Secularization of the Church, clericalization of society:
Intimate/Sexual Citizenship and the Roman Catholic Church counter-narratives

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The article deals with the process of the “secularization” of the Roman Catholic Church and their attempts to secure exclusionary patriarchal and traditional values and interpretations in the context of issues pertaining to intimate citizenship. Taking two case studies as examples – the recent Family Code debate in Slovenia and the Health Education in Croatia – it shows how the Church and its satellite civil society organizations increasingly refrain from using “biblical discourse”, substituting it with what appears as a rational, scientific discourse moulded into reassuring and populist common-sense statements. In such a way, the Church is secularizing its discourse in order to “clericalise” society. Furthermore, it successfully reinvents issues of family and marriage as an ideological battleground of contemporary cultural wars in post-socialist societies, constituting gays and lesbians as outsiders of the nation.

Key words: intimate/sexual citizenship, secularization, Roman Catholic Church, homosexuality, populism, Slovenia, Croatia

1. Introduction

The American investigative documentary “8: The Mormon Proposition” explores the role of the Mormon Church in getting California’s Proposition 8 against the legal recognition of same-sex marriage on the ballot and then winning the cause in November 2008. Among others, it shows how the Mormon Church established a coalition with Roman Catholics and evangelical Christians in order to create a “secular organization” – the National Organization for Marriage – which would not give its religious background away and would appeal to the general public. Among other things, in their door-to-door campaign Church activists were instructed on how not to appear Mormon (Holden, 2010).

Similar phenomena of the “secularization” of the Church were recently recorded during the Family Code debate and the Health Education debate in Slovenia and Croatia, respectively. This paper does not investigate to what extent the Slovenian and Croatian debates copied the American strategies. Rather, it
analyses how the Church and its satellite civil organizations used and abused scientific data during these debates in order to agitate for their goals: the non-recognition of gay marriage in Slovenia and the exclusion of non-heteronormative sex-education modules from Croatian public schools. Taking these two case studies as examples, the paper shows how the Roman Catholic Church (hereafter RCC) and its satellite civil society organizations, faced with the processes of secularization and (at least generally) increasing tolerance towards homosexuality, refrain from using “biblical discourse”, substituting it with what appears as a rational, scientific discourse moulded into reassuring and populist common-sense statements.

Instead of explicitly stating that “homosexual activity is immoral” (Congregation, 1986) in order to disqualify same-sex partnerships during the Family Code debate, the RCC in Slovenia insisted on referring to sociological research on homosexuality, (ab)using its results so as to assert that gays and lesbians do not “deserve” equal rights and that same-sex families are a dangerous environment for children to grow up in. The interpretation of the public/private division, which typically sets the limits of tolerance towards gays and lesbians to private spaces, was now reinterpreted in a way that gays and lesbians could be tolerated in the private sphere as long as they are childless. In Croatia, which ranks as one of the most religious countries in Eastern Europe (Ančić & Zrinščak, 2012), the shift from “biblical” to “scientific” discourse is not so obvious. During the Health Education debate – similarly as in Slovenia – the RCC tried to confine sexuality issues to the private sphere, while invoking Croatian cultural tradition (Bijelić & Hodžić, 2013). However, the highlight of their campaign against Health Education was a visit of an American scientist whose role was to scientifically back up the Church’s goals and the process of the “clericalisation” of Croatian society.

The use of (distorted) scientific arguments moulded into populist discourse seems to occur over and over again in debates pertaining to intimate citizenship – a concept defined by Ken Plummer (1996) as a “new set of claims around the body, the relationship and sexuality” – which have (re-)emerged in post-socialist
societies particularly in the last twenty years. More specifically, the right for the legal recognition of one’s partnership and the right to relevant information about one’s sexuality are part of the three bundles of rights defined by Diana Richardson (2000) as the content of “sexual citizenship”.¹ All these debates are informed by the fact that certain groups within a political community, although they have the formal status of citizenship, still suffer inequality and exclusion based on an unjust distribution of economic as well as symbolic, social, political, and cultural rights. The resulting intimate/sexual citizenship claims therefore not only envisage new morals, establishing themselves through tensions with traditional values, but also present a frame for a new politics of intimacy.

