The Code of the Hourglass: an Operational Code Analysis of the Anti-Homophobic Textual Production in the Serbian Opposition Portal Pescanik in Relation to Gay Pride Parades

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Abstract

Ever since the drastic increase of nationalist sentiments within Serbia from the early 1990s, said nationalism (coupled with a drastic increase in official religiosity) has been leading a newly formed wave of homophobia into the public discourse. Pride Parades were attacked, participants attacked, and homophobia promulgated from the Church, fringe Far-Right groups, and official state leaders. These issues have been successful in sparking academic debates and analyses within the scholarly community that holds an interest in the Balkans; however, the very opposition to homophobia is still to be tackled by the academia. This is why we have chosen to analyse the anti-homophobic textual production by a row of authors that have found a platform at the known Pescanik (the Hourglass) portal in Serbia, an online space where stark social and political criticism could be heard for almost two decades. Additionally, we have chosen to tackle the issue from the perspective of Operational Code Analysis, a powerful methodology that has recently been made more accessible by social science automation and the new software, ProfilerPlus, that codes the text to be analyzed and retrieves a selection of indices that speak about the text under scrutiny.

Key words: Serbia, Pescanik, homophobia, Operational Code Analysis, anti-homophobia

Introduction

There is no novelty in the statement that the contemporary Serbian society can be described as homophobic, as a vast amount of scholarly literature has shown (Mršević, 2013, Bilić, 2016b, Bilić, 2016a, Gould and Moe, 2015). Connected to various displays of nationalism, religion and patriotism by some political parties and various groups (official and unofficial), the gay Pride parade has had a record of having been under attack in Serbia (Mikuš, 2015). As much has been written on the issue of homophobia – having in mind that scholars within the fields of social sciences and the humanities oft tackle primarily negative aspects of society – we have decided to take a look to the „other side" of the story and analize the *opposition* to homophobia in Serbia.

To be more precise, in this research piece, we are analyzing the opposition to homophobia in relation to the gay Pride parades in Serbia on the arguably best-known critical, opposition portal in Serbia – the *Peščanik* (the Hourglass). Peščanik has long been at the forefront of a liberal/left thought in Serbia, ever since its inception in 2000. Initially, it started as a radio broadcast on 2 February 2000, then to expand to video editions, and a website that has until now published over 20,000 articles. In their words, their contributors are „well known intellectuals and artists" (Peščanik, 2019). It has taken a critical stance on a vast array of societal and political issues, commonly (if not exclusively) with an anti-government bent. Consequently, the authors that publish their work on Peščanik take an anti-homophobic stance, which can be seen in a number of articles, *all* of which (in their English language form) we have taken to analysis through the lens of Operational Code Analysis.

Societal and political context

The Serbian society is oft described as „pronouncedly homophobic" (Stakic, 2015), where „stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes toward LGBT people are frequently expressed in public discourse and through social practices" (Mikuš, 2015). Open violence at Pride parades (especially in the early 00s) was seen as common (Bilić and Stubbs, 2015), so that the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights dubbed homosexuals as one of the most stigmatized minority groups in the state (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2014), as homosexuality

has been „frequently depicted by Serbian nationalist politicians as an illness and abnormality" (Stakic, 2015). Two decades after the fall of Milosevic, however, the situation has not changed significantly, even though that several Pride parades have successfully been conducted. The choice of the newest Prime Minister, Ana Brnabic – an open lesbian – was in the meantime seen as „pinkwashing" and the government's attempt to pacify potential criticisms from the international community. Even though the current government, led by President Aleksandar Vucic, has increasingly been described as becoming more and more authoritarian as the years go by (Eror, 2018), and even though openly homophobic politicians such as Dragan Markovic Palma are at the country's steering wheel, the situation during President Boris Tadic (up to 2012) was far from better. During his tenure, at the attempted Pride parade in 2001, „the nationalists repeated for the media, with a prophetic matter-offactness, that "there won't be a gay parade" but avoided explicit calls for violence. Posters reading "We're expecting you!" and depicting a rowdy crowd waving Obraz flags appeared in downtown Belgrade. Other organizations had their own "campaigns" limited to posting stickers. Numerous anonymous graffiti read "Blood will pour on the streets / There won't be a gay parade," "Death to faggots," or "Stop the parade." After the Pride, the nationalists blamed the "regime" and the organizers and attendees for "provoking" the righteous anger of patriotic youths" (Mikuš, 2015).

