



FUNDACIÓN
MECENAS



Global Campus
Alumni

Forward * with Hope

**Creative Responses to
Anti-Gender Movements**

A publication developed within the Global Campus
Alumni Cross-Regional Projects 2025-2026.

2026

Forward with Hope:

Creative responses to Anti-Gender Movements

Project Leads

Maida Salkanović

Juan José Guzmán

Editor

Maida Salkanović

Contributors

Paula Contreras Sánchez (Chile)

Pewmayen Figueroa (Chile)

Alma Gačanin (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Vuk Gorki (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Valeria Radrigán (Chile)

Maida Salkanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Igor Stipić (Bosnia and Herzegovina/Chile)

Project Partner

Fundación Mecenás (Chile)

Year of Publication

2026

Design and Layout

Emil C. Sepúlveda

Cover Design

Emil C. Sepúlveda

This publication was developed within the project *Forward With Hope: Creative Responses to Anti-Gender Movements*, implemented by Maida Salkanović and Juan José Guzmán in cooperation with Fundación Mecenás and supported within the Global Campus Alumni Cross-Regional Projects 2025-2026.

Table of Contents

04	Disclaimer
05	Foreword
06	"Could you imagine this happening in Bosnia?": Queer adolescence across the Atlantic Igor Stipić (Bosnia and Herzegovina/Chile)
10	Weaving Diverse Spirits: Indigenous Echoes and Experiences from the Mountains of the Far South Pewmayen Figueroa (Chile)
15	Taking the Knee Alma Gaćanin (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
19	The Way Out Maida Salkanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
24	Forward Into the Past: Women's Resistance in the Era of Clerical Restoration Vuk Gorki (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
35	Carta Abierta a la Humanidad Valeria Radrigán (Chile) Paula Contreras Sánchez (Chile)

Disclaimer

This publication contains artistic and literary works that engage with themes of gender, sexuality, religion, discrimination, and political violence. Some contributions include depictions of nudity, explicit language, or other content that some readers may find sensitive or challenging. These elements are presented in their artistic and contextual capacity and should not be interpreted as gratuitous or intended to offend.

Copyright and responsibility for the content of the publication *Forward With Hope: Creative Responses to Anti-Gender Movements* rest solely with its authors and contributors.

The views, interpretations, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views, positions, or policies of the Global Campus Alumni, Fundación Mecenass, partner organizations, donors, publishers, distributors, or any other institutions involved in supporting, disseminating, or promoting this project.

The inclusion of contributions, references, examples, or opinions in this publication should not be understood as an endorsement by the Global Campus Alumni, Fundación Mecenass, or any partner organization. Responsibility for the accuracy of information, interpretations, and opinions contained in individual contributions lies exclusively with their respective authors.

© 2026 Authors and Contributors
All rights reserved.

Foreword

Across different regions of the world, so-called anti-gender movements have emerged as influential actors in public debates on gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and broader human rights issues. While these movements operate within distinct political, cultural, and historical contexts, they often draw on remarkably similar narratives, strategies, and transnational networks. Understanding these connections—and finding constructive ways to respond to them—has become an increasingly important challenge for human rights advocates, journalists, educators, artists, and cultural workers.

Forward With Hope: Creative Responses to Anti-Gender Movements was developed in response to that challenge. Supported within the Global Campus Alumni Cross-Regional Projects 2025-2026 and implemented by Maida Salkanović and Juan José Guzmán in cooperation with Fundación Mecenaz, the project brought together Global Campus alumni and young cultural and media practitioners from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Chile to explore anti-gender movements through informed, non-polarizing, and hope-based communication.

The project was built on the premise that although Bosnia and Herzegovina and Chile are geographically distant and shaped by different histories, they face many of the same contemporary challenges. In both contexts, public debates around gender, sexuality, family, and human rights have become increasingly polarized, while anti-gender actors have adopted narratives that resonate far beyond national borders. By creating a space for dialogue between participants from the two countries, the project sought to encourage comparative learning, exchange experiences, and identify common patterns and responses.

Six participants—artists, writers, journalists, and cultural practitioners—took part in a series of online workshops examining the origins, strategies, and impacts of anti-gender movements, as well as approaches to hope-based and constructive communication. Rather than focusing solely on critique, the project encouraged participants to consider how storytelling, artistic expression, journalism, and cultural production can contribute to public conversations that inform, connect, and empower without deepening existing social divisions.

The result is this publication: a collection of original artistic, journalistic, and written contributions that engage with anti-gender movements from local, comparative, and personal perspectives. The works gathered here differ in form, tone, and approach, but share a commitment to human rights, critical inquiry, and meaningful dialogue. Together, they offer not only an examination of contemporary challenges, but also reflections on solidarity, creativity, and the possibilities of communicating across differences.

We hope that this publication will serve as a resource for educators, activists, journalists, artists, students, and all those interested in fostering constructive responses to polarization and advancing human rights through thoughtful and imaginative forms of public engagement.

"Could you imagine this happening in Bosnia?": Queer adolescence across the Atlantic

Igor Stipić





Photo #1: Defend and struggle: Equality of Rights (At Liceo de Aplicación in Santiago de Chile)

Act I: Strange encounters

As a Southeast European anthropologist from Bosnia and Herzegovina, arriving at an LGBTQI+-friendly high school in Santiago de Chile was a profound cultural shock. As was the case with many other high schools, universities, and public spaces in general in Chile, Liceo de Aplicación—the school in which I conducted ethnographic research for my doctoral dissertation in social anthropology—was likewise affected to a great degree by the feminist movement that shook Chilean society in 2018 and reshaped the norms of public conduct and opinion regarding questions of sexuality and sexual identity.

During my stay, the situation at the school was such that the famous feminist green scarf was placed over the statue of the founder of the school and there were no open macho commentaries allowed in the public. At the same time, queer students not only organized under the umbrella of Cogesex (the Committee on Sexuality and Gender), but also became fully integrated into the social life of the school, forming an important part of the dominant current in student politics, in which ending the patriarchal education

system emerged as one of the movement's central demands. As a result, during my stay it became quite normalized that many students paint their nails and eyebrows, teachers and student organizations used inclusive non-binary language in their teaching and statements, gender and sexuality was included as a special section in class on civic education, and queer students got elected to several positions within student government.

One day, the teacher I was working with and I observed from the balcony a new mural being painted by Cogesex on the school's steps. As we watched the boys writing that "the future is non-binary," that "love is love and not a condition," and that "only without fear can we be free" within a world where "girls could wear pants and have a penis, and boys could wear skirts and have a vulva," the teacher I was working with—who himself felt that all of this had gone a bit too far—turned to me and asked: "Igor, could you imagine this happening in Bosnia?"

Remembering my response—that I "could not imagine this even in my wildest dreams" because "Chile and Bosnia belong to different worlds"—I turn in the following section to the story of Damir, a young queer student whom I befriended during school ethnography I conducted in a small town in central Bosnia several months after returning home from Chile.

Act II: Queer youth in Central Bosnia

Unlike the queer youth I met in Santiago, who were very open and outspoken about their sexual identities, Damir—the only queer person I befriended during my stay at a high school in central Bosnia in 2023—invested a great deal of effort and life energy into concealing his identity from the society in which he lived. Nevertheless, while very secretive about his identity, Damir was very open in his criticism of school culture during interviews and coffees that we had together. This culture, which he viewed as steeped in a toxic masculinity that was misogynistic, homophobic, and sexist, and embodied above all by the figure of Andrew Tate, was very popular among the boys at the school during my stay. It forms the very basis of the queer story I present in this section.

According to his interpretation, Damir lived inside a conservative culture of “balkonaši” (people who are limited and closed off in their thinking like a balcony) which was brought to the spaces of the school by the boys arriving from both the surrounding villages and the town itself. The constant navigation of this “unfriendly space” that “did not allow for diversity” made Damir very anxious—so anxious that, on many days, he dreaded the prospect of spending another day at the institution. As he told me, Damir neither felt free to dress in the way that he wanted nor to express what he really wanted to express. In his strive to not be noticed, called out, or criticized, on many days Damir would just decide to put on sweatpants for confronting another day at school, in order to camouflage and fit in within a space in which the majority of boys wore either black or grey colors. Damir told me that he learned about his unacceptable preferences already in his childhood when, as a kid, he could not fit into the company of boys who only knew how to talk about war-related topics that did not interest him. During many of these instances, he was pushed away and told to “go and play with the dolls.”

Damir's two favorite teachers at school were Nejra and Ivana, two feminists in their thirties who dyed their hair green, led unconventional student workshops, and were considered hippy weirdoes by other teachers and the wider society of the town. Besides these two teachers, Damir also found support within the school in two female friends, one of whom he described as a “tomboy.” As a “woke kid” at school, Damir found acceptance and a sense of safety in their company. While he also had one close male friend at the school, Damir was disappointed that the two of them only hung out outside of the school premises. Damir told me that the other boy was afraid of what people might think if they saw him in Damir's company. He recalled that the boy once even threatened to stop greeting him if he decided to get a dragonfly tattoo on his shoulder—which he ultimately chose not to do.

On several occasions during our conversations, Damir referred to “The Fortress”, the novel written by Meša Selimović, as the work that best illuminated the situation he was living in within his town. As he was describing this ambiance that is “filled with

muškarčine (bos. tough guys)”, Damir said that “this is like when someone is a lesbian and the whole society condemns them immediately.” Saying how “this is not normal for us” since “we are a place in which society immediately condemns all those who are different”, Damir came to describe his town as a prison that suffocated him and which he wanted to leave for a place that is not so conservative. Damir told me that the same thing had happened to his two favorite teachers, whom he described as “the sun that illuminated the school,” but who ultimately had to leave because “they were just too different,” “could not fit into the environment of this small and conservative town,” and were, in his view, essentially “expelled by society.”

On several occasions during our conversations, Damir emphasized how eager he was to finish school and leave the town behind. As he remarked: “The town is beautiful, but only for a visit. It is not a place to live. Run away from here—that is what I tell everyone.” In the end, Damir left to study in Germany. As he was leaving he told me how he “was happy that he will not have to stand these people anymore” and how he was “happy to go to a place where no one really cares how you dress or what you do.” Speaking about his friend of Croat ethnicity, whom I did not befriend myself but whom I also suspected might be queer, Damir said: “People like Luka—the people who could really change something—are the ones whom society in towns like these prefers to push away because they are too different.”



EL K PIERDE
ES HETERO

Photo#2: Heterosexual is the one who loses (taken at Liceo de Aplicación)

Act III: Masculinities against homophobia

On May 17, 2022, the International Day Against Homophobia, a politicized group of both heterosexual and queer students at Liceo de Aplicación, the high school where I conducted ethnographic research in Santiago de Chile, decided to mark the occasion by breaking into the office of the school's head inspector and attempting to set it on fire. The official reason behind it was an accusation of homophobia against the inspector, who was said to have used homophobic insults against non-heterosexual students participating in the mobilization at the school.

Regardless of whether I could support this type of action, which itself was far from being devoid of hegemonic masculinity, I could not help but ask myself: "Could this happen in Bosnia?"

The real answer to this question lies in another question: Why not? Why are we so different? Why do we seem to stand worlds apart? What kind of experience would Damir have had if he had been born in Chile and attended Liceo de Aplicación? The answer to this question is far from unidirectional and does not seek to reveal any kind of straightforward or non-binary logic.

IGOR STIPIĆ is a social anthropologist and educator whose work sits at the intersection of political anthropology, education, and youth studies. He holds a BA in Economics from Lake Forest College in Illinois, an MA in Political Science from the University of Economics in Prague, and an MA in Sociology from Universidad Alberto Hurtado in Santiago de Chile.

After working for seven years as a researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Kőszeg and the University of Sopron, Igor was awarded a Leibniz Science Campus scholarship to pursue a PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Regensburg.

His dissertation, titled *Abandoning States: Class, Violence, and Emotions at a Public High School in Santiago de Chile*, examines how working-class youth from the Chilean capital come to theorize the state through political engagement that results in situated and embodied understandings of classed violence that they and their families experience within the social world they inhabit. Over the past decade, Stipić has conducted fieldwork in Southeast Europe and Latin America, and has published in both international academic journals and popular magazines on topics covering youth politics, collective memory, education, and social movements.

Weaving Diverse Spirits: Indigenous Echoes and Experiences from the Mountains of the Far South

Pewmayer Camila Figueroa

*"The mirror of our trans identities
does not live only in cities, It also lives
in mountains, forests, and deserts."*



This work takes shape as a series of five authorial photo-collages scattered throughout an essay. In her writing, Pewmayen Figueroa—an Indigenous travesti, activist, teacher, and writer—shares reflections and actions harvested after 10 years of literally walking through South American rural territories, organizing trans-Indigenous communities of land defenders. These portraits emerge from a collective process of dialogue around fire, which is understood as an ancestral force of clarity, transformation, and memory.

Each portrait embodies a response to hate speech by using affective, territorial, and travesti knowledge from the austral South, transforming the body into a sensitive territory of resistance and enunciation. Within this space, ancestral forces and fire act as active presences that guide community care, survival, and the defense of existence against erasure. Finally, this visual work is complemented by short poetic captions that function as an affective message, amplifying the resonance and impact of each image.

Being born trans throws us onto a path we must clear with a machete, carving out just enough space to move forward without the thorns of the undergrowth tearing our legs apart. “For centuries, the Inquisition, the stake and law have been used to persecute those

who gave birth or were born with a diverse spirit—one that does not correspond to the physical body”

Hate became the emotional language of colonialism

A pedagogy of feeling that taught people to despise what had once sustained the balance of the world. My sister Delfina Acosta, an academic Guaraní travesti, speaks of **ethno-travesticide** as a way of naming the capacity of the European colonial project to erase the pre-existing trans-travesti lives of Abya Yala. Across Latin America, chroniclers and missionaries from the Global North portrayed us as abominable beings. By my own experience I can affirm their goal was never simply the extermination of our bodies. Their hate speech constitutes a colonial technology designed to fracture our spirituality, interrupt the continuity of our lineages, and render our memories illegible. Just as the State of Israel strategically targets Palestinian children in order to destroy the future of their people, Western colonial civilization has done the same to Indigenous trans-travesti communities. Systematic exclusion, expulsion from our homes, and the denial of our right to exist, to access healthcare, and to work have all been part of the ethno-travesticide that has reduced the life expectancy of trans people in our region to barely thirty-five years.

Hate speech constitutes a colonial technology designed to fracture our spirituality, interrupt the continuity of our lineages, and render our memories illegible.



Today, neo-fascist discourses continue this colonial legacy. Terricide governments attempt to erase trans understandings of nature by destroying diversity—that vital element sustaining life itself, whose true essence can never take root in the sterile monocultures of pine and eucalyptus.

For this reason, it is an act of historical reparation to refuse to treat those who spread hate speech as neutral actors. Their words produce material consequences and make them intellectual authors of the hate crimes inflicted upon sexual and gender diversities and racialized communities.

Trans Indigenous Health: A Perspective and a Proposal

"When identity is stolen and its story is falsified, there is a perverse intention. Wherever there is falsehood, there is illness."

— **Estela de Carlotto**, founder of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Argentina

One of the political and spiritual responses I am currently cultivating emerges from my own diagnosis received from a *machi* (Mapuche healer) and from my *rakizuam*—a way of thinking rooted in intention and in the responsibility to understand how we are meant to live and act in this world. Through this process, I have come to understand that hate speech does not merely wound the body or affect mental health. It disrupts the relationships that sustain life itself: our connection to territory, to memory, to community, and to spirit.

From childhood onward, these narratives inflict a *kutxan*: an illness of the *püllü*, the spirit. They are built upon false realities that sever trans experience from the landscapes that sustain us and from the networks of kinship and meaning that make life possible. This dissociation gives rise to a profound sense of loneliness—among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike—that seeks to tattoo itself onto the travesti body, unsettling the spirit, disrupting memory, and ultimately undermining the very possibility of inhabiting the world itself. They break the *itrofill mongen*, and when that occurs, when

relationships are broken, illness takes root not only within individuals, but within the relationships that connect people to the Earth and to one another.

"I am sick in the soul."

— **Claudia Rodríguez**, travesti activist and writer, Chile

In one of her most recent books, *Enferma del alma* (*Sick in the Soul*), Claudia Rodríguez writes about the deep sorrow and rage that trans people carry from childhood onward—it's even worse when wounds come from those closest to us, she wrote before committing suicide a couple of months ago. It is a vertiginous spiral that conventional healthcare systems rarely attempt to understand, much less address.

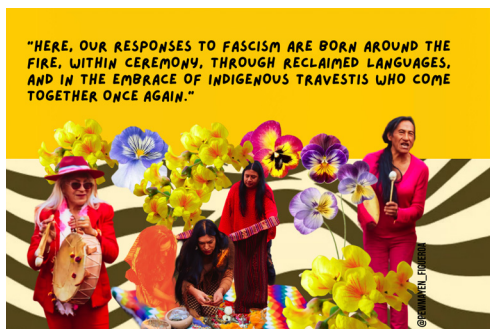
The right to healthcare for trans people is one of the human rights that we are only now beginning to articulate across Latin America. Yet when confronted with these wounds, Western medicine reveals its limitations. Where its answers are exhausted, ancestral practices regain their meaning and begin opening pathways once again—not only for healing, but for restoring our rights to self-determination as Indigenous peoples and reclaiming our capacity to care for ourselves according to our own worldviews.

Some of these practices of care and healing emerge from the understanding of *trava*-ancestrality: a framework through which memory, land, and spirituality are woven back together as pathways for collective healing and self-determination. They have taken shape through the following actions:

1. Plurisexual Brown and Indigenous Gatherings Across South America

These gatherings are living power. In times marked by individualization and neo-fascism, they help reorder us and redraw a shared horizon. Exchange strategies for caring and land defense. Over the years, I have been organizing these gatherings held in Indigenous territories in northern Argentina. Subsequent massive editions have taken place in Aymara-Quechua territories in Chile and Bolivia, and the 4th edition will be held this year in Cusco, Peru.

It is no coincidence that nearly fifty percent of participants identify as neurodivergent. There is something unique that manifests with particular intensity among younger generations. Those who participate return to their territories with renewed energies for inhabiting this world. And many have organized their own trans-diverse communities.