In this paper I will use the concept of intimate/sexual citizenship in order to show that citizenship does not only separates those who belong to a certain political entity from those who are “strangers”, “visitors” or simply “outsiders”. Rather it also creates “strangers” – “sexual strangers” (Phelan, 2001) – among those who seem to belong. The latter are excluded, as they do not fit into a heteronormative notion of a “good citizen”. For that reasons I will interchangeable use the concepts of intimate (Plummer 1995, 1996, 2003) and sexual citizenship (Ewans, 2003, Weeks 1998, Richardson 1998, 2000, Bell and Binnie, 2002), as they overlap and relate to each other, although they are not identical. This is followed by a short discussion on how the RCC regained its powers in post-socialist Slovenia and Croatia and how the “new politics of intimacy” became one of its major targets and a vehicle for its public (media) visibility, particularly in relation to homosexuality. The latter is the implicit (and sometimes explicit) bone of contention in both case studies analysed in the last part of this paper. The article aims to contribute to better understanding of the functioning and strategies of counter-narratives, induced by the emergence of an intimate/sexual citizen. More precisely I am interested in the role of the Roman Catholic Church in two post-socialist

¹ The three bundles of rights and obligations, defined by Richardson (2000), include rights related to (sexual) praxis, identity and partnerships. The first group of rights addresses issues related to a physical body, including the right to participation in sexual activities, the right to pleasure and the right to sexual and reproductive self-determination. The latter includes the right to know and be informed about one’s sexuality. “Identity bundle” deals with the rights to self-definition, sexual expression and self-realization. The bundle of rights, dealing with partnerships, include the right to equal age of consent, the right to freely choose one’s partner and the right for the relationship to be publicly and legally recognized.
countries – Slovenia and Croatia - and its counter-narrative, which serves to combat both LGBT and feminist movements.

2. Sexuality, intimacy and citizenship

After Marshall’s (1950) seminal discussion on the concept of citizenship and social class in the middle of the twenties century, scholarly debates around citizenship regained its relevance at the end of that century due to political, social, and economic changes in the world, including the processes of globalization, the crisis of the welfare state, and the formation of new political entities, such as EU and new democratic states in Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Turner, 1990, 1993; Isin and Wood, 1999; Faulks, 2000). Citizenship is not only seen as a legal status category, a set of rights and duties ensuing from a membership in a particular political community; rather it is understood as a question of cultural, symbolic, and economic practices, allowing individuals to establish and demand new rights as well as strive for their extension or the protection of already existing rights (Plummer, 2003; Isin and Wood, 1999; Turner, 1990).

Citizenship as a status and a practice is always simultaneously linked to the questions of inclusion and exclusion, since it is never granted to all the members of a certain political community. In this respect, the feminist analyses of citizenship have shown that the concept of citizenship is essentially a gendered category (Walby, 1994; Smith, 1999). The debates around LGBT citizenship rights, including the two presented in this paper, show that the concept of citizenship is also sexualized. Hence, it is not simply men who are inscribed into the concept of citizenship, as feminism argues; it is, instead, heterosexual men. Richardson (2000) claims that the latter becomes evident primarily in those instances when the relations between heterosexuality, the status of citizen and the national identity seem to be endangered or challenged.
In its most general sense, intimate/sexual citizenship questions the justifications of human sexual self-expression, as well as of the non-sexual choices relating to our bodies, feelings, identities, relationships, genders, eroticism, representations and so forth. In other words, there is a question of how a certain community, granting its members the status of citizenship, controls and influences the members’ intimacies, sexual lives, their bodies, desires, fantasies, etc. It shows how citizenship, having been (in the liberal political tradition) originally directed exclusively to the participation in a public sphere, increasingly affects the questions of privacy and the changes in private lives of individuals in late modernity. These changes – reflected in Bauman’s (2001) assessment that in contemporary societies individuality is a fate, not a choice; and framed as reflective project of late modernity (Giddens, 1992) or as a risk society (Beck, 1992) – bear numerous troubles and decisions about one’s intimacy, body, gender, identities and intimate relationships (Plummer, 2003). “The sexual citizen exists,” says Weeks, “because of the new primacy given to sexual subjectivity in the contemporary world. […] [T]his new personage is a harbinger of a new politics of intimacy and everyday life” (Week, 1999: 35). Roseneil (2010), for example, notices a process of “counter-heteronormative relationship practices” among increasing number of those who prioritize friendship and decentralize sexual/love relationships. In line with intimate citizenship, Roseneil proposes a political agenda, which would enable “the freedom and ability” to establish a range of close relationships, recognized by the state and civil society in its “dynamic, changing forms” (Roseneil, 2010: 82).

The discourse on intimate/sexual citizenship came into being due to the processes of democratization of intimate partnerships, the emergence of new subjectivity and the new narratives about people’s private lives. These narratives, the stories about discrimination and social exclusions, opened political space for demanding equal rights and for corrections of injustices. It is in this context that sexual/intimate citizens came into being. Their narratives, says Plummer (1995, 2003), are the ones that open public debate, question social norms, change culture, create a "new language", envisage new morals, implicate political change etc. Weeks (1998) shows that it is the intimate/sexual citizen who enters the public sphere to reveal
his/her intimate choices and turns them into political issues in order to be able to live his/her "intimacy" both in private and, as an intimate/sexual citizen, in public. However in doing this the intimate/sexual citizen encounters resistance and anti-narratives.

