

“LET’S BEGIN LOVE ANEW”: RIGHT WING ON WOMEN, WOMEN ON RIGHT WING, CASE OF SERBIA

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Abstract. *Public disqualification of women is done through denying them the right of ownership and decide on their bodies and it is a paradigm of the conservative, nationalist discourse of the Serbian Orthodox Church, but also a crucial part of the value system of the right wing, which remains the same for different social systems. Right wing organizations and the Serbian Orthodox Church not only disapprove the emancipation of women and their equal position in society, but continually oppose these values in public and media space and actively advocate for the disrespect and violation of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and other laws. In a secular society such as ours, the border separating state and church should be clear, so that patriarchal, traditional, conservative discourse of the church and the right wing could not even think about usurping the (symbolic) spaces of freedoms and rights we have won, nor could they produce the hate speech and discrimination against women.*

Key words: *women, right wing, retraditionalization, conservative policies, the Serbian Orthodox Church.*

1. RIGHT-WING READING IN PRESENT-DAY SERBIA

We live in a time of militarism, growing violence, the dominant discourse of nationalism, racism, traditionalism and provincialism, and of the increasing impact of ultra right-wing and fascist groups in the public and media discourse. Extreme right-wing groups have become agents of social and political life in Serbia back in the 1990's. "While during the war developments in the region of the former SFRY ultra right-wing groups worked primarily as paramilitary formations, present right-wing organizations, in altered circumstances, continue to disseminate national, racial and religious hatred and to participate in numerous violent incidents" (Stakić 2013). The expansion of right-wing extremism in

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contemporary Serbia has some of the same constituents as the European right-wing, such as economic, political and national identity crisis, but it is also shaped by some local specific factors, such as war-time occurrences, glorification of war crimes, as well as by aggressive, destructive nationalism in the region of the former SFRY during the nineties. If we map factors that contributed to *the awakening of the right wing* in Serbia, we will find the following *social points* “normalization of nationalism, rise of anti-antifascism, questionable secularism of the state, and a deficit in the rule of law (Stakić 2013; Kuljić 2002). On the other hand, deficiency of sanctions by the state, as well as winning and a return to the political scene of retrograde nationalist parties, which underwent a decorative and formal European transformation, actually brought about a kind of alliance of the right wing and the state. Ultra right-wing organizations that are active in the social and political milieu of contemporary Serbia are the result of the continuity of “ethnic conflict” (Stakić 2013) in the area. An important segment of their ideology is apology for war crimes, obsession with national humiliation and victim status, as well as advocating national revanchism” (Stakić 2013). Ultra right-wing groups are becoming more and more involved in social and political courses; they actively participate in the public scene and become its distinctive factor. A favourable climate for the legitimacy of this social group is continuously being produced by the media and the Serbian Orthodox church. Media support the ruling social structure (especially tabloids tend to do this, since they dominate the public sphere and media space) and reproduce xenophobia, homophobia and hate speech via the authoritative promotion of non-scientific opinions, prejudice and “traditional Serbian values”, religious as well as moral ones. On the other hand, transformation of the social system, after the breakdown of socialism, initiates the re-definition of the public space in Serbia, in which influence and power of the Serbian Orthodox church are on the rise, as one of the key factors in the rehabilitation of traditional discourse and resistance to social modernization, and also an important subject in the process of acquiring power, “not only in the sphere of culture, but also in terms of gaining power in the fields of politics and economy” (Perica 2011, 37). By the beginning of the nineties, the Serbian Orthodox church ceased being a religious institution only and was constructed as a political subject in the public sphere. During the wars in the region of the former SFRY, SOC had an inglorious role, providing support to the Serbian leadership of the time and contributing theological justification of war policies (Đorđević 2001; Stakić 2013). The common denominator of the ideology of the current right wing in Serbia and a number of representatives of the Serbian Orthodox church is their attitude to war crimes, the LGBT population and organization of the Pride parade, territory and fictional borders of Serbia, so that clericalization of the society occurs at the same time with intensified influence and visibility of extreme right wing groups.

The policy of the state of Serbia towards these groups, i.e. the absence of criminal policy, processing of cases of violent crimes, lack of preparedness for prevention and system efforts on suppression and ban of extremist groups “contributes to establishing right wing extremism as a legitimate framework for political thinking and acting” (Stakić 2013). Aggressive nationalism, xenophobia, homophobia, fear of any kind of Otherness, of all those who do not belong to the same faith, nation, religion, are re/animated in the public and media discourse in Serbia, and with no clear political willingness and decision to sanction/prohibit/abolish such activities, we will have a process of a comprehensive fascization of society.

