Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sweden may be viewed as each other’s opposites when the rights and representations of sexual minorities are concerned. At first glance, religion seems to be a factor of importance mainly in the former, where the views of Eastern Orthodox Serbs, Roman Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniak appear very much in agreement in their public and political rejection of homosexuality. In post state-church Sweden, the dominant political frame is one of secular liberal views and a broad acceptance of LGBT-rights. What both countries do have in common, however, is the fact that the combination of religion and homosexuality in public debate seems to be a recipe for “moral panic” (Weeks 1991): A conflict over identity and moral behavior arises as soon as the two are mentioned in relation to each other. Moreover, the public framing of religion and sexuality often conflates in various ways with nationalism: not only the right sexuality is at stake, but also a Bosnian or Swedish mode of sexual acceptance. In this chapter we see nationalism as a process of public identity-formation, and following Peterson (2010: 35), we define nationalism as “the territorially based subset of political identity.” Peterson further distinguishes two main forms of nationalism: state-led, where citizens assimilate with cultural forms set by the state, and state-seeking, where the goal is to obtain a recognized state through group mobilization.

Here we discuss both an example of state-led nationalism (Sweden) and state-seeking nationalism (Bosnia and Herzegovina), which is a recognized state but also has a strong commitment to confirming its own legitimacy. Discussing religious and sexual nationalism, we argue, is not merely a matter of taking nationalism and then “add religion and sexuality and stir,” as though there were a “pure” form of nationalism which is then blended with religious beliefs and practices and/or ideologies of sexuality. Many nations have a long history of merging nationalist discourse with religion and even nations which built on secular ideologies, such as communism, have done so in part by dis-identifying with religion. God is therefore not so much “once again” present in the public sphere (Friedland 2002: 381), but rather in a different shape. Religious
nationalism, moreover, has the organization of sexuality at its center (Friedland 2001: 134). As Pryke (1998) explains, sexuality has figured in nation-building in two important ways: as a quest for purity in which an acceptable mode of sexual behavior is outlined, and as the regulation of human reproduction. We will focus on the way in which the first strategy, the expression of accepted sexuality, is present in public discourse.

Religious and sexual nationalism, in our definition, means the simultaneous formation of national, religious and sexual identities in a particular geographical context (that of the state). Whether nation-led or nation-seeking, religious and sexual nationalism have as their main goal an investment in the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991), where supposedly fixed cultural codes or frames emphasize the “oneness” of the group (Hall 1990). This community-building, however, comes at a price, namely the exclusion of “[t]hose within the nation who share least in élite privilege and political representation, especially those whose identity is at odds with the projected image of homogenous national identity” (Peterson 2002: 35). In this chapter we will be looking precisely for these perspectives, i.e., on those whose religion or sexuality do not fit within the dominant frames of reference. We shall bring to the fore the marginal voices of those who have no stake in emulating the grand narrative of the nation. In doing so, we shall take as our point of focus the interplay between nationalism, religion and sexuality.

Subjects for research will be responses to Papal statements on homosexuality (both the “pastoral” statements of present Pope Francis and the more “dogmatic” statements by his predecessor Benedict), these being in print and online media in the two national contexts of each of the two states. We pose the following question: What can sexually or religiously marginal perspectives tell us about the way in which religious and sexual nationalism inform each other? Which alternative framings of religious and/or sexual identity might be imagined when the dominant frames are being challenged by the former, i.e., the ones that they have attempted to shut out or misrepresent? What counts as “marginal” in these questions will depend on what, in both contexts, counts as “mainstream,” which in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the rejection of “abnormal” sexuality most notably by religious and political leaders. In Sweden it is the dominant liberal attitude toward homosexuality advocated by both the government and the Lutheran Church of Sweden.

To do this, we will first give a concise overview of the ways in which nationalism, religion and sexuality have in recent history become entwined in both countries. We shall then reflect more in depth on the “echoes from the margin” as both an empirical and epistemological choice. By studying responses to the Pope in both contexts, we then hope to gain more insight into the complex ways