

# **Politicizing Sexuality:**

## **An Investigation of LGBT Rights and the NGO Sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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Spring 04  
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## Acknowledgements

There are several people that helped me with this research without which I could not have completed it within my time constraints or in a meaningful way. I want to especially thank all the members of Organization Q that I met with, and who introduced me to other contacts who were friends and colleagues of theirs. Svetlana Durkovic, one of the presidents and founders of Q, was both my key contact and an excellent source of advice and contacts. She is one of the busiest people that I have ever met, yet she found time to help me with my research. I also owe special thanks to a guy who is called Jack in this research and who preferred to remain anonymous. He was a great help in inviting me to meetings and setting up interviews while Svetlana was out of town. As will become evident when reading this paper, Senad and Dejan (also pseudonyms) both provided me with a lot of my key insights, and with a very honest perspective on the issues.

In addition to those people directly partaking in my research, I had a great support group outside of BiH as well. This includes Jill Benderly, Goga Pajnic, and Mirna Santro, the School for International Training staff in Zagreb, who made it possible for me to live in Sarajevo and to stay on track with this paper. My advisor, Roman Kuhar, who is based in Ljubljana and who I have never met in person, also provided great long-distance criticism throughout the ISP period via email and suffered through a few very early drafts. My mother, Rose Mary Mercer, also edited my paper from a continent away, and was amazingly unbiased in her criticism. My paper would have been very different without their help.

## **Introduction**

This research was done as a part of the independent study component of a study abroad program in the Balkans through the School for International Training. During the program, I visited several cities throughout the region, but I chose to be based in Sarajevo for

the last month and the time frame of this project. Initially, my independent study project proposal focused on the issue of gender and how people in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) understand it both politically and socially. I wanted to study the relationship between women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the new NGO that is working on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intergender and queer (LGBTTIQ) individuals. Both of these groups work with social problems involving gender and gender stereotypes. However, due to the length and time constraints that I faced, I changed my thesis. I focus a lot more on the LGBT community and the challenges people of non-heterosexual orientation face. This is a group that is largely invisible in Bosnian society because they are not accepted in most settings and their rights are not recognized. The prejudice that they face means that it requires a lot of courage to be an activist or even to be open about one's sexuality.

There are several NGOs advocating LGBT rights and providing support and safe space in both Serbia and Croatia, but BiH is not quite as advanced. There is one LGBT NGO that was created last February, and there is some networking between people happening for the most part online. Other NGOs and governmental agencies are also doing some work to educate the public about the concept of gender and sexuality. In this paper, I want to explore both the work being planned by the new LGBT group and what is already being done. I also want to look at the terms that are used in the NGO and governmental sectors to describe this work.

I think one of the important goals of this research is to give a more complete picture of the lifestyle of LGBT persons, the problems they face and the activism on their behalf. I have made some effort to identify the challenges they deal with, and the strategies that are being used and could be used to bring about greater protection and acceptance. It almost seems like too basic of a topic to address because it sounds like something that should already have been

done, but that is why here in BiH it is so important. It has not been fully addressed, and the research on this issue is limited and largely only addressed incidentally when other issues are being examined. One of the most common things I heard during my research was that if I wanted to do a paper on LGBT rights, it would have to be a short paper. Yet, I have discovered the opposite to be true. There is a lot that is going on, but the awareness among many people of it is very limited, and that lack of awareness is one of the biggest challenges to the new NGO working on behalf of sexual minorities.

I spent a lot of time during my research phase considering my own position in the work, that of both an outsider and an ally. I had some difficulty with the fact that I am sympathetic to the movement for LGBT rights, whichever country it is occurring in, because I felt this hindered my ability to do quality unbiased research. However, it is impossible to get away from the fact that I am a supporter of the movement because even my selection of the topic for study shows this. The fact that I recognize an LGBT NGO as important enough to research says something about my personal opinion. In one way my role as a supporter actually aided my research because it gave me the opportunity to speak with lesbian, gay and bisexual people themselves. If I were hostile to their cause, it is very unlikely that they would have spoken with me. It is easy to hear people who are prejudiced, and it is important to consider that those voices are often the loudest. Therefore, I think it is valuable to have a bias with an alternative slant to help publicize the work that is being done and the existence of LGBT persons. I have made an effort to give voice to all the opinions that I heard during my interviews, and it is important to remember that I am trying to explore the perspective of activists and those who suffer from discrimination. Studying activism is a much bigger part of this paper than studying the nature of prejudice.

The last interview that I conducted in Sarajevo was actually with a man who is not a part of the LGBT community or an activist on behalf of either women's or LGBT rights. He

is 25 years old and has worked in some capacity as a translator for two NGOs. He was very little informed about LGBT persons living in BiH or the new NGO that is working on their behalf, Organization Q. It was actually a valuable interview to have last because it helped me to reframe my work. My personal perspective was getting very skewed because I had only spoken with activists and LGBT persons themselves. It was difficult, but important, to hear the perspective of someone who believes without question that the protection of the traditional family structure in society is the key to the health of the society as a whole. He did not articulate his prejudice against lesbians or gay men, but it was there, even though he has never had to really say it or think deeply about the issue. This interview is why the work of Organization Q is so important and so difficult.<sup>1</sup>

Mark Blasius uses a quote by Foucault in his book on lesbian and gay politics, which I think is particularly fitting for my topic. In a discussion of the role of government in social control in a democracy, Foucault wrote, “the ancient right to take life or let live is replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.”<sup>2</sup> Without more work to make them more visible and their lifestyles more widely understood and accepted, the LGBT community in BiH is in danger of simply being silenced and erased by a lack of awareness by the public, and the social illusion that heterosexuality is the norm for everyone. This paper will look at why they are not recognized, and how to make LGBT issues more visible.

The nature of my research is field-based, and draws mainly on in-person interviews with those involved in activism in Sarajevo and Mostar. I also spoke with a few people outside of the activist circle, who are members of the LGBT community or who are useful for gaining an outsider’s perspective. My other resources were legal documents and more theoretical writing about lesbian and gay politics worldwide. Therefore, since most of the people I spoke with live and work in Sarajevo, the conclusions that can be drawn from this

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<sup>1</sup> Amir (anonymity requested). Interview: April 29, 2004, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>2</sup> Blasius, Mark. *Gay and Lesbian Politics* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1994), p. 63.

research are limited. However, useful conclusions can still be drawn. It can be looked at as an indicator of the attitude throughout the country, as long as one bears in mind that it is the capitol city and it does tend to be more open than other areas. In the end, this is qualitative and not quantitative research. This paper does not attempt to draw larger conclusions or to represent a sample of the entire population of BiH. Instead, its value lies in an exploration of the opinions and perspective of people who are important to LGBT activism and to gender oriented NGOs more generally. Rather than provide a picture of BiH as a whole, I will attempt to explore some common problems with LGBT rights and the NGO sector that the new Organization Q will have to join.

### **LGBT Community**

There is no real data on the actual size of the LGBT community in BiH, but during my research I found evidence for a sizeable community that could be a real force in civil society. Unfortunately, the majority of LGBT persons remain invisible to the rest of society because they choose to keep their sexuality a secret from most people they know. They make this decision because they face the possibility of discrimination from their family, their friends and even their employers if they go public. The personal risks to an activist make it difficult to begin public discussions about sexual orientation and LGBT rights.

According to the members of Q, which I interviewed, there may be only eleven members of the NGO, but online there are around seven hundred people registered for something called Homo Klub. Homo Klub is a place to chat and to meet people. The internet allows them to connect without revealing their identity. Sabrina<sup>3</sup>, a 19-year old lesbian, spoke with some people for several months before she decided to meet anyone in person. The internet can be risky because people can misrepresent themselves. For example, in Croatia

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<sup>3</sup> Anonymity requested. A pseudonym is being used.

recently, there was one man who was visiting chat rooms to discover people that he could “out” to their family, friends and employers. This is why a person, after meeting one person, then meets someone through him or her and so on from there. It is safer this way. Sabrina met only one person at first, and from there has now found a group of friends and become involved with Q as well.<sup>4</sup> Senad<sup>5</sup>, a 26-year-old gay man, has not chatted much in the past few years, but said that when he was online a lot he developed a sense of when a person is lying about who they are. This is not a skill that is unique to LGBT chat rooms, but is necessary in many online situations. He said that it is usually easy to tell when someone is not being genuine. Friends are also a protection against intruders because they can warn one another once a person has been identified as causing any kind of a problem. He was aware of one person a few years ago that was trying to get young men to meet him by pretending to be someone he is not. Once Senad was aware of this person, however, it was easy to avoid him.<sup>6</sup>

Social pressure encourages secrecy and forces a lot of people to maintain two sets of friends, one that knows about their sexual orientation and one that does not. For Emina<sup>7</sup> age 27, who is a bisexual living in Sarajevo, all of her friends are aware of the men she has dated, but they are not aware of the women. She is currently dating a woman and only half of her friends are aware of it.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to lead this type of life in a place as small as Sarajevo, or in Bosnia as a whole because people gossip, just as they do everywhere. Dejan<sup>9</sup>, a 24-year-old gay man, has experienced this. People will often point someone out and mention that the person is gay, and it seems to him like this type of gossip is becoming more casual and common. Of course, any discussion beyond that is still very taboo. In fact using data accumulated between 1990 and 1997, World Values Surveys reported that 56.4% of

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<sup>4</sup> Sabrina (anonymity requested). Interview: April 14, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymity requested. A pseudonym is being used.

<sup>6</sup> Senad (anonymity requested). Interview: April 24, 2004, café, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymity was requested. A pseudonym is being used.

<sup>8</sup> Emina (anonymity requested). Interview: April 14, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymity requested. A pseudonym is being used.



Bosnians would not want to be neighbours with a homosexual.<sup>10</sup> Daily interaction with a homosexual is something most people want to avoid, and, therefore, in order to have regular interactions in society, most homosexuals keep their identities a secret.

