family of languages and nations. Instead, they drew from the notions of “reason and scientific facts,” “linguistic reality,” and “clear language politics of the future, rather than of the past” (Glušica 2008, 298). Similarly to the memories analyzed by Tanja Petrović in this volume, the language standard proposed by this group was an attempt “to negotiate *belonging to Europe* by looking at one’s own socialist past,” as well as post-socialist present. By refusing to see the presumable lack of national linguistic specificity as problematic, this group conceptualized the Montenegrin socialist and post-socialist linguistic experience as authentic and legitimately European. Whether or not Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian language standards reflected the well-established ethnonational identities did not pose a problem since authenticity was located in the present. This group left the task of interpreting the regional linguistic and national relations to the educated speakers of these standards, their politicians, and the EU, focusing instead on codifying what they saw as the contemporary language situation in Montenegro.

One year later, in early 2009, the two informal council groups submitted two different orthographies to the Ministry of Education and Sport. Instead of choosing among them, the ministry formed a new expert group to which it transferred the tasks of the council. The expert group included three people, one of whom was a member of the former council and none of whom lived and worked in Montenegro. The expert group published *The Orthography of the*



*Montenegrin Language and the Vocabulary of the Montenegrin Language* in the summer of 2009, using the work of both council groups unevenly. Grammar principles implied in the Orthography were mostly based on the solutions proposed by the 'archaization' group, and the Vocabulary was based on the work of the other part of the council. The Orthography (re)introduced two letters and codified multiple doublets. The discussion about the language continued in the Montenegrin media, where links between gender, competence, and political choices of the members of the former council and the expert group were often made. The Grammar was adopted in 2010 by the government-appointed the *Council for General Education*, standardizing a large number of doublets.

Gal (2006) argues that, despite its aim, standardization does not produce language homogeneity across the territory of a nation-state, but hierarchically ordered heterogeneity in speech. Going a step beyond, the final product of the standardization of the Montenegrin language introduced heterogeneity in norm as well as in speech. Multiple orthographic doublets were found to be acceptable in order to respect the contemporary language practices alongside "linguistic characteristics which survived the long-imposed foreign standard language form," as the authors of the final Orthography wrote in the Foreword.<sup>6</sup> The explicit aim of standardizing doublets was to create

conditions to allow spontaneous language development until the adoption of the next Orthography that will distinguish which of the doublets will continue to function and which will become part of the history of the Montenegrin language. (Orthography of the Montenegrin Language, 2009, 6)

The final adopted standard thus oscillated between differing norms proposed by the two council groups: it codified doublets for the majority of disputed linguistic forms which reflected both conceptions of authenticity. Offering the speakers a possibility to choose which variant they prefer, thereby postponing the codification of a singular language variant, might not be common in the processes of language standardization (cf. Milroy 2001). It remains to be seen whether such a hybrid decision will be dominantly interpreted as an instance of linguistic openness and tolerance presumably characteristic of the EU language regimes, or as an example of Balkan "messiness" and "ambiguity." In either case, this discussion presents a clear case of politics as a struggle over meaning, characteristic of both the EU and the Western Balkans.

<sup>6</sup> The final version of the Orthography is available at the website of the Government of Montenegro: <http://www.gov.me/files/1248442673.pdf>, accessed April 19, 2014.

### Politics as a Struggle Over Meaning

The discussion over language in Montenegro in the last five or six years has repeatedly moved from linguistics to politics to education and back. Rather than understanding this discussion (and similar ones across post-Yugoslav spaces) as more than a century late replica of those led in the Western European nation-building processes, I argue that it mirrored some of the issues the EU is faced with today—culture was politicized in a very contemporary way and the appropriate ground of legitimacy of a new cultural and political framework was searched for, contested, and negotiated from various positions (cf. Shore 2000, Abeles 2004). Woolard and Schieffelin (1994, 65) write:

Even where nationhood is as classically well-established as it is in France, orthographic battles flare. Thus, orthographic systems cannot be conceptualized simply as reducing speech to writing, but rather they are symbols that carry historical, cultural, and political meanings.