There are numerous explanations of the reasons behind the pronounced homophobia in Serbia. Some can be traced to the patriarchal roots of the past (Kaser, 1992, Halpern et al., 1996), while some put forth the resurgence of nationalism in the early 1990s and the increased influence of the Orthodox Church (Stakic, 2015). And indeed, „the Church's narratives are strikingly similar to the narratives of extreme nationalist organizations" (Stakic, 2015), where Far-Right groups tend to promote a specific brand of Serbian Orthodox Nationalism, in which there is no space for homosexuality. While the Patriarch opined that homosexuality was a „disease that needs to be cured" (Radio 021, 2012), the ultra-clerical Far-Right group Obraz was of the view that homosexuality is „evil ... in the eyes of God" (Obradovic, quoted from: Stakic, 2015).

Be that as it may, voices rose against local homophobia, and many of them found an outlet/platform on the site of the Pescanik. For almost two decades, Pescanik has stood at the forefront of the opposition to nationalism and all its forms, from violence, via exclusion, to homophobia.

Methodology

Operational Code Analysis (OPCODE) has a history within the social sciences, though it came into being in the early 1950s via Leites' work in political psychology (Leites, 1951, Leites, 1953), after which it has expanded to foreign policy and political analyses (Holsti, 1970, Holsti, 1977, Walker et al., 1998, Walker et al., 2003), as well as non-political groups that engage in the political, such as the Church (Jovanović, 2019). After having initially been developed by Leites, George took on the concept and further developed it (George, 1969), with Holsti following closely (Holsti, 1970, Holsti, 1977). OPCODE has thus initially „taken as its fundamental assumption the idea that useful (and revealing) information about political leaders can be gleaned from public speeches, if only one knows where, and how, to look" (Renshon, 2009). Thus, it was the politician that was the subject of the analysis, based on their textual and/or spoken production. In the words of Schaffer and Walker, „the fundamental logic informing this method is the assumption that we can infer psychological characteristics based upon the subject's verbal behavior: what an individual says and how he or she says it can tell us important things about his or her 'state of mind'" (Schafer and Walker, 2006). An insight into „what made one tick" has thus been developed.

OPCODE functions via the coding of the political text so that the result is classified into what OPCODE refers to as *political beliefs* and *instrumental beliefs* (Malici, 2006). To be more precise, „philosophical beliefs are external attributions that the leader makes about the political universe and other actors in the political universe. Instrumental beliefs are internal attributions that the subject makes regarding his or her own best approaches to political action" (Schafer and Walker, 2006); it is understoog that the political beliefs would refer to the Other, and the instrumental ones to the Self, a binary based on which much social scientific research has been conducted. With the development of the ProfilerPlus, the hand-coding has taken a backseat to software-based coding, which has in turn allowed the reseacher to code large amounts of text, and a significant number of new works based on OPCODE have recently been published, in a sort of a rediscovering of the methodology, resulting in a number of politicians being analyzed, including terrorist groups, as well as religious ones (Dyson and Parent, 2018, Yang et al., 2018, Zhang, 2017, Özdamar, 2017, Adler, 2012, Schafer and Crichlow, 2000, Walker et al., 1998,

Walker, 2011, Jovanović, 2019). Currently, the hubs of Operational Code Analysis are in the USA and China.

The coding and analysis is conducted via the VICS (Verbs-in-Context System), that „provides values for six attributes for each recorded verb and its surrounding context: subject, verb category, domain of politics, tense of the verb, intended target, and context. These categories become the basis for calculating the operational code indices" (Malici, 2006). In more detail, „the indices for the separate beliefs in the operational code construct are consistent with the principles of reenforcement and alteration that characterize the operation of neural networks. Stimuli from the environment embedded in a subject's rhetoric are weighted for central tendency, variety, and balance in the construction of indices for beliefs about others and weighted by positive (+) and negative (-) valences to reflect corresponding associations of positive and negative affect (feelings)" (Schafer and Walker, 2006). It is beyond the realm of the possible to present the entirety of the coding system used within VICS due to the constraints of a standardized research article; nevertheless, we shall quote Schafer and Walker, who explain that within VICS, „two linguistic components, the subject and the verb, combine to form the recording unit—called the 'utterance'—for the VICS system. Verbs are first coded for direction as cooperative (+) or conflictual (-), and then coded for intensity as words or deeds. Cooperative and conflict deeds are the most intense sanctions (rewards and punishments) at the opposite ends of a continuum separated by words of lower intensity that communicate as threats, promises, or expressions of authority by the potential or symbolic use of sanctions. These distinctions produce a scale with six values ranging from -3 to +3, which are marked by the following verb signifiers as the exercise of different forms of power: Punish (-3), Threaten (-2), Oppose (-1), Support (+1), Promise (+2), and Reward (+3)" (Schafer and Walker, 2006). The results are then combined to form a series of indices through a row of mathematical equations, ending up in indices representing *Philosophical beliefs* and *Instrumental beliefs:*