This all means that the social scene for members of the LGBT community is very hidden and very small. Each individual knows of different places that he or she can go to meet people. Jack<sup>11</sup>, a 20-year-old gay man, who works with Organization Q, pointed out that there is one unofficial club for lesbians, gays and bisexuals. It is like an open secret, where everyone knows, but no one talks about it.<sup>12</sup> The issue is so closed in Sarajevo and so little talked about that the term “gay” is not widely understood. Sabrina said that she could wear a rainbow colored t-shirt that reads, “I am gay,” and that no one would really understand it. They might like the fact that the shirt is so colorful.<sup>13</sup>

The LGBT community is so closed that people within it can have very different impressions of what is going on. How people view the relationship between men and women within the community is one example of this. Dejan has known that he is gay for three years now, and he socializes with several other people who are also gay. However, he did not meet a Bosnian lesbian in person until three months ago. This seems amazing considering how long he has been talking to and meeting other homosexuals. He believes it is because the two groups do not relate well to one another, and he has met some gay men who feel tension between themselves and lesbians, who do not feel that the two groups have things in common. While he disagrees with this sentiment, he feels that it is the way the situation is throughout Sarajevo.<sup>14</sup> However, I spoke with other people who work with Q and they have not had the same experience at all. They told me that all groups within LGBT persons associate with one

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<sup>10</sup> Ingelhart, Roland, et al. WORLD VALUES SURVEYS AND EUROPEAN VALUES SURVEYS, 1981-1984, 1990-1993, and 1995-1997: cumulative file.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymity requested. A pseudonym is being used.

<sup>12</sup> Jack (anonymity requested). Interview: April 14, 2004, café, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

<sup>13</sup> Sabrina (anonymity requested).

<sup>14</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested). Interview: April 13, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

another and that there is no tension.<sup>15</sup> They do not know the other man that I interviewed, and it is clear that they hang out with different people. This is a minor misunderstanding in some ways, but it is a symptom of a larger problem. The society is so closed that there is no chance to freely associate with one another and to get a sense for either the number of LGBT persons in Sarajevo or the variety of opinions among them.

In the end, the invisibility of this segment of society makes it difficult to fight for their rights. Senad pointed out to me that, in order for there to be an awareness of these issues, people need to be aware that there is a group in need of protection and acceptance.<sup>16</sup> Dejan feels that since 2001, the city has opened up at least a little. He said that three years ago the city was so closed that there were a lot of taboo topics, but that now it seems a bit more open and it is possible to talk about homosexuality in a very limited way.<sup>17</sup> This is not enough to really reshape society, but it is important to encourage this growth because people must know that a group exists before they can fight to protect it.

### **Background on Organization Q**

On February 26<sup>th</sup> of this year, a new non-governmental organization (NGO) was created in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) called Organization Q. Svetlana Đurković is the President of National Affairs for the group, and one of the major actors in founding the group. According to a flyer distributed by Q,

“The Organization Q is dedicated to protection of the human rights of sexual and gender minorities (lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, transsexual, intersexual and queer individuals), as well as to empowerment, development and public visibility of the queer identity and culture, leading to large-scaled combat against the discrimination and inequality based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and (inter)sexual characteristics of all the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Members of Organization Q (anonymity requested). Interview: April 14, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>16</sup> Senad (anonymity requested).

<sup>17</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>18</sup> Organization Q leaflet. March 2004.

This is an ambitious mission statement for BiH, a country with a conservative political and traditional cultural climate. Q is fairly small, with 11 core members, including four leaders. It's plans, however, are big. Initial projects include efforts to found an LGBT Youth Center in Sarajevo and to do awareness training in rural areas and in schools. Vanja Hamzić, President for International Affairs for Q, explained promotional flyers, posters and booklets will educate about both Q and issues related to sexuality and sexual minorities. They will not only work within Sarajevo schools, but also in other smaller places. Here, there tends to be more conservatism and a greater need for work on LGBT rights because traditionalism and patriarchy have a greater impact. These efforts, supported by international donors, will increase the group's visibility throughout BiH. Q is already finding donors who can support larger scale work, and the issue of funding will be explored further later in this research.<sup>19</sup>

This is not the group's first work. It was operating for about a year operating under the name Bosnia 14.September, which was an NGO that had ceased to do its original work. It provided Q members with an official identity until they could create a group of their own. Under this old title, they attended three regional meetings about LGBT rights that drew representatives from all over the former Yugoslavia. Activists from all over the regional are planning the fourth regional meeting for the end of May. First, however, Q must hold a national meeting within BiH so that the group can coordinate actions on a domestic level.<sup>20</sup>

To understand just how ambitious Q's goals are, it is important now to examine why this issue is important in general, why it is important specifically in BiH and how the issue is perceived in BiH. Q has gotten some sense of the public's potential response to its work from a press release it recently posted to the website Sarajevo-X.com. It is a website that is often accessed by youth, and it provides news about Sarajevo and BiH. The press release was posted as well as a place for visitors to the site to add comments. Several people actually

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<sup>19</sup> Vanja Hamzić. Interview: April 21, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>20</sup> Vanja Hamzić.

responded, which was good news for Svetlana because she often finds it hard to get people in BiH to respond to invitations for feedback on her activism. She has gone on television and radio, but it usually results in no response either positive or negative. The press release for once provided this.<sup>21</sup> The reactions were both positive and negative as it turned out. Some people were excited to hear about the new NGO, and welcomed the chance to open up Bosnian society more, while others were simply hateful.

The European Union was used as one justification for the activism, and there was a lot of discussion of this. In some ways, people felt that the NGO was okay because it was necessary to become a part of Europe, but others did not feel that the change was worth it. One person put the question as simply as this, “Do you, intolerable idiots think about where you are and which year you are in? Do you want to be like Albania or like Europe?”<sup>22</sup> This is not an attempt to discuss human rights or to appeal to morals, but simply to identity and the need to become a full partner with Europe. A strong sense of the division between the east and the west comes through in the comments. There are several references to the conservatism of countries like Iraq or Afghanistan, and it is clear that drawing comparisons between BiH and these countries is considered an insult.<sup>23</sup> The pressure of the international community and the influence it holds is clearly a factor in these issues. This point will be addressed further later in this paper.

It is interesting how the issue of nationalism is brought into the discussion, and one commenter drew a parallel between war criminals and those who hate people of other sexual orientations. The comment was, “Obviously, this does not stop them from behaving as war criminals – they would also kill people because of their identity, whether national or sexual.”<sup>24</sup> This discussion shows how closely tied people feel their identity as a person from

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<sup>21</sup> Sarajevo-X.com. Europro Net. April 9, 2004 <[www.sarajevo-x.com](http://www.sarajevo-x.com)>.

<sup>22</sup> Sarajevo-X.com. Europro Net. April 9, 2004 <[www.sarajevo-x.com](http://www.sarajevo-x.com)>.

<sup>23</sup> Sarajevo-X.com. Europro Net. April 9, 2004 <[www.sarajevo-x.com](http://www.sarajevo-x.com)>.

<sup>24</sup> Sarajevo-X.com. Europro Net. April 9, 2004 <[www.sarajevo-x.com](http://www.sarajevo-x.com)>.

Bosnia is tied to their acceptance of others. It is an issue of honor and personal identity because homosexuality does call into question a lot of basic assumptions that a traditional social structure allows for and encourages.

Obviously, the reactions to the press release are only from a handful of people, but the opinions do give the NGO some idea as to what to expect from the public in the future. Svetlana Đurković also told me that the negative comments are useful in proving that the discrimination against LGBT persons is real in BiH. Even a negative reaction in this case is better than none because it gives the activists some direction to their work.<sup>25</sup>

### **Public Perception**

In a newspaper article published last December, a well-known feminist and lesbian activist from Belgrade, Lepa Mladenović, was photographed and interviewed in a piece about lesbian, gay and bisexual activism in BiH. The article itself contains several errors, but the most obvious message comes from the photographs in the paper. The one of Lepa is very large and it is relevant to the article. The second photo is not related to the story, but it is located conveniently right next to it. On the second page, where the article continues, there is a short article provided by the newspaper titled, “A Short History of Homosexuality.” An erotic photo of two women together accompanies it.<sup>26</sup> Lepa wrote a letter to the editor of the paper asking that some of the incorrect information be retracted and that the issue of this basically pornographic photo be addressed. She pointed out that this is a photo of two women, who are not lesbians, but rather porn stars, and that the pornography is for the consumption of heterosexuals and not homosexuals. It is a misrepresentation of

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<sup>25</sup> Svetlana Đurković. Informal interview: April 10, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>26</sup> Mirha Dedić. “Jos uvijek nije vrijeme da se u BiH organizuje gej parada,” *Slobodna Bosna*. December 4, 2003. pp. 58-59.

homosexuality and it sensationalizes it for heterosexual men's enjoyment. It was an inappropriate location for this particular type of media in the paper.<sup>27</sup>

Another one of the errors in the article is that the group Organization Q, which works with lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgender, intergender and queer persons, was reduced to a lesbian group. Lepa was also identified as both the president of Labris, a lesbian group in Belgrade, and of the Serbian section of the international group Women in Black. Neither of these facts is true.<sup>28</sup> It is interesting how the focus was on lesbians so much, and how the reporter chose not to write as much about gay men or about the other groups represented by Q. This tie to pleasure and to the erotic excitement provided by lesbians to heterosexual males might explain that. It is easier to accept two women together because that is an exciting sexual thought, whereas two men together is labelled as more perverse or abnormal.

Jadranka Miličević, a woman who works for the women's NGO *Žene Ženama*, believes that public perception is particularly skewed on these issues because of presentations like this article and other negative publicity. The letter that Lepa composed with corrections was never printed in the paper, so the only impression the public has is the original article and the misrepresentation it provided. The other big press that LGBT activism receives is publicity about the gay pride parades that have been held in both Zagreb and Belgrade over the last few years, which has not been positive.