The discussion over the Montenegrin language was an example of a struggle over such historical, cultural and political meanings materialized in the orthography and the language standard.<sup>7</sup> Wrights (1998, 9) argues that politics understood as a struggle over meaning often occurs in three stages:

The first is overt attempts by identified agents to redefine key symbols which give a particular view of the world, of how people should be and behave and what should be seen as the “reality” of their society and history: in short, an ideology. A second stage is when such a view of the world becomes institutionalized and works through non-agentive power. [...] A third stage is when a key term which carries a new way of thinking about one aspect of life enters other domains (outside the activities of the state) and becomes a diffused and prevalent way of thinking in everyday life.

All three stages—“naming,” “institutionalization,” and “normalization”—were present in the standardization of the Montenegrin language as well, but they were interwoven and concurrent processes rather than consecutively following one another. The discussion repeatedly moved from the first to the second

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of how senses of national belonging were redefined through the category of “national minorities” during the language standardization, look at Zahova (2012b).

stage and back, which resulted in the Montenegrin language vaguely and unevenly appearing as an indisputable fact of life.

For example, in 2008, the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Montenegro founded the Department of Montenegrin Language and South Slavic Literatures, in addition to the already existing Department of Serbian Language and South Slavic Literatures, thereby institutionalizing the Montenegrin language. However, since the council was still working, some of the key symbols of the legitimacy of a national language and the essential sources for the newly founded department, such as the Orthography, Vocabulary, and Grammar, were lacking. Once the expert group finished its job in 2009, and the new working group completed the Grammar in 2010, it seemed as if the tensions over the language decreased slightly. When the first generation of students of the Montenegrin language was approaching graduation, the language discussions again moved to the first stage, this time concerning the name and the shape of the language in elementary and high school education.<sup>8</sup> The assumption that the name of the school subject would be changed to "Montenegrin language" was proven wrong in 2011, when certain members of the political opposition in Montenegro conditioned the ratification of the new Election Law on the inclusion of the word "Serbian" in the name of the school subject. After intense negotiations over the punctuation and word sequence, a group of four leading politicians, including the Montenegrin Prime Minister, agreed that the school subject would be named *Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature*. The new Election Law was ratified, and the Ministry of Education and Sport formed a *Committee for creating the curriculum for the subject Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature*. The members of the committee, another body with the task of institutionalizing the language, failed to reach an agreement over the status of the two new Montenegrin letters. The alphabets of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian standards have thirty letters, and the new Montenegrin alphabet has thirty-two. The new subject name was introduced in schools in 2012, although the curriculum of the subject "Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature" for elementary and high schools is still in preparation.

As we can see, the struggle over the meaning of language has been led for many years. Here, I have not discussed the tensions over naming the language "Montenegrin" or "Serbian," which started with the dissolution of the SFRY and continued until 2007. Instead, I followed how clearly identifiable actors *within*

<sup>8</sup> The name and the curriculum of the subject *Serbo-Croatian language and literature* were changed in 1992. The name *Serbian language* was used in education from 1992 to 2003, when the subject was renamed to *Mother Tongue*.

*state institutions* tried to redefine the key symbols concurrently with institutionalizing them. For this reason, the stage of institutionalization was not fully conducted through “non-agentive power,” as Wright calls it. Rather, the institutionalization was often used by the same actors as just another strategy and another argument in the naming stage. Perhaps it was this *simultaneity of the struggle to redefine the Montenegrin language with the struggle to institutionalize one of its definitions* which made the discussion so overtly and openly political. The participants in this discussion drew from a large repertoire of arguments about national specificity, linguistic standards, cultured Europe and so forth, but none of them presented it as an apolitical, or purely scientific process.