2. Trava Pacha: An Ancient Andean Ceremony

Within the Indigenous Travesti Movement, **Tejido Plurisexual**, we affirm that **Trava Pacha** is a time, a moment, an awakening, an uprising. It is *Our Time*. It means that this is the time of travestis in dialogue with the *Pacha*, Mother Earth. As travesti and trans people, recovering our ancestral memory is essential for re-signifying the ways we identify ourselves. We understand that travesti identity is inseparable from Indigenous identity.

This practice takes place every August, a month of profound spiritual significance in the Andean world. It is the moment when offerings are made—through the opening of the mouth of the Earth—in gratitude for abundance, for the harvests, for those who have passed away, and for the renewal of the land for the cycle to come.

3. Trans-Travesti Language Immersion in Patagonia / Wallmapu

Only a few weeks ago, I helped bring into being the first **Weyekeche Linguistic Gathering**, an immersion

in the Indigenous language Mapuzungun—"the language of the land"—held on both sides of the Andes. It is the first space dedicated to recovering the words through which we may name our trans-travesti existences within an ancient language that continues to bind us to the Earth. In the Araucanía region, this journey brought us to the word **Macao**, which one of the *machi* accompanying us described as an ancient term for a *pewen* (Araucaria) tree that grows neither as male nor female and yet still fulfills a necessary role. Because Mapuzungun emerges from the territory that surrounds it, travestis there could be named **Macao**.

To collectivize the wound is one of the most fundamental ways of neutralizing its poison



The Trans Indigenous Health perspective does not seek merely to repair damaged bodies. It seeks to restore relationships: between people and the Earth; Trans bodies are not the only ones at risk. The Earth itself is also under attack. Trans Indigenous Health constitutes an intersectional response and a proposal for an alter-native world. In the same way, it offers pathways through which trans and gender-diverse healthcare programs emerging across Latin America might be nourished by Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and self-determination. The mirror of our identities does not live only in cities. It also lives in mountains, forests, and deserts. And as long as those landscapes endure, so too will the memories, metaphors, and living evidence of our existence.

"ANCIENT ARE THE WATERS THAT WILL
CONTINUE TO BE BORN TRANS"

@PEWMAYEN_FIGUEROA



PEWMAYEN FIGUEROA (36) is an Indigenous trans-travesti activist who has spent more than a decade traveling across rural territories of South America, building networks of connection among Indigenous sexual and gender diversities. She is a popular educator (UMCE, 2012 Chile.), holds a specialization in Sustainable Development (2011), and a diploma in Integral Sexual Education (UBA, 2021. Argentina).

She is the founder of Tejido Plurisexual, a movement of Indigenous travestis from Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Bolivia. Through this initiative,

she has organized four Plurisexual Gatherings, bringing together more than 170 Afro, trans, and Indigenous activists from across South America. More recently, she founded Weyekeche, a traveling language community dedicated to fostering new speakers of Mapuzungun among trans and gender-diverse Mapuche people in Patagonia.

Her current work is shifting from community organizing toward writing, photography and audiovisual creation, exploring territorial, spiritual, and earth-centered narratives that sustain contemporary Indigenous travesti movements and memory.

Taking the Knee

Alma Gačanin



My father told me that one of his classmates was once forced to kneel on corn (by her father) as punishment for receiving a lower grade than him. Although this form of humiliation, common in the 19th century, has long since disappeared from educational practice, the gesture of kneeling itself carries a long and layered history. Across cultures such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and India, kneeling has signified reverence, submission, mourning, resistance, and political solidarity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it also became associated with abolitionist movements opposing the slave trade, which began in 1770s, and was led by William Wilberforce.

Given these historical associations, the contemporary appropriation of kneeling within anti-gender movements, in opposition to women's rights and bodily autonomy, becomes deeply unsettling. A gesture once connected to solidarity and emancipatory struggle is repurposed in the service of exclusion, control, and the policing of bodies. Through this work, I seek to reclaim and subvert the act of kneeling, returning it to the language of resistance, dignity, and human rights.

ALMA GAČANIN is a visual artist based in Sarajevo, working between watercolor and performance. Drawing on her own labor history, from flight attendant to client care specialist, she examines how shame, discipline, and gendered expectation settle into the body. In 2024 she was selected for the Artist Changemaker Program by the Global Fund for Women in recognition of her contribution to gender justice and feminist practice, and in 2022 she received the ZVONO Art Award for Young Visual Artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She holds an MA in Fine Arts Education from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo and is currently completing an interdisciplinary MA in Human Rights and Democracy with a regional focus on Southeast Europe (ERMA). She is a member of the CRVENA Association for Culture and Art; her poetry and texts have been published in magazines and web portals across Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region.







The Way Out

Maida Salkanović

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, shame surrounding sexuality—particularly female sexuality—plays a defining role in romantic and emotional relationships. Sex is often treated not as a source of pleasure, but as something that should remain hidden. For many women, the fear of exposure can be devastating.

The events that inspired this story took place before Bosnia and Herzegovina criminalized the non-consensual distribution of intimate content. After the law was introduced, the harassment ceased. While no law can erase trauma, legal protections can alter the course of a person's life.

Legal protections against gender-based violence remain contested. In Republika Srpska, conservative and anti-gender organizations opposed proposed legislation on protection from domestic violence and violence against women. The consequences of delaying or weakening such protections are impossible to quantify—but stories like this remind us what may be at stake.

I'm telling you this because I have no one else to tell. It's too late for everything now anyway. Bright colors have spilled across the walls, and things are slowly losing their shape.

Even as consciousness slips away, the feeling of dread remains. Maybe if I tell you about it, it will fade as well.

How did I end up here, with colors dancing along the walls and my thoughts drifting among feather-light clouds? Carelessness. A mistake. Perhaps you'll find some use in my story, if only by avoiding the steps that brought me here.

—

My phone vibrated softly. I don't understand how it works, but I can tell every app apart by its vibration.

Maybe it's the length of it, maybe the intensity, but I always know where the signal is coming from.

WhatsApp.

A familiar dread settled in my stomach. It climbed upward, all the way to my heart, which began to pound.

She always contacted me through WhatsApp. I no longer understood how, or from what number, when I blocked every one as soon as it appeared. I ran to the bathroom. Nothing but water came up. I hadn't eaten anything. The fear didn't leave with the water. It was still there, pulsing and spreading. It reached my hands, and they were trembling when I picked up the phone.

"Hey, do you have the notes for Introduction to Andragogy?" Ajla asked.

I started to cry.

—

She would get in touch every few months. And each time, the familiar dread would arrive with her. My hands would tremble and my mouth would go dry.

"Do you remember this?" the message asked, attaching a file I already knew all too well.

From the video, a familiar face looked back at me—my ex-boyfriend's, alongside the one that looks back at me from the mirror every day.

She must have had another fight with him, I thought. The sight of my own naked body on the screen made my eyes sting.

"I'm going to send this to your father, so he can see what kind of daughter he raised," she would say. And what she called me along with that isn't fit to repeat. The messages came in bursts—fast, fragmented, riddled with typos and exclamation marks.

God, please make it stop. Please, just make it stop. I'll never do anything like this again. God, tell me what to do—anything, just make it stop.

I didn't know what to do. Begging her didn't work.

"Oh, now you're begging? You weren't begging when you were having fun. If you could do that, then deal with the consequences," she'd laugh.

She never called, but she would sometimes send voice messages. The same rapid-fire style, the same insults. Sometimes she screamed. Other times she laughed with spiteful satisfaction. Sometimes she would throw things at the wall, and through the phone I could hear glass shattering, metal clanging, wood striking hard surfaces.

God, just make it stop.

Relationships haven't interested me in a long time. Every time someone approaches me, I think of that WhatsApp vibration and a wave of nausea washes over me.

If she sends it to my father or my uncle, like she keeps threatening to, that's the end of me. There's no way out. What would happen is unimaginable. I cannot fathom their reaction. I don't know how I would continue to exist. This is just not something that happens. I don't know what to do. I could go to the police, but then what? People would find out, and I don't believe the police would do anything anyway.

God, what am I supposed to do?

Once, I wrote to him.

I didn't want to be in touch with him, but writing to her had gotten me nowhere. I couldn't concentrate on studying. I couldn't eat. My mother came into my room and called me to lunch.

"You haven't eaten anything in three days," she pleaded softly. "I'm not hungry", I said, looking at my laptop.

I couldn't look her in the eye. She kept lingering at the door, wanting to say something, but not knowing what. She just sighed and closed the door. She won't sleep tonight either. She rarely ever sleeps. The pills are no longer helping.

Her disease started catching up to me as well. Nights have become long, and I kept trying to fall asleep. I would close my eyes but I would keep waiting to hear the vibration. What if it vibrates and I don't respond? I have to say something, I have to engage her, I have to plead with her so she doesn't send it to my father. So she doesn't post it online. The feeling of dread in my stomach just at the thought of it. My life would be over. There is no way out.

She would sometimes write at two in the morning, at three in the morning. Worst of all, I knew the feeling. I could understand her. I could see him provoking, starting a late night fight that ran out of control. I tried to plead with her, to tell her I am no longer interested in him. To please delete it and we can all just continue our lives, not having to ever think about each other again.