Zagreb has successfully held two of these parades in the last two years and is planning a third for this summer. The success of the event has, however, been dependent on the presence of a heavy police guard. The first year, 2002, the police were not as present as they were in the 2003 parade, but due to attacks made on several members, the numbers had to be increased. This means that the images of the parade itself are quite intimidating. It is not the

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<sup>27</sup> Jadranka Miličević. Interview: April 14, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>28</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

ideal picture of a parade in celebration of sexual minorities because the police outnumber the participants. In Belgrade, the situation is even worse. They held a parade in 2001, but angry citizens physically assaulted several parade participants. The situation was so bad that they decided not to hold another parade for a few years.<sup>29</sup> This year they attempted to plan a parade again, but there was not enough assurance that security would be present and effective, so the event has been cancelled again.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, situations like these are the most widely known images of the LGBT community.<sup>31</sup> It does serve to make clear the prejudice this group has to face, but it also fails to inform the public of the full scope of LGBT activism and lifestyle. It is not only about holding parades and facing harassment. These are only the political and activist aspects, and it does not inform the public about the everyday activities and problems of LGBT persons. They also have jobs, friends and relationships. They are just one of many groups within society, but events like gay pride parades and violence are much more interesting to the media and sell more newspapers. This is a common problem with news, a preference for stories that sensationalize events and issues, but it does provide a skewed picture of the LGBT community. This picture is the only one the majority of people have access to.

The problem in BiH is not always simple prejudice, but rather a lack of awareness. In Dejan's experience with gender training, the majority of people are not aware of the existence of an LGBT community. They do not understand what a homosexual is or that discrimination against them exists. It is a kind of internalized homophobia because they are perpetuating heterosexual norms without being conscious of the impact this has on sexual minorities. It is not always a problem of prejudice, but often a lack of education. People do not always insist on traditional relationships because they think they are best, but because they have never been

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<sup>29</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

<sup>30</sup> Jill Benderly. "Fwd: Otkazivanje najavljene Parade Ponosa za 2004. godinu." Email to Rachel Mercer. April 23, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

shown an alternative.<sup>32</sup> I spoke with one person who is both straight and outside of the group of activists that work on gender issues. He preferred that I not use his name, but I will call him Amir for this research. I wanted to talk to him about his impressions of the LGBT community and the new NGO, as an outsider. Amir has done some work with NGOs, but it was in the capacity of a translator and it was not gender related. He is 25-years-old.

In the beginning of our conversation, Amir admitted that he does not know an LGBT person himself, but that is only because he has not had the opportunity. He understood the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual, and he thought that most people would. Yet, despite claims that he is very open, he also told me that, while he would not mind a gay pride parade in Sarajevo, he would not support it. When asked if he would support a gay man's right to be open and public about his sexuality, he was hesitant to answer. So, I asked him what he thought about efforts to reframe the traditional concept of the family and the heterosexual relationship, and he said matter-of-factly, "You have to admit that the traditional concept of the family keeps the health of society."<sup>33</sup> He did not have strong opinions about the issue of rights for sexual minorities specifically, but the concept of marriage between a man and a woman and the family as the key institution in society he was very clear about. These are things that he feels confident in supporting, and it did not seem to me that he had felt the need to ever question those assumptions.

This man did not have a deeper understanding of LGBT rights, or realize that there are a lot of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual persons in BiH. He felt that it would not be possible to hold a gay pride parade in Sarajevo because there would not be enough people to be in the parade. In fact, his exact words were, "It would be more of a charade than a parade." He may be right because people would be too afraid to go out in public to support the parade, but that does not mean that these people do not exist. He had no knowledge of

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<sup>32</sup> Dejan (Anonymity Requested).

<sup>33</sup> Amir (anonymity requested).



any activism being done on behalf of LGBT rights, and he had not heard about Q. He seemed surprised to hear that any actions of that nature were even being considered in Sarajevo. Amir is an example not of prejudice precisely, but of a lack of education and of internalized homophobia. His biases are not fully developed because there have been no challenges to his traditional expectations about relationship, families and sex. There is no reason for him to have a strong opinion about homosexuals because he is never forced to really consider the issue. He may know lesbian and gay people, but they probably would not tell him about their sexuality.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Importance of and Need for LGBT Activism**

I have already discussed how and why the LGBT community is not highly visible in BiH society. Now, it is important to look at the larger issues and reasons behind the societal attitudes that do not allow for variation on either sexual orientation or gender identity.

A major problem that LGBT activists have to face is the concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” that holds power in society. This is the idea that everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, and that anyone who strays from that label is marginalized and considered abnormal. This societal constraint does not only negatively impact homosexuals, but straight women as well. For women, this assumption that the family is so important to society and its preservation limits their options. It makes marriage and finding a husband a priority, and bases a woman’s success on her ability to find a man. A male-female pair is the norm, and if someone does not find that or desire that then they are seen as sick or strange. This glorification of the heterosexual family results in women being seen primarily as child bearers and mothers. It also causes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transsexuals to be marginalized. This oppression is based on gender stereotypes and the fact that these two groups do not fit

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<sup>34</sup> Amir (anonymity requested).

them. A woman who wants equality is not the unselfish nurturer who takes care of the home, and a lesbian who desire to have a relationship with another woman is not the mother and life-giver she is supposed to be. Of course, a lesbian could be a mother through the means of artificial insemination or adoption, but she is still separating out the sex act from the act of reproduction. She is participating in sex solely for pleasure, and she is content without a man to take care of her.<sup>35</sup> A gay man is also pressured to find a woman, and to have children. The fact that he is interested in other men places him outside of the traditional role of a man as the protector and father. He is abdicating his responsibility to the family as well. All of this threatens the basic foundations of a society that assumes all people desire relationships with the opposite sex, and that the family is a vital institution to the survival of the society.

LGBT politics also help to combat traditional gender stereotypes that exist and still have a strong influence on Bosnian society. Compulsory heterosexuality is possible to maintain because LGBT people are often closeted, and they do not feel comfortable displaying their affection for a person of the same sex in public. This means that an assumption that all people are heterosexual is reinforced by a person's daily experience. Looking around a public place, it is possible to see male-female pairs, but no other sexual orientations are readily apparent. In this way, LGBT activism by increasing awareness of diversity, and by helping homosexual, bisexual and transsexual persons to come out of the closet helps to change these assumptions. Once the question of sexuality is discussed more often, it is also possible to question the traditional gender stereotypes themselves.<sup>36</sup> If a woman does not need to marry a man, then she is free to define herself and her role more independently. Once these issues become more opened up, it can be possible for men and women in general, and not just LGBT persons, to act outside of the framework provided by a patriarchal and heterosexual society.

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<sup>35</sup> Blasius, pp. 76-77.

<sup>36</sup> Blasius, p. 139.

In a more radical theory, the ability to identify and categorize sexuality gives the government a certain amount of social control. By reducing sexuality to the realm of scientific study, it makes it seem more possible to neatly define it. It becomes something that can be grasped easily in the brain, several categories can then be defined, and people can be placed in those categories. There is then the power to point out what is normal and what is abnormal.<sup>37</sup> There is a much broader range of alternatives in sexuality and sexual orientation than a hetero-normal society allows for. “Lesbianism and gay sexuality is an insurrection,” writes Mark Blasius, “not only on the part of gender, as feminism is, but on the part of the subjectivity- individuality- itself, asserted with reference to sexuality as a technology through which ourselves are governed. It is, as such, a politics of ourselves calling into question the power relations constitutive of us through our sexuality.”<sup>38</sup> Homosexuals push the boundaries and step outside of the control of social norms, and present new aspects of sexuality that are not recognized. LGBT activism increases awareness of the truth that sexuality is not a concept either limited to the actions between a man and a woman or to a series of categories. There is a spectrum of possibilities and it is a person’s own choice of how he or she will define him or herself.<sup>39</sup>

The closeted nature of the LGBT community and social taboos mean that the problems young LGBT persons face are often not talked about or addressed. For example, the trafficking of women as involuntary sex workers is a big issue among NGOs recently in BiH. It is an important issue as well because women who are forced to have sex for money are often stigmatized as prostitutes, even when it is a situation beyond their control. However, there are some cases of trafficking that involve young homosexual males. As discussed before, there are some times when the internet can be used to take advantage of young people. This is not always the case, but when it does happen it is a difficult issue to confront in public.

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<sup>37</sup> Blasius, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Blasius, p. 83.

Emir Nurkić, from the Forum for Solidarity in Tuzla, deals with sex workers including men who have sex with men, and he has done some work on trafficking. In his job, he met one young man who had met someone online. After chatting for some time, he decided to meet the person for a date, and he was willing to travel some distance to do it. He arrived on a bus late at night to find a 48-year-old waiting for him. He had been expecting someone who was 19. He ended up having sex voluntarily with the man on the first night, but in the morning he found that he was not allowed to leave and that he was forced to have sex with other people. He was not able to escape for two days, and, even once he escaped, there was no one for him to report the crime too. He was not even open about being gay with people he knew, so there was no way to explain to them what had happened. This is an extreme example, but it shows the problems in the system. There may be other people who have had similar experiences, but there is no way to effectively target this type of rape and violence because no one wants to talk about it.<sup>40</sup> It is a situation like this that highlights the urgent necessity to open up discussions of homosexuality in public.

I heard a lot of opinions about whether women or men who are homosexual, bisexual or transsexual have it more difficult in BiH society, but ultimately there are reasons that both sexes have problems. Madeleine Rees of the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights shared her opinion that women face more prejudice in BiH because they are both women and sexual minorities, and, therefore, they are doubly stigmatized. She explained that gay men are more visible in public than lesbians because male sexuality has always been more of a public issue. There used to be a gay bar in Sarajevo where a lot of men came and were very open about their sexuality. This type of public activity is also shaped, in her opinion, by the fact that men tend to be wealthier and have more resources than women. Women tend to be more private and to want to create their own private space, and this keeps

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<sup>39</sup> Blasius, p. 148.

