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“It’s Not the Pride Parade Model”: Investigating Changes in Queer Activist Practices in Sarajevo after 2008

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**“It’s Not the Pride Parade Model”: Investigating Changes in Queer Activist Practices in
Sarajevo after 2008**

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Methods & Ethics	6
Literature Review	9
Findings	13
<i>Context of Sarajevo</i>	13
<i>Landscape of Queer Activism in Sarajevo since Dayton</i>	15
1995-2008, First Steps at Visibility.....	15
2009-Present: New Spaces and New Actors	18
Factors Affecting Activist Tactics	23
<i>Current Challenges in Queer Activism</i>	25
Homonationalism in Sarajevo	25
Coalition Based Activism.....	28
The Place of the Trans and Intersex Community	31
<i>Does It Get Better in Sarajevo?</i>	33
Conclusions	37
Bibliography	40
Appendix	43

Abstract

In 2008, a group of queer activists in Sarajevo organized the Sarajevo Queer Festival in an attempt to raise the visibility of queer people in Sarajevo, but the event resulted in a violent attack on the queer community. Since 2008, the actors and tactics of activists have changed, moving from the single, more radical, Organization Q, to the emergence of more groups with a more moderate approach. My research poses the question how have the tactics of queer activists in Sarajevo changed since the attack on the Sarajevo Queer Festival and the passage of the 2009 anti-discrimination law. Through semi-structured interviews and observational study of queer-friendly spaces and activist events, I conclude that activist tactics have taken a more moderate approach that has resulted in legal protection, but has not yet built a strong community amongst queer people in Sarajevo. These changes lead me to analyze current challenges in queer activism and the trajectory of practices.

Introduction

In 2008, a group of queer¹ activists in Sarajevo organized the Sarajevo Queer Festival in an attempt to raise the visibility of queer people and queer issues in Sarajevo. The build-up to the festival was tense as conservative voices in the city condemned the event. At the opening night of the event, several Muslim extremists attacked attendees, severely injuring some, and halting the event (Amnesty International, 2008). A year later, the government of Bosnia and Hercegovina (from here on BiH) passed a sweeping anti-discrimination law that aligned itself with European Union (EU) standards. Passed in 2009, the law protects “sexual expression...sexual orientation and every other circumstance with a purpose or a consequence to disable or endanger recognition, enjoyment or realization, of rights and freedoms in all areas of public life” (BiH Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, 2009). Despite the change in laws, there has not been a new initiative for the Sarajevo Queer Festival since, except for smaller visibility events such as the annual Merlinka film festival formerly of Belgrade. It is important to note that this event has also been the sight of violence in recent years as well (Toe, 2016b).

Further, new, albeit smaller, attacks on the queer community have occurred more recently. In March 2016, a “small group of people” attacked what many considered to be queer-friendly café and theater in Sarajevo. Four people were “detained but then released after interrogation” (Toe, 2016a). Between the 2008 attack on the Sarajevo Queer Festival and now, activist tactics have changed, moving from large scale visible events, to smaller events, while at the same time frame, little in the climate of Sarajevo towards queer activism has changed.

¹ I further explain my choice of queer versus some other variants of “LGBT” in my methodology section.

Following this tension between legal protection and lack of social acceptance, my research poses the question how have the tactics of queer activists in Sarajevo changed since the attack on the Sarajevo Queer Festival and the passage of the 2009 anti-discrimination law. This main research question raises several follow up questions I explore in my study. Are there new actors in the field different from those who organized the Festival in 2008? If so, what happened to the old ones and what are the objectives of the new ones? What factors caused changes in activist tactics? To what extent has oppression united queer people in Sarajevo across ethnic lines? In a similar vein, are there initiatives to connect queer people in Sarajevo with other queer people across BiH? If so, do these cross or follow ethnic lines? In what ways does homonationalism and ethno-nationalism affect queer activism in Sarajevo? What do changes in activist tactics tell us about queer culture in Sarajevo and the perceptions of queer people of the culture?

Before I begin to answer these question, I will go over my methodology and ethical concerns that arose during my study. I follow that with a brief outline of literature that assisted me in my research and informed my thinking before, during, and after the interview and writing process. In my findings section, I will recount from interviews the brief history of queer activism in Sarajevo since 1995 until the present. There, I will discuss the major actors that have existed or still exist in the queer activism landscape. In this same section, I will address general obstacles faced by the NGOs as it relates to their choices in tactics and activities. Following, I will discuss three major challenges faced by queer activists and the community in general. I will start by discussing the influence of the international community and the effect homonationalism has on activist practices. Next, I will contextualize coalition based activist efforts across BiH and the success and challenges of such efforts. Third, I will address the place of the Trans and Intersex communities in activism in Sarajevo. To close my findings section, I will discuss to what extent

the NGOs have been successful in improving the lives of queer people in Sarajevo and BiH in general. This section will also address prospects for the future of the activist groups, including but not limited to a discussion of a possible pride parade. I will finish by offering some concluding thoughts and general observations about my research, as well as, further possible research topics.

Methods & Ethics

To begin to answer my research question, I mapped out actors in the field of queer activism to see who is working in the field and what their objectives and tactics are. This mapping was done through participatory observation of events and spaces that are advertised as friendly to queer identifying people. I then analyzed how these spaces communicate their friendliness to queer groups. Understanding how these spaces communicate their existence (through social media outreach, or special events), was important to analyzing the culture of queer life in Sarajevo. At the same time, I identified activist groups that have developed since the 2008 Queer Festival attack and the 2009 law. I completed six semi-structured interviews with two activist leaders, two general member activists, one manager of a queer friendly space, and one academic. I interviewed activist leaders about their changing roles in Sarajevo as well as the goals and tactics of their work. My questions centered on their activities, events, and obstacles to visibility. Further questions handled challenges to queer activism in Sarajevo as well as hopes about the future of queer life in Sarajevo. Through these activist leaders, I identified networks of other queer people who engage with general member activists, to begin to answer questions about perceptions of queer life and activism in Sarajevo. In order to protect their identities, I have altered the names of all of my participants and used pseudonyms instead.

As for terminology used relating to various sexual orientations and gender identities, I consistently use the term “queer,” as opposed to a variation of LGBT. However, it is important to

note that in my interview questions I used the term “non-straight.” The general reaction to this term from my early interviewees was a sense of confusion as it did not follow the local lexicon. In my interviews, my participants used different terms when talking about their work to me. To account for this variation, I maintained their usage of things such as “gay and lesbian” and “LGBTI” or others. However, in my own writing, I have made the choice to exclusively use queer, which is both something common in my experience in Sarajevo and in the United States.

My choice to use “non-straight” in my interviews stems from my positionality as a person involved in non-straight discussions in the United States. In my preparations before my project period began, I found all these terms exclusionary in one way or another and in the case of “homosexual” overly scientific for sexuality, which does not fit a scientific binary of hetero- and homosexual. As for variations of LGBTQ, whether or not the T in LGBTQ actually means Trans people are represented, or that Trans people feel a part of the LGBTQ community is an issue still under debate (Phelan, 1997; Dilley 1999; Kuhar 2004). This tension is reflected in academic and lay-person discussions, where Trans and queer issues have been grouped together because questions of gender identity and sexuality are linked by heterosexism (Phelan, 1997). However, more recently, Judith Butler has argued that the “queers of color” movement in the US has worked to break down and democratize the concept of queer, which in many respects has become “white and classist,” all at the same time, recognizing that regimes of queerness stem from a specific limited American context and may not apply to different contexts (2016, p. 9).