The focus of this paper is precisely these counter-narratives – the “old stories”, the old morals, tradition – which seem to be challenged by the existence of intimate/sexual citizenship. The counter-narratives’ power and persuasion have already resulted in very concrete pieces of legislation, denying the rights of gay and lesbian citizens, such as the notorious prohibition of “promotion of homosexuality” in Russia or constitutional protection of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (for example in Hungary or Croatia).

Lehr (2003) shows that it is precisely the institution of marriage, which is closely related to the concept of citizenship. In legal terms, marriage is still one of the most important ways of entering into a political entity and consequently its citizenship. In symbolic terms the institution of marriage regulates and defines proper gender roles, social norms and sexuality, which reflects the Christian dogma on prohibition of sexuality before marriage. To be married, claims Lehr (2003), often meant to be civilized. Those who were not married or could not get married were outcasts. For that reason demands for gay marriage challenge the most profound foundations of the heteronormative society; it questions what it means to be a man, a woman and what are proper gender roles. It is in this context that the Roman Catholic Church found a new battleground, where – as I will show – one of their new tactics is to secularize its discourse in order to “clericalise” society. This reflects what Burack and Wilson (2009: 137) call the Christian Right “remarkable adaptability to a variety of political contexts”, including the one in post-socialist societies, putting the lie to those political analysts which predicted that “Christian Right movement has run its course and lost cultural and political influence.” For that reason we will first take a look at how the Roman Catholic Church has been rehabilitated in the post-socialist contexts of Slovenia and Croatia.
3. Rehabilitation of the Roman Catholic Church in the post-socialist context

The Yugoslav constitution introduced the freedom of religion in 1946 with an additional provision that allowed the government to limit human rights (including the freedom of religion) if these liberties were abused for anti-democratic goals or for undermining the constitutional order. The constitution introduced a rigid separation of the Church from the state, while the Church's property was confiscated. According to Zrinščak (2004), being religious was considered non-progressive and religious ceremonies were restricted to the private sphere. All this was later accompanied also by the processes of secularization and individualization, which left the Church performing its religious functions only at subtle and/or abstract world-view levels.

However, after the process of political pluralisation and democratisation in the early nineties the Church regained its position as a “collective intellectual” providing answers to important social and political questions (Kerševan, 1996). In Croatia (and less so in Slovenia) it also became a marker of national identity, strengthening nationalism and – in the context of the armed conflicts in the nineties – preserving a separate Croat identity (Zrinščak, 2004).

The process of rehabilitation was gradual. Alojzij Šuštar, the Archbishop of Ljubljana (1980–1997), for example, had a chance to wish his flock a Merry Christmas on the Slovenian national radio as early as 1986 (Ramet, 1996: 157). In 1989 Roman Catholics in Croatia had a chance to celebrate Christmas publically in the streets for the first time after the Yugoslav constitution of 1963 defined religion as an exclusively private affair (Jakelić, 2010: 47–48). The rehabilitation process continued in the early nineties when in 1991 the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana became an official member of the University of Ljubljana, having been
excluded from the University by the communist government in 1952. Unlike in Slovenia, in Croatia the RCC managed to secure itself an important position in the educational system. By 1997, based on the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Education and Culture (signed between Croatia and Vatican), according to which the educational system should pay attention to Christian values and ethics, the Croatian RCC institutionalised religious education in public schools (Zrinščak 2004).

In regaining its powers, the Church started a process of the re-traditionalisation of society (understood as a return to the nation’s true patriarchal culture and values, previously destroyed by the communist regime (cf. Kuhar, 2013)), acquiring its influence over numerous social and political issues. This was often accompanied by a nationalistic quest for the “true national self”, which had been allegedly lost during the communist regime. In different degrees, this was experienced all around Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. For example, during the process of the adoption of the new Slovenian constitution, the “forces of re-traditionalisation” in the parliament tried to abolish the reproductive freedom of women, guaranteed by the Yugoslav constitution of 1974. Already in the mid-nineteen eighties the Catholic weekly Družina (Family) started to publish personal stories of women who chose not to work on the labour market and to stay at home, taking care of the family and children. In this way, according to Jalušič (2002: 72), the RCC started to promote traditional family patterns and proclaiming abortion as evil.