<sup>40</sup> Emir Nurkić. Interview: April 20, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

them from being as visible.<sup>41</sup> Yet, Dejan feels that this visibility works against men because it causes people to gossip more, and it is a bigger deal if a guy is gay than if a girl is a lesbian. He also sees more gay men who are drawing attention to themselves and playing with gender roles more.<sup>42</sup> The members of Q, which I interviewed, felt that men had it harder as well because it is a bigger deal for men to be affectionate with one another in public. Two women can hold hands comfortably, and it is considered normal, but two men cannot. It is also a more normal thing to see two women together on TV or in the movies, whether they are lesbians or not.<sup>43</sup>

LGBT rights are fundamentally an issue of human rights. Every individual should be free to live their lives as they choose, and they should not only have their privacy protected, but also be able to be open about who they are without being harassed for it. If a person is not protected from losing their jobs or from being attacked simply because of their sexual orientation, then there is something wrong. If people are ashamed to talk about who they are, then they are not free to be themselves or to seek help when they need it. His or her basic human rights are being violated. Dejan says that he learned not only about gender issues, but also about the tie between all human rights from attending the women's studies program in Sarajevo.<sup>44</sup> The problem is that many people do not recognize this connection. Jadranka feels that there is often a disconnect between human rights and LGBT rights. She has met some people who call themselves human rights advocates, but who hate gay people.<sup>45</sup> This does not make sense. They do not understand the concept of human rights as being inclusive of all groups irrespective of who they are. Rees also agreed that there is a lack of

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<sup>41</sup> Madeleine Rees. Interview: April 13, 2004, UNICEF building, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>42</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>43</sup> Members of Organization Q.

<sup>44</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>45</sup> Jadranka Milicevic.

understanding of human rights in general. The link between that and LGBT rights is simply not being made in BiH.<sup>46</sup>

### **Activism, Legislation and the Term “Gender”**

The term gender is used a lot in the NGO sector in BiH, both in the women’s movement and in discussions about sexual orientation. It is difficult to define because it is used in several contexts. Within the text of the new Gender Equality Law, in section 3, Article 4a, it is defined as “socially constructed roles of men and women in public and private life, as opposed from the same expression which reflects biological determination. In the spirit of this Law, the term gender represents the significance the society affords to the biological determination of sex.” There is no definition of the phrase gender equality, but based on this definition it is possible to understand gender equality as being equality for persons regardless of their gender. This phrasing should protect a person’s right to freedom of gender expression and identity as well as to a woman’s right to be equal to a man.

The term gender is also used in the phrases “gender based violence”, “gender equality”, “gender center” and “gender training”. “Gender based violence” usually refers to domestic violence against women and the violence inherent in the trafficking of women. This is true in most of the programs that I encountered. However, one NGO does have a program to combat gender-based violence that also addresses issues of sexuality and discrimination against sexual minorities. According to the definition of the word gender, discrimination against sexual minorities should be included in the concept of gender-based violence. After all, harassment of people based on their sexual orientation is predicated on the fact that they fail to subscribe to their traditional gender role. This is not the reality of the situation in BiH, however, and sexual minorities are normally not considered in programs with this title.

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<sup>46</sup> Madeleine Rees.

“Gender equality” is intended to refer to equality for people of all genders, which sounds like it should include those with more alternative gender identities like members of the LGBT community. However, in practice gender equality legislation and programs are most often targeted at helping women gain power and respect in society. The use of the term gender equality in this sense is a part of the practice called “gender mainstreaming”.

Gender mainstreaming is the attempt to incorporate a discussion of gender into a variety of issues rather than separating gender equality out into separate categories like women’s or sexual minority rights, which in theory sounds like a good thing. According to Sadmira Kotorić, who works for the government’s Gender Center in Sarajevo, gender mainstreaming is an attempt to make both men and women equal to one another across the board. She feels that it is important to include both men and women in their projects, and that to exclude men would be only to reverse the current situation.<sup>47</sup> Sevima Sali-Terzić, from an international NGO called the Global Rights Group in Sarajevo, believes that this is a way to undermine the effectiveness of women’s rights activism by getting away from the real issue that there exists a disparity between women and men. She dislikes gender-neutral policies because, “You have to have women’s rights secured, discrimination eliminated, and then you can have gender equality policies. Otherwise, you are working on equality between unequal people. Between men and women, women are down here and men are up here. So, we have gender neutral policies to maintain inequality.”<sup>48</sup> Rees agreed that the term gender is often preferred, but that it takes away the power that a specifically women’s movement can have.<sup>49</sup>

However, in other cases the term gender can be used to be more inclusive of LGBT rights in education and legislation. As of a few years ago, there is a women’s studies program in Sarajevo. It is run by Žene Ženama, a women’s NGO, but another NGO, the International Forum Bosnia, is planning on creating a new gender studies program in addition to the

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<sup>47</sup> Sadmira Kotorić. Interview: April 26, 2004, Gender Center, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>48</sup> Sevima Sali-Terzić. Interview: April 14, 2004, Global Rights Group office, Sarajevo, BiH.

women's studies. I spoke with a man, Senad, who works for the gender center that is run by the Forum Bosnia. He has only been working there for a few months, but he is trying to influence the program to focus more on sexuality and LGBT issues.<sup>50</sup> In this way, the program would address new subjects that do not receive enough attention, like sexuality and sexual minorities. In this way, the term gender could be used to cover a variety of groups affected by the social construction of gender, and not just women.

It seems that in some cases the use of the word gender as a word that covers all issues that deal with the subject of gender works against both women and the LGBT community. If an institution is labeled with the word "gender" then it is possible to claim that all of these issues are being addressed, even if they are not effectively covered. Instead of labeling a program a domestic violence prevention program, it is called a gender based violence program. It may not actually address all the issues related to gender, but it appears to. It seems that more specific terms might be more helpful. This would succeed in communicating more precisely the goals of an action or a program, and make it more clear what work is actually being done. Issues would receive more publicity and understanding this way. It would be clear how much activism is actually focused on women, and what the goals of it are. At the same time, it would become clear how many programs are actually dealing with lesbian and gay rights and discussing sexual orientation. This might encourage better understanding of these issues as well.

In this paper, I will use the term gender in this paper to refer both to the socially constructed roles that are traditionally expected of a man or a woman, and also to refer to the way a person expresses themselves, whether it fits within the traditional framework or not. Finally, it is necessary to use the term when it is used in the names of programs, institutions or legislation.

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<sup>49</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>50</sup> Senad (anonymity requested).



## Legislation and the Government

Current legislation dealing with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is very limited. The practice of homosexuality was only decriminalized in 1996 in the Federation of BiH, and in 1998 in the Republika Srpska.<sup>51</sup> Sexual orientation and protections or rights associated with it are not mentioned within the text of the constitution, which resulted from the Dayton Peace Accords in 1996. There is a lot of discussion of human rights protection and, in Article II on human rights and fundamental freedoms in clause 4, it states that all rights and freedoms listed in the article shall be secured “without discrimination on grounds such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status”. This clause provides specific protection to a lot of groups, but sexual minorities could really only be protected under “other status”, which is at best vague and imprecise.

The situation has improved to some extent recently with the passage of the Gender Equality Law last fall. The purpose of this law was originally to deal with women’s rights and equality between the sexes, which is the main focus. However, there is one place where discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is explicitly mentioned. In section one on general provisions, Article 2, it reads, “Discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual orientation is hereby prohibited.” This clause at first appears to be a major achievement for the LGBT community, but the absence of any clarification of the statement in the rest of the law’s text and the story of how it was added tell a lot about the reality of the situation in BiH.

Interestingly, there was no major opposition to the mentioning of homosexuals in the new law. The law as a whole was initiated because of a combination of pressures from the international community, the NGO sector and the domestic government.<sup>52</sup> It was a

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<sup>51</sup> Sarajevo-X.com.

<sup>52</sup> Jasna Baksic-Muftic. Interview: April 20, 2004, Law Faculty, Sarajevo, BiH.

cooperative effort between the three groups that decided how the final draft would look, and they all had their own interests. The women's groups wanted a strong law to support gender equality, the international community wanted to increase cohesiveness between Bosnian law and international standards and the government was under pressure to pass some sort of a law addressing the issue of gender equality. It was actually the suggestion of a member of the international community that caused the clause on sexual orientation to be added. Rees has been working in the region permanently since 1997. Her suggestion to include homosexuals in the new law was based on the argument that it would apply either way through the influence of international law.<sup>53</sup> The suggestion was taken, but no one believed that it would be allowed to pass. Sevima Sali-Terzić, from the Global Rights group in Sarajevo, said that in the first draft the government actually removed the clause, but the NGOs simply wrote it back in. The second time it was allowed to pass without comment.<sup>54</sup> Also, the public debates that were held during the drafting process, despite generating many comments on the law, did not result in any feedback on the issue of protection for people with non-heterosexual orientations. Due to this lack of response, the government ran a survey to study people's awareness of these issues, and the result was that people in general do not have a good understanding of alternative sexual orientations or of sexual harassment.<sup>55</sup>

When asked why she thought this had happened, Rees commented, "I would love to believe that its because they are all liberal and understand international legal principles, but I think it goes far to say that they just didn't <know>, that they knew not what they were doing. But they've done it, so tough."<sup>56</sup> In fact, she mentioned that a government official had actually asked, "Where is it all going to end? We are going to have all sorts of perverts being protected by the law." This comment was made even before the clause about sexual

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<sup>53</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>54</sup> Sevima Sali-Terzić.