I only knew the sexual orientation and gender identity of my interviewees based on their own disclosures and I do not reveal them because it did not become a relevant point of analysis. Finally, there exists the problem of even applying queer theory as it exists now to Sarajevo, Bosnia, or even the Western Balkans as a whole. As Kuhar writes, in the Western Balkans, “national

identity seems to be vulnerable and images of threatened identity still exist” (2004, p. 129-30). Because queer theory attempts to subvert the very notion of fixed or stable identities, applying such thinking to fragile or newly constructed identities could prove to be challenging. Further, queer theory arose largely out of the white, educated academic world of the US, and cannot be applied as it is formulated from the US context to the context of the Balkans in general, or Bosnia and Sarajevo specifically.

As for my own standpoint in Sarajevo queer activism, there are levels of factors that affected my perception of the activist work as well as their perception of me. My standpoint further affected my ability to conduct effective interviews that built rapport and develop meaningful data. As a white, middle-class, queer, male from the United States, raised in a Catholic household and attending a private Catholic university, I had a number of obstacles to overcome in the queer community in Sarajevo. As an outsider, I faced the challenge of entering a small community of activists, who seemed to face immense pressure from forces in Sarajevo, let alone Bosnia in general. However, as a queer male, who has led activist fights at my home university as well as the surrounding community, I did understand at least some aspects of the work happening in Sarajevo. At the same time, I have never truly felt my life threatened or have been attacked for my sexual identity as it seems is common in Sarajevo (Vasić, Gavrić, Bošnjak, 2014). Although, I have experienced some familial hostility and pressures at my university that acted as a tool to build rapport with my interviewees. As a citizen of the United States, my position in Sarajevo was a tenuous one. Coupled with my beginner level in local language skills, and the post-conflict context of Sarajevo, my position could have been perceived in a myriad of ways. Being from the US helped or hindered me in ways I may not have fully perceived in my interview process. Activists may have looked at me as an extremely privileged queer person because of the wide-spread acceptance

of minority sexualities in the US. All at once, being an outsider allowed me to analyze some possible results of the development of activist tactics in Sarajevo from a less connected perspective.

Literature Review

Literature for this project focused on four main areas of research: the post-conflict and Dayton context of Bosnia and Sarajevo; homonationalism in Southeastern Europe; queer activism in the Western Balkans; and finally, NGO reports, mostly from, but not limited to, SOC, a major human rights activist group in the city. Over the course of my paper, I will also reference various journalistic and newspaper sources to contextualize individual events.

Queer activism in Sarajevo exists within a post-conflict context and in the Dayton Accords political system which has specific avenues for political change which activists target. For example, the ethnic compartments limit the effect ethnic minorities can have on political change. For queer activism, this plays out in interesting ways which I will address further in the findings section of my paper. In *From Dayton to Europe*, Chandler (2005) seeks to establish political stagnation within Bosnia as a result of the Dayton Peace Accords as facilitating more international intervention and regulation rather than restricting it. To argue this point, Chandler traces the history of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which he argues resulted from “little guidance for understanding the extension of international mandates or the mechanisms of international administration over the new state” (2005, p. 340). Chandler concludes that the interference of the international community has “done little either to build the capacity of the BiH or to legitimate it in the eyes of the population” (2005, p. 346). Chandler’s argument contextualized the possibilities for political change as a result of activism and gave me insight into who has authority and mandate to make changes in the government of BiH. Similarly, Kappler (2013) argues that a semi-public

arts and cultural space in Sarajevo works to break down and degrade social division that has become institutionalized in post-Dayton space. This analysis contextualized the dynamics of queer activism in Sarajevo which is both trying to establish a queer cultural life as well as change political and social realities. More specifically, Kappler's discussion of the nuances that exist in semi-public spaces and, the ways in which the semi-public fosters social legitimacy for marginalized groups applies very specifically to the queer community in Sarajevo, as I will discuss more below.

As for Sarajevo, which is now a predominately Bošniak Muslim city despite being the official state capital, queer activism there does not reflect the whole of BiH, in resources or tactics. To understand this, Kajinić addresses to what extent the liberal-leaning² media sources in Sarajevo and Bosnia articulated conceptions of Sarajevo as either a "backwards" city or a "metropolis" that should not accept violence against difference that occurred during the Sarajevo Queer Festival (SQF). This discourse is measured through an analysis of various media sources and their coverage of the build-up and aftermath of SQF. Kajinić's work shed light into how perceptions by media outlets of Sarajevo communicate different ideals from the population and then in turn, reinforce them in a cyclical pattern. This communicative construction of Sarajevo as either a "metropolis," "backwards," or "a Muslim city," influences discourse about possibilities for activist tactics and successes.

Because of the influence of the international community and the context of ethno-nationalistic rhetoric in Bosnia, literature to contextualize homonationalism in a Balkan context proved helpful. As Colpani and Habed (2014) write that sexual minorities were "once regarded as an inner threat to the social order and Western civilization at large, [but] today enjoy increasing political and cultural recognition at the expense of racialized others...this shift has been termed

² "liberal media" and "liberal media sources" are terms used by Kajinić (2010) that are not immediately defined, but used in reference to what seem to be more left-leaning media at the time of SQF.

homonationalism” (2014, p. 73). Rather than viewing homonationalist agendas as homogenous in a heterogeneous European context, Colpani and Habed consider a “European homonationalism,” which emerges from “the frictions and negotiations between national and European institutions and LGBT social movements” (2014, p. 74). The main focus of the piece is the “borders of Europe,” specifically Italy, but their analysis spills over into the Balkans (p.74). The comparison drawn between Italy and the Balkans is reflected in the concept of the “Mediterranean homosexual” (p. 83). The discussion of a “Mediterranean homosexual” hinges on a conception of the modern. In this conception, Europe represents the “modern homosexual,” someone who is the opposite of heterosexual, while the “Mediterranean homosexual” is someone who has sex with another person of the same sex, but is not necessarily the opposite of heterosexual. The authors argue that this conception of homosexuality is “pre-modern,” that is, not European (p. 83-4). Whether or not the concept of “Mediterranean homosexual” can apply to the Balkans or Bosnia as the authors claim, is not addressed in this paper, but the theoretical framework underpinning “European homonationalism” and the way it constructs a hegemonic homosexuality despite variance within Europe assisted me in analyzing the effect homonationalism and European Union aspirations have on the tactics of queer activism. More generally, in relation to nationalism and nationalistic narratives and gender, Nagel (1998) outlines the relationship gender and sex has on the production of national mythology and identity. The author drew from literature on national identity to argue that masculinity as such is understudied as a phenomenon in feminist histories. She argues that simply replacing male history with female history neglects the effect masculinity has had on the construction of history. She also refers to the place of femininity in national identity and myth as the locus of sexual purity and protection. Some reference is made to “homosexuality” as an antithesis and subversion of masculine national identity, despite the homosocial and

homoerotic nature of many national masculine images. This analysis is helpful to my understanding of narratives of masculinity and non-straight ethnic identity and nationalism. This article also helped me analyze questions about cross-ethnic coalition-building and networking for queer actors.