### Lagging Behind or Sharing Concerns Over Legitimacy?

Initiated primarily by the so-called intellectual and political elites, this discussion was rarely articulated through the terms of “pure” linguistics. The standardization of the Montenegrin language was an explicitly political process, since it was a “well-known fact that language politics is an inseparable part of the dominant general politics of a society” (Glušica 2008, 287), to use the words of Glušica, one of the actors in this discussion. She even claimed that council’s task was re-standardization, “which primarily occurs on a symbolic level [...] with the aim of highlighting the status of a language—giving it a national name and affirming it as such” (Glušica 2011, 271). Another participant, Čirgić, also said that “[t]he name of the language is certainly more a political than a linguistic issue.”<sup>9</sup> The actors openly assigned various ideological and political positions to their opponents, including those of the implementers of the “unificatory Serbian language politics” (Čirgić 2010), supporters of “imported ideologies” and “self-colonisers” (Drašković 2012), “Serbian and Montenegrin nationalists” (Glušica 2010) and so forth. References to Europe were commonly made in the form of warnings that Montenegro would “harm itself in the eyes of cultured Europe by toying with linguistic norms” (Koprivica in Čirgić 2010), reflecting the notion of Montenegro as a messy Balkan country and of Europe as a civilized center in which this sort of discussions was long resolved.

However, such an idea of “Europe” does not take into account that the EU itself has been facing a similar problem of legitimacy and has attempted to resolve it by politicizing culture in a very comparable way. As Shore (2000, 3) writes, “the politicisation of culture in the EU arises from the attempt by

9 <http://www.europamagazine.info/cgjezik.htm>, accessed April 19, 2014.

European elites to solve the EU's chronic problem of legitimacy." The problem of the grounds on which the EU could claim legitimacy as a polity remains and the dominant way of addressing it was by attempting to negotiate the key terms and concepts of belonging, such as "European culture," "European symbols," "Europeans" or "European citizenship," and so forth (Shore 2011). If the aim of the politicization of culture in the EU is "to reconfigure not only the map of Europe but the terms and processes by which people in Europe perceive themselves and construct their identities" (Shore 2000, 27), then this process is rather similar to the reasons and mechanisms of the politicization of culture in Montenegro and other post-Yugoslav states. The discussion about the language—its appropriate name and standard—is one piece of an attempt to reconfigure the ways in which people in Montenegro understand themselves and their senses of belonging. Some of the issues raised during this discussion are similar to the ones negotiated through the EU language politics: they include uncertainty over how past relations among standard languages and non-standard linguistic practices should be evaluated, should contemporary language politics try to correct the past wrongs over minority languages, should it include contemporary linguistic variations into the standard, and if so, which ones, and so forth (cf. Wright 2000).

Perhaps, if the discussion about language in Montenegro and the discussion about European culture in the EU are both understood as struggles over meaning—that is, as simultaneous and largely comparable social processes led by similar ideas about the legitimacy of a political community—participants in both discussions could learn from each other. In such an imaginary exchange, as Obad argues in this volume, post-Yugoslav states could offer a doubt in a "big self-evident symbolic story behind the EU accession" as well as an understanding that "the system can change [...] Or, rather, that not even the system which is now being offered to us is deemed to last forever." Perhaps another insight which Montenegro and other post-Yugoslav states could offer in such an exchange of experiences with the EU is that legitimacy of a polity does not automatically and fully depend on the power of a hegemonic worldview. As Jansen (2014) argues, people yearn for (material) predictability as much as for (symbolic) clarity, if not more—listening to how people in Bosnia and other former Yugoslav states voice their complaints suggests that they do not necessarily require political communities to present well-defined stories of origin and neat cosmologies, but to respond to their everyday, material needs. A polity shaped by contested views of the world and one's place in it can leave issues of legitimacy unresolved for a long time if it manages to secure the repetitiveness and predictability of everyday life.