Another example of the clash of values caused by the process of re-traditionalisation in post-socialist societies is the issue of same-sex partnerships and families. In this context value systems are not conceived of as purely different world-views in relation to homosexuality. They are often also a platform for exclusion, discrimination, intolerance and, finally, transgression of the boundary between the religious and the political, between the Church and the state. In Slovenia and Croatia – as well as in other European

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{For a brief history of theological studies in Slovenia, see http://www.teof.uni-lj.si/?viewPage=129 (July 29, 2013).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{Article 7 of the Slovenian Constitution and article 41 of the Croatian Constitution state that religious communities and the state are separate. According to the interpretation of the Slovenian Constitutional Court (U-I-92/07) the}\]
democracies – Christian morals and ethics represent the ideological foundation of a number of parliamentary parties. For example, New Slovenia, a right-wing parliamentary political party, states in its official programme that their activities are “internally rooted in the Slovenian Christian value heritage”.

Similarly an MP from HKDU (Croatian Christian Democratic Union) stated in 2003 during the parliamentary debate on the Same-Sex Unions bill that in their “Croatian demo-catholic culture” it is an obligation of men and women to get married and reproduce (Kuhar, 2011).

The Church, therefore, (in)directly enters into the sphere of the political with its own interpretations, despite the fact that these might be in contradiction with constitutional provisions. At least for some parliamentary parties in Slovenia and Croatia the Church’s interpretations of homosexuality (as abomination), but also marriage and family, remain the main source of inspiration. It is at this point that we can witness an irreconcilable source of tension: while the Church appeals to the Bible, the framework in which a given democratic community politically organizes itself is determined by the constitution and the related notion of citizenship. These two facts can be completely at odds with each other. While the Church, referring to the Bible, sees homosexuality as immoral, the Slovenian constitution protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Similarly, the fact that the RCC secured its position in public schools in Croatia leads to a discrepancy between religious and secular educational programmes on sexuality. In such a way – according to Bijelić – the Croatian school system is faced with “the juxtaposition of Catholic teaching on sexuality ensured through the Vatican agreement and secular teaching ensured through human rights treaties and national legislation” (Bijelić, 2008, 331).

The principle of separation includes three aspects: (1) neutrality of the state in terms of religion and ideology, (2) an autonomy of religious communities and (3) equal treatment of the state of all religious communities. The neutrality of the state, however, does not mean that the state cannot cooperate with the church (See: http://odlocitve.usrs.si/usrs/us-odl.nsf/o/525A00D4A9080D2AC1257736004527C4 (January 4, 2014)).


The author refers to the above mentioned Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Education and Culture between Croatia and Vatican, which states that Christian ethics has to be taken into consideration in the public educational system.
4. From God to science: the case studies

According to RCC homosexuality is immoral. While they do not deny the existence of gay people, they find the materialisation of homosexuality as a non-reproductive sexual act morally wrong. Such acts contradict God's plan of sexual relationships between men and women. However, the representatives of the RCC are well in the know that “transcendental arguments”, which refer to God as the moral authority or use quotes from the Bible, do not resonate with an increasingly secularized society. In other words: it is not a good “PR strategy”. Furthermore, the ethics of political correctness seems to prevent them (at least in some cases) from using rhetoric which sounds violent: that homosexuality is a sin and something that is not normal and goes against nature.

There are, however, notable differences between Slovenia and Croatia in the expectations regarding the role of the Church in this issue. According to the study on the social role of the Church conducted in Croatia, a bit more than 52% of population believe that the Church is called to deal with issues such as same-sex relations, while in Slovenia the corresponding share is a bit more than 32%. Furthermore, in Slovenia it is more likely that the elderly and those in rural areas agree that the Church can express its views on contemporary social issues, while in Croatia there are no such socio-demographic differences among those who recognize the importance of the Church to express views on dividing social issues (Ančić

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6 Initially the RCC interpreted homosexuality as a (temporary) weakness, a sin, a turn away from one's essential heterosexual nature. In 1975, however, the Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics introduced a more liberal understanding of homosexuality. It was established that in some cases people are essentially homosexual. However the RCC retained its moral condemnation of homosexuality. According to the Declaration, homosexuality can never be justified. In 2003 Vatican issued Consideration regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons claiming that marriage is the basis of family life and the family is a constitutive unit of society. Homosexual partnerships do not deserve legal protection because they do not carry out the aforementioned functions oriented towards the common good. The Vatican therefore called on Catholic members of the parliaments across Europe to vote against the “legal recognition of homosexual unions”. In fact, “all Catholics are obliged to oppose” it, while the Catholic law-maker “has a moral duty to express his (sic!) opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. Here the RCC intervened into the sphere of politics and by giving instructions on how to vote in the Parliament crossed the often thin line of the state-church separation.