Literature on regional queer activism proved effective in contextualizing challenges and prospects for the future of queer activism because there is little literature on SQF in 2008 and even less written about queer activism in Bosnia since then. In “On the Other side of an ethnocratic state?: LGBT Activism in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Salmić (2016) nearly mirrors my research, but with a heavier focus on the political mechanisms of EU integration rather than a mapping of non-straight activist practices. However, the author did outline a history of non-straight activism in BiH before and after the attacks on the Sarajevo Queer Festival, which proved helpful. The author also made specific mention of reports from the queer advocacy group SOC, which assisted me in contextualizing the situation in BiH as well as provided depth for my activist interviews. The author also briefly touched on activist networking efforts across BiH. Because the article’s focus is on the politics of EU integration as it relates to queer activism, the author leans on the extremely limited, but EU sanctioned, “LGBT.” From a more regional perspective, Bilić (2016) looks generally at post-Yugoslav queer activism in “Europeanization, LGBT Activism, and Non-Heteronormativity in the post-Yugoslav Space: An Introduction.” Bilić argues that viewing the former Yugoslavia through the lens of post-ethnic conflict can shield or block the view of post-socialism, which is also a relevant framework because it can shed light on “intense and heterogeneous civic initiatives” (2016, p. 2). Bilić also ties EU ascension for places like Slovenia and Croatia with a backlash against queer initiatives (2016, p. 8). This analysis helped me analyze long term goals and techniques of queer activism across the post-Yugoslav space.

SOC produces excellent reports that gave me insight into the primary issues of the community, both in the broad area of human rights and specifically relating to queer rights. In their 2015 Annual Report (2016), SOC briefly outlines the work they have done on the rights of “LGBTI people,” specifically, “psychological and legal support...increasing responsibility of BiH institutions to protect human rights of LGBTI people...[and] informing the public about rights of LGBTI people” (p. 7). The annual report also lists the development of projects and initiatives as they relate to Trans people as well as state-wide coalition building (p. 8). Similarly, SOC’s strategic plan for 2014-17 laid out the goals and strategies for the future of their work (2013). The plan lists the programs for activist focus as, “LGBT Rights [and] Women’s Rights” (p. 2). The overall objective for the period 2014-17 is listed as “to improve the human rights situation of LGBT people and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (p. 7). Three outcomes are also listed to orient tactics for 2014-17. They are 1) “LGBT people are socially and legally empowered”; 2) “BiH authorities have increased responsiveness to guarantee human rights of LGBT people and women”; and 3) “LGBT and women’s rights are mainstreamed in public” (p. 7). I did consult more reports from SOC and other NGO’s about the situation of queer people in Sarajevo and BiH in general, but these reports formed the foundation to begin my research into the specificities of queer activism in Sarajevo.

Findings

I. Context of Sarajevo

BiH is a post-conflict, post-Yugoslav, space with a governmental structure set up by the Dayton Accords. The political system in BiH is divided in three entities, The Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina, the Republika Srpska, and the Brčko District, which is governed by both the Republika Srpska and the Federation. The Federation is divided into ten cantons, which with the

exception of a few, are monoethnic cantons. The Republika Srpska does not have internal divisions and is centralized in the capital Banja Luka. One of my interviewees, senior management of a queer NGO in Sarajevo, said that “If we had a less complex political system our results would be more visible” (personal communication, 18 April 2016). The political system has many avenues to address the concerns of the citizens but the structure does not facilitate rapid legislative change because of the tense divisions in the country.

My interviewees also reflected on the post-conflict status of Bosnia as something that contributed to their work. Bojan said “we went through war...and everybody was using that which was going on and still manipulating [the war] for political purposes” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Similarly, Ismail believed, queerness in Sarajevo “has to be understood with what has happened to the society and what has happened in the last 20-25 years” (personal communication, 16 April 2016).

As for the specific place Sarajevo, which is now predominately Bošniak Muslim, the changes in the city affect the values and culture of the city. Amir believes that “a lot of people are not out, for security issues. We use cover stories, people are really judgmental when it comes to those issues” (personal communication, 16 April 2016). As the state and Federation capital, Sarajevo is the largest city in BiH and therefore, is not representative of BiH or even the Bošniak parts of BiH. Selmić (2016) has found that queer people in BiH are increasingly becoming “trans-ethnic citizens, positioned beyond suffocating insistence on ethnic belonging and the supposedly omnipresent political desire for living in a nation state” (p. 86). In response to some of these ethnic trends, the SOC found that 73% of queer people do not declare themselves as part of any ethnicity (2013, p. 28). “In a weird way, the notion of being Bosnian instead of the other constituent groups, has always had this vaguely civic category, basically meant left, urban, and relatively progressive”

said Ismail. The concept of being Bosnian “has come to mean queer, or at least queer-friendly” (personal communication, 16 April 2016). The context of Sarajevo influences activist tactics and abilities, giving them access to resources and spaces smaller cities or rural groups would not. This access allows activists to have a special place in Sarajevo society while also limiting their reach in the rest of BiH. Because my study focused on Sarajevo, which is distinct as the capital of BiH, the activist tactics, groups and practices cannot be viewed as representative of a BiH queer activist movement, but only as a Sarajevo queer activist movement, despite activist efforts to extend their reach beyond Sarajevo.

II. *Landscape of Queer Activism in Sarajevo since Dayton*

It became clear very early on in my interviews that the history of queer activism in Sarajevo, thus far, can be divided into two distinct historical periods. The first lasted from 1995 until 2008 culminating in SQF. There was one active organization at the time, but following SQF, they quickly faded from the scene. The second historical period lasts from 2009 until the present, following SQF and continuing with vibrant activism into 2016. This periodization is by no means static or formalized, but SQF in 2008 marked a watershed moment for queer activism in Sarajevo.

II.1: 1995-2008, First Steps at Visibility

In 2001, while Belgrade and Zagreb organized their first pride parades to mixed results, the first queer activist group in Sarajevo was just beginning, known as Organization Q (Q). Although not officially a recognized organization with its own space until 2004, Q represents the first attempt to organize the queer community in the city. Ana, the last leader of Q who remains in Sarajevo, told me, “Q was the first organization to register and have their own space, which was very important in the beginning” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). The space Q had was a “free open space where you could come, rent a book, see the rainbow flag, things like that that

were important” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). However, according to Ana, there was quickly a miscommunication between the leaders of Q and queer community about priorities and activities (personal communication, 21 April 2016). If the leaders of Q wanted to do “serious things,” then the community “started to withdraw” because the community wanted to “have fun” and “not many of them realized that you have to work” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). The leaders responded by letting people go who “weren’t ready to engage in politics” (personal communication, 21 April 2016).

A few years into operation, Q planned a major visibility event, SQF, which was to display queer art and culture from BiH. SQF planning started in 2007 and the idea came from Branko, then working at the German Cultural Center in Sarajevo and now in a leadership position in the SOC (personal communication, 21 April 2016). He wanted to partner with Q and support them through the German Cultural Center (personal communication, 18 April 2016). However, this partnership did not last very long as there were disagreements about the approach SQF should take. Branko wanted “a mainstream approach” whereas Q often pushed certain “concepts and ideas that were not popular or accepted among the LGBT community here such as queer or transgender or transsexual” (personal communication with Ana, 21 April 2016). Q wanted to do something more “challenging or subversive,” so by April or May 2008, the partnership ended, but Q continued work on SQF (personal communication, 21 April 2016).

In the months leading up to SQF, media coverage centered on the scheduling of the event, which was to take place during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Kajinić (2010) argues that the media coverage from liberal sources had the effect of “inadvertently rendering queer persons and queer art invisible” (p. 63). The arguments amongst liberal media sources focused on SQF being a litmus test for Sarajevo’s claim of being a metropolitan, diverse city. Kajinić (2010) further

argues that the discourse surrounding SQF created a bipolar Sarajevo: one that was “authentic” and traditional, the other, progressive and European (p. 67). I will show later how this discourse influences current activist practices, but for Q and SQF, the tension leading up to the event, especially because of Ramadan, was a surprise. Ana told me they “never thought about the Ramadan issue,” and now, “can’t actually believe how ignorant we were” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). At the same time, Ana does not regret the timing of SQF saying her only regret is that “we didn’t say well we did it on purpose, because we wanted to show that Bosnia was a secular country” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). On the opening day of SQF in September 2008, “dozens of men” attacked the festival participants and severely injuring several people (*Amnesty International*, 2008). Following the attack on the first day, the festival was made private. SQF represents the last major, widely publicized event of Q and one of the most violent attacks against the queer community in Sarajevo.