### Discussing Sexuality

Another topic of intense discussion in Montenegro in the past decade was the appropriate and acceptable modes of expressing sexuality. The discussion about sexuality has been led in several directions and from multiple positions, including the EU, the state apparatus, two NGOs working on the issues of the LGBT human rights, and the so-called “general public.” Challenged by the two NGOs and induced by its goal to join the EU, the government has started to adopt legislature which should prevent discrimination on the basis of sexuality and to negotiate with the NGOs how to nominally fight the discrimination. The impact of the process of the “European integration” on the reconfigurations of sexuality is enormous as it has offered both the vocabulary and the techniques of such reconfiguration. This is a very common situation for the EU which “has imposed equal rights legislation for gays and lesbians in those countries of the East that have become member states or want to be included” (Hekma 2007, 8). However, the discussion about sexuality which I will present here suggests that the vocabulary and the techniques of intervention in Montenegro which are politically and financially encouraged by the EU need to be seriously rethought and possibly altered, if the position and the rights of sexual minorities are to be effectively redefined. As we will see, the discussion about sexuality in Montenegro is conceptually almost inseparable from the notion of Europe and the process of the EU integration, and pays very little attention to the actual, everyday regimes of exclusion, through which the desires and fears of LGBT people living in Montenegro are shaped. As an attempt to replicate the achievements of the LGBT movement led in the so-called West, this discussion is primarily grounded by the NGOs and focused on the medical and legal arenas of the state. Forgetting the short history and tenuous position of the “civil sector” in all former Yugoslav states, and the specificities of post-socialist state apparatuses, people who aim to improve the position of sexual minorities in Montenegro thus often overlook opportunities to articulate contextually sensitive techniques and concepts of their struggle.

### Europe and Homosexuality

Since the open discussion about sexual minorities not only coincided but was also principally motivated by the process of the EU integration, it is not surprising that the notions of “homosexuality” and “Europe” are conceptually difficult to separate, regardless of the values attached to both. In other words,

whether Montenegrin inhabitants understand transition to Europe as a track towards belonging to the “civilized and cultured world,” or towards the “loss of family values and morality,” sexuality is rarely discussed separately from geopolitics. This conceptual connection between “homosexuality” and “Europe” often leaves enough room for homophobia, as is evident from the words of one of many commentators on LGBT-related issues:

regarding the gay population (who invented the “LGBP” or whatever it’s called), it’s not necessary to promote them, that would be ridiculous, but to give them tolerance and equality. And that is not currently the case with us, everywhere in the Balkans where they show up in the street, they get—beaten! We’re really humiliating ourselves in front of Europe and appear to be exactly how they imagine us—primitive.

By condemning physical violence, while claiming that increased visibility of LGBT people (“promotion”) is ridiculous, this comment reflects that homophobia and the desire to be properly European can be fully compatible. Another commentator expresses strong homophobia in his criticism of the lack of social and financial security, which arose as a constitutive part of the economic and political transition “towards Europe”:

I would love to be a homosexual. Everybody protects you, man: the state and its institutions, non-governmental sector and embassies, directorates and agencies, media and individuals, international community and the United Nations led by Ban Ki-Moon himself. Barack and Michelle Obama, of course. [...] Simply and shortly, rather than promote what I consider natural, healthy, and most importantly equal protection of minorities, foreigners, institutions, the non-governmental sector, and others aim to protect some more than others. They even protect more widely and decisively those minorities which are less threatened. [...] There are] first and second class minorities. Furthermore, this, like all the other magnifications, becomes counterproductive [...] a torture of minority over majority. Unhealthy, unnatural and bad.

While this commentator might have dropped the idea of “overprotection” of LGBT people, had he tried to learn *anything* about their everyday lives and practices in Montenegro, it is the sense that homosexuality and the rights of LGBT people are somehow intrinsically related to Europe that presents the conceptual challenge. One of the loudest proponents of a homophobic

pro-European discourse was the former Minister for Human and Minority Rights, who claimed in 2011 that

Some people mix apples and oranges and—when discussing the rights of sexual minorities—they elevate that issue to the one of the rights of national minorities, especially with regard to the mechanism of the affirmative action—and that is not European practice! [...] As a Minister in the Government of Montenegro I will not allow placing the equals sign between mechanisms for the protection of the LGBT population and mechanisms for the protection of national minorities. Naturally, I will try to ensure—for both groups—the protection of everything that Europe ensures and acknowledges.