<sup>55</sup> Sadmira Kotorić.

<sup>56</sup> Madeleine Rees.

orientation was introduced. Sevima also concluded that the clause was allowed to pass simply because it was not understood. She did not feel as if most of the women's groups were not supportive of the addition either, but none of them attempted to fight it.<sup>57</sup>

There is one other place where this type of discrimination is mentioned and protected against, and that is in article 145 of the Criminal Law that was passed a year ago. This, however, is the general law. In order for laws to be effective, they are usually mentioned both in a more general context and in a more specific one, like the Gender Equality Law.<sup>58</sup>

As mentioned before, a major impetus to pass laws such as these is the pressure exerted on BiH by the international community. One part of the OHCHR's mission is to make domestic law more cohesive with and reflective of international standards. The Gender Equality Law was a good example of these efforts, and Rees said that it was a success for the OHCHR.<sup>59</sup> Sadmira Kotorić, who works for the governmental Gender Center in Sarajevo, also agreed with this, saying that the reason gender issues have received so much support is in part because of BiH's status as a candidate for admission to the European Union (EU). These issues are important to the EU, and so they are important in BiH.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the Gender Center itself, while being an official governmental institution, is also partially funded by the Republic of Finland's Gender Equality and Equity Project (GEEP) for BiH.<sup>61</sup> It is in part the result of international interests.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to gender right in general, LGBT rights are also supported by international documents and standards. While there is no specific mention of homosexuals in any of the international documents that legally apply in BiH, the case law argued under the

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<sup>57</sup> Sevima Sali-Terzić.

<sup>58</sup> Jasna Baksic-Muftic.

<sup>59</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>60</sup> Sadmira Kotorić.

<sup>61</sup> Sadmira Kotorić.

<sup>62</sup> Madeleine Rees.

European Convention had upheld the rights of LGBT persons to their own private lives and to protection from discrimination or harassment. The cases argued under the European Convention have applied Article 8 and Article 14 in favor of a person claiming discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Article 14 deals with discrimination on the basis of race or sex. Article 8 protects a person's right to privacy in their personal and family life. Article 8 has been more specifically applied, which has been used in a way that does not necessitate application of Article 14. It would be a stronger test and precedent if the protection on the basis of sex were to be used, but there is still legal recourse with the case law that is currently on the books.<sup>63</sup> Transsexuals have also received protection against discrimination in the workplace, in medical care and legally, if they wish to change their sex. They cannot be fired from a job because they are undergoing a change, they are guaranteed medical benefits to help pay for the operation and they are allowed to legally change their sex on all documents. This type of legal recognition is groundbreaking, and enforceable throughout Europe.<sup>64</sup> This reference to Europe includes BiH because, as it explicitly states in the text of the Dayton constitution in Article II on human rights and freedoms, "The rights and freedoms set forth in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols shall apply directly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These shall have priority over all other law." The only problem is that there are not really any international institutions coming into BiH specifically to address these issues and implement programs. It is a part of every field office's mission statement in the OHCHR, but there is no coordinated official action to support the words.<sup>65</sup>

In theory, these laws should also be able to protect a person's right to freedom of gender expression and protection from discrimination, leaving considerations of sexual orientation aside. Freedom of gender expression allows any individual, not just a

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<sup>63</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>64</sup> Madeleine Rees.

homosexual, bisexual or transsexual, to be able to express him or herself in whatever way they want. A man can feel like a woman in a man's body, but not necessarily be gay. Combating discrimination on the basis of gender expression is one part of the mission statement of Q, and it is something that the founder of Q, Svetlana Đurković, feels is not adequately addressed in the legal code.<sup>66</sup> Rees feels that there is legal room to argue for protection from this type of discrimination under the Gender Equality Law, but that there are problems. The argument for this type of case, as with any type of discrimination case, is complex and requires a lot of strong support for the claim. Many lawyers in BiH are not well enough trained to make an argument of this kind. That combined with the general lack of respect for the law in BiH, and the complications within the legal system itself, make it difficult to successfully win a case. These are also difficulties that hinder the enforcement of any part of the Gender Equality Law.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, the question of how effective laws can be if they do not reflect the reality in society remains because passage of the law itself does not bring with it social change. In BiH, the law now supports the right of an LGBT person to live their life as they choose and to be open about their sexuality without receiving harassment, but this is not what is actually being practiced in day-to-day life. When I asked her about this contradiction, Rees answered, "Will it make a difference on the attitudes of people directly? No, it won't. What will have to happen is over a period of time the law will have to be used to protect homosexual rights." This will then make the penalty for this type of discrimination clear, and will also make the issue more visible.<sup>68</sup> Here again, we return to the issue of visibility and how important it is in bringing about social change. The law allows for individuals to be more open about who they

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<sup>65</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>66</sup> Svetlana Đurković. Informal interview: March 30, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>67</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>68</sup> Madeleine Rees.

are, and, ideally, to be safe when they do this. Over time, social change can then have room to occur because the legal mechanisms are in place to support it.

In terms of institutional support for the new legislation, the government has established the Gender Centers, which function on the entity level. As mentioned before, these Gender Centers are a joint project between the BiH government and GEEP, but they are an official government institution just like any other. I spoke with Sadmira Kotorić, who works with the communication between the Gender Center in Sarajevo and the NGO sector. There are two Gender Centers in BiH, one for the Federation of BiH and one for the Republika Srpska, but they both work closely together and share the same mission. They identify problems or insensitivities to gender issues, and then they create policies and programs to solve them. They do not work with individuals, but rather they focus on the institutional level. They are mentioned within the text of the Gender Equality Law as an enforcement agency, and they are working on a special project to that end. They are working to train those involved with all aspects of implementing the new law to train them to be more gender sensitive. This training includes judges, public officials, police officers and any other relevant actors. They are working with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on this project. As of now, there is no inclusion of the issue of sexual orientation or minorities in this training, and she is not aware of any plans to do so. As mentioned before, the Gender Centers also practice gender mainstreaming in all of their programs. They try to avoid gender polarization, but Sadmira admitted that many program end up being focused on women anyway. They are simply a group that is more often in need of help, and more likely to respond to programs. Men are always welcome though.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sadmira Kotorić.

### **Past Activism on behalf of LGBT Rights**

Women's groups have done a lot of the work that has been done on LGBT rights in the past. For example, the group *Žene Ženama* (Women to Women) has been quite active in this capacity. They have held gender seminars in schools and they even started a support group for LGBT people so that they could have a space to talk and relate to one another. In terms of Q, *Žene Ženama* is very supportive of the group. They may not be able to provide them directly with funding or staff, but they do give what they can. Jadranka, who works with this organization, told me that they do this with a lot of groups. They allow them to use *Žene Ženama*'s space if they do not have their own, and they give them access to what computers and equipment is available.<sup>70</sup>

More directly, *Žene Ženama* takes its gender seminars into primary and secondary schools in and around Sarajevo. The students in the primary schools are 12-13 years old, and the students in secondary schools are 16-17 years of age. They have also done some work with older people as well, where they hold the seminar, but also teach the participants to be trainers themselves. Dejan heard the term gender for the first time in one of these seminars held by *Žene Ženama*. The discussions taught him a lot about the concept of gender as being a socially constructed identity based on biological make-up, and it helped him to explore a lot of things about himself and his own identity. He then went into various schools and was one of the seminar trainers himself.<sup>71</sup>

Selma Gaši, one of the trainers that is also involved with *Žene Ženama*, has been working with the NGO for over seven years now. She has been into a lot of schools and she talked a bit about her experience. She says that she starts the seminar by brainstorming about the terms gender and sex. Every class is a mixture of opinions. Some people think that homosexuality is okay, while others feel like it is an illness. She talks to them about gender

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<sup>70</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

<sup>71</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

identity as well and how it does not necessarily have anything to do with being gay or not. A person can express his or her gender in a variety of ways, and that is normal. Selma admits that maybe working with kids who are sixteen or seventeen is too late. Having studied some psychology, she learned that at every age level there are those kids who are identified as being different. In primary school, people begin to notice physical differences. They notice if people are fat or have distinguishing physical characteristics. Later they begin to identify people based on their gender expression. This is because they begin to be aware of their friends as either male or female, and not as just a friend. Later, in high school, those kids who do not fit their expected gender role become labelled as either lesbian or gay. The key is to teach kids to accept difference early on. It might be more effective to work with them at seven or eight years of age. At that point, discussions about sexual orientation would not make sense to them, but teaching them to respect differences would. As she told me, “It’s not about a lesbian/gay thing. It is about accepting differences.”<sup>72</sup>

Another aspect of the work Žene Ženama does is their women’s studies program. This is not a program recognized by the government or officially a part of the university, but it is a program that teaches people about gender and about women’s rights. Both Dejan and Senad attended this program to learn more about the concept of gender and the role society plays in constructing it. It is the only place where a person can learn about these issues, and in this way the program is not only an asset for encouraging women’s activism, but also for encouraging LGBT activism and awareness.<sup>73</sup> There is not much discussion of sexual orientation, but, as mentioned before, Senad is pushing for this to be included more directly in the curriculum of the new Gender Studies program that is planned for next year, which will

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<sup>72</sup> Selma Gaši. Interview: April 22, 2004, House for Human Rights, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>73</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).



operate in addition to women's studies. There is no way to say if he will be successful or not, but the idea is out there.<sup>74</sup>

Another group that has done a limited amount of work on behalf of LGBT rights is the women's NGO Medica Zenica. They do not directly include these groups in their mission statement and most of their work is focused on helping women who were victimized in the war. They provide gynaecological services, childcare and counselling and support for raped women. They also do some work to train members of the community about gender based violence, teaching police officers, judges and all other public officials about what domestic violence is and sexual harassment. This work is meant to help these officials become more gender sensitive, and it does touch briefly on people of different sexual orientations and gender identities. This raises awareness of differences and of the discrimination that can result from them. It is not the focus of the program, but the effort to include it says something.<sup>75</sup>

Other support for the LGBT movement is found in other cities where the movement is stronger. For example, the LGBT groups in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana all work to encourage activists in BiH as well. Jadranka feels a lot of support both for feminism in Sarajevo and the rights of homo-, bi- and transsexuals from other cities.<sup>76</sup> The fact the Lepa Mladenović came to Sarajevo from Belgrade and spoke to a local paper on behalf of the new LGBT NGO, despite the errors in the article itself, still shows the support between the nations.<sup>77</sup> Also, the fact that three regional meetings have been held already and that a fourth is in the planning stages shows the network that exists within the former Yugoslavia. Activism is planned on both a national and a regional level.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Senad (anonymity requested).