Following the attack, Q started to fall apart as an organization. The leaders felt as though they needed to stick together during the festival, but when it ended, the cracks became larger and larger in the structure and Ana left Q in April 2009. The atmosphere for queer people also took a turn for the worst and fear amongst the community increased. Ana believes in some way that people blamed Q for the increase in fear. She, then recognized as one of the campaigners of the festival, was in fear of direct attack. In spite of that, she is proud of SQF, calling it “a magnificent event, very important for Sarajevo and post-war Bosnia that proved that this city was basically no different than the cities in the region. It stopped victimhood” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). In the wake of the attacks on SQF and Q falling apart, Bojan, an activist leader working for Okvir, one of the major queer NGOs in Sarajevo since 2011, admitted that indeed two or three years after 2008, nothing happened, and everybody was silenced out of fear. Branko drew two

lessons from SQF: first was the realization that the state of Bosnia is not quite secular and that religion is very influential in the country; and second that state institutions were not quite ready to protect queer activists, which was confirmed by the attack on the film festival in 2014. The silence induced by fear forced queer activism to the peripheries of Sarajevo life and the lessons learned from SQF were incorporated into activist practice since then.

II.2: 2009-Present: New Spaces and New Actors

Sarajevo Open Center (SOC):

SOC began work officially in 2010 focusing on a broad human rights platform that would later be refined to focus exclusively on women's rights and LGBTI rights (SOC, Strategic Plan, 2014-2017). SOC started to fill the empty space left by Q with small symbolic things such as parties. The first programs started in 2010 and in 2014, SOC adopted a strategic plan where they concluded that they should have a parallel program of LGBT and women's rights programs (personal communication, 18 April 2016). In the early stages, SOC chose events without big consequences such as a small film festival, as even the small festival was a risk for people's safety. As of now, SOC is a highly professionalized and organized NGO. According to Ismail, an academic specializing in BiH politics and democracy, SOC is "one of the best NGOs in the region or country period because they have placed queer issues on the agenda, in a very smart way" (personal communication, 16 April 2016). According to Branko, because SOC has a monopoly on activism in Sarajevo, no one "could replace us in our activity and visibility for a few years," if they fell apart, so they are cautious in their activities, avoiding extremely large or public events, such as SQF (personal communication, 18 April 2016). As for staff, they employ twelve people and four local paid interns and have according to them a strong ethnic diversity and some religious people.

SOC uses three types of tactics to accomplish their goals in queer activism: community empowerment, institutional work and advocacy, and raising awareness. Community empowerment focuses on social and legal empowerment and media work. In community empowerment, SOC does peer-to-peer consultations with a social worker, who can recommend free psychological assistance, but because of practical reasons, free psychological counseling is not made public, only the peer to peer counseling is. Twice per month, SOC organizes community events and lectures that are closed and only known by people in specific Facebook groups or on mailing lists. Word of mouth is also important within the community. Legal counseling and advice is provided for things such as seeking a marriage license outside of BiH, reporting attacks to police and to human rights offices or courts, and assisting Trans people with name, gender and sex changes in official documents. Finally, the specialized online portal LGBT.ba provides queer cultural news and updates in the local language to the community.

The second part of SOC's tactics are institutional work and advocacy where they monitor the development of queer rights and then report developments to EU and UN groups, and also produce "an annual LGBTI report *The Pink Report*, the only one in Bosnia" (personal communication, 18 April 2016). They also do concrete lobbying and advocacy work, such as developing specific laws, for example, a law for same-sex partnership. According to Branko "this is not visible because we don't want backlash from radical groups especially the religious communities" (personal communication, 18 April 2016). SOC advocate among specific MPs to get their support, works to change criminal laws to protect against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination, and works with key public civil servants: police, judges, and prosecutors (personal communication, 18 April 2016). Branko said they "include LGBTI rights into their

training,” especially with young journalists and lawyers, to develop “a group of support people to change institutions” (personal communication, 18 April 2016).

The final piece, raising awareness, is where they do queer cultural events but these events happen less than before. Now the focus tends to be on the Merlinka Film Festival³ and some smaller art exhibitions, to bring “LGBT arts content into the public sphere” (personal communication, 18 April 2016). All of these activities and divisions work to support, advocate, and build community for queer people in Sarajevo. The successes and limits of these activities is documented by SOC in their annual *Pink Report*, published every year, but at the time of writing was not available for 2016, but is expected to be published soon.

Okvir

Founded in 2011 and much less formal than SOC, Okvir works towards similar goals of acceptance and community building, but through mostly cultural and arts projects. Bojan, one of the leaders in Okvir, told me that the project started among friends from the community because at the time SOC was not focusing specifically on queer issues (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Since they began in 2011, the leadership has changed, and only three have stayed from the beginning.

Okvir tried to fill the visibility void left by Q by doing non-formal events, for example flash mobs, and different types of easily visible street actions for queer people in BiH. They focused on street activism and a program called “Transformastica,” where they placed rainbow flags on important buildings in Sarajevo and put graffiti all over the city, some of which still can be seen in the Old City. On Transformastica, Bojan said “it included anybody, we would just go

³ More information about the film festival can be found at <http://merlinka.com/>

outside...if you take a walk there are graffiti left, but we are not going outside for almost 3 or 4 years, something like that, we are doing different types of activism now” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Since Transformastcia, Okvir has been trying to collect the community and make sure they create? a group though lacking the adequate space. The only place where the community can socially gather en masse, Club FIS is set to shut down in two to three months with no plans to reopen a similar space. As to why Okvir moved from street activism and visibility raising to community building, Bojan said “it was a matter of safety, a lot of us were attacked, myself included, a lot of times.” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Their aim therefore is to strike a balance between visibility activities and community building because of safety concerns.

Okvir focuses on the LGBT community through arts education and activities and psychological support. In deciding on events and activities, Okvir tries to combine something educational, useful, and fun. The art projects and writings the community produces are displayed on Okvir’s website. Some consistent projects they have are “I am writing you a letter...” where queer people write letters to people in their lives who cannot or refuse to listen to their stories, and there is also a backlog of poetry, stories and interviews from people in the community. Similar to SOC, they offer peer to peer counseling and therapists. In February 2016, Okvir put on their largest public event, the Forum Theater which is a type of experimental theater used to liberate and empower oppressed groups. Unlike SOC, Okvir does not have metrics to measure their success in community building. Community building and community empowerment is hard to measure in a quantitative way and represents one of the obstacles to more funding for Okvir to expand their programs.

Kriterion Café

In partnership with SOC for the Merlinka Film Festival and other activities, Kriterion café is one of the few places in the city that is explicitly viewed as queer-friendly by the community in Sarajevo. Opened in 2011 in an effort to give students first time employment, a manager of Kriterion, Milica, told me they “believe that this city needs a very open minded cultural place” (personal communication, 12 April 2016). In partnership with the original Kriterion Café in Amsterdam built after the Second World War, Kriterion café in Sarajevo is located on a main street by the river and has a theater in the back rooms. Its architecture is industrial and inside the walls are a gray that is not harsh, but is actually chalkboard to be drawn on by guests and staff. When I visited, they were a few days from a massive regional music festival housed in their back theater featuring bands from nearly all the former Yugoslav states. The seating is open, comfortable and welcoming in a large room and there is also more seating in back that is more private. All of these features make it an open space for young people in the city regardless of sexual identity, which makes Kriterion important for the social life of Sarajevo. In the opposite corner from me, two females hugged and kissed next to the window without interruption. Ismail told me that “a place like Kriterion is incredibly important because it gives people in this city, or perhaps in the country, a safe space” (personal communication, 16 April 2016).