7 Here I leave aside an interpretation that political correctness is a PR strategy in itself, often protecting the powerful from charges of excluding the disempowered (while an actual exclusion (and violence) still takes place).
Despite these differences, the case studies presented in this paper show how the RCC and civil society initiatives, which either work in close collaboration with the RCC, are based on the RCC’s value system or are established by the RCC itself in order to minimize/conceal its role in the debate, increasingly substitute “transcendental arguments” in policy debates pertaining to intimate/sexual citizenship with arguments based on scientific data (and their interpretations). This is not to say that the RCC enters into public debate on intimate citizenship issues solely with scientific rhetoric. Their discourse is framed in different ways, but the use of scientific data drawing mostly on sociological and psychological research seems to be a novelty in these discussions and a new political tactic of their counter-narratives.

4. 1. The Slovenian Family Code debate

In October 2009 the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs presented a proposal for the reform of the 1976 Family Code, which introduced ground-breaking innovations in the definitions of the institutions of the family and marriage. The new definition of the family moved towards the recognition of the ethics of care as the ground for family relationships, legally recognizing social parenting as equal biological. The definition of a civil marriage was also changed by a “simple” de-gendering of the article with stipulated that two persons of the opposite genders can get married. In such a way the new Family Code put heterosexual and homosexual couples on equal legal footing, including the right of same-sex partners to second-parent and joint adoptions.

When the proposal of the new Family Code was presented to the public, the Civil initiative for the family and the rights of children (Civilna iniciativa za družino in pravice otrok, hereafter CIFRC) was established and became the leading opposition voice, trying to create a situation of moral panic by proclaiming the weakest
element of society – “our children” – endangered if the Family Code was adopted.

Besides CIFRC, the Roman Catholic Church played an important role in the public debate on the Family Code. At the beginning it looked as if the RCC had not been connected to the CIFRC, although they were giving out similar messages. Later on it was found out that the website 24kul.si which the CIFRC used to spread out its messages, was hosted on the official server of the Slovenian Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, the organization “24kul”, which owns the website, was officially registered and established by a young priest who also represented the RCC in the public debate on the Family Code (Blažič, 2010). There seemed to be a close connection between the Church and the CIFRC as their actions were obviously jointly orchestrated. Furthermore, the leading figures of the Church rarely appeared in public to comment on the Family Code, as their public image had been compromised due to sexual and economic scandals. Instead, the Church was very active within its community. The head of the CIFRC, for example, gave speeches during Sunday masses in churches, the initiative also collected signatures against the Family Code outside churches etc.

The public debate on the new Family Code was often narrowed down to the issue of the adoption of children by same-sex couples. The media insisted on debating this question in a pro et contra format, which they advocated in the name of balanced reporting. However, there was also an implicit expectation of spectacle which is easily achieved in such debates. Although the public debate on the Family Code was similarly framed as in 2003, when the government’s bill on registered same-sex partnership was debated, the comparison between the debates in 2003 and 2009 shows some significant changes, particularly in the role of the RCC.

In 2003 the representatives of the RCC explicitly referred to God and the Bible in order to oppose the legal recognition of same-sex unions. For example, one of the most resounding statements of the Archbishop of
Ljubljana in 2003 was during his interview on national TV in which he claimed – quoting from the Bible – that homosexuality is “an abomination”. In line with the Archbishop’s argumentation, another representative of the RCC, a moral theologian, claimed in an interview for the magazine Ona that “God did not create homosexuals” (Horvat, 2002). Such references were totally absent from their comments on the Family Code, as they proved to be ineffective; the lawmakers did not pay much attention to religious-based arguments. God and the Bible were replaced – among others – by the results of scientific research. However, as these results do not usually support religious interpretations of homosexuality, they were presented in a manner supporting RCC arguments.

Their starting point in opposing the new Family Code was based on the RCC fear that the Code reduces the symbolic importance of what they identify as the family. In their understanding, the only proper family is a heteronormative nuclear family (father + mother + child(ren)) as it is the only type of the family which is in accordance with the Creator’s plan. The Church framed this argument in their public appearances as a concern over the demographic profile of Slovenia, drawing attention to the possibility of collapse of the Slovenian nation – both in terms of demography and morality. Furthermore, they voiced concern about the wellbeing of the children raised outside “proper families”. Here they disguised their argumentation in the interpretations of the results of the scientific research which – according to their views – showed that same-sex families are dangerous for children.

An illustrative example of this is the claim that an American study on intimate partner violence showed that “in same-sex partnerships there is 100% higher occurrence of partner violence compared to heterosexual partnerships”. They came up with the “100% more violence” by comparing the incidence of violence between men in same-sex partnerships (15.4%) and violence against men in heterosexual partnerships,
caused by their female partners (7.7%), but not men’s violence against women in heterosexual relationships (30.4%). The question why the incidence of violence in same-sex relationships was not compared to men’s violence against women in heterosexual relationships is almost rhetorical. Furthermore, as most of the same-sex families in Slovenia are in fact lesbian families, it is telling that the opponents never mentioned the data from the same research which suggest that for now (the report states that more research is needed in this area) lesbian couples experience less intimate partner violence (11%) than heterosexual couples (cf. Samuels & Thacker, 2000).