Table 1. OPCODE indices, arranged by Renshon (2008, 842-3)

P1 (Nature of the political universe)								
Hostile Friendly								
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

P2 (Realization of political values)								
Pessimistic Optimistic								
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

P3 (Predictability of political future)				
Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
0.0	.25	.50	.75	1.0

P4 (Control over historical development, P4a Self, P4b Other)				
Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
0.0	.25	.50	.75	1.0

P5 (Role of chance)				
Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
0.0	.25	.50	.75	1.0

I1 (Direction of strategy)								
Conflict Cooperation								
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

I2 (Intensity of tactics)

Conflict Cooperation								
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0
I3 (Risk orientation)								
Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0
I4a (Flexibility of tactics between cooperation and conflict)								
Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0
I4b (Flexibility of tactics between words and deeds)								
Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0
I5 (Utility of means – appeal/support, promise, reward, oppose/resist, threaten, punish)								
Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

In short, OPCODE can be seen as a „quantifiable discourse analysis", somewhat similar to CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis, see: (van Dijk, 1993, Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, Wodak, 2001, Wodak, 2006, Fairclough, 2001, Meyer and Wodak, 2009, Kress, 1990, Billig, 2003, Wodak and Meyer, 2009)), with the important exception that CDA concentrates on the discourse itself, where OPCODE wishes to quantify it.

Analysis and discussion

The corpus of the text analyzed for this particular occasion consists of 31,385 words by 18 authors (Boban Stojanović, Dejan Ilić, Dubravka Stojanović, Goran Miletić, Lazara

Milenković, Miša Brkić, Nadežda Milenković, Pavle Kilibarda, Predrag Petrović, Sanja Radović, Saša Đorđević, Saša Gajin, Saša Ilić, Svetlana Lukić, Svetlana Slapšak, Vesna Pešić, Vladimir Đorđević, and Žarko Korać) on the topic of the Serbian gay Pride parades since 2001. The list comprises, politicians, authors, activists, university professors, and journalists active in the realm of the political. The texts have been selected on the Peščanik website in its English edition (due to the constrains of Profiler Plus, that works on English text) via their topical subject; all were selected due to their tackling of the Pride parades. Each author's text has been coded separately, and the results of the analysis are shown in the table below for comparison:

Table 2. OPCODE indices

	I1	I2	P1	P2	I3	I4a	I4b	I5 Punish	I5 Threaten	I5 Oppose	I5 Appeal	I5 Promise	I5 Reward	P3	P4	P5
Boban Stojanović	N/A	N/A	-1	-0.33	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	1
Dejan Ilić	0	0	-0.17	-0.14	0.4	1	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.06	0.03	1
Dubravka Stojanović	0.5	0	0.06	0.01	0.55	0.5	0.5	0.25	0	0	0.75	0	0	0.08	0.09	0.99
Goran Miletić	1	0.33	0.13	-0.01	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.11	0.01	1
Lazara Marinković	-0.5	-0.58	-0.54	-0.54	0.25	0.5	1	0.5	0.25	0	0.25	0	0	0.23	0.15	0.97
Miša Brkić	N/A	N/A	-0.05	-0.13	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.25	0	1
Nadežda Milenković	0.71	0.29	0.11	0.02	0.46122	0.29	0	0	0	0.14	0.71	0.14	0	0.05	0.13	0.99

Pavle Kilibarda	-1	-1	-1	-0.67	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.4	0.5	0.8
Predrag Petrović	N/A	N/A	0.13	-0.04	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.16	0	1
Sanja Radović	N/A	N/A	0	-0.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.09	0	1
Saša Đorđević	N/A	N/A	0.24	0.16	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.03	0	1
Saša Gajin	0.2	-0.2	0.17	-0.01	0.424	0.8	0.8	0.4	0	0	0.6	0	0	0.14	0.1	0.99
Saša Ilić	0	-0.33	0.1	-0.04	0.4	1	1	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	0.10	0.02	1
Svetlana Lukić	N/A	N/A	-0.16	-0.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.11	0	1
Svetlana Slapšak	N/A	N/A	-0.09	-0.03	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.13	0	1
Vesna Pešić	-1	-0.67	0.35	0.1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.17	0.01	1
Vladimir Đorđević	N/A	N/A	-0.07	-0.09	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.07	0	1
Žarko Korać	0.33	0.28	0.08	-0.07	0.13333	0.67	0.67	0	0.17	0.17	0.33	0	0.33	0.10	0.06	0.99

Due to the limits of some texts being rather short, 8 of the 18 possess a number of unavailable indices (N/A within the table). However, the so-called *master indices* (P1, I2, and P4) are mostly available (P1 and P4 especially, at a 100%) – as Marfleet and Walker wrote, „these master beliefs are (P-1) the image of Other in the political universe, (I-1) the image of Self

in the political universe, and (P-4) the leader's belief regarding his or her relative ability to control events between Self and Other in the political universe" (Marfleet and Walker, 2006); one can only work with what is available.

Even a casual glance over the index table, for an OPCODE researcher, tells of fairly extreme indices. Note that „extreme" in this context does not carry any negative (or positive, for that matter) connotation in regards to the very beliefs promulgated by the subjects (as this is not of interest to OPCODE), but the position of the indices within their range, from minimums to maximums (P1, P2, I1, and I2 range from -1.0 to 1.0; the rest go from 0.0 to 1.0). We shall go from index to index.

The P1 index ($-1.0 < P1 < 1.0$) represents the subject's belief in the friendliness (or lack thereof) of the sociopolitical universe around them. A full eight out of 18 authors are in the negative part of the spectrum. Boban Stojanovic, formerly a known gay activist in Serbia, known as Bobby Q (before he emigrated to Canada), for instance, boasts a full P1=-1.0, an extreme value, similarly to Pavle Kilibarda (who works with asylum seekers). This is representative of a worldview in which the nature of the political universe is extremely hostile; something that can be expected, especially from Stojanovic, who himself used to be discursively attacked. The P1 in general, for all 18 authors, tends strongly towards the negative; Vesna Pesic's (P1=.35) is the highest, indicating a general view of the political universe as being hostile. Similarly, the P2 index ($-1.0 < P1 < 1.0$) – the prospects of realizing one's goals within said universe – is oft highly negative. We ran a Pearson's correlation test between the P1 and P2 indices and found a high correlation of R=0.901 with a P<0.00001, showing a high, statistically relevant correlation between the two indices; if the political universe is seen as so hostile, it stands to reason that the prospects of realizing ones goals shoul not be high as well. Most P2 values, though, would center around the medium range (leaning towards the negative).

Perhaps consequently, the P3 value ($0 < P3 < 1.0$), that depicts the predictability of political future is firmly low in all the authors' text, reaching the lowest point at Sasa Dordevic's .03, and a high within Brkic's .25. In all cases, the P3 value is read as very low. P4 ($0 < P4 < 1.0$) – the descriptor of the control of one's future is also consistently very low, barely above zero, with its highest value at 0.5 in but one instance, in Kilibarda's text. The P5 – the index of the same range, that represents the impression of the role of chance – is in most analyses extremely high (within

other conducted OPCODE research), and we are of the opinion that it is commonly of no value to analysis.

While the P-indices in OPCODE represent the „Other", that is, the understanding of the political universe *around* the subject, the I-indices concentrate on the Self. I-1 (the index of the direction of strategy, $-1.0 < I1 < 1.0$), which tells about the subject's own view of the means of behaving – from a conflictual to a friendly strategy – is however rather different in the ten authors wherein the index itself was found. It ranges from a high negative (Kilibarda and Pesic, $I1=-1.0$), to a high positive with Miletic ($I1=1.0$). This is as well seen in the I2 index (the intensity of tactics, $-1.0 < I2 < 1.0$), with the indices displaying a high range from -1.0 to 0.58. The I3 index, corresponding to the probability of taking risk, in most texts, centers around the medium value. The I5 index array (the six common tactics employed) are mostly centered around Opposing, Appealing, and Punishing.

Conclusion

The Operational Code Analysis of the Peščanik's authors' opposition to anti-gay Pride homophobia shows a fairly grim view of the homophobic environment in which the authors have found themselves. In general, the authors tend to view the political – homophobic – universe as inherently hostile, one in which one's political values would be difficult to achieve. The predictability of the political future is low, with the exception of Boban Stojanovic's $P3=1.0$. This comes as small surprise, having in mind the essential nature of denouement within the anti-homophobic community. Homophobia in Serbia has been consistently impinging human rights in Serbia for decades now, not only with wwell-spread invective, but policy as well. It is of high importance, however, to analyze the opposition to bigotry as well as bigotry itself, and it is out hope that this article will contribute to that in at least a small manner.

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