Kriterion began to be known as a space friendly for queer people when it partnered with SOC for a once a month movie series called “Sex, Pop, and Politics”. Although Milica was clear to mention that being open to queer people was not a formal decision the staff made, rather she said that in Kriterion, “it never made a difference, like if two girls were kissing or two boys were kissing” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). For the queer community in Sarajevo, Kriterion does mostly cultural events, but does not put on a lot of parties that are specifically queer

parties because the community in Sarajevo likes music that according to some is “borderline Turbo Folk which is not something we want in our venue” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Kriterion, when holding the Merlinka Film Festival, and more recently, has been the subject of attacks from people in the city, the director believes attendance has not changed. I will farther discuss Turbofolk and the way it shapes some discussions in the community below.

II.3 Factors Affecting Activist Tactics

During my interviews, three factors were presented as the reasons affecting activist tactics in Sarajevo: a persistent threat of violence, barriers to police protection, and funding. After the most recent attack on Kriterion café, a level of cautiousness now exists in their choice of events but at the same time, I was assured that threats would not prevent future queer friendly activities but there will be more responsibility in choosing events for the safety of the employees and guests. Bojan sees groups such as Wahabbis, a radical Muslim sect new to Sarajevo, and football hooligans as the two main culprits of attacks (personal communication, 14 April 2016). At same time, both Milica and Bojan were indignant in the face of violence and threats. Milica said violence “has to stop” and that supporters of queer issues should not back down because of these threats (personal communication, 12 April 2016). For the staff of Kriterion, she questioned where the limit would be, saying “in our minds if we allow that we cannot screen gay movies, whatever they are, that means that next year somebody could come and say ‘okay you cannot have nude pictures in your bar’” (personal communication, 12 April 2016). Similarly, Bojan said violence “will ever stop us. I’m not afraid. I’m just aware of what is going on in Bosnia” (personal communication, 14 April 2016).

For places or events that have been threatened with violence, the police do provide protection, but not without clearing a few hurdles to get that protection. After the most recent

attack at Kriterion, Kriterion now must go through a process with the police and pay for protection if they expect a large crowd. Okvir has to go through a similar procedure which may take a long time and be very costly. In lobbying for protection from police, the staff of Kriterion writes letters and asks for support, but with limited funds and staff, there is only so much they can do. In the event of attacks on individual members of the queer community, queer people do not go to the police, but come to NGOs, like Okvir. A lot of people “don’t want to talk about it publicly. You will find out that someone was attacked but not the details” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). As for Amir, a non-affiliated activist, he said he knows “police officers who are cruel, but also gay. There are also some who are openly gay” (personal communication, 17 April 2016). While this is speculation by my interviewee, it is interesting to consider to what extent the make-up of the police actually influences or does not influence policy and procedure.

Finally, because most of the funding comes from international actors, access is limited and restricted. Branko in SOC believes “Funding is a factor influencing our work but we are covered well by funds. But we are funded because we do good work and have good internal procedures, and we publish annual reports saying where money went and what it will go to” (personal communication, 18 April 2016). Kriterion receives no international funding and focuses on running a successful for profit business.

Thus far, I have outlined activist tactics and practices in Sarajevo beginning with Q in 2004, culminating in 2008 with SQF, and ending sometime shortly after. Following the dissolution of Q, there was a two or three year period of inactivity, but by 2011, SOC and Okvir were beginning to do small visibility and community events for the queer community. Around the same time in 2011, Kriterion café opened and began working with SOC soon after. Despite the growth of these groups following SQF, factors that affects their activism in Sarajevo exist such as threats of violence,

limits to police protection, and limits in funding. These factors further reflect more specific challenges facing queer activism, to which I will now turn my attention.

III. *Current Challenges in Queer Activism*

III.1: Homonationalism in Sarajevo

Homonationalism according to Colpani and Habed (2014) is the process in the West whereby “sexual minorities, once regarded as an inner threat to the social order and Western civilization at large, today enjoy increasing political and cultural recognition at the expense of racialized others” (p. 73). Homonationalism names a phenomenon similar to “Pinkwashing,” whereby acceptance of queerness is instrumentalized as an arm of the state apparatus to oppress other non-dominant groups. Ritchie (2010) has shown that this phenomenon exists rather strikingly in Israel as it relates to the exclusion of Palestinians from Israel’s queer spaces because of their “Arab-ness.” Because BiH is both on periphery of what is “European” and Sarajevo is the State capital, the homonationalist tendencies of the international community manifest themselves in funds for the NGOs. However, this funding raises questions about the intentions of the international community and also raises ethical questions about queerness in Sarajevo space. The involvement of the international community works in two ways in queer activism in Sarajevo: it indirectly sets the agenda to substantive, often meaning legislative change, rather than community building, and it reasserts queerness as a Western concept placed on BiH.

According to the group, most of Okvir’s funding comes from international actors but said it “is in their interest” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). When Okvir first started, they received funds from the US embassy. For some activists it raised many question and the dilemma “are we willing to take this money?” (personal communication, 17 April 2016). If the international community is staying in BiH, then there will be funding; but, the NGOs are going to need to

eventually start to receive funding from inside BiH to maintain legitimacy. Funding from the international community indirectly sets the agenda of NGOs because donors have power of what they do and do not fund. One donor tried to directly influence SOC, but SOC no longer receives funding from them. Further, for a nascent queer activist movement, Western funding of activities runs the risk of constructing a monolithic queerness in BiH that is not distinctly Bosnian, but is actually a replica of Western queerness. This construction neglects the context of Sarajevo and Bosnia and the specificities of manifested queerness in this space. To this point, Ana called influence of the international community on queer activism in Sarajevo as “devastating,” going so far as to call BiH a “colony,” and claiming that, “If we get rights because we are going to the EU then I don’t want that right” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). However, Amir said that NGOs “usually do it the way we want to” (personal communication, 17 April 2016).

The funding has helped, but there has been little substantive change and some believe it is always important to talk about their and our position in society, namely one of power and privilege versus one of oppression and in need of support. People may perceive that there is a community in Sarajevo because of behind the scenes activity like lobbying, but those lobbying is a small group of people. Activists talked about their fear that without a substantial community, they may repeat mistakes made by Q. Because the international community funds advocacy projects, which have tangible results such as laws passed, community building and empowerment is being left out of the agenda because it tends not to have such visible results. Ana noticed that

“We are still missing this stronger link with the community. They are still not ready to listen to the community who grow slower than the activists. This is something that is typical for organizations in the region is that they are project based because they fit within donor politics” (personal communication, 21 April 2016).

In fact, the presence and influence of the international community can help, rather than hinder activist efforts. For example, SOC actually uses the international community to leverage a legislative agenda; the EU and US have become more involved in queer rights. Amir is confident that “Civil rights will come because of the EU and agreements we have with them” (personal communication, 17 April 2016). International influence seems to reinforce the idea that LGBTI rights came from the Western powers, and that it is not a normal thing for BiH, which confirms stereotypes about queerness in BiH., at the same time, the benefits of funding from the international community has benefits which may be bigger than the losses. Along the same lines, Moss (2014) argues in the case of Croatia, that although scholars and activists should problematize and critique the international community for its role in societies with different levels of acceptance for queer people, the tangible benefits for an oppressed group should not be ignored.