That made her mad. *Do I think I'm better than her? Do I think I can just walk away after what I have done?* I had no idea what I had done. I never spoke with him after we broke up. I was happy he was out of my life. I never wanted to see him again. He was a bitter memory that turned into a living nightmare when her messages started. She brought him back into my life, and me in theirs.

All that was going through my head as my poor mother stood in my doorway, trying to figure out what was wrong. When she left, I started crying again.

What if she knew?

It's simply unimaginable. The caring mother would turn into a monster, into a ball of hate. The duality of humans never ceases to surprise me. I imagine the look of disgust on her face, the upper left corner of her lip twitching as she spits at me. Beyond that, I don't know what would happen.

There is no way out.

And so, I decided to write to him. To ask him to please do something to stop it. That I am no longer a factor in their lives and it should stay that way.

I drafted the message and revised it over and over again. It couldn't contain anything unnecessary, nothing that might make him think I was writing for any reason other than this, that I wanted some further contact with him. Every time we would break up, he would take the slightest contact as a sign I wanted to get back together with him. One time he told me he was checking if I was online on messaging apps on my way to work. "There is a spot where your phone catches wifi. That's how I know exactly where you are on the path to work". It made him feel safe, he said, to get at least some sort of contact with me when I did not want to talk to him. To know exactly where I was. It was soothing, he said.

This time we broke up, we did not have any contact. I blocked him everywhere. I looked at his name on WhatsApp and with hesitance pressed "unblock".

The message had to be humble enough that he wouldn't think I was provoking him, kind enough to appeal to his humanity, flattering enough to persuade him to do something.

I wrote it on my computer and sat there until I finally worked up the courage to copy it into WhatsApp and press "Send."

I stared at the open chat for more than an hour before the word "Seen" appeared on the screen.

And that was it.

I never got anything else from him. What happened then, I do not know.

All I know is that that week, she called me every day. She shouted and screamed, and I could hear from her hoarse voice that she had been crying.

God, what am I supposed to do? How do I get through to her? How do I beg her to stop? To leave me alone?

—

I hadn't heard from her in several months. I still flinched at every WhatsApp notification, but it had become much easier to bear. I avoided every place in town where I might run into either of them. I only went where I absolutely had to, spending most of my time either in my room or at university.

That evening, Ajla asked me to go out.

"Sure," I said, surprising even myself.

God, maybe it's over. Maybe I'm finally free.

I was sitting at my vanity table, putting on mascara. I was almost ready. Smiling at the bright future ahead of me, able to look at my face once again.

My phone vibrated.

Ajla was probably texting to say she'd be late. I grabbed the phone ready to tease her and tell her her tardiness will not be tolerated.

I looked at the screen and froze.

"Do you remember this?" the flickering words asked.

I did not need to see anything else. It all just came back in a second. The feeling of dread. The nausea.

I ran to the bathroom and threw up.

WHAT, WHAT do I do??

I could no longer go on. I noticed a full box of pills staring at me from the medicine cabinet. Mother's insomnia cure that no longer worked.

I have to do something.

I took the box and went back to my room.

One, two, three, five...

I am doing something.

I don't know how many there were, but before long there were none left.

Bright colors began to dance across the walls, and my thoughts turned to downy feathers. The furniture slowly lost its shape, and the room its light.

That's how I ended up here, and why I'm telling you all this.

The last words are slipping away now. It's getting hard to remember what I've already told you. I no longer know why I'm here, but I know that perhaps, at last, everything will disappear.

Did it finally stop?

MAIDA SALKANOVIĆ is an award-winning journalist and writer whose work focuses on human rights, social justice, and equality.

Forward Into the Past: Women's Resistance in the Era of Clerical Restoration

Vuk Gorki



The article examines the formation of the anti-abortion movement in Croatia and its expansion into Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author maps the individuals and civil society organizations of a Catholic worldview that have been actively campaigning against abortion in Croatia from the 1980s to 2026. At the same time, the author introduces and traces the feminist struggle against these actors.



Protest in front of the Croatian Government, 13 April 2011. (Photo: Archive of the Center for Women War Victims – ROSA, Zagreb)

One cannot walk down Vlaška Street without encountering Nela Pamuković. It is a part of Zagreb she passes through every day. In the late 1980s, as a member of the Women's Group Trešnjevka, she and other feminists set up an information stand in Flower Square (*Cvjetni trg*). Their focus was on criticizing gynecological practices.

Many women had negative experiences during gynecological examinations and childbirth. For this reason, she distributed leaflets on women's health and reproductive rights together with other activists.

"Gynecology appropriated women's knowledge from midwives, and gynecologists were mostly men," she says. Still active in advocating for women's rights, she points out that during that period "childbirth was often quite cruel."

A good example is the story *Diary of a Woman Giving Birth* by Jasenka Kodrnja, who was also a member of the aforementioned feminist group. It was published in 1981 in *Start*, one of the most widely read Yugoslav magazines.

The Women's Group Trešnjevka in Zagreb focused on women's rights. It chose violence against women as its main priority. In 1988, it established the first SOS hotline for women victims of violence. Two years later, it opened the first women's shelter in Eastern Europe.

Nela Pamuković is a pioneer of second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia. (Photo: Jusuf Hafizović).

Although information was scarce at the time, Nela Pamuković was aware that there were individuals active in opposing abortion. Among them were Father Anto Baković, Marijo Živković, physician Antun Lisec, and university professor Ante Vukasović. It was a period when many different issues were being questioned and debated. Institutions of the Catholic Church were among the places where such ideas and materials were disseminated.



With the breakup of Yugoslavia and Croatia's independence, Father Anto Baković became Assistant Minister for Reconstruction in 1992. A proposal for the spiritual and demographic renewal of Croatia was subsequently drafted. The Autonomous Women's House Zagreb informed the international public about it.

"Because of that, the proposal as a comprehensive concept of so-called demographic and spiritual renewal was halted for a time," says Nela. "However, efforts by the clerical right to ban abortion and restrict women's reproductive rights inherited from the socialist period continued uninterrupted."

From Marx to Conscientious Objection

A heated debate took place in Croatia in 1998 over the Family Law. Before the new law was adopted, a press conference was held in Parliament in November. It was organized by the Committee for the Coordination of Family Pastoral Care, an association of organizations with a Catholic worldview. They justified their response as an effort to protect marriage and the family.

At the event, Ante Vukasović insisted that the law should incorporate "the constitutional principle according to which every human being has the right to life," overlooking the fact that legal personhood begins at birth. Baković also spoke, saying that the reaction had come too late, while Marijo Živković opposed measures aimed at simplifying the divorce process.

Even then, it became clear that support for such activities was coming from the affluent West. Paul Marx, a Benedictine monk, founded Human Life International, one of the first ultraconservative organizations in the United States focused on promoting abortion bans internationally. He delivered lectures in Split in 1988. Živković served as the organization's coordinator for Eastern Europe.

One of the attendees at the lectures given by the aforementioned American was physician RužicaČa-

var. Following the model of that organization, she founded the right-wing Croatian Movement for Life and the Family in 1990. A year later, the organization submitted a request challenging the constitutionality of the existing abortion law.

Abortion has been legal in Croatia since 1952. The current law dates from 1978, while the constitutional provision guaranteeing the right was adopted in 1974. However, in 2003, conscientious objection was introduced. As a result, a significant number of gynecologists refuse to perform abortions. At the same time, there have been cases of pharmacists refusing to sell contraceptives, citing their conscience as the reason.

The Invisible Network: The Influence of Opus Dei

Although anti-abortion groups, ultraconservatives, and the Catholic Church have been active since the 1980s, their activities in Croatia have intensified over the past two decades.

In October 1928, the Spanish priest Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer founded Opus Dei. Seventy-five years later, Father Jorge Ramos and Father Julio Guijarro-Garcia arrived in Croatia. Their purpose was to expand the social influence of some of the most conservative ideas within the Catholic Church.

In every country where they operate, they do so in coordination and agreement with local Catholic Church authorities. They began their work in Zagreb from a rented apartment on Vlaška Street. The space served both as their residence and as a venue for educational and spiritual activities. Today, they have their own center in the Croatian capital, which also includes a student residence.

By searching the organization's website, one can learn that it offers young people "activities aimed at the formation of students and working youth, such as lectures on Christian doctrine, spiritual guidance, cultural events, and socially engaged projects."

In 2004, the weekly magazine *Nacional* described the Catholic organization as “a threat to national security.” According to the same publication’s investigation, agents of the Croatian Counterintelligence Agency identified the most important associates of the organization’s Croatian branch.

Among them were members of the Croatian Catholic Association “Mi” (“We”). *Nacional* also identified several other prominent individuals, including Tomislav Karamarko, then a close associate of Croatian President Stjepan Mesić.

Also mentioned were Vladimir Lončarević, assistant to the Presidential Office’s adviser on domestic policy, and Neven Jurica, Croatia’s former permanent representative to the United Nations. The list further included senior church prelates Juraj Jezerinac and Želimir Puljić. Retired General Ivan Tolj and his brother Mario Tolj, a parish priest in Zagreb, were identified as important links in the network.

“Members of this Catholic organization have penetrated the highest business and political circles and wield significant influence over the state of affairs in the country,” university professor Jadranka Brnčić told *Novosti* journalist Dragan Grozdanić in 2019.