<sup>75</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>76</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

<sup>77</sup> Mirha Dedic. "Jos uvijek nije vrijeme da se u BiH organizuje gej parada," Slobodna Bosna. December 4, 2003. pp. 58-59.

<sup>78</sup> Vanja Hamzić.

### **The LGBT Movement's Relationship to Women's NGOs**

It is important to stop at this point in the discussion and address an interesting relationship, the one between LGBT rights and women's rights in BiH. There appears to be a natural tie between the two groups, since they both deal with gender issues and both work to combat traditional gender stereotypes. This is recognized in the text of the Gender Equality Law because both issues are addressed in the same place, although LGBT rights are mentioned in a much more limited way, and it is in some way recognized by members of women's groups themselves. It is a potential source of support for LGBT activists because both groups work with gender, but most women themselves do not see it in this light.

I spoke with some women who work for women's groups in both Sarajevo and in the city of Mostar, and they all have worked on the issue of gender in one way or another. It is not work that is always specifically addressing the need to open up traditional gender roles to include acceptance of homosexuals, but at the same time they are working to question traditional roles of men and women. If arguments about why a woman should not be primarily defined as a mother are carried to their logical conclusion, then this is a questioning of the "compulsory heterosexuality" of many societies. A woman should not be only seen in terms of her biological capacity to bear children because she can be a lot more than that. She can be a valuable asset to society through her career or her intelligence. Respect for and recognition of lesbians in a society take this one step further. They are women who completely separate sex from reproduction, and they step further from the traditional expectations of what a woman should be. They may have a family, but there does not need to be a man included in that family. Dejan stated it very clearly when he pointed out that after

all 50% of the LGBT community is women, and, as previously stated, they bear a double burden of discrimination because of this.<sup>79</sup>

However, it is often difficult to get this tie to be recognized because so many people are focused on their own problems that they cannot see those of others. There are many problems that need to be dealt with in BiH, and, therefore, it becomes difficult to be supportive of other group's work. The attitude is often that a person has the field they work in and that is what they do. They cannot see outside of that. Dejan summed up this attitude when he said, "We come back to the same point, 'I don't care, that's not my part of the story.'" He does not think that a lot of women's groups would come out in support of an LGBT NGO because they do not see it as their field of work.<sup>80</sup> The two groups may have some challenges in common, but it is the same problem that a high rate of unemployment causes to many NGOs. In a country where so many people are unemployed, and are struggling just to put food on the table, it is hard to get them to care about social change and problems not directly related to survival itself.<sup>81</sup> Women also have so many problems in BiH that it is difficult for them to see the problems of others because they themselves are so disadvantaged. Yet, in some cases they are the stronger and more established groups and they are in a position to help and support new NGOs, as the work of Žene Ženama and its support for Q shows.

### **HIV/AIDS and Homosexuality**

HIV and AIDS are issues that are often associated with lesbians, and, more often, gay men. The practice of homosexuality is not the only way to contract the disease, but it seems to be the most talked about. It is possible for two heterosexuals to share the disease, or for a

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<sup>79</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>80</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>81</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

person to receive a blood transfusion that is infected.<sup>82</sup> However, this and other STDs can be a problem for homosexuals as well, especially because there is not enough education about safe sex and STDs, and it is not a problem that is often worked on, again because people do not recognize the need to address it or the size of this group.

In her work with school kids, Selma speaks with them about gender based violence, gender issues, and STDs like HIV and AIDS. She says that the discussion about AIDS is useful because it generally results in a discussion about homosexuals. When the kids are asked about how one gets AIDS, one person usually mentions being gay, and this provides an opportunity to ask them what they think about homosexuals. Otherwise, if the topic of lesbians and gays were brought up independently, the kids are likely to just laugh and not really talk about what they think. This indirect approach is much more effective in getting them to actually speak about their feelings.<sup>83</sup>

The discussion of HIV and AIDS and the groups that work with it, is another way that the problems of lesbians and gays are being discussed in Bosnian society. In some ways this relationship is positive. It provides a way to discuss some important problems. Due to the closed nature of the LGBT community caused by prejudice, there is less information provided on important topics such as safe sex and STDs.

Yet, in my opinion, there is a negative side to this connection as well. In the publicity done by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), a book was produced entitled Youth in BiH. In it there is a section called “Health and Sexuality”, written by one of the people I interviewed, Emir Nurkić. Homosexuality is mentioned in this section, but it is only at the end and only in connection with the segment just before it “HIV and AIDS”.<sup>84</sup> According to Emir, this was how UNDP wanted it. He says that it was due to constraints on space and an

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<sup>82</sup> Blasius, pp. 159-160.

<sup>83</sup> Selma Gaši.

<sup>84</sup> United Nations Development Program. Youth in BiH (UNDP: Sarajevo, 2004), pp. 19-22.

attempt to cover too many topics in a small book,<sup>85</sup> but it still says something about UNDP's strategy. If there is only room to mention homosexuality once, then the organization feels that the most important place is in a discussion about a disease. It does not cast the issue in a very positive light, nor does it represent the reality of the LGBT community in BiH, which is much larger and involved in many activities, not just unsafe sex. Yes, HIV and AIDS is a problem, and the data prove the young gay men are a high risk group, but this is not the only light they should be seen in and AIDS is not a disease that only they are at risk of getting.

Emir also works with the Forum for Solidarity in Tuzla, which works with several groups including victims of trafficking and men who sell sex to men. They also run support programs for LGBT persons, which includes discussion groups, counselling and free HIV testing. His group is working to raise awareness of the problems, and to provide support to youth as well.<sup>86</sup>

### **Challenges Within the NGO Sector**

There are certain problems that any activist NGO in BiH faces, and that will need to be dealt with by Q as well. These come from various forms of corruption in the system and the way this affects public perception, and the character of NGOs in general.

Before the war that resulted in the destruction of the former Yugoslavia, BiH was part of a larger federation of republics including Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and BiH. The major urban centers were found in Zagreb, Belgrade and Ljubljana. Sarajevo was not a city with the same cultural or political power as the other cities that are today national capitols. BiH as a whole was in many ways economically dependent on the others because it was more of an exporter of natural resources. The heavy industry was not based in BiH, and therefore the power was not either. This meant that in the 1980s, when the

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<sup>85</sup> Emir Nurkić. Interview: April 21, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.

<sup>86</sup> Emir Nurkić.

women's movement began to blossom in Ljubljana, Belgrade and Zagreb, it did not have the same affect in Sarajevo. The women who felt strongly about women's rights generally went to one of these centers of power to do their activism.<sup>87</sup> It seems strange to think in this way today, but at the time BiH was not an independent country. Laws that were made in Belgrade affected all of Yugoslavia, and therefore it was a focal point for activism whereas Sarajevo was not as important.

The war changed all of this, and it also resulted in the creation of an NGO sector. The war caused a state of emergency in BiH, which forced groups to be created to fulfil basic needs. The NGO sector became vital because during the war and the following transition, it provided services that the government failed to provide, whether it was unable to or simply unwilling. One example of an NGO doing this type of work is Medica Zenica. This group is based in Zenica and focuses on helping women who were victimized by the war, and they were started by international organization from Germany. They provide gynaecological services, counselling for raped women and day care. Their work is well respected, but the government should be doing this type of work. As Rees explained, "What we have here is basically NGOs that came out of conflict, and provide services which the government should provide or won't... If you took all the NGOs out of here, the system would collapse."<sup>88</sup> This gives NGOs in BiH an interesting character. Since the majority of them are service oriented, the focus in civil society is not placed on advocacy. They were created in a time when more material needs had to be met, and that is what they try to do still today.

Sevima Sali-Terzić, who works for the Global Rights Group in Sarajevo, does not believe that civil society exists in BiH because the concept is not fully understood. As she explained, "We have flourishing NGO sector, but we don't have civil society. We don't have civil society that understands the role of civil society that can really be a force in the society

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<sup>87</sup> Jasna Baksic-Muftic.

<sup>88</sup> Madeleine Rees.

to push to government. You have particular activities, you have specific programs, but as a whole there is nothing.”<sup>89</sup> NGOs exist and they are doing a lot of good work, but they do not function as a strong force for social change.

Sevima could not really explain what the difference is between Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana and Sarajevo in terms of what makes Sarajevo less active and involved today eight years after the war. She did say that activism seems to be a difficult thing to get people involved in here. For example, in the winter the gas has simply stopped working for up to two weeks at a time. People are in their houses freezing, and no one thinks to do anything about it. No one thinks to go out and protest or demand that the government fix the problem quickly. They simply wait for someone else to fix the problem.<sup>90</sup> Jadranka also spoke about this problem. She says that even among those who are involved with NGOs it is hard to get people to come out and support public activities. Over 8000 NGOs exist on paper, but when these groups are actually contacted it is difficult to get a response out of them. They mostly exist on paper.<sup>91</sup>

The main challenge in the NGO sector is simply the time it takes to make the transition from a communist system where all institutions are a part of the government to a democratic one that encourages criticism transparency of government. Jasna Baksic is a law professor and a women’s rights activist in Sarajevo. She agreed with Sevima that there is not really a civil society established in BiH, and she added that, “For the legal changes you need six months, for economic changes you need 6 years, but for developing civil society you need 60 years.”<sup>92</sup> It may just be a matter of time before a real civil society is developed, but in the meantime NGOs that want to work mainly on advocacy are going to have a more difficult time.