In trying to negotiate the future of queer activism with international influence, my data shows that there are still concerns. Changes in laws have helped but challenges still remain in changing the perceptions of people. The international community’s involvement has left behind the community in “the basics” (personal communication, 21 April 2016). A queer activist community in BiH could exist without foreign influence, but without funding from within the country, it will not. However, the leader from SOC expresses the need for caution and patience in activism saying, “You cannot demand radical action, you need to be a bit more liberal” (personal communication, 18 April 2016). However, this raises concerns if the NGOs are not challenging the existing patterns of queer mainstreaming, which could be detrimental to queer causes in the future. The concerns about mainstreaming run the risk of repeating homonationalistic tendencies in Sarajevo in relation to the rest of BiH that occur in the West in relation to the Oriental other. And because Sarajevo is very different when compared to the rest of BiH, NGOs run the risk of

exclusionary practices in their activism and changes to laws or in society. However, NGOs are working to negate these possibilities by partnering with each other in the city and with groups outside the city.

The place of the international community should raise particular concern as it relates to the construction of activism and queerness in Sarajevo. The Pride model presented by the West, specifically the US and the EU, may not fit within the context of BiH. Further, the Pride model left out significant portions of the populations in the US and EU such as the Trans community, which still needs to find ways to be represented in those places. Ignoring these shortcomings and investing money towards legislative goals as the international community has done thus far in Sarajevo repeats many of those same mistakes. A focus on funding legislative goals further restricts the possibilities of NGOs and the queer community in Sarajevo, possibilities which donors from the international community may not be able to conceive.

III.2: Coalition Based Activism:

Coalition Work in Bosnia

In BiH, NGOs partner with each other to put on artistic events or develop communities in smaller cities. SOC recently worked to help start the non-affiliated, Tuzla Open Center with whom they partner. Tanka, also in Tuzla, and Liberta Mo of Mostar work with Okvir and SOC to build communities in their cities. Funding and time limits possibilities for collaboration, however. Amir believes the activists are all working together because they are all colleagues but admits there have been minor conflicts amongst groups. Activism and communication outside of Sarajevo is important because if activists in Sarajevo do not know what's happening in Tuzla or Prijedor, the needs of queers in BiH as a whole may not be met. Bojan mentioned an informal queer activist coalition that formed to address issues across Bosnia, but "It stopped after a year or so because

some wanted to formalize it and others didn't" (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Attempts to start a group like this again were not mentioned, but the possibility of something like it in the near future to address Bosnian concerns rather than Sarajevo concerns seems likely.

SOC partners mostly outside of Sarajevo, on various human rights issues and their support is most visible with some feminist organizations in BiH, particularly CURE, the association of women in BiH. Okvir and SOC have no issue working across traditional ethnic boundaries institutionalized by the Dayton Accords. Ethnicity does not affect work in Banja Luka, for example, because activists work to build strong connections and have two or three NGOs outside of Sarajevo they work with regularly. . . Similarly, Kriterion worked with queer activist groups in Banja Luka. Amir went even so far as to say, "Almost all of the LGBT community is anti-nationalist. They are generally very left" (personal communication, 17 April 2016). However, when I pressed my other interviewees on the question of nationalism and the queer community answers tended to vary.

Nationalism in the Queer Community

Nationalism still exists within the queer community in Sarajevo despite differences in opinion about the effect nationalism has on the community. In the community there are people who cannot escape the chain of nationalism because of the way politics is constructed in BiH. The community still justifies nationalism in a lot of ways and it is difficult for the community to get over it when national identity is still the most important thing in the country. However, not everyone agreed. Branko believes nationalism in the queer community is "not an issue" continuing that "when you admit yourself as gay you're excluded from nationalistic groups, and that's what happens basically. Even if people identify as a national group, they are more moderate about it" (personal communication, 18 April 2016). Amir agrees saying nationalism does not play a big role

in the community “because there is a lot of stereotypes around the LGBT community and a lot of them don’t want to identify as an ethnic group or religious group” (personal communication, 17 April 2016). The queer community has ideas about a national society, but there is not always space for queer people. The fact that you are gay or lesbian does not mean that you are not nationalist, actually, it can mean that you are a prominent nationalist.

Some of these claims about the absence of nationalism in the queer community in Sarajevo are problematized by the generally preferred music style at queer parties, turbofolk. Turbofolk is a style of music popular in the Western Balkans that combines traditional, folk music with pop music elements, and during the wars of the 1990s, turbofolk was often co-opted by nationalist causes. Turbofolk is often associated with the Milošević regime and dismissed on those grounds alone. Other criticism of turbofolk include it is aesthetically poor, rural and non-urban, that is non-modern; and oriental, which is articulated in orientalist and balkanist terms (Archer, 2012, p. 19). However, for the queer community, turbofolk may not be as nationalist as it seems. The gay community who listens to turbofolk do not really care if it is a Serbian singer, a Bosnian singer, or Croat singer, they just know it as turbofolk. Turbofolk may be a completely different phenomenon that has nothing to do with nationalism. If there is anything that is anti-nationalism, it is turbofolk because some of the most prominent nationalists listen to turbofolk from Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia.

Yet, for the development of social life and community, a preference for turbofolk poses problems for the possibility of queer community building. Because of this choice by some in the community, in Kriterion turbofolk is not played. Bojan describes a similar dilemma for Okvir, who do not want to organize turbofolk parties but they also know the parties will attract a lot more people.. However, turbofolk can be an important tool for the queer community. Ismail believes

“turbofolk has become this sort of kitsch and a part of the identity in the way drag is important part in the US, it is in a way, part of the war troupe” (personal communication, 16 April 2016). He continued, “At some point the form of turbofolk became one of the most visible forms of queerness that was not self-consciously queer. But during this current generation of turbofolk I think ‘this isn’t an accident’” (personal communication, 16 April 2016). Some, on the other hand, described the songs as “corny” and “full of violence and patriarchal” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). At the same time, Bojan understands why the community likes it saying, “People like to suffer and idealize the mother and the mother queens” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). The love of the women in turbofolk is similar to the idolization of female pop stars in the queer movement in the US where the lyrical content of the songs are also generally patriarchal, with some recent exceptions.

III.3: The Place of the Trans and Intersex Community

The place of the Trans and Intersex communities in queer activism in other parts of the world has been precarious at best, and ignored at worst. For this project, I unfortunately did not speak to a person who identified to me as Trans or intersex, but I did try to find someone. The fact that I could not find someone to speak with me even in a completely confidential setting is data in itself and signals the deep invisibility of the community, which was confirmed by my interviews. Organization Q always had an inclusive policy, they were “LGBTIQ,” and there were not many in the region who are that inclusive. The Trans issue in BiH is emerging as an exclusive issue and advocacy project, which may be repeating the same mistakes as other movements.

SOC and Okvir do explicitly advocate for Trans and intersex people, but “out” Trans and intersex people are not always involved in activity. Bojan said Sarajevo does not have a Trans or intersex community, but he knows “3-5 people who are Trans, but you will only see them once

and a while at events, but a majority of them don't live here anymore, so it is nonexistent" (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Some have seen a lot of hate between members of the queer community, and there are "some people who do not like Trans people because they believe that it is a mental illness. Okvir does events for Trans and Intersex people and they help out people who are going through a possible transition. For their strategic plan, SOC included Trans people as one of their indicators but the Trans group disappeared, but people from the group still attend events and use services, but they do not want a peer to peer support group so SOC does not measure it anymore in their reports.