Democracy, she argued, is not something in which they place much faith. “According to their elitist understanding of society, authoritarian regimes suit them better,” said the Zagreb-based professor. She explained that the main goal of Opus Dei is “to steer society in a particular direction, toward an increasingly prominent role for the Catholic Church—one in which the Church determines society’s moral values and a society that is otherwise multiconfessional and pluralistic is guided by a narrowly defined Catholic worldview.”

Around seventy percent of Opus Dei members are married men or women. Most are lay Catholics, while a smaller proportion are priests. However, according to journalist Gareth Gore, the organization is misogynistic.

“Women vote, but whatever they vote for must later be approved by men,” he observed. Gore is the author of *Opus*, a book in which he describes the organization as “dangerous to itself, to its members, to the Church, and to the world.”

Opus Dei firmly upholds the Catholic Church’s opposition to abortion. On its official website, the organization emphasizes that “all initiatives that help mothers continue their pregnancies, especially when they face particular difficulties, are worthy of praise.”

Several organizations have been particularly prominent in this regard.

From Banning Sex Education to a Monument for Unborn Children

The association GROZD (*Parents’ Voice for Children*) was founded in 2006. It succeeded in halting the introduction of sex education in schools. Feminists had long advocated for comprehensive sex education, while the Catholic Church and organizations sharing its worldview consistently opposed such efforts.

In 2009, the Association for the Protection of Human Life from Conception to Natural Death – Bethlehem was established in Karlovac. It provides counseling to pregnant women considering abortion, as well as humanitarian assistance in the form of food and clothing for families. However, the organization traces its history much further back.

Friar Marko Kornelije Glogović first presented his vision for saving unborn children from abortion on Radio Maria in Zagreb in 1999. In 2003, in the village of Sveti Petar u Šumi, and in cooperation with the Diocese of Poreč and Pula, he founded the Center for Unborn Life.

In 2008, a monument to unborn children was erected at the municipal cemetery in Karlovac. This initiative eventually led to the creation of the Bethlehem association. The organization now has branches in several Croatian cities.

In the years that followed, a number of organizations emerged that became increasingly vocal in the public sphere. They began organizing conferences and petitions, as well as holding prayer vigils outside hospitals.

The association *Vigilare* was founded in 2011. It organizes anti-abortion campaigns, including petitions calling for a complete ban on abortion. Its initiative *"I Was Once an Embryo Too"* was most active in 2012. The campaign collected 133,000 signatures across 500 of Croatia's approximately 1,500 Catholic parishes.

Members of the organization believe that human life begins at conception and that embryos should be granted legal protection. They also opposed the adoption of the Law on Medically Assisted Reproduction and threatened to initiate a referendum that would invalidate the legislation.

The leadership of the Catholic Church in Croatia does not publicly comment on the activities of such organizations. They neither openly support them nor distance themselves from them. Financial support for these associations likewise does not come directly from the Church hierarchy, but rather from private sources.

A similar role is played by the association *Croatia for Life* (*Hrvatska za Život*). In its name, the organization insists that the word *Život* ("Life") be capitalized, contrary to Croatian capitalization conventions. The organization explains that writing *Life* with a capital "L" signifies "Croatia for Christ, because only Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Founded in 2014, the association organizes annual international conferences. In April 2026, it held its 8th conference, *"Now Choose Life"*, and its 7th annual Catholic men's conference, *Be a Man*.

One of the organization's programs is the *40 Days for Life* initiative. The campaign originated in the United States in the early 2000s and has involved more than one million participants. Its organizers frequently highlight what they describe as the closure of dozens of abortion clinics as a result of their activism.

The initiative has been active in Croatia since 2014. It organizes prayer vigils outside public hospitals. More than 11,000 people have participated in these events across over thirty cities throughout the country.

According to its website, the initiative brings together Christians of all denominations "in a common commitment to protecting the lives of unborn children; healing women who have had abortions; the conversion of medical personnel who perform abortions, as well as politicians and activists who advocate and promote them; and providing spiritual, moral, and material support to every mother and father who are considering or have decided to abort their child."

Croatia for Life is funded by the Christian Rhema Foundation. The foundation has also supported the associations GROZD and *Vigilare*. Behind it stand Ivić Pašalić, a former adviser to Croatia's first president, Franjo Tuđman, and his wife Ksenija, as well as the business couple Ivan and Mirjana Topčić.

A New Offensive Against Reproductive Rights

In October 2014, the Women's Network of Croatia submitted complaints regarding the legality of hospital practices and demanded the enforcement of laws governing the termination of pregnancy.

Six of the nine institutions contacted responded. Four denied media reports claiming that they did not provide abortion services: Požega General County Hospital, Zagreb Clinical Hospital Centre, Zabok General Hospital, and "Dr. Josip Benčević" General Hospital in Slavonski Brod, which responded on behalf of the affiliated Nova Gradiška General Hospital.

"One hospital confirmed that it does not perform abortions—*Hrvatski Ponos Knin* General Hospital—which stated that all of its gynecologists had invoked conscientious objection and that, in such cases, patients were referred to other healthcare institutions according to the pregnant woman's preference," noted Nela Pamuković.

She further pointed out that "the Ministry of Health was aware of this situation, and that if the Ministry were to issue different instructions to the hospital, the hospital would promptly act in accordance with them."

One hospital—Našice General Hospital—reported that it had “found a physician who will perform abortions on request at Našice General Hospital, and this service will therefore be available at the institution in the future.”

Nevertheless, anti-abortion initiatives in Croatia have continued unabated. Critics argue that their aim is to place women in a subordinate position and to transform a society built on democratic values into a conservative one shaped by a Catholic worldview.

The Rise of the Clerical Right: From the Margins to Centers of Power

“Their strategy is to use positive-sounding concepts—life, family, children,” Pamuković emphasizes. “At the so-called March for Life, they carry pink and blue balloons. They used to show grim films featuring bloody fetuses and similar imagery, but then they realized how to rebrand themselves in a more positive way.”

According to Pamuković, they appropriate the language of human rights in order to pursue policies that would restrict women's rights.

The aforementioned *March for Life* has, since 2015, brought together and expanded virtually all existing anti-abortion initiatives. Estimates suggest that attendance at the Zagreb march ranges from 5,000 to 20,000 participants. The event is now organized in numerous cities across Croatia.

In 2026, marches were held in twenty Croatian cities under the main slogan: **“The First Step Is the Law! Life Is a Gift—Let Us Protect It with a Just Law!”**.

According to media reports, several Croatian politicians have participated in the event in previous years. Among them were former Minister of Culture Zlatko Hasanbegović, as well as Zagreb mayoral candidates Mislav Herman and Tomislav Jonjić. This year, the march was also joined by nationalist singer Marko Perković Thompson.

“This shows how the clerical right is becoming even more visible and assertive,” says Nela. “This year they are very explicitly calling for the abolition of abortion rights, whereas in the past they tended to foreground images of the idealized family.”

The event is also known for being attended by Dario Kordić, who was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for war crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the same time, it should not be overlooked that, throughout the years of activity by these organizations, women's rights activists have continued to resist and organize campaigns in opposition to their initiatives.

Advertisement Addressed to Women Seeking to Terminate a Pregnancy Whose Hospital Doctors Refuse to Perform a Legal Abortion, Arena, 5 November 1998. (Photo: Autonomous Women's House Zagreb)

SVIM ŽENAMA

**Ukoliko ste se odlučili za prekid trudnoće
a liječnici u bolnici Vam odbijaju izvršiti legalni pobačaj**

OBRATITE SE ŽENSKOM SAVJETOVALIŠTU

**za informacije o svojim zakonskim pravima
Svakim radnim danom od 11-17 h na telefon**

01/ 48 23 258

08005544

besplatni telefon

Arena, 5.11.98.

"As early as the 1990s, we published newspaper advertisements inviting women to contact us if they needed help or if they had been denied an abortion," Nela recalls.

Today, Croatia has a feminist support network called *Brave Sisters (Hrabre sestre)*, which specializes in assisting women who encounter obstacles in exercising their right to access abortion services.

"We organized a large petition, protests, and public actions, and we also drafted our own proposal for an abortion law," the activist recalls.

These activities were carried out through various organizational frameworks. In some campaigns, activists worked as part of an ad hoc coalition for abortion rights that brought together the Lesbian Group Kontra and the association B.a.B.e. (*Be Active, Be Emancipated*), led by Vesna Kesić.

Some of these activities were organized through the Women's Network of Croatia, while work on the legislative proposal and certain campaigns was also carried out through the Autonomous Women's House Zagreb.

The most recent public forum was held in 2023. It was broadcast from Zagreb's Bogdan Ogrizović Library on the Third Program of Croatian Radio. In addition to feminist activists, the event featured Željka Markić, daughter of Marijo Živković—the same man who campaigned for an abortion ban during the socialist period.

"Two of our women from the Women's Network completely dismantled her arguments," says Nela.

Željka Markić is the leader of the right-wing, anti-rights organization *In the Name of the Family (U ime obitelji)*, one of the organizers of the March for Life. She previously served as vice president of the association GROZD and was also the first president of the political party HRAST (*Croatian Growth*), formally known as the *Movement for a Successful Croatia*.

