
LGBT Activism In The Post-Yugoslav Space

The academic year 2014-2015 at the Master of Arts MIREES (*Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe*) is rich in seminars and workshops. Among them the two-days' presentation held by the sociologist Bojan Bilić, former MIREES tutor and Fellow at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (Centre for Gender and Sexuality Studies), about LGBT activism in the (post-) Yugoslav space. He presented the outcome of his Doctoral Thesis, *We were Gasping for Air: [Post-]Yugoslav Anti-War Activism and Its Legacy* (2012). During the first day, after the welcoming remarks of the MIREES coordinator Professor Stefano Bianchini, Bilić focused on his methodological approach, while on the second one, the core of the discussion was the relationship between LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) activism and EU accession .

First, Bojan Bilić outlined a general theoretical overview of the ways to approach activism through sociology. He stressed the need of a synergetic cooperation between theoreticians and activists, between theory and praxis, between power and knowledge in researching civil society. The most innovative element in his research is a trans-national approach towards anti-war activism in the (post-)Yugoslav space. Since nationalistic sentiments have been often used as a lever to instigate war against the "others", approaching anti-war activism and analyzing them beyond national boundaries might help to have a comprehensive and more inclusive overview of what anti-war activism is. Citing Mac Adam "social protests never come from nowhere", Bilić listed three predecessors of anti-war activism in the area: the students protests in 1968, a leftist critique of the Soviet model aimed at improving the democratization of the society; the environmentalist protests and the feminist protests (he focused on the group Women in Black).

During the second day, the discussion concentrated on LGBT activism in the post-Yugoslav space. What LGBT movements demand are civil rights in a society where the acronym LGBT is often related to concepts such as luxury, infertility, impurity. Their activist demands intersect with the process of Europeanization, with a more democratic society being the purpose of both processes. Although EU institutions support LGBT movements and organization both formally and practically, also through financial aid, the relationship between EU accession and LGBT activism is ambiguous. Indeed, this connection might lead to a dangerous marginalization of LGBT activism in the post-Yugoslav space. The LGBT claims, and in some cases even their presence, are often used by nationalistic and conservative policy makers to claim the negative outcomes of Westernization, perceived as unnatural and shameful contamination of the purity of the country.

Finally, it seems that in the post-Yugoslav space the EU plays a contradictory role. On the one hand, it presents itself as an opportunity in order to deepen the process of democratization in these countries. On the other hand, it seems to have been generating local tendencies towards a re-traditionalization of culture as a response toward the EU accession.

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