As the queer activist movement develops, the issues of gender identity and sex characteristics will likely grow more important as gains are made for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. Amir believes the "Trans movement is really huge. It is something we are working to achieve in Bosnia. It is also has a huge role in uniting the LGBT movement" (personal communication, 17 April 2016). At the same time, Ana expressed concern about how the Trans movement in Bosnia is developing. The most active Trans people are Trans men with very few Trans women involved. Ana found that astonishing, saying the patriarchy and heteronormativity functions beyond the borders" (personal communication, 21 April 2016). There seems to be a trend amongst the Trans community going along the line of medicalization of gender. Gender and sex norm challenging is not on the radar of the queer community yet. The normalization of sex and gender difference works with homonationalism as normative ideas about sex and gender become part of the state apparatus that can be used to oppress other forms of difference at home and abroad. The Trans and Intersex community is important to subverting state and heterosexist narratives about gender and sex, but without a community, or even with a small exclusive community, parts of the queer movement in Sarajevo will be left out of activist gains.

IV. Does It Get Better in Sarajevo?

The general consensus from the interviews I conducted was that the life of queer people in Sarajevo has been greatly improved by the activist work since 2009, but more work needs to be done outside the city and in the more rural parts of Bosnia. NGOs and queer-friendly spaces that exist have improved the lives of people Amir agrees saying “The mentality is also changing with younger people, people are more open and they see LGBTQ topics as no longer taboo” (personal communication, 17 April 2016). The pace which they are moving is not really fast, but it is going in the right direction. Gains have been made much more than queer people may be aware actually. However, Amir warned that not everything is being addressed just yet, mentioning that “If your employer finds out you are gay or lesbian you can be fired, just like that” (personal communication, 17 April 2016). The success gained provides insight into the trajectory and future of activism in Sarajevo and in BiH.

IV.1: Looking to the Future

My interviewees laid out both concrete and abstract goals for the years to come in queer activism in Sarajevo. Some want Sarajevo to be a safe place in the near future. Similarly, others want to increase visibility as much as possible and less violence and less fear. Ana said that she thinks “we are still very, very frightened. This fear is eating us alive. And I don’t know if you can actually fight fear with policy, it is a sensitive process” (personal communication, 21 April 2016).

As for concrete legislative and substantive goals, the leader at SOC wants to see “court cases suing the institutions for discrimination” similar to how many US laws changed to include queer people (personal communication, 18 April 2016). Branko also said he would like to see two laws passed:

“A same sex partnership law and a gender identity law. We have drafted both. Equal rights to same sex couples other than adopting children. Children will be the last thing. The gender identity law gives overall protection to Trans people and also allows them to change documents if they want without the full transition. The law requires letters from a psychiatrist or psychologist. We even want to be able to change the ID number. We finally want to include in the law for the government to pay for a sex transition surgery.” (personal communication, 18 April 2016).

Related to visibility is the issue of queer friendly spaces in the city. With Club FIS closing in two months or so, there are limits on space for queer social gatherings. There are a few people who were just trying to find a new public space, like a café for the community but nobody, so far, wants to open the space, especially once they hear what kind of café it is going to be. There is going to be a demand at some point that the community demands a variety of services, and no more secret bars. Designated space or spaces for activities are helpful for centralizing activist movements as well as limiting barriers to entry for queer people from outside Sarajevo or people who are questioning their sexuality. The current barriers that exist to attend events with Okvir and SOC are minimal, mainly a confidential email, but it is really quite difficult to form a group of people, who will come to a queer event if it is not a party. Of course, a party is not an activist event and parties tend to have neutral or minimal effects on policy level decisions by the government. At the same time, designated spaces for queer people build a community that will demand changes and thus reduce invisibility. At once, Ismail noted “in a society where LGBT people are to a greater extent marginalized and persecuted, and often live in fear, you either completely go underground or you have to imbed yourself into the culture, into the society” (personal communication, 16 April 2016). Ana, reflecting on mistakes Q made, said “we didn’t realize the importance of having people by our side” (personal communication 21 April 2016). Without a community behind them, the activist groups in Sarajevo could be left out in the cold when it comes to moving to larger or more

public events in the city. Balancing substantive goals and community building is a complex process that very few activist movements perfect.

There was mutual desire to have a more radical queer activist group in the city, albeit for different reasons. The leader from Okvir wanted a radical group who “does interesting and crazy stuff,” in an attempt to “be seen as normal, we are not different, we have the same types of needs, some might be different” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). On the other hand, the leader from SOC wanted a radical group “who wants bigger faster more radical change. If we had someone who advocated marriage then it would be easier for partnerships” (personal communication, 18 April 2016). As to why Branko and Bojan both want a radical group for different reasons is clear based on the goals of their organizations. Branko and SOC want substantive legislative change and Bojan and Okvir focus on building community. As for more people and groups, Bojan noticed that they are having “a hard time recovering and organizing large groups of people” and they need a lot more groups to “do at least more visible stuff out there. We need somebody who’s going to show everybody that we exist” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). Ismail also expressed hopes for the future of queer-centric NGOs that evolve and grow in a more organic and grassroots way.

IV.2:Pride Parade in Sarajevo

In the coming years, my interviewees expressed a desire to stage a pride parade in Sarajevo with five years set as the time frame for the event. However, that goal might not be possible just yet and the community might not be ready. Bojan said, “If we organize Pride, in a year or so, we will not have the group that is needed” and continued, “we will have a pride in 3-4 years. In that time, the climate of people will change, people in Bosnia will change” (personal communication, 14 April 2016). At SOC, there is no space anymore to do something like pride, someone would

have to stop working on some sort of part of our work to do pride. A pride parade is an important step for BiH in general and EU aspirations saying and it may be an unwritten rule that a pride parade must happen to enter the EU. As to why at this point activists were not focusing on a pride parade, Branko said “we will not focus on a pride parade because we would not be protected and visitors would not be protected. And it might hurt the whole movement which could leave some of us burned out and leave the country” (personal communication, 18 April 2016).

And still, a pride parade may be another Western imposition of what Bosnian queerness can or even should look like. questioned whether To what extent festivals and pride parades are the best markers of how integrated or safe it is for queer people to be out in a given society is up for debate, but there are hugely important step in the process of acceptance. As my data shows, legal protection in BiH does not necessarily translate into social acceptance, so should Sarajevo activists aim for something different than a pride parade? Ismail hopes BiH develops something distinct from Western ideas of sexuality saying,

“I think that is the ultimate organic societal level process that needs to happen, where being queer in Bosnia is not going to be the same thing as in the US. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have the necessary protections but that the discourse should be informed by the space that you are in” (personal communication, 16 April 2016).

BiH has a distinct and specific context in the Balkans, let alone in Europe or the world, and therefore hegemonic or Western understandings of sexuality and gender may not apply to the people of BiH. The Western sexual imaginary has been formed by the heterosexual versus homosexual binary, but that schema may not apply to all of Europe, especially the peripheries like the Balkans. How queerness is constructed in BiH will have major implications for the future of activism in Sarajevo and BiH going forward, and whether that means a pride parade or not is yet to be seen.

Conclusions

The central research questions of this paper is how have queer activist practices in Sarajevo, Bosnia changed since 2008. I outlined the pre-2008 situation and then mapped the current actors and their objectives, tactics, and limits. In doing so, I also laid out a short list of possible challenges to queer activism in Sarajevo, but there are many more which this study could not capture the full depth of. The main concerns I raised about current activist practices focus on the influence of the international community, the limits of an activism based in Sarajevo and efforts to combat such limits, the effect and conception of nationalism within the queer community in Sarajevo, and finally, the places of the Trans and Intersex communities. Finally, I looked at the future of activism in Sarajevo, where activists plan to go in the near future with their tactics and activities. I also laid out the legislative and abstract social goals of the activists and their cursory hopes of a pride parade in the future.