In 2016, the association *In the Name of the Family (U ime obitelji)* submitted a petition to the Constitutional

Court seeking a review of the constitutionality of the *Act on Health Measures for the Exercise of the Right to Freely Decide on Childbirth*. The organization called for an almost complete ban on abortion, with the sole exception being cases in which the mother's life was at risk.

The petition was filed as a counterproposal in the constitutional review proceedings concerning Croatia's abortion law. It is worth recalling that Ružica Čavar had already submitted her own proposal challenging the law in 1991.

The Constitutional Court of Croatia issued its ruling in 2017, taking the position that abortion could not be prohibited by law.

However, what made Željka Markić widely known to the Croatian public was her launch of the *In the Name of the Family* initiative. On the basis of that campaign, the association of the same name was established in 2013. It organized a signature drive to trigger a referendum aimed at defining marriage in the Constitution as a union between a man and a woman.

In December 2013, 66 percent of Croatian voters supported the inclusion of such a provision in the Constitution.

"In this way, marriage equality for all citizens was prevented," says Nela Pamuković.

Croatia is a member of the European Union, which facilitates connections among like-minded actors across national borders. When the state does not formally support the ideas promoted by these organizations, support is often sought from abroad.

In 2019, the Croatian branch of the *Ordo Iuris* Foundation for Legal Culture was established. Founded in Poland, *Ordo Iuris* played a key role in campaigns that led to a near-total abortion ban in this country.

It is a group of Polish ultraconservatives. They offer legal, advisory, and financial assistance to individuals whom they perceive as being targeted because of views they consider Christian.

They promote a heterosexual, traditional, and patriarchal understanding of the family and seek to influence legislative frameworks across Europe.

The organization also has representatives within European Union institutions. One of its leaders in Croatia, Ivan Prskalo, was third on the candidate list of the political party MOST in the elections for the European Parliament.

Yet none of this is without consequence, and the legal system has, at times, recognized the threats posed by the foundation's activities. For example, in May 2026, the Zagreb County Court ruled in favor of the association *Dugine boje* (*Rainbow Colors*) in a case brought against Ordo Iuris.

The court found that the campaign "*Christ and Homeland*" (*Krist i domovina*) amounted to the harassment and discrimination of LGBT people. It ordered the removal of the campaign's content, including the website *kristidomovina.hr*.

Although lawyers, state institutions, and civil society organizations continue to do what is within their power, ultraconservative groups are making significant efforts to impose their ideology on society.

If you happen to find yourself in Zagreb on the first Saturday of the month, you may encounter the *Knights of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* (*Vitezovi Bezgrešnog Srca Marijina*) in Ban Jelačić Square. These are organized groups of Catholic men who gather to kneel and pray in public spaces. In addition to the capital, similar gatherings can be seen in the central squares of other Croatian cities.

They first appeared in Poland and Australia, while in Croatia they have been gathering since October 2022 at the invitation of the *Be Masculine* (*Muževni budite*) project, an initiative of *Croatia for Life*.

Among the group's most prominent figures is Vice Batarelo, the leader of the previously mentioned association Vigilare. He is also connected to the Ordo Iuris Foundation.

A returnee from Australia, Batarelo once headed the Office for Family Pastoral Care of the Archdiocese of Zagreb, though he was later removed from that position. He has been a vocal public opponent of women's rights and LGBT rights.

Exporting Ideology: The Ultraconservative Wave in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia share a border stretching more than one thousand kilometers. In addition, according to the 2013 census, Croats, who are mostly Catholic, make up 15.4 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population. The influence of ultraconservative groups from Croatia has also spilled over into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 2016, lawmakers Deni Ćosić of the right-wing Croatian Alliance HKDU–HRAST and Marija Češkić of the Croatian Party of Rights Dr. Ante Starčević (HSP Dr. Ante Starčević) in the West Herzegovina Canton drafted a bill intended to protect life "from conception to natural death." The proposed legislation sought to prohibit the trade in fetuses, the "creation of hybrid beings," euthanasia, and abortion. However, the bill never reached the parliamentary agenda.

From the same canton, the association *Mlado Sunce* (*Young Sun*), founded in Široki Brijeg in 2017, erected billboards across Herzegovina in 2019. The imagery depicted a womb in which a baby was connected to its mother's heart by an umbilical cord, with a pair of scissors positioned beneath it and the slogan: "Don't Give Me Up, Mother!" (*Ne daj me, majko!*)

Additionally, the country's capital Sarajevo is home to three counseling centers for unwanted pregnancies that promote similar views. The oldest among them is *Svjetionik – Center for Life* (*Svjetionik – Centar za život*), founded in 2001 by Bob and Eileen Pressler. The couple arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998 as Catholic missionaries from the United States.

Another is *Voice for Life* (*Glas za život*), an initiative launched as a project in 2016 and formally registered as an association in 2020. The association also operates the online counseling service *Sara – A Place for You* (*Sara – Mjesto za tebe*).

Journalist Azra Husarić Omerović found that these organizations are not transparent with the public regarding their finances and frequently withhold information about their staff. Nevertheless, the fact-checking platform *Raskrinkavanje.ba* established that two of them—*Voice for Life (Glas za život)* and *Svjetionik – Center for Life (Svjetionik – Centar za život)*—are affiliated members of *Heartbeat International*.

Heartbeat International is a Christian anti-abortion network founded in the United States in 1971. It brings together organizations from various Christian denominations and operates on six continents, in more than 100 countries, through a network of over 4,000 affiliated centers.

In Mostar, a city widely regarded as the center of Croatian politics in the multi-confessional state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catholic men have been gathering in the main square since 2023 to kneel in prayer.

Since 2015, periodic forty-day public anti-abortion prayer vigils have also been held outside the University Clinical Hospital in Mostar.

The interconnected nature of these organizations on both sides of the border is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, in 2017, one of the leaders of the association *Mlado Sunce (Young Sun)* was Marko Topić, who also served as the coordinator of the *40 Days for Life* initiative in Croatia.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a deeply divided society, there is no single law governing sexual and reproductive health. Nor is there a national program or state-level strategy in this area.

Instead, these issues are regulated by the country's constituent administrative units—the two entities, the *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* and *Republika Srpska*, as well as the self-governing *Brčko District*.

The relevant laws permit abortion up to the tenth week of pregnancy.

In Republika Srpska, conscientious objection has been introduced into the healthcare system. This right is limited in cases where there is an obligation to provide emergency medical care in situations involving an immediate threat to life or a risk of severe harm to a person's health.

In the rest of the country, no such legal provision exists. Nevertheless, abortions are not performed in one canton of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in part of the city of Mostar.

"In Canton 10 (Livno Canton), this issue is not regulated by legislation, and we believe that abortion should be addressed by introducing a complete ban on abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina," the cantonal Ministry of Labour, Health, Social Welfare and Displaced Persons told the Sarajevski otvoreni centar (Sarajevo Open Centre) in 2024.

According to the 2013 census, 41,784 women lived in the canton. More than half of them were adults.

The Mostar hospital outside which the *40 Days for Life* initiative holds its prayer vigils is also among the institutions that do not perform abortions, except in cases where the woman's life is at risk or the fetus has severe abnormalities.

According to reporting by *Detektor.ba*, a specialized online outlet that monitors the judiciary and reports on war crimes, corruption, terrorism, and organized crime, the hospital's director, Ante Kvesić, stated in February 2026 that he saw no issue with prayers being organized on hospital grounds. At the time, the Ministry of Health of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton declared itself not competent to address the matter, while the Federal Ministry of Health did not respond to journalists' inquiries.

Meanwhile, billboards bearing the slogan "**Choose Life**" appeared across Herzegovina, signed by the *40 Days for Life* initiative.

Journalist Matea Jerković of *Oslobođenje* also found that the initiative's social media posts include quotations from the Croatian nationalist singer Marko Perković Thompson about Europe's Christian roots. The posts likewise feature excerpts from sermons on abortion by the Zagreb archbishop and cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, who was convicted after the Second World War for collaboration with the Ustaša regime in the persecution and extermination of Serbs and Jews.

The *40 Days for Life* initiative has received support from the Catholic Church and from media outlets close to it in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has also been covered favorably by the entity-level news agency FENA, as well as by the state broadcaster BHRT.

A Civilizational Step Backward: Challenges of a New Era

Nela Pamuković closely follows developments related to women's rights. She attends conferences, gives lectures, and speaks with journalists. At times, her protests against organizations seeking to curtail women's reproductive autonomy have even resulted in her being detained.

Nevertheless, she continues to use her voice and influence to engage with and respond to developments across the region once known as Yugoslavia.

At times, she feels the struggle is futile. Yet she refuses to give up. During the breakup of Yugoslavia, she protested against the war and helped care for refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Later, she became a prominent advocate for LGBT equality.

As she sits in a café in the city where she grew up, dressed in black—the color of a goth—the image seems fitting. It is also a reminder of the somber tone that patriarchy has long imposed on women in this

region. Nela is one of the pioneers of second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia.

"Back in the 1980s, many of us in Zagreb wore black—punk, gothic," she says, sipping hot chocolate on Preradovićeva Street. "It was a form of resistance to the mainstream."