Claiming that sexual and national minorities are incommensurable entities (“apples and oranges”) and that nationality has a higher status than sexuality (which the minister did not want to “elevate”) misses that these two power vectors jointly produce social subjectivities and senses of belonging. It also suggests that issues of nationality are perceived as more important and more legitimately political than issues of sexuality. In the minister’s view, the rights of sexual minorities are to be protected because Europe ensures and acknowledges them, rather than because of the people who live in Montenegro. It seems that as long as the talk about sexuality remains a proxy for the talk about Europe and one’s place in it, homosexuality and other minority sexual practices will continue to be perceived in the nationalist homophobic discourses as external to Montenegro and, therefore, as not quite legitimately political. However, in order to redefine the discussion about sexuality as separate from the discussion about geopolitics and to claim its political legitimacy beyond “Europe,” not only actors from Montenegro but also those from the EU have to be involved.

Namely, Puar (2007, 2) argues that, in the so-called West, the interweaving of sexuality with other forms of belonging, such as race, nationality, and citizenship, frequently takes a form of homonationalism—a form of nationalized homosexuality which “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.” Homonationalism presents a politics in which minority sexual practices were appropriated by nationalist and racialized discourses and used as a criterion of civilizational difference. Kahlina (2012) notes the presence of homonationalism in the processes of the EU integration of former socialist countries:



The logic underpinning the homonationalist discourses represents one of the most visible means through which the unequal division between Western and Eastern Europe within and outside of the European Union is constructed [...] In opposition to the homophobic Eastern Europe, Western Europe is framed as a place of rights and safety for sexual minorities, which strengthens its image as a role model of liberal pluralism and democracy for Eastern Europe to follow.

The idea that homosexuality is not authentically Montenegrin but a European import, along with neoliberalism, consumerism, and overall loss of morality fits well with the stereotype of Montenegrin society as traditional and deeply conservative. In certain Montenegrin media, even the historically noted practices of gender cross-dressing were interpreted as reproducing patriarchal worldviews.<sup>10</sup> In the last two decades, civil society, or more specifically, NGOs, became the dominant, albeit problematic, form of intervention into such ideas. Let us take a closer look at how LGBT people in Montenegro perceived this form of intervention.

### Redefining Sexuality through Civil Society

The key actors raising issues over human rights of LGBT people in Montenegro are two non-governmental organizations based in its capital, Podgorica, from which they organize their activities across Montenegro. Despite significant conceptual and operative differences between the two NGOs, which led to intense clashes I cannot address here, both use similar mechanisms to fight the discrimination and improve the status of sexual minorities. They conducted researches on practices of sexual minorities in Montenegro, provided health-care designed to their specific needs, cooperated with state representatives and various other NGOs during the drafting of legislature against discrimination,

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10 The “sworn virgins”—women living in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the areas of contemporary Montenegro, Kosovo, and Albania, who swore to never get married and who occasionally adopted male gender roles and compellingly performed masculinity—are in Montenegro widely understood through the prism of protection of family honour and legacy. In this view, a woman had become a sworn virgin when her family was left without sons, thereby securing the existence of the family’s name, its honour and property, for at least another generation. Šarčević (2004) argues that the reasons for becoming a sworn virgin were much more complex and points to an interplay of patrilineal kinship structure and agency of sworn virgins as people who challenged gender norms.

organized trainings for state officials, administrators, police and members of other state institutions, submitted lawsuits, organized large conferences on the topics of LGBT human rights, opened a shelter and a drop-in center, initiated a guerrilla group which occasionally intervenes in public spaces by leaving prominent LGBT symbols in visible places, they made a couple of television commercials promoting visibility of LGBT people and practices, organized approximately a dozen LGBT parties, and so forth. Apart from their work, there are no other organizations or initiatives working openly and actively on LGBT issues in the country—there are no gay clubs, cinemas, town quarters, parties, and similar. LGBT people largely rely on their friends, the Internet, public parks, and one well-known beach to meet potential new lovers.