Another illustrative example is the claim that same-sex partnerships are unstable and short-lived. Referring to a study on the incidence of HIV (Xiridou, 2003), a journalist of the Catholic weekly newspaper Družina claimed that research “revealed that the average duration of gay partnerships is 1.5 years”.10 Again, the research findings were interpreted selectively and out of context: the respondents of the research were asked only about the length of the current relationship. Furthermore, the sample was very specific as the research focused on HIV. It consisted of young gay men from Amsterdam aged 30 or less who had been sexually active in the previous six months. It is self-evident that people who are 30 or less are unlikely to have been in long term relationships yet. However, the result presented in such a way successfully played on stereotypical images of homosexuality (and particularly homosexual relationships) and resonated as scientific evidence that the stereotype is in fact the truth.

Yet another type of seemingly scientific discourse that occurred in the Family Code debate is related to using statistical data to enhance moral panic. A representative of the RCC, for example, often quoted his estimation based on the incidence of HIV in Slovenia11 that gay men are over 435 times more likely to

11 Slovenia is a country with low HIV prevalence rate. In 2008, 34 new cases of HIV infection were identified in Slovenia. 32 of them acquired it through MSM sexual intercourse (Institute for the Protection of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, www.ivz.si).
contract HIV than a heterosexual person.\textsuperscript{12} It means that children in same-sex families are also more likely to lose one of the parents during their upbringing. However, the aim of using these statistics was not to make a rational and scientific argument. Instead, these interpretations played on social imaginary of (deviant) sexuality and still existing images of HIV being a gay disease or even God’s punishment.

Falsified or selectively interpreted data in a format of catchy, “populist” statistics was used throughout the debate on the Family Code by the representatives of the RCC and their satellite civil society organizations. Similar tendencies can be identified in the Croatian debate on the Health Education programme, which continued in 2013 with the “citizens’ initiative” to change the Croatian constitution in a way to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

4. 2. The Croatian Health Education Debate

In 2004, after a public controversy over a pro-life American documentary \textit{The Silent Scream} shown during a religion education class in a secondary school in Zagreb the already existing debate on sex education in schools intensified (Bijelić, 2008). Attention was focused primarily on the extra-curricular abstinence-based sex education programme TeenSTAR, originally developed in the USA, which was administered since 1997 in approximately 100 schools in Croatia. While the Church believed that the programme was in line with Croatian culture and values, the opponents of the programme, including sex education experts, claimed that the programme provided “biased information on the topics of homosexuality, masturbation, contraception and gender“ (Hodžić et al, 2012: 503). For example, the educational programme claimed that masturbation was a sign of grave moral disorder, while homosexuality was a form of sexual harassment.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} TeenStar Croatia, www.teenstar.hr
By 2005 the TeenSTAR was removed from schools as the Ministry of Sport, Education and Science concluded that the programme was in fact inadequate. It then issued a public call for new educational programmes on sexuality, which would be part of a broader programme on health education. In 2006 two programmes were selected to be piloted in schools, one of them commissioned by Parent’s Voice for Children (Glas roditelja za djecu, hereafter GROZD), an organization established by the leading figures of TeenSTAR programme.

Despite the fact that GROZD's module on sexuality was more or less a copy of the TeenSTAR programme, the Ministry decided to give it another try. The decision was taken albeit the majority opinion of the members of the Ministry’s evaluation commission, who believed that GROZD’s programme misrepresented scientific data on gender (GROZD claimed that gender was a “feminist figment”\(^\text{14}\)), masturbation, and homosexuality (homosexual intercourse was interpreted as being in total contradiction to the nature of sexual intercourse) and violates sexual and reproductive rights. (For a detailed analysis of the programme, see Bijelić, 2008).

Two years later, in 2008, the government changed its mind again, stating that there was no need for a Health Education programme. Their conclusion was based on a study, which showed that the students who attended the aforementioned sex education programmes did not have a better knowledge on health-related issues than those who did not attend the classes (Hodžić et al., 2012; Bijelić and Hodžić, 2013).

The debate on sex education in Croatian schools was recently revived as the new left-wing government announced in September 2012 that Health Education would be introduced into school curricula, including a module on sexuality. The “Sex/Gender Equality and Responsible Sexual Behaviour” module consists of three hours (one hour in primary school, two hours in secondary school) on gender and sexual diversity,

including issues of sexual minorities and discrimination.

The inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum and the educational goal of accepting and tolerating sexual diversity immediately stirred public controversy. The association GROZD, with the support of the Church and other church-based civil organizations, started a campaign against the programme. For GROZD the fact that the programme discusses homosexuality as equally “natural” as heterosexuality is unacceptable. Furthermore, they believe that the programme opens the door to “homosexual propaganda” to enter into Croatian schools. They claim that the government is trying to impose its own ideology upon their children, a practice typical of a communist regime (HINA, 2012).