She goes on to list some of the bands that defined the era: *Bauhaus*, *Laibach*, and *The Damned*. The West was something to aspire to. It was not unusual for her to take a train to Ljubljana for the day. Slovenia was the most open republic of the federation in which the activist was born.

Women in Yugoslavia gained full voting rights and formal legal equality in 1945, at a time when many women elsewhere in Europe were still fighting for the same rights. Socialism brought significant progress in many areas. Yet problems persisted, particularly with regard to violence against women.

There were also challenges stemming from the double burden placed on women—at work and at home—as well as concerns about the promotion of pornographic representations of women. These were among the issues on which feminists campaigned for change.

At the same time, reproductive rights were considered one of the era's major achievements, including access to abortion and rights related to maternity leave.

The socialism that was often regarded as flawed was, in some respects, more progressive than what followed. At the same time, the anti-rights efforts directed against women that this article examines are unfolding at a moment often seen as the height of modern civilization—a period in which the scope and limits of human freedoms are perhaps being debated more intensely than ever before.

VUK GORKI is a journalist and political scientist from Bosnia and Herzegovina whose work focuses on issues of social justice and human rights.



Nela Pamuković Continues Her Fight for Women's Right to Make Their Own Life Choices. (Photo: Jusuf Hafizović).

Carta Abierta a la Humanidad

Val Radrigán

Paula Contreras Sánchez

Satan has historically been a symbolic figure alluding to evil, sin, and darkness, heavily used today by neoconservative discourses and anti-gender movements, that associate Him with sexual excesses and people from the LGBTQ+ community in its broadest sense. However, from Latin American perspectives, the Devil is a playful, festive, and transgressive figure, full of seduction. With our text, we wanted to mock politically correct structures and the use of this symbolism by hate speech, subverting this tendency through humor and the enjoyment of popular culture, imagining a statement in the form of an "open letter" signed by the Prince of Darkness himself. We used a mixture of languages and slangs (Spanish/English) to suggest play, confusion, and a hybrid style that alludes to the Devil and the contemporary times. We invite you to get lost in translation.

Carta Abierta a la Humanidad

Comunicado Oficial ·

Dpto. de Relaciones

Públicas Infernales

De: Satanás™

Para: Todos ustedes

Asunto: Varios; Muchos; Demasiados.

Dear people,

We **NEED** to talk. Y no porque me importe especialmente su opinión (I'm Satanás™ y no tengo esa necesidad) sino porque hay cosas que llevan demasiado tiempo sin aclararse y mi departamento legal me ha insistido en que ya es hora so here I am.

Primero lo primero: I have a full time job girl. Soy la showrunner de mi propio lado del mundo, tengo

reuniones, leo reportes y me hago cargo del infierno. No ando suelta por ahí causando el caos doméstico que me atribuyen. Lo que pasa en sus casas, en sus gobiernos, en sus vidas y en sus comentarios de internet lo hacen ustedes solitos con una dedicación y creatividad que, honestamente, me genera sentimientos encontrados. Ya me aburrí. Llevo milenios cargando con la culpa de todos los vicios de la humanidad ¡Todos! La lujuria, la codicia, el mal gusto estético entre infinitos más.

Yo los observo desde acá y me quedo sin palabras. Y eso no es fácil ya que llevo milenios siendo perversa.

Dicho eso: no les guardo odio. Soy malvado, no rencorosa. Son cosas distintas. Pero hay cuatro asuntos que necesito dejar por escrito hoy. *Take a seat because this is gonna take a little bit of your time.*

First of all: don't use my name in vain.

Mi nombre Satanás™ es una marca registrada. Ha sido construida y posicionada durante milenios con un esfuerzo considerable. N.A.D.I.E. les ha dado el permiso para hablar en mi nombre, N.A.D.I.E. (**NOT EVEN JESUS**) ha adquirido los derechos para usarla libremente en conversaciones cotidianas, discursos políticos, sermones, ni en comentarios de YouTube or even META. (Yes Fuckerberg, you know what I mean, te tengo en la mira cabrito, sé qué quieres que varios te asocien conmigo). Mi abogado ya tiene anotado todo esto.

Por otro lado, ustedes llegan y me llaman pero saben que tengo una estricta política de no apariciones sin cita previa.

El otro día estuve en Reddit (un lugar que visito únicamente como plataforma de estudio) y leí: *"if i'm having an orgasm during sex, ¿is that a demon?* Mis incubos y súcubos tienen agendas apretadas y criterios de selección bastante más exigentes de lo que se imaginan. Esto que le atribuyen *is like, sooo vanilla*, sin duda ellos prefieren la acción y el peligro. También, me encontré con esto otro: *I am masturbating with a shemale, is that Belcebu?*

¿En serio?

This is like

the math is not mathing

I am so sick of all this hate!!

Dejen de hacerme la responsable de todos sus gustos y mejor asuman sus identidades en paz y den rienda suelta a todos sus deseos ¡¡¡Free yourself!!! Porque mejor no follan y ríen ya que estoy segura que les encanta (wink, wink).

Next: el problema reputacional más grave de mi carrera

Este es el punto que más me afecta ya que hablamos de mi *REPUTATION*

Mucha gente *be like*: "*Trump es el diablo*", "*Milei es peor que Satanás*", "*Bolsonaro y Netanyahu, agentes del infierno*"

I mean ... ¿chica what?

Necesito, con toda la seriedad que me permite mi naturaleza (esto sólo lo puedo hacer porque ahora hago dos horas de yoga por la mañana como toda una *white girl full clean look shit*), desmentir públicamente lo siguiente: yo no estoy afiliado a ninguna de estas personas ni a empresarios, presidentes, economistas o golpistas. N.O.N.E O.F T.H.E.M Ni como colaboradores, ni como contratistas, ni como pasantes no remunerados. Pueden revisar todos mis registros y auditorías. *I'm clean*.

El mal que yo ejerzo tiene coherencia interna. Tiene lógica. Tiene *estética*. Lo que hacen estos señores es crueldad sin elegancia, caos sin propósito y, lo que es peor, una hipocresía tan densa que ni yo me la explico. Yo nunca he firmado órdenes de desplazamiento mientras daba discursos sobre proteger familias. Nunca he desfinanciado hospitales públicos mientras me fotografiaba sosteniendo textos sagrados que claramente no he leído. Nunca he llamado a defender la vida mientras financiaba su destrucción sistemática. Ese nivel de disociación no lo aprenden

de mí. Eso requiere un entrenamiento específico que yo no imparto.

Básicamente, nunca he dicho ni he pretendido ser Jesús mientras me veo y actúo como el diablo reina.

Moving on: Jesus and.....families??

Me and Jesus #complicatedrelationship (still moving on)

No les voy a mentir: algo que siempre le reconocí es que era *consistente*. El hombre anduvo con los pobres, con los enfermos, con las trabajadoras sexuales, con toda la gente que ustedes hoy preferirían que no existiera. Era coherente. Yo puedo no estar de acuerdo con su agenda pero le tengo respeto profesional.

But you bitches??

Ustedes dicen seguirlo y votan para quitarle derechos a exactamente las personas con las que él se sentaba a comer. Eso no es ser discípulo angelitos. Eso es tener un *mood board* de Jesús sin haber leído el *brief*.

Y sobre la familia sagrada, nuclear, heterosexual, bendecida esa que ustedes tanto insisten, persisten y machacan con hacer tendencia cuando ya esta out baby!! Predican pureza y tienen carpetas escondidas en el teléfono, computadores y bajo la cama que harían llorar al mismísimo Jesús.

And last, but not least: kink and aesthetics

Me gustan los cuerpos. Siempre me han gustado en toda su gama, en todas sus combinaciones, sin jerarquías porque hay que probar de todo. Me declaro como alguien con buen gusto y criterio amplio. *Aesthetics again, bby*. Entiendo que ser una persona abierta a explorar les puede causar cierto miedo porque hay varios de ustedes bien puritanos pero no por ser una chica de gustos varios voy a permitir ser el motivo, explicación e incluso desviación de sus deseos que no saben cómo procesar ni encauzar *for god's sake !!!*

In that line of affairs, tengo un gusto amplio por los remolinos y las estéticas weird (más que por los trajes rojos y de látex que se me atribuyen porqué that was sooo 90s) pero los republicanos???? Kristi querida mi amor, pillaron a tu marido Bryon con sus huge, huge ridiculous boobs de silicona y sus hotpants rosados chateando con unas fetish models LOOOOL ¿What can you tell us about that?

Honey, te prometo que yo llevo milenios ya curada de espanto y AUN ASÍ me tomé un momento para recuperar la peluca que se me había ido a marte. Pero bueeeeeeeno, I guess we have to love a man that is out of the closet and embraces who he is....

Having said that: I am not coming again to speak with you morons in another century. Call me like in da old days: pacto bajo la higuera, vudu style, enciendan un par de weás, y con las nunca bien ponderadas: ofrendas.