My interlocutors, who perceived themselves as gays and lesbians and were all in their twenties and thirties, were generally glad that someone was dealing with such issues. However, they also expressed discontent with the way in which the issues were being dealt with. When I asked how he perceived gay activism in Montenegro, Bojan, a gay in his mid-twenties living with his parents and siblings, said:

Theft, theft, theft, theft, theft, theft. Tell me about a single activist for human rights who didn't get rich? What about Mina, who's fighting for women's rights and who traveled the world thanks to those monies. What about Dražen, who's protecting his own behind?

When I asked him what about our mutual friend who is a gay activist and has a rather low salary, he agreed the situation is not black and white, but that generally, gay and other forms of human rights activism are a way for people to get salaries and opportunities they would not be able to get otherwise:

Dražen is driving my car. That is my car. That is my boyfriend's car. It's an expensive Audi Europe gave us. It did not give the car to him and say: "Take it, drive it, and protect your own behind." I was thinking of sending him a message at PlanetRomeo:<sup>11</sup> "Hello Dražen, I've noticed that you're driving a very good car. Since the European Union is investing in us, in us as gays, I think that . . . give me 300 Euros, I need it." I would have to think how to phrase it properly, and I would love to see how he would respond.

Bojan's harsh views reflect a much broader idea that the framework of "civil society" in former Yugoslav countries was used by highly educated cultural and

11 A very popular dating site among Montenegrin gays.

social entrepreneurs who improved their own incomes and life-styles by brokering through NGO activism between foreign funds, agencies, governments, and people who did not possess the required cultural and social capital (cf. Stubbs 2012). The normative idea of what civil society is and how it should operate was introduced in Montenegro in the early 1990s as something that had yet to be built, rather than developed from the existing social practices. Stubbs (2007) argues that starting from a normative model of what “civil society” *should be* leads to two things: one, ignoring other social practices which have transformative and/or regulatory potential usually implied by the notion of “civil society,” and two, assuming that civil society does not (yet) exist in “post-communist” countries.<sup>12</sup> As a result, civil society in Montenegro is rarely generally perceived as a framework in which genuine will, ideas, and needs of Montenegrin citizens can be framed, and more often as a frame through which the will, ideas, and needs of the international funders, the EU, and the government are addressed. As more of a “utopian imaginary” than a “concrete program derived from theory” (Gal and Kligman 2000, 93), “civil society” has had a significant impact on the political life in Eastern Europe; however, it does not account for “gaps, slippages, and difference” (Ibid.) between the daily practices of politics and the normative idea of where and how politics should be practiced.

As a result, the discussion about sexuality brings not only a novel *topic*—visibility and protection of people who practice certain forms of sexuality—but also novel *techniques* through which LGBT issues came to be governed. The language and practices of the NGOs, which include concepts such as “target groups,” “project implementation,” “project evaluation,” “fundraising,” and so forth, are relatively recent and not quite comprehensible to most people living in Montenegro. Besides pervasive heteronormativity and homophobia, this is one of many reasons the legitimacy of LGBT issues is contested—perceived as external and imposed, rather than as stemming from oppressive relations over certain members of a political community.

Most gays and lesbians I talked with shared a sense of separation from the discussion about the LGBT rights, since they did not necessarily recognize gay activists as legitimate representatives of other gay people. Additionally, they did not perceive the discussed techniques, such as Pride parade, as appropriate ways of resolving their everyday problems. Bojan voiced this sense in the following way:

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12 Stubbs (2007, 7) also quotes a guide to civil society building, according to which “civil society” in Bosnia was perceived in the following way: “what it is—nobody knows but it sounds good.”

Dražen is not a good example of gay people. He looks terrible, fags don't like him, he has no support in Montenegro. He has the support of the European Union, from which he steals money to drive the Audi. He's protecting himself, he's calling us to join him in the Pride Parade, where he'll be surrounded by fifteen gorilla guards, but there will be no one to protect little Marko [a transgender person living in Podgorica]. Marko's spine will be broken, and Dražen will be greeted with "Oh, hey, there's the Audi."