At a press conference members of GROZD pointed out that “the gender ideology which is promoted through this programme is not only in conflict with scientific facts, but it also destroys the gender identity of children in adolescence, during the most important period of life for the construction of sexual identity” (ibid., emphasised by the author).

The RCC in Croatia and its satellite civil society organizations “framed their campaign within parents' rights to decide on the upbringing of their children and in reference to the proposed sex education module as being an attack on traditional Croatian values” (Bijelić & Hodžić, 2013). Such framing reflects a similar approach of the RCC in Slovenia during the Family Code debate, where the arguments against the Code were often framed as the protection of children and their wellbeing.

As a reaction to the governmental attempt to introduce sex education into schools, the vice president of GROZD later became one of the leading persons of the civil initiative In the name of the Family (U ime obitelji, hereafter INF)\(^\text{15}\), which was inspired by the events in France (the gay marriage controversy) and

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8  In the name of the family, http://uimeobitelji.net/ (August 1, 2013).
their initiative Maires pour l’enfance (Mayors for Childhood). In May 2013, INF managed to collect 743,316 signatures for a public referendum on changing the Croatian Constitution in a way to introduce the traditional catholic definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The RCC supported them and helped them by collecting the signatures after mass.

While both initiatives were focused on the protection of family and children, they were simultaneously trying to “disqualify” homosexuality and same-sex families by using (distorted) scientific arguments, which in many ways mirrored the Slovenian debate. One typical example is a general reference to “all studies” without ever mentioning the authors or the studies themselves. The leading person of INF, for example, stated in a TV interview that “all studies show that the best environment for children to grow up in is a low-conflict union between their biological parents” (D. D., 2013).

Another example is a continuous quoting of the Regnerus New Family Structure Study (Regnerus, 2012), which (notoriously) showed that same-sex families are not a healthy environment for children. They have used this study despite its many criticisms (see Gates et al, 2012), the disclosure of the Croatian media that the research is in fact not about openly gay parents, the public announcement of the Croatian Sociological Association about questionable scientific credibility of the study and the author’s own acknowledgement that he in fact researched people who had a parent in a same-sex relationship at some point in their lives and not necessarily while they were children.

Yet another example of juggling with scientific discourse was the visit of the American researcher Dr. Judith

17 See Jarić Dauenhauer, Nenad (2013): ‘U ime obitelji’ poziva se na lažirano istraživanje (‘In the name of the family’ refers to fake research). Tportal, at: http://www.tportal.hr/scitech/znanost/264663/U-ime-obitelji-poizva-se-na-lazirano-istrazivanje.html (January 4, 2013) and
Reisman in January 2013, who was invited to Croatia by the opponents of the Health Education programme. Reisman, according to her official web-page, exposes “fraud in sex science and education”20 and was introduced in her first interview for the Croatian media, Večernji list, as “one of the most important authorities in disclosing the negative effects of pornography” (Pavičić, 2013) and as a researcher who, using strict scientific methods, showed how pornographic images change the chemical structure of human brains for the worse.

Her visit to Croatia and her lectures received high media attention. After one such lecture at the Faculty of Political Sciences she was not satisfied with the provocative questions posed by the students, claiming that their questions were not linked to the topic of her lecture. She then accused them of being “brainwashed” by communism (Kovačević, 2013).

In her many interviews and public appearances, Reisman accused the Croatian sexologist and sociologist Aleksandar Štulhofer, one of the authors of the sexuality module, of cooperating with paedophiles, trying to present pornography, homosexuality and paedophilia as positive social values. She believes that it would be a big mistake to allow children in schools to be indoctrinated by Kinsey's sexual ideology. The result of such education would be a variety of “sexual crimes, violence, sexual abuse of children, abortion, divorce, trafficking with children” (ibid.)

Upon the invitation of the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), she also gave a lecture in the Croatian parliament, persuading MPs that sex education would result in the raise of teenage pregnancy and increase in sexual diseases. One of the reasons being that pupils at that age are not capable of understanding the content of sex education (Moskaljov, 2013). Arguing against “the hypersexualisation of children”, she stated that “children should be allowed to be children and not to become sexually active too soon”

20 http://www.drjudithreisman.com/
5. Conclusion: Playing with science

In their analysis of Christian Right movement in US, UK and Eastern Europe, Burak and Wilson (2009) rightly claim that political demands, springing from intimate/sexual citizenship debates, such as legal recognition of gay marriage or prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, are reinterpreted by this movement as a moral threat to the nation and the world as we know it. Similarly Plummer (2003) claims that the new intimate narratives are often interpreted and seen as the reason for the collapse of the old value and moral system. This, in return, gives an aggressive and revanchist ethics to some groups, which manifests in violence and marginalization of those who differ from traditional interpretations of femininity and masculinity. In other words: it mobilizes “justified and righteous anger” (Lambevski, 2011: 210).