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<sup>89</sup> Sevima Sali-Terzić.

<sup>90</sup> Sevima Sali-Terzić.

<sup>91</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

<sup>92</sup> Jasna Baksic-Muftic.

## **The Impacts of War on Activism**

In the 1990s, the war that occurred in the Balkans had a tremendous impact on BiH. It was a war between different ethnic groups that resulted in a siege of the city of Sarajevo, and that turned neighbors against one another. It is important to consider the impact this conflict had on both the people and the social infrastructure. As previously discussed, it resulted in the creation of an NGO sector in BiH, but it also had an affect on the attitudes of the citizens and on how they approach activism and on their value system. The experience of the war changed a lot of people forever, especially in places like Sarajevo. There the war was not a temporary situation, but rather a siege that lasted for four long years. It was a way of life.

Another place that was forever changed by the war is the town of Srebrenica and the surrounding area. Here one of the worst incidents of genocide occurred where somewhere between eight and ten thousand Muslims were killed over a period of three days by Serbs. Entire families were killed, and the majority of the remaining population is young children and older women because most of the men were systematically executed. Dejan came to this town to run a gender-training seminar, and he said it was a difficult thing to do. He was working with kids who were in primary school and that were 12-13 years old. They would have been 5-6 at the beginning of the war. He admitted that he had concerns about working with a group like this because, having been through so much, he was not sure they would care about gender, sexual orientation or the position of LGBT persons in society. He was not sure that they should care about it either because they had much larger problems to cope with. In the end, he came to the realization that the issues he had come to talk about were important no matter what the situation, and that it is impossibly to place problems in a hierarchy. In fact,



he found that these kids tended to be more mature than other groups that he had worked with. They seemed more open to the topics, and they were more willing to listen.<sup>93</sup>

Jadranka also touched on this theme of how the war still shapes life in this region, and affects the methods that can be used to affect change. She pointed out that with the high unemployment rate and with a lot of people not even having enough to eat, it is often difficult to get them to care about social problems beyond their immediate concerns and needs. It is sensible reaction to a crisis to only care about the immediate, to only solve the most important problems first. This logic, however, causes a hierarchy to be created. It places some concerns higher on the list than others, and this is not fair.<sup>94</sup> To a person who is unemployed, solving unemployment may be the most important goal, but to someone who is bisexual, gaining acceptance from family and friends may seem more vital. Neither problem is small or unimportant and it is necessary to work on solving several issues at once.

The people I interviewed had seen the war have a variety of impacts on the individuals they know. Some people turned toward more traditional values after the conflict and found comfort in strong religious conviction. Yet, for someone like Dejan at least, the violence of the war made him re-evaluate his own prejudices and become more accepting. He does not understand how people can have suffered through something like the war, and still be biased or discriminate against others. The war forced many people to experience discrimination first hand, and this he feels should make them more understanding, but some people still are not.<sup>95</sup>

A third way that the war impacted people was not to make them more accepting or more conservative, but rather to make them more apathetic. Some people just stopped caring about anything after the war,<sup>96</sup> and in the case of young people more specifically, many of them focus their thoughts on leaving rather than trying to change things here. Medica Zenica,

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<sup>93</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>94</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

<sup>95</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>96</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

an NGO in Zenica, noted this in a study it conducted on women's organizations in BiH, "Young women are often in the vanguard of women's movements in other countries, but many of Bosnia's young women think more about escaping abroad than about putting their energies into changing B-H."<sup>97</sup> It is easy to see how this sentiment would negatively impact social movements more generally as well, as the feeling is not limited only to young women, but includes young men as well.

Dejan expressed his concern that while the international community is still in control in BiH real social change cannot occur. The UN, NATO and the EU keep everything very safe and very politically correct, which is a good thing because it brought an end to the war and protects individuals and their rights. However, it means that a lot of institutions are being built because of outside pressure, and necessary changes are often simply mandated by foreigners. It does not force people to fight for change or to take responsibility for it and work out their differences. Until this safe foreign influence is gone, he does not feel that real deeper change can occur.<sup>98</sup>

### **Funding for Q and other NGOs**

Every NGO needs to find a source of funding, and since the ability to support projects is based on access to money this is a big issue that dictates a lot of what happens in the civil sector. It is further complicated by the power a donor can wield over an NGO simply by controlling the flow of cash. In BiH, as in a lot of the former Yugoslavia, these donors are not local organizations. There is no money available domestically because the economy was devastated after the war. Instead, NGOs get the majority of their funding from international donors, and the projects that the international donors are willing to support are the projects that can actually be done. This gives the international groups a lot of power, and it means that

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<sup>97</sup> Medica Zenica, Infoteka. Second Look 5: Women Organizing for Change. Zenica: Medica Zenica, June, 2001, p. 150.

they really dictate what is being done in BiH.<sup>99</sup> For example, with the program run by Medica Zenica to train public officials about gender issues, the donor, UNICEF in this case, insists that the accent of the program be on women and children.<sup>100</sup> This means that even if Medica wanted to work more with variations on gender roles and how that impacts sexual orientation they are not able to because they would lose their funding. This is not to say that Medica would choose to restructure the program, but it does limit the choices the NGO can make about its own programs.

I was told by many people that work with NGOs that there is a major problem with NGOs only working on those issues that are “trendy” or popular at the moment. There will be a lot of NGOs focused on one popular issue, like trafficking at the moment, and none focused on another issue that is also vital. This is a symptom of a system that is controlled by outside donors. It is because the most popular issues have the most funding available for them, so that is what the NGOs work on. It is not because they see a real need for the work, but because they can get support for it. Senad, who works for an NGO called Forum Bosnia, explained that a lot of NGOs do not even consider designing a program and then finding funding for it. Instead, they go to the donors and see what money is available, and then they design their application for grants.<sup>101</sup>

Fortunately, Q is not doing this. They are working on a set of goals that they created before they began their search for funding. Vanja has recently made contact with COC, an international organization started by the Dutch that supports LGBT activism internationally. They do work with LGBT organizations in other Eastern European countries, and they have agreed to give Q the funds it needs to hold the national and regional conferences, as well as to begin its publicity campaign throughout the country. This is important and valuable support

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<sup>98</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>99</sup> Jasna Baksic-Muftic.

<sup>100</sup> Aldijana Trbonja. Interview: April 19, 2004, Žena BiH office, Mostar, BiH.

<sup>101</sup> Senad (anonymity requested).

because often donors focus more on service providing programs, rather than giving money for advocacy work. The results of advocacy work are less tangible and harder to quantify, so this might make it less desirable for an international group because it is not easy to show the results of the work. It is harder to be certain that the funding is making a difference and that the money is being effectively used. Vanja also wants to contact the Helsinki Committee for human rights to get more funding for the even larger projects, like the LGBT youth center for Sarajevo.<sup>102</sup> Getting funding from the Helsinki Committee would also be placing LGBT rights within the broader context of human rights work.

### **Strategies for LGBT Activism in BiH**

In this last section, I want to look at the plans of Q more closely for effecting change in BiH. I also want to present some of the opinions about the future of LGBT rights that the people I interviewed had.

The first need in Q and in efforts to get a real LGBT movement started is to get more people involved and active. Jadranka sees a common need in both the women's NGOs and in the work of Q, and that is the need to be more visible. It is a need that I heard expressed many times, and it is important for both groups because there needs to be a sense in the general population of the needs of these groups. She pointed out that Q is limited because only a handful of the members are ready to be in the public eye, and it is a difficult problem to solve.<sup>103</sup>

The reason an NGO is so urgently needed is because people do not feel comfortable or safe being public about their sexuality, but a good way to cause social change is by making oneself more visible. Dejan and Senad both shared this sentiment. Dejan told me that he does want to go and get involved, but that five minutes later he wants to keep it private. He wants

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<sup>102</sup> Vanja Hamzic.

<sup>103</sup> Jadranka Miličević.

to protect the other parts of his life as well. He gave the example of a friend of his, who is in theory supportive of the rights of homosexuals, but when confronted with Dejan's being a homosexual he did not know what to do with it. His friend did not say that he supported the rights of gay men simply in order to be politically correct, it was something he really felt he believed in, but it was difficult for him to connect the theory with the reality. This is true of a lot of people. There is no way to be really certain of how they will react. Dejan is totally okay with himself and his own identity, but he feels like when one joins an organization like Q, one is no longer an individual. There are other people to consider in the situation, like family and friends, and it is important to consider how becoming an activist will affect those people. Even if a person's family or co-workers are not completely supportive of his or her actions, it will be assumed that they do. Activism can negatively impact people other than the one who is actually a part of the organization.<sup>104</sup>

Being an activist changes a person's entire life, and this makes the choice to be one more difficult. Senad told me that, "I didn't have time to put my life aside and go and become an activist." It is not that he does not care about activism, but it is not something that he wants to dedicate all of his time to. He has a relationship and he has friends who know he is gay, and he is working on other issues that he feels are important. It is not his top priority to work with an NGO that focuses on LGBT rights. He knows he should do more, but he is not at that point yet.<sup>105</sup> As Dejan expressed, "Part of me just wants to yell and scream, to make it visible, but it is also just a part of my life." He can see the purpose in politicising sexuality, but he is also just a normal person and he wants to live his life in that way.<sup>106</sup>

A real problem for an NGO working for LGBT rights is that in BiH not only is there a social stigma attached to the subject of homosexuality, but there is also one attached to sex in general. People are not eager to hold public discussions that address sexuality and topics that

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<sup>104</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>105</sup> Senad (anonymity requested).

should be talked about only in private. Emir Nurkić of the Forum for Solidarity feels that this is a major challenge in his work with homosexuals because it requires a more indirect approach in his sessions with young people. He prefers to use the phrase “people who have sex even with people of the same sex” rather than more loaded terms like “lesbian” or “gay”. He finds this is a much more constructive approach than the more common strategy that ultimately results in “promoting sexuality”. He points out the difference between being totally in favour of homosexuality and just having respect for people of different sexual orientations. In his work, he has visited some very “macho” schools that were all boys. At first, the boys were all 100% against the practice of homosexuality, but by the end of the workshop they were neither against it nor for it. They had simply learned to respect it. As he puts it, “I do not have to fight for the rights of homosexuals. I have to fight for a person’s freedom to express their sexuality.”<sup>107</sup> It seems here it is possible to return to Selma Gaši’s point about the need to respect differences in general, which will then help sexual minorities as well.

Another part of the planned activism by the members of Q is to lobby for legislative change, including pushing the UN to pass the resolution incorporating LGBT rights into the UN mission. This resolution was proposed this year by Brazil and was lobbied for by activists who went to Geneva. Unfortunately, there was not enough support and the vote was put off till next year. I have heard a mixture of opinions about the effectiveness this resolution may have, however. Rees, despite working for a UN institution, admitted that often the resolutions passed by the UN are difficult to enforce. She said that it is a great resolution, but does anyone care? The law of the UN tends to be very soft, and it is a shame because these resolutions are very hard fought for. Yet, in a place like Bosnia, where the international political climate has so much force, perhaps a UN resolution will matter. Rees

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<sup>106</sup> Dejan (anonymity requested).

<sup>107</sup> Emir Nurkić.

did say that it is a test of the political climate, and that means that if it passes the political climate is in some way supportive of LGBT rights.<sup>108</sup>

Activism can also occur in small ways, as people learn more about sexuality and what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender or anything else. For example, as Senad points out he has made some difference by educating people in his own life, who he cares about. By developing relationships and teaching them to accept him for who he is, he has made that many people more aware that homosexuality exists and is normal.<sup>109</sup> This is one form of education, and even small changes in the minds of individuals can be helpful to the cause.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, I can draw two main conclusions from my research. First, the LGBT community in BiH is in a difficult position because they need more visibility, but there are not a lot of people willing to accept the risks that more publicity would incur. Secondly, the environment of the NGO sector as a whole challenges the new NGO. In the end, this is a social movement like any other and it has deal with the same constraints and problems of other NGOs in BiH. The lack of development of a cohesive civil society makes it more difficult for a new NGO to get started because there is not always the support from other groups that there would be in an ideal world. This situation is compounded by a bad economy and by the number of everyday problems people face that make them less receptive to activism in general. It is tough to get people to devote their time and energy to a new cause when their resources are limited.

Obviously, the mixture of emotions about activism among LGBT persons in general is also a problem. In order to effect change, sexuality must become a political issue, and this

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<sup>108</sup> Madeleine Rees.

<sup>109</sup> Senad (anonymity requested).

means that an activist's personal life is made a public issue. Svetlana Đurković explained that her activism has nothing to do with her sexuality personally. It is more an issue of human rights. It is a basic human right to have the freedom to express themselves in private and in public however they choose, and they should not be persecuted if the choices they make are not those traditionally made by a man or a woman.<sup>110</sup> Yet this is not how the majority of people would view her. Ideally, LGBT rights would become an issue that is recognized as important to all people and not just sexual minorities themselves, but this is a long way from happening. I ran into this problem while conducting my research as well. A lot of people did not feel comfortable talking about the concept of homosexuality themselves and preferred to refer me to a friend of theirs who was either a homosexual or an activist. It was difficult for me to get the perspective of an outsider because of this, and the majority of the activists I spoke with were also members of the LGBT community. It needs to become accepted as a cause that can be fought for by all people regardless of their own sexual orientation. This will not happen, however, until LGBT persons become more visible and people realize that they are a real force in Bosnian society.

BiH is a unique case because of the circumstances surrounding the war, the influence of international actors and the attitude of the people themselves. Their drive to form NGOs and groups outside of governmental sectors is still not as strong in Sarajevo as it is in Croatia or Serbia. This is a state of affairs that is hard to explain. It can be seen as a result of the economic status of BiH in relation to the other former republics of Yugoslavia or it can be seen as a result of the work of the international community. Perhaps it is true that the safety net provided by international groups does undermine grassroots movements for change in BiH, or perhaps it is simply an aspect of the "Bosnian mentality" that tends to wait for someone else to change bad situations. Either way the law professor from Sarajevo, Jasna, is

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<sup>110</sup> Svetlana Đurković. Interview: March 30, 2004, café, Sarajevo, BiH.



probably correct. The nation needs more time to change, and civil society will develop in time. If the work of people like those who belong to Q continues, time will also bring positive results for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals. This political activity combined with the social activity encouraged by the freedom the internet provides sexual minorities could make a real difference. In the long term, even individuals educating their own friends and families will make a real difference.

### **Self-Reflection**

The ISP process was a difficult one for me because I was very aware of my role as an outsider in the research. One of the biggest challenges to my research was the effort to be as fair to the group I was researching as possible. It was intimidating for me to ask people about their personal experience being aware that I was not in the same position as they are. I did not want to come off as condescending or as too impartial. It was difficult to balance trying to genuinely connect with the people I interviewed in order to let them know that I only wanted their perspective, and to try to be as open in the research as possible. One of the most difficult interviews for me was definitely with the man that was outside of the groups I was studying. Amir had an opinion that was very different from other people that I interviewed, and he had a different perspective as well. It was an invaluable part of my research, but I had to be very careful to remain as unbiased in the questions I asked him as possible. I wanted to give him a fair chance to voice his own opinion without being too judgemental. I was actually only able to hold off having a real discussion with him until the real interview was over, and then I shared my own opinion.

I benefited personally from the research because I learned an incredible amount about what it means to be a homosexual that I did not know before. I realize that I have my own prejudices, which are the result of being brought up in a very traditional environment, and my

research was just as educating for me personally as I hope it will be for other people. I learned something about recognizing my own biases in the way I talk about certain aspects of homosexual lifestyles, and in this way my advisor was very helpful. It was not so much of a traditional prejudice, but more a problem of using words or phrases that communicate a bias that I was not aware I used before. I know that I needed the perspective of someone else outside the research group to help me clarify my research and be fair to my human subjects. This paper is still not perfect in all those respects I am sure, but it is representative of what I was able to do within a very limited time frame. I am worried that I tried to cover too much in this ISP, but it seems that all of the different aspects of the issue are very inter-related and, therefore, a lot of topics needed to be addressed. One piece that is still missing is the consideration of the effect religion has on LGBT persons, and on society's perception of them. I believe this is a very important component of this research, but it is simply something I ran out of time to explore. Unfortunately, I was limited to only a month to conduct both my research and to write the paper. Perhaps, this could be a useful question for further research, especially considering the unique mixture of religions and beliefs in BiH.

Ultimately, I am happy with what I was able to produce, and I feel satisfied that I did what I could with the resources I was given. Credit is owed to my key contact at Q, Svetlana Durkovic, and to the other people I interviewed that helped me by putting me in contact with friends and colleagues to further my work. Without the support of people involved with activism in Sarajevo, my research would have been much more limited.

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- Gaši, Selma. In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 22, 2004.
- Hamzić, Vanja. In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 21, 2004.
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- Miličević, Jadranka. In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 14, 2004.
- Nurkić, Emir. In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 20, 2004.
- Rees, Madeleine. In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 13, 2004.
- Sali-Terzić, Sevima. In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 14, 2004.
- Senad (anonymity requested). In-person interview. Sarajevo, BiH. April 24, 2004.
- Trbonja, Aldijana. In-person interview. Mostar, BiH. April 19, 2004.
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## List of Interactions and Interviews

March 30, 2004	Svetlana Đurković, Founder of Organization Q, Sarajevo
April 10, 2004	Svetlana Đurković, Jack (anonymity requested), and Robert Mizzi, 3-5 p.m., Sarajevo
April 13, 2004	Madeleine Rees, Office of High Commission on Human Rights, 2-3 p.m., Sarajevo
April 13, 2004	Dejan (anonymity requested), 5-7 p.m., Sarajevo
April 14, 2004	Sevima Sali-Terzić, Global Rights Group, 11-12 p.m., Sarajevo
April 14, 2004	Jadranka Miličević, Žene Ženama, 6-7:30 p.m., Sarajevo
April 14, 2004	Members of Organization Q, 8-10 p.m., Sarajevo
April 15, 2004	Roman Kuhar, virtual meeting over email
April 19, 2004	Aldijana Trbonja, Žena BiH in Mostar, 10-11 a.m., Mostar
April 20, 2004	Jasna Baksic, Law Professor, 11-12 p.m., Sarajevo
April 20, 2004	Jill Benderly, ISP Check-in via Phone, 3:30-4 p.m.
April 20, 2004	Emir Nurkić, Forum for Solidarity in Tuzla, 6- 6:45 p.m., Sarajevo
April 21, 2004	Vanja Hamzić, Jack, Organization Q, 8-10 p.m., Sarajevo
April 22, 2004	Jadranka Miličević and Selma Gaši, Žene Ženama, 5-6 p.m., Sarajevo
April 24, 2004	Senad (Anonymity Requested), 3 - 4:30 p.m., Sarajevo
April 26, 2004	Sadmira Kotorić, 2-3 p.m., FBiH Gender Center in Sarajevo
April 26, 2004	Roman Kuhar, virtual meeting over email
April 27, 2004	Jill Benderly, ISP Check-in via Phone, 3-3:30 p.m.
April 29, 2004	Amir (anonymity requested), 1-2 p.m., Sarajevo
May 2, 2004	Roman Kuhar, virtual meeting over email