Destruction of the social system, rehabilitation of the patriarchal, provincial, small town culture initiates different social processes, and one of them is the (re)construction of

female identities, but also women’s bodies, which become social and cultural products, sites of social, political, cultural and geographic inscription” (Elizabeth Grosz 2005). The overall re-traditionalization in the nineties was reflected in the revitalization of traditional, patriarchal stereotypes about the roles and obligations of women in the sphere of *the public*. This process participated and was inscribed in the reality of women (and women’s public) by their bodies and identities becoming political expressions in “the function of the community cohesion” (Iveković 2000, 10).

Although it seems today that key rights are available (the right to vote, work, an education, abortion, divorce) and non-questionable, the system once again confiscates from us the conquered territories and indicates instability of the position and regenerative capacity of patriarchy. Jointly with growing racism, xenophobia and incomprehension of other cultures, the right wing recognized the potential of and utilized it to assemble *symbolic capital* which is used to construct and mark women through the figure of the Other, as a figure which reflects dominant social relations, and what is usually attributed is second-class, unwanted and less worthy in the ruling ideology/gies.

2. “MECHANICAL WOMBS”:

VIEW OF WOMEN IN IDEOLOGY OF NATIONALISM AND RIGHT-WING DISCOURSE

“MPs and their rosaries should stay away from my ovaries!”¹

Militant, nationalist discourse of the official politics and an overall re-traditionalization during the last two decades in Serbia have mapped the limits of the female body, which was to affirm anew its reproductive capability and in this manner contribute to reinforcing national identity and revitalization of the traditional community. The Draft Law on Population Policy from 1990, repressive measures in national legislation and resolutions, aggressive statements of the Serbian Orthodox church and its Synod, via a continuous promotion of an increase in the birth rate, bringing forth the issue of banning abortion again, i.e. denial of one of the basic women’s/human rights, the so called reproductive right, represent a foundation of nationalist projects, in which the state and the church appropriate women’s bodies as their own territory.

“We are calling on our spiritual daughters to give birth to children for the present day, and not to kill them unborn in their wombs, calling that family planning. Nobody should use poverty as justification; children do need a lot of things, but what they need most cannot be bought with money, and that is love and peace within a family” (Patriarch Pavle).

The Serbian Orthodox church does not accept women’s emancipation and equal status in society, but continually opposes them, in the public and media sphere and actively advocates disrespect and violation of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and other laws. In a secular society, which ours is, the boundary between the state and the church should be clearly drawn, and in that manner, patriarchal, traditional and conservative

¹ Slogan from a protest held in Madrid in January 2014, organized because of the intention of the Spanish Government to tighten laws on abortion.

discourse of the church and right wing policies could not even be considered, let alone allowed to conquer (symbolic) spaces of freedoms and rights won, and at the same time to generate hate speech and discrimination of women.

Construction of new conservative ideologies (which is not an exclusive issue of Serbia, but coincides with the growth of the right wing in all of Europe) means:

“the instrumentalization and naturalizations of female identities (both women’s roles and their symbolic representation in the public)

Subjugation of women and their bodies in clear national-creating processes results in two mutually dependent forms of violence against women: highly limited identity in line with patriotic requests (no abortions) for women inside the community, and extreme violence, as in the case of rape (identity re-ploughing of the territory, author’s comment)” (Papić 2001, 22).

“Women are primarily seen as mothers, and in that manner, the norm of female identity is constructed. It is also constructed by pro-birth-rate policies and argumentation for that policy” (Broz 2011), i.e. reinforcing “reproductive capacities” is insisted on (Papić 2001, 21) which in that way contributed to strengthening of *potency* of the national identity. This potential gave women legitimacy of an instrument for renewing community, because reduced to her body, she is a symbol of survival of species and perennial renewal. In this way, women are positioned in the “vaginal zone“, and not as active participants in the social arena, with relevant opinions about political, cultural, economic and social occurrences. “This position of female non-presence in the public sphere is by itself a sign of strong Serbian patriarchal culture and politics. Women are not even discussed in public – except in the natural context of the nation” (Papić 2001, 23). Patriarchal strategy of producing women *susceptible to manipulation* is replaced by a strategy of producing *invisible* women. What and who is omitted, who is favoured, deconstruction of *different levels of inclusion and exclusion (as production power relations)* – are the methodologies upon which the image of an oppressive system (Višnjić, Lončarević 2011, 22) can be built, and their implementation is continuous in the state policy of Serbia.

In the atmosphere of constant political tension, solving deep socio-economic crises and setting a new historical framework, the issue of women’s position is among the last in the political agenda. Actually, we can talk only about insufficiently quick changes related to the women’s position in society, and about the loss of privileges previously gained. Public disqualification of women is conducted precisely by contestation of rights to one’s own body and one’s right to choose and that is a paradigm of conservative, nationalist treatment, but also a value pattern used by the right wing, and it is common in different social systems. In the last few years, the question of abortion was brought back to the Parliaments of Spain, France, and Macedonia,² This is only a confirmation that we live in

² On January 2014, several thousands of people demonstrated in *Paris on the eve of parliamentary discussion about a draft law to facilitate conditions for the termination of pregnancy*. The protest was organized by religious right wing groups and activists against homosexuals. Demonstrations were inspired by legal changes in Spain, where in December 2013, the conservative government, under the pressure of the Catholic church, supported a draft law which bans abortion, except in the cases of rape and mother’s life being endangered by pregnancy. In December 2013, in Strasbourg, right wing and extreme right wing MPs rejected the request for the women in EU to have a universal right to contraception, abortion and artificial insemination.

societies which are deeply traditional and conservative. In the case of Serbia, it is a direct consequence of militarism, wars, the growing influence of the church, and in Europe it is the result of an increased influence of right wing ideologies and presence of conservative parties in Parliaments. This is what we have in common, but there is no concept of a *universal* female experience, and there is neither a unified policy nor *technology of resistance*. “Resistance to instrumentalization can mark the beginning of bringing down the always vital patriarchal system. If each and every one of us gives a subversive feature to her own history and practise, which is mirrored in the constant re-assessment of inner and outer borders” (Višnjić and Miroslavljević 2008, 241), if she builds partnerships and associations related to wanted interventions in the context, then we will build “a feminist approach which is political, and in these countries (of the region, author’s remark) this *has to* mean not only the old motto “personal is political”, but also that feminist is anti-militarist and anti-nationalist” (Zaharijević 2010).

3. THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN RIGHT WING PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS

“Radical right movements, racial, religious or nationalist, most often tend to use women in order to give a human face to their movements, so that it seems that the movement has a humane side. This was confirmed by a research about women in the Ku Klux Klan and fascist Italy. But, this is not necessary. Such interpretations hide a trap. It appears that women are manipulated and used as pendants. But, they are not. They are very autonomous and aware of their actions. Some women can pursue their interests by participating in nationalist and radical right movements.” (Šipić 2011).

Action which is a constant re-assessment and consideration of reality, but also a critique of all the established ways of thinking, including feminist ones, is one of the basic postulates of feminist theory and policy, and it was a paradigm in the process of conquering different rights for advancing the position of women.

Women that appear as active participants in right wing politics, who are present in political parties and in right wing groups, and who advocate re-traditionalization of women’s roles, promote the return of gender oppression and establishing of male supremacy, are not aware that positions from which they speak and the possibility to be present in the public sphere, education, political participation are the rights provided to them by a continuous feminist struggle.

The new approach of the right wing, even of the more extreme type, means “co-opting women in their lines, with even a party which exceeds cultural frames of the mainstream right wing – Jobbik (full name is the Movement for a Better Hungary; Magyarországért Mozgalom) for the European Parliamentary elections in 2009, having a woman on their list. That was Krisztina Morvai, a very successful lawyer with a feminist past” (Begić 2014). Elections for the Polish Parliament for a number of years include female corps. The extreme right wing party National Front of Marine Le Pen on May 25, 2014 won in the European elections with 24.85 percent of votes (they won in front of the centre-right UMP and Socialists of President Hollande) and in the European Parliament they will have 24 out of 74 seats belonging to France. The list of the Croatian Democratic Union in Croatia for the European parliamentary elections also had women representatives, known for their homophobia and sexism, Marijana Petir and Ruža Tomašić. The first woman to be elected the President of

Croatia, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, is also a member of the right wing Croatian Democratic Union. The only female president of a political party at this moment is Sanda Rašković Ivić (Democratic Party of Serbia), known for different misogynistic, nationalist and xenophobic statements in public.³ Recognition of the poor status of women, and the possibility of recruiting them into their own lines, as well as the construction of political subjects of right wing ideologies, were used by right wing parties. Their key political concept is the return of the woman into the private sphere, in which her primary role is wife and mother. Precisely this, socially constructed division between private and public, was the cause of the subordination of women (Pateman 2000). It is without a doubt that the recurring (exclusive) reduction of women to fulfilling their anatomic mission and the role of mother will bring women back to a subordinate position both in the private and in public sphere. On the other hand, the broader trend of including women in radical and extreme right wing parties, shows that these parties “began to use inside the public arena a language which is filtered and acceptable for mainstream environment” (Begić 2014). A similar methodology, in which the presence of women in right wing groups gives “a semblance of normalcy”, is also used by Nazi groups. In Germany, the Neo-Nazi scene is traditionally dominated by men, but lately, right wing and radical meetings tend to include more and more women who share their extreme views. In the book *Girls’ thing! Women in the Neo-Nazi Scene/Mädelsache! Frauen in der Neo-Nazi-Szene* (by Andrea Röpke and Andreas Speit), the authors highlight that “a young mother with children in her arms tends to win hearts of potential new members much more easily than a pumped-up and tattooed bald guy, screaming racist slogans”.⁴

Extreme right wing groups in Serbia began to include young women in their ranks. “Female fellow fighters of right wing ideology” are not visible and loud in public as their male leaders are, but their numbers are growing. They were present for all the almost violent meetings of right wing groups, especially in the Belgrade Republic Square, when members of *Obraz* and *1389* show up for protests staged by *Women in Black*, on the occasions of marking the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. *Women in Black*, an anti-militarist and feminist group, are very often targeted by the far right groups. The latest protest against them was organized by the *Zavetnici* organization, as a sign of support to the former spokesperson of the Ministry of the Interior Counter-Terrorist Unit, Radomir Počuča, who was fired after he called for the lynching of *Women in Black* on his Facebook profile. *Zavetnici* requested a law which would, based on a law of the Russian Federation, which enables non-governmental organizations funded by the Western embassies to be treated as foreign mercenaries (and in their opinion, *Women in Black* are among those). The spokesperson of the *Zavetnici* organization is Milica Đurđević, whose political platform is based on the unification of all the political currents that are opposed to the membership in the European Union (EU) and for keeping Kosovo within Serbia. “We fight for a change in the way the state is ruled – change of authorities and turning to Russia and against the EU membership” (Đurđević 2013).

The utilization of nationalistic, clerofascist discourse, gives legitimacy to women solely via the position of the mother, glorification of war crimes, nationalist ideas and goals, racism and homophobia, all this constitutes the value ideology map of women in

³ Among other things, the claims that Mothers of Srebrenica became a lucrative profession

⁴ <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/nazimajke-zene-u-njemackoj-sve-brojnije-u-ultradesnicarskim-strankama/555592.aspx>, accessed on May 01, 2016

right wings in present-day Serbia. Violence coming from right wing groups does not know gender, it is aimed at women, lesbians, Roma women as well as men, in this world of “rigid patriarchal social structures and rigid patriarchal brains” (Iveković 2001, 25) unprepared for differences, otherness and Others.

The phenomenon of women in right wing politics should be thoroughly studied in order to enable the production of different manners of resistance to their policies, alliances should be established and strategies for fighting right wing extremism. Above all, it is necessary to ban by the Constitution all the extreme right wing organizations; this is the first and essential step.

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“POČNIMO LJUBAV IZ POČETKA”: DESNICA O ŽENAMA, ŽENE U DESNICI, SLUČAJ SRBIJA

Živimo u vremenu militarizma, rastućeg nasilja, sprege države i crkve, dominantnog diskursa nacionalizma, rasizma, tradicionalizma i provincijalizma, kao i jačanja uticaja ultra desničarskih i fašističkih grupa u javnom i medijskom diskursu. Ekstremne desničarske grupe postaju akteri socijalnog i političkog života u Srbiji još tokom devedesetih godina. Zajedno sa razvojem rasizma, ksenofobije i nerazumevanja drugih kultura, desnica je prepoznala potencijal, iskoristila i izgradila simbolički kapital koji žene konstruiše i označava kroz figuru Drugog, kao figuru u kojoj se ogledaju preovlađujući društveni odnosi i ono što joj se obično pripisuje je drugorazredno, nepoželjno, manje vrednovano u vladajućoj/vladajućim ideologijama.

Ključne reči: *ekstremne desničarske grupe, patrijarhat, mizoginija, Srpska pravoslavna crkva.*