These groups, including RCC, refrain from distinguishing between citizenship rights and moral enemies, construing their moral enemy – the homosexual or – more generally, the sexual/intimate citizen – as a political enemy. “For this movement,” claims Burak and Wilson, “moral enemies are and must be political enemies; the stakes of this equation are the survival of the nation and, indeed, Christianity itself” (Burak and Wilson, 2009: 138). However, such equation can no longer rely on biblical interpretations of moral unacceptability of homosexuals as such discourse is ideologically ineffective. As I have shown in this paper, the Church’s discourse (and its public appearance) seems to be “secularizing”: the Bible is substituted by science and the Church itself by civil society proxies.

Before the change of the political system in the early nineties, civil society in former Yugoslavia, and specifically in Slovenia and Croatia, bore progressive connotations. The so-called new social movements in
Slovenia – civil society initiatives such as women's movement, green movement, peace movement etc. – represented a (political) alternative that the communist government tolerated. Eventually these movements contributed to the democratic change of the political system in 1991. The pluralisation of the political scene later enabled new civil initiatives to emerge. Despite the fact that they often take the term “civil society” on board, their political activities are far from the political heritage and spirit of civil society in the eighties. These initiatives can be traditionalist – as in the case of CIFRC in Slovenia and GROZD and INF in Croatia – and their political endeavours are not necessarily targeted towards greater social inclusion but rather the exclusion of those who do not fit into their traditionalist imaginary of “good life”. Nevertheless, the term “civil society” or “civil initiative” still bare positive connotations in the sense of being a political activity of a group of people who have the right for their voice to be heard in a democratic dialogue. In other words: these initiatives adopt advantageous framing in terms of civil society organizations, which triggers better (more democratic) impressions compared to the sentiments triggered by the institution of the Church.

It is precisely for this reason that the Church either establishes its own civil initiatives or works through other civil initiatives, which share their value system and offer it a secularized context within which the Church can reach its political goals.

All this is reflected also in the discourse the Church and its satellite civil initiatives use in debates pertaining to intimate citizenship. As shown in this paper, it seems that the Church is refraining from “biblical discourse”, substituting it with populist rhetoric, disguised in what looks like rational arguments based on scientific evidence. Although the manipulation of research results, discussed in this paper, has been revealed by some sociologists in public debates and interviews and Reisman was “disclosed” by some

Croatian media as, for example, a “promoter of conspiracy theories and pseudo-scientific ideas”\(^{22}\) such “disclosures” had limited effect. In the case of Reisman, the very invitation to Croatia and huge media attention to her lectures generated her as a “newsworthy” event. Furthermore, in a populist pro et contra format in the media it is hard to go into detail about why the results of scientific research are misleadingly presented. A simple, false, but effective slogan: “Homosexuals are 100% more violent” worked. What is therefore effective in the context of the populist address to “the masses” is a skilful reversing of words and uncritical use of information from (sociological) research, often without reference to the source. Selling statistics as pure gold without a proper understanding of the background of the data and without paying attention to the interpretations by the authors of the research studies is very problematic. However, both case studies showed that this kind of juggling with scientific data may be ideologically very effective.

In this paper I have focused specifically on the use of scientific discourse by the Church and related civil organizations in two policy debates dealing with intimate citizenship issues. An analysis of other types of rhetoric used in both debates is outside of the scope of this paper, but “scientific” discourse was neither the only one nor necessarily the prevailing one in either debate. This paper also does not suggest that similar or identical approaches were not taken by the proponents of the Family Code and Health Education. The latter demands further research. However, these two case studies show how the Church and its civil initiatives found a new “niche”, substituting the mostly ineffective and outdated “biblical discourse” (failing to mobilize big masses of people for their political cause) with the “rational discourse” of science. In this way they are no longer explicitly trying to show that homosexuality is an abomination. They rather base their counter-narratives on their concern for the wellbeing of children and the preservation of the “natural” union between a man and a woman. In other words: the goal is the same (the exclusion of gays and

lesbians), but the approach is different (the protection of the family and marriage). In such a way the Church is secularizing its discourse in order to “clericalise” society. Furthermore, it successfully re-generates the issues of the family and marriage as an ideological battleground of contemporary cultural wars, constituting gays and lesbians as outsiders in the nationalist and patriarchal imaginary of post-socialist nation states. It is in this context where the “envisaged new morals” of intimate/sexual citizens (Plummer, 2003) face their resistance and counter-narratives.

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