During the last decade, the public perception of religion and (homo)sexuality has undergone fundamental change in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The rights and liberties of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people are still marginalized in the societies of the post-Yugoslav space. The ethnic construct, specifically ethno-nationalism, as the attendant ideology of the states newly established after the breakup of Yugoslavia, is inherently based on principles of exclusion. The vacancies in its cultural and social semantic are performatively filled with rhetorical claims and constructs in order to establish “universality” (Butler 2000: 35). LGBT issues are included in this, and radical separation is sought for them. For this to be achieved, however, they must be recognized as a troublesome factor in relation to the ideal of all that is ideal in the false universality and substantiality of ethno-nationalism. Thus the practice resorted to is one of translating opposing concepts into one’s own terms using Žižek’s (2000: 103) syntagm of “false disidentification” for the purposes of hegemonistic policy. In doing so, the supposedly radically ‘Other’ and different is integrated into one’s own symbolic network and order of things with the use of oppressor-imposed designations, which have ontological force since they give rise to subordination. This performativity, as Butler notes (2006: xv), is never an individual act; rather it is a ritual repetition which achieves its impact by way of naturalization in the context of the body, which has a temporal aspect and cultural support.

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1 In this chapter we focus on Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2 As Bjelić (2011: i) notes that ethno-nationalism in the post-Yugoslav space “became the master narrative, presenting itself both as a consciousness of national liberation and a psychic cure for the social pathology of Communist totalitarianism.”
In such a context, the nations of the former Yugoslavia need religion in order to transcend the post-transitional reality symbolically and ritually. Religion is the prime mover that sets all that is national in motion, yet at the same time it sets its ultimata, as traditional religious values are presented as the height of morality (Juergensmeyer 2006, 2008, Brubaker 2012, Grigoriadis 2013). Such religion and religiosity is of necessity ideologized, though declaring and presuming itself to be universal, transcendent and uncontaminated. It is presented as universal despite seeking to define key aspects of the ethnopolitical narrative (Mujkić 2010: 102). Or as Bourdieu (1977: 167) has noted, every established order has a tendency to portray its arbitrariness as something natural.

In the context of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, both religion and diversity relating to sexual orientation and/or gender identities have taken on public significance. Public statements by religious officials and political leaders have displayed a high degree of homonegative attitudes, including hate speech and strong discriminatory positions. Of course there are also positive and affirmative examples that do not get much media coverage, especially not at times when Pride Parades or other occasions involving LGBT issues come under the media spotlight. For example, the political and religious discourse in Serbia rejects the explicit acceptance of the LGBT community. As a result of the patriarchal tradition and homonegative attitudes, 67% of those surveyed in Serbia, male and female, have said that homosexuality is an illness, while 53% believe that the government needs to act to suppress homosexuality (Prejudices exposed 2010). Similar results have become evident from research recently conducted by the Centre for Civic Education, according to which two thirds of Montenegrins believe that homosexuality is an illness, while 80% believe that it should remain a private matter. Other data from Central and Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe show that homophobia is far more pervasive than in other parts of Europe (Andreescu 2011, Takács and Szalma 2011).

As we will see later in this chapter, the background to these attitudes lies in the interpretation of homosexuality as a threat from the West against the traditional values of national and religious identity. The tone, intensity and ideological oversaturation of these accusations is situated within today’s traditionalist discourse in the post-Yugoslav space, which is opposed to processes of modernization, postulating conservatism as the answer to social crisis, insecurity and the devastating consequences of transition (Jovanović 2013, Van der Berg et al. 2014).

This study is based on a constructivist approach that tackles issues of the representation of symbolic systems capable of expressing meaning and power