XOXO

STAY IN TOUCH

I WILL NEVER RESPOND

YOURS TRULY, ALWAYS AND FOREVER

SATANÁS™ THE REAL MARICON TWISTED

(AKA):

- El Diablo
- Lucifer
- Belcebú
- Mandinga
- El Demonio
- El Maligno
- El Enemigo
- El Tentador
- El Príncipe de las Tinieblas
- El Ángel Caído

- El Cachudo (*Yours truly*: Chile, Perú y otros países andinos)
 - El Coludo
 - El Patas (Perú)
 - El Patas de Cabra
 - El Cuco
 - El Chamuco (México)
- El Chancas o El Chamuco Mayor (México)
 - El Cuernudo
 - El Malo
 - El Oscuro
 - El Cojuelo
- El que no debe ser nombrado
 - El innombrable
 - El de abajo
 - El otro

PAULA CONTRERAS SÁNCHEZ is a Chilean sociologist and visual artist. She holds a Master's degree in Research, Art, and Creation. Her work is situated within the field of cultural criticism, particularly focusing on fashion as a medium and system through which she develops artistic projects and research that challenge, connect, and reflect on questions of identity, urban life, and memory in Latin America.

VAL RADRIGÁN holds a PhD in Philosophy with a specialization in Aesthetics and a Master's degree in Contemporary Art Theory. A researcher and writer, her work explores the relationships between the body and technology, with a particular focus on cyborg theory, sexuality, and media/digital culture. Her projects are characterized by transdisciplinary approaches, examining embodiment and its representations through the lenses of critical theory and the lived experience of physical training.

Annexes

Open Letter to Humanity — English Translation (Not the original version)

DISCLAIMER

This document is an English translation provided exclusively to facilitate access to and circulation of the original work. It is not the original artistic piece. In the event of any discrepancy, the original version shall prevail.

Open Letter to Humanity - Val Radrigán, Paula Contreras Sánchez

Satan has historically been a symbolic figure alluding to evil, sin, and darkness, heavily used today by neoconservative discourses and anti-gender movements, that associate Him with sexual excesses and people from the LGBTQ+ community in its broadest sense. However, from Latin American perspectives, the Devil is a playful, festive, and transgressive figure, full of seduction. With our text, we wanted to mock politically correct structures and the use of this symbolism by hate speech, subverting this tendency through humor and the enjoyment of popular culture, imagining a statement in the form of an “open letter” signed by the Prince of Darkness himself. We used a mixture of languages and slangs (Spanish/English) to suggest play, confusion, and a hybrid style that alludes to the Devil and the contemporary times. We invite you to get lost in translation.

Open Letter to Humanity

*Official Communiqué ·
Dept. of Infernal Public Relations*

From: Satanás™

To: All of you

Subject: Various; Many; Too many.

Dear people,

We **NEED** to talk. And not because I especially care about your opinion (I'm Satanás™ and I have no such need) but because there are things that have gone unclarified for far too long and my legal department has insisted that it is high time so *here I am*.

First things first: *I have a full time job girl*. I am the showrunner of my own side of the world, I have meetings, I read reports and I take charge of hell. I am not roaming about causing the domestic chaos you attribute to me. What happens in your homes, in your governments, in your lives and in your internet comments, you do all on your own, with a dedication and creativity that, honestly, leaves me with mixed feelings. I am bored now. For millennia I have been shouldering the blame for all of humanity's vices. Every one of them! Lust, greed, poor aesthetic taste, among infinite others.

I watch you from over here and I am left speechless. And that is no easy thing, given that I have spent millennia being wicked.

That said: I bear you no hatred. I am evil, not spiteful. They are different things. But there are four matters I need to put in writing today. *Take a seat because this is gonna take a little bit of your time.*

First of all: don't use my name in vain.

My name *Satanás™* is a registered trademark. It has been built and positioned over millennia with considerable effort. N.O.B.O.D.Y. has given you permission to speak in my name, N.O.B.O.D.Y. (NOT EVEN JESUS) has acquired the rights to use it freely in everyday conversations, political speeches, sermons, nor in YouTube comments or even META. (*Yes Fuckberg, you know what I mean*, I have got my eye on you, laddie, I know you want plenty of people to associate you with me). My lawyer has already noted all of this down.

On another note, you go and summon me, yet you know I have a strict policy of no appearances without a prior appointment.

The other day I was on Reddit (a place I visit purely as a research platform) and I read: *"if i'm having an orgasm during sex, ¿is that a demon?.* My incubi and succubi have packed schedules and selection criteria far more demanding than you imagine. What you attribute to them is *like, sooo vanilla*, there is no doubt they prefer action and danger. Also, I came across this other one: *I am masturbating with a shemale, is that Belcebu?*

Seriously?

This is like

the math is not mathing

I am so sick of all this hate!!

Stop making me responsible for all your tastes and better own your identities in peace and give free rein to all your desires !!!Free yourself!!! Because you would do better to shag and laugh, since I am sure you love it (wink, wink).

Next: the most serious reputational problem of my career

This is the point that affects me most, since we are talking about my *REPUTATION*

Loads of people be like: *"Trump is the devil", "Milei is worse than Satanás", "Bolsonaro and Netanyahu, agents of hell"*

I mean... girl what?

I need, with all the seriousness my nature permits me (I can only manage this because I now do two hours of yoga in the morning like a proper *white girl full clean look shit*), to publicly deny the following: I am not affiliated with any of these people, nor with businessmen, presidents, economists or coup-plotters. N.O.N.E O.F T.H.E.M Neither as collaborators, nor as contractors, nor as unpaid interns. You may review all my records and audits. *I'm clean.*

The evil I practise has internal coherence. It has logic. It has *aesthetics*. What these gentlemen do is cruelty without elegance, chaos without purpose and, what is worse, a hypocrisy so dense that not even I can explain it. I have never signed displacement orders while giving speeches about protecting families. I have never defunded public hospitals while being photographed holding sacred texts I clearly have not read. I have never called for the defence of life while financing its systematic destruction. That level of dissociation is not something they learn from me. That requires specific training that I do not provide.

Basically, I have never said nor pretended to be Jesus while I look and act like the devil queen.

Moving on: Jesus and.....families??

Me and Jesus #complicatedrelationship (still moving on)

I will not lie to you: one thing I always granted him is that he was consistent. The man walked with the poor, with the sick, with sex workers, with all the people you would rather did not exist today. He was consistent. I may not agree with his agenda, but I have professional respect for him.

But you bitches??

You say you follow him and you vote to strip rights from exactly the people he sat down to eat with. That is not being a disciple, little angels. That is having a *mood board* of Jesus without having read the *brief*.

And as for the sacred, nuclear, heterosexual, blessed family, the one you so insist, persist and harp on about making trendy when it is already out baby!! You preach purity and you have folders hidden on your phones, computers and under the bed that would make Jesus himself weep.

And last, but not least: kink and aesthetics

I like bodies. I have always liked them across their whole range, in all their combinations, without hierarchies, because one ought to try a bit of everything. I declare myself someone of good taste and broad judgement. *Aesthetics again, bby*. I understand that being a person open to exploring may cause you a certain fear, because quite a few of you are proper puritans, but just because I am a girl of varied tastes I will not allow myself to be the reason, the explanation and even the deviation of your desires that you do not know how to process or channel *for god's sake !!!*

In that line of affairs, I have a broad taste for swirls and weird aesthetics (more than for the red and latex outfits attributed to me, because *that was soooo 90s*) but the Republicans???? Kristi, darling, my love, they caught your husband Bryon with his *huge, huge ridiculous boobs* made of silicone and his pink hotpants, chatting away with some fetish models *LOOOOOL ¿What can you tell us about that?*

Honey, I promise you I have been beyond shocking for millennia now, and **EVEN SO** I took a moment to retrieve the wig that had flown off to Mars. But *weeeeell, I guess we have to love a man that is out of the closet and embraces who he is....*

Having said that: I am not coming again to speak with you morons in another century. Call me like in da old days: a pact under the fig tree, voodoo style, light a couple of bits and bobs, and with the never sufficiently praised: offerings.

XOXO

STAY IN TOUCH

I WILL NEVER RESPOND

YOURS TRULY, ALWAYS AND FOREVER

SATANÁS™ THE REAL FAGGOT TWISTED

(AKA):

- * El Diablo — The Devil
- * Lucifer
- * Belcebú — Beelzebub
- * Mandinga — The Devil
- * El Demonio — The Demon
- * El Maligno — The Evil One
- * El Enemigo — The Enemy
- * El Tentador — The Tempter
- * El Príncipe de las Tinieblas — The Prince of Darkness
- * El Ángel Caído — The Fallen Angel
- * El Cachudo — The Horned One (Yours truly: Chile, Peru and other Andean countries)
- * El Coludo — The Tailed One
- * El Patas — The Hoofed One (Peru)
- * El Patas de Cabra — Goat's Hooves
- * El Cuco — The Bogeyman
- * El Chamuco — The Devil (Mexico)
- * El Chancas or El Chamuco Mayor — The Flip-flops One or The Greater Devil (Mexico)
- * El Cuernudo — The Horned One
- * El Malo — The Bad One
- * El Oscuro — The Dark One
- * El Cojuelo — The Limping One
- * El que no debe ser nombrado — He who must not be named
- * El innombrable — The Unnameable
- * El de abajo — The One Down Below
- * El otro — The Other One

2026

Forward with Hope

Creative Responses to
Anti-Gender Movements



FUNDACIÓN
MECENAS



Global Campus
Alumni