Based on my research developed in this paper, the landscape of queer activism in Sarajevo has undergone many changes and permutations since the implementation of the Dayton Accords. Beginning with Q, activists attempted a more radical approach that in some ways worked to establish visibility of the queer community, but also alienated a-political and more moderate members of the community which resulted in the rapid decline of Q's presence in Sarajevo. After a few years of inactivity, Okvir and SOC emerged and began working on both visibility activities and community building, but with a more liberal and moderate approach. This approach has produced results in terms of legislative and community building goals but to what extent queerness in Sarajevo is developing and flourishing as a result remains to be seen. To be sure, SOC and Okvir have been around for a little over five years and what both groups have accomplished has been impressive in such a short time. These changes in queer activism represent a more moderate and

liberal approach as opposed to the radical queerness of Q. This approach also has limits, some of which I addressed in this paper, but the successes gained should also not be dismissed. Yet work remains on many aspects of queerness and queer activism in Sarajevo.

I have further concluded that the place of the international community should raise particular concern as it relates to the construction of activism and queerness in Sarajevo. The Pride model presented by the West, specifically the US and the EU, may not fit within the context of BiH. Further, the Pride model left out significant portions of the populations in the US and EU such as racial minorities and the Trans population, which still needs to be reckoned in those places. Ignoring these shortcomings and investing money towards legislative goals as the international community has done thus far in Sarajevo repeats many of those same mistakes. The fear which derives from my research in the field is the potential of a queer elite in Sarajevo in relation to the rest of BiH, whose queerness is not representative of the whole of BiH, or at the very least, or which is not in some ways Bosnian as distinct from Western constructions of sexuality and gender. I did not have the resources or time to evaluate the differences and nuances of queerness in Sarajevo or BiH as it relates to the US, but because both are different contexts, there will ultimately be differences in queer manifestations. At the same time, without the money provided by the international community, the queer activist community in Sarajevo would not exist as it does now, nor would they have made the gains they have now. Funding from the international community has assisted the queer activist movement here in building itself up, but there must come a point when the NGOs exist without the influence or support of the international community.

Coalition based activism across BiH is helpful in negating some aspects of international interference. Efforts to promote equality across the State of BiH through joint-events and tactic coordination works to negate some of the homonationalistic effects of international funding and

indirect agenda setting. And still, because of Sarajevo's position in the Federation and in BiH in general, it is still the hub of the most active and successful queer activist groups in BiH. Coalition based activism in BiH should work to promote a unified queer movement but because international funding does not normally go to community building, this objective can be hard to reach. Although my study did not focus on the topic of ethno-nationalism in queer activism, my interviewees provided insight into the effect it can have on the community. Notably, however, my interviewees agreed that nationalism operates as a source of identity for some people in the community, but then does not influence activist choices. Given the limits of my study, this topic deserves more research.

The place of the Trans community in Sarajevo deserves more attention. My short experience thus far has shown that the community is being looked after by the NGOs that exist now, but without the voice of Trans people in the tactics and activities, there cannot really be Trans protection in Sarajevo. A Trans movement cannot exist without the visibility, protection, and voices of Trans people themselves. Further, in the interviews I conducted, the trajectory of the Trans movement, either on the periphery and as something separate from the queer movement in Sarajevo, or as something that does not challenge or radicalize the construction of gender binaries in Sarajevo will pose problems for the queer community in the future.

Looking to the future of queer activism in Sarajevo, the possibility of a pride parade is certain. As is well documented and my interviewees said, the EU demands such displays of acceptance as if a pride parade were an accurate depiction of acceptance for queer people. However, to what extent Bosnian queerness can exist without the interference or influence of Western notions of sexuality remains to be seen. The ultimate goal of Sarajevo and Bosnian activism should be a different conception of queerness as it relates to the context of BiH not a Bosnian queerness that is a carbon-copy of Western notions of sexuality because that does not

promote or foster acceptance and societal change. For Bosnian queer movements to truly succeed, they must be Bosnian in every way.

My conclusions should be understood with the limits of my study in mind. I conducted half of my interviews with a rather small group of leaders in the queer activist community, with the other half of my interviewees being non-leaders, but also activists. Further, I did not spend enough time in Sarajevo to truly understand the nuanced results of activist practices for the community. Finally, because none of my interviewees were from the international community, my discussions of their priorities and agenda setting practices could be considered one-sided. Although, I would argue the activists, from their standpoint, have a better sense of the needs of the community and what is and is not being provided for.

For future research, I would like to study nationalism within the queer community in Sarajevo with a comparative analysis in Banja Luka. An ethnography of queerness in Sarajevo and how it is or is not being shaped by Western conceptions of sexuality and gender would also be an interesting avenue of research. A comparative study of activist practices across the major cities of BiH, such as Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, and Banja Luka, would also follow from this research. This topic would touch on coalition building and efforts to have a Bosnian queer movement rather than a Sarajevo queer movement. Finally, I would want to explore to what extent queer theory, as it is formulated currently, can apply in the context of BiH, given the post-conflict, post-socialist, and pre-EU contexts affecting work and representations of queerness there.

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Appendix

Chart of Interviews

Participant	Sex	Organization/Institution	Field of Work	Interview Date
Milica	Female	Kriterion	Cultural Center	12 April 2016
Bojan	Male	Okvir	Civil Society	14 April 2016
Ismail	Male	Academic	Academic	16 April 2016
Amir	Male	Student	Student	17 April 2016
Branko	Male	SOC	Civil Society	18 April 2016
Ana	Female	Organization Q/Mediacentar	Civil Society	21 April 2016

List of Interview Questions

For Activist Leaders:

1. How did you become involved in activism with your organization?
2. What are activities organized by your group?
3. To what extent does the attack at the Sarajevo Queer Festival affect your activities?
4. What other factors affect your activities?
5. What other organizations do you work with in Sarajevo? In BiH?
6. From your perspective, how does coalition-based activism function in Sarajevo? In BiH?
7. What role does the international community play in your activism?
8. Where does most of the funding for your organization come from?
9. What is the role of the Trans community in your organization's work?
10. How does ethno-nationalism affect the queer community?
11. What do you predict will be the future of non-straight rights in Sarajevo?
12. What would you like to see accomplished in terms of non-straight rights in Sarajevo?

For General Member Activists/non-activists:

1. What is your role in non-straight activism in Sarajevo?
2. What organization events do you attend and why?
3. To what extent do you attend events outside of Sarajevo?
4. How does ethno-nationalism affect the community?
5. What do you see as the role of the Trans community in activist work in Sarajevo?
6. To what extent do straight people participate in events?
7. To what extent are activist groups effectively improving the lives of non-straight people?

For Directors of Non-Straight Friendly Spaces:

1. When did your space open and why?
2. How did you become a friendly space for non-straight people?
3. How did you communicate to the non-straight community that you were a friendly place?
4. To what extent do you consider yourself an activist in the community?

5. What would you like to see your space become in Sarajevo cultural life?
6. To what extent do you coordinate with activist organizations in Sarajevo?
7. What types of events seem to be the most successful or well attended? What events are not well attended?
8. To what extent does the attack at the Sarajevo Queer Festival affect your activities?
9. What other factors affect your activities?
10. To what extent do you feel safe as a business known for being non-straight friendly?
11. To what extent do you work with other non-straight friendly spaces?

For EU Delegation Members/Human Rights Ministry:

1. What role does the anti-discrimination law play in Bosnia's EU ascension process?
2. To what extent has this law been effectively implemented?
3. How does the EU delegation support non-straight activism in Sarajevo?
4. What was the general response as the anti-discrimination law was being passed?
5. What is your perception of the culture towards non-straight people?
6. Was there any specific ethnic or religious response to the passage of the anti-discrimination law?
7. To what extent do you now consult with activists organizations about human rights legislation efforts?