This sense of separation from LGBT activists and the discussion about the LGBT rights stems partly from its dominant emphasis on legality and healthcare. While attempting to navigate the recommendations of the EU institutions, funders' expectations, and the needs of sexual minorities in Montenegro, the NGOs focused primarily on adapting the legislature and providing healthcare services. That law and medicine are the first on the agenda is a common practice in the struggle against homophobia across Eastern Europe (cf. Kuhar and Takács 2007). However, as Renkin (2007, 269) shows, while in Hungary legal battles were won more or less successfully in the last two decades, the problem that remained was articulation of belonging to a polity:

The exclusions that many lesbians and gays feel most deeply affect them are thus not primarily legal in nature. Rather, they occur on the level of everyday cultural behaviors and attitudes: the freedom to be visible participants in daily life; the right to *belong* in Hungarian society.

Many Hungarian activists, disillusioned with the power of legal and political approaches, refocused their attention on rewriting the history of sexuality. According to Renkin, this move points to an importance of citizenship understood in "cultural" terms, rather than as a category of legal and social rights and obligations. Similarly, analyzing the Pride Parade in Belgrade, Mikuš (2011) argues that in the struggles over who and how gets to belong to a polity in Serbia, approaches which stress Europeanization and the human rights discourse are less effective from the emerging "populist" politics of the LGBT rights, which does not make references to Europe but adopts the "folk" mannerism and vocabulary.

That changing legislature cannot necessarily affect the everyday forms of exclusion and oppression points to the power of heteronormativity as well as to the complex and tenuous relationship between legality, techniques of intervention and the issue of membership in post-socialist polities, both in the sense of state membership in the EU and citizens' membership in the state. The separation of the discussion about sexuality from the everyday practices

of exclusion speaks about the need to rethink social and political mechanisms which make the legislature partly relevant, rather than affecting all members of a political community for whom it was written and ratified.

Finally, the right to practice non-normative forms of sexuality was not always justified by evoking notions of “civilization” and “Europe.” Some of my interlocutors, from time to time, claimed it through the universalistic terms of love and humanness, framing it as an imperative: “Let people love whomever they want.” The danger of evoking love and humanness as the grounds of equality lies in its potential to pathologize sexual minorities: the “flip side” of this narration was approaching non-heteronormative desires as the result of a deep seated childhood trauma and expressing charitable acceptance of homosexual love as the best a subject damaged in childhood can hope for. Since the focus of the two NGOs was on legislature and healthcare, they had not counteracted this kind of a narrative in an organized way.



FIGURE 8.1 A photograph which illustrates the nexus of NGOs, EU, and legality in the LGBTIQ struggles in Montenegro. Taken at the first Montenegrin Pride Parade, held in Podgorica in October 2013, it shows LGBTIQ activists from former Yugoslav region, an EU representative in Montenegro, and three out of 2000 police officers which separated 150–200 participants from other residents of Montenegro in order to ensure safety.

PHOTO BY VANJA GAGOVIĆ

### Conclusion

Both the discussion about language and the discussion about sexuality presented a quest for political legitimacy—of language and, consequently, of the state in the first case and of sexual practices and non-heteronormative senses of belonging in the second. Although political legitimacy was searched for in different places and claimed according to different ideas, the notion of “Europe” as a model of how things should be was somehow always looming behind. The process of the European integration affected this quest for political legitimacy by prescribing its vocabulary as well as its techniques. In this chapter, I explored the residues and inconsistencies produced along the way, often disregarded in these kinds of conversations. I argued that approaching such residues as “childhood diseases” or results of “lagging behind” (which would presumably disappear once Montenegro shared the same time and place with Europe) closes off an opportunity to envision novel grounds in which political legitimacy of language and sexual practices could be pursued. It also takes away a great deal of responsibility from the actors of these conversations for their own actions, since they are not expected to shape the ideological and practical frame through which language and sexuality could be redefined, but rather to shape the Montenegrin context by following the recommended path to “Europe.” Hopefully, further directions of these discussions will pay more attention to the residues they produce and tackle both the vocabulary and the techniques of political intervention into language and sexuality.

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