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Kosovo War, Feminist politics and Fascism in Serbia

Kosovo crisis is at the heart of the decade long war drama of the late country that used to be called Yugoslavia. The symbolic sign of the scope of immensely shallow (mis)understanding of the dead country's destiny is (for those of us who still remember) today painfully visible in CNN headlines: "War in Yugoslavia".

What "Yugoslavia" the world is talking about today? The trick with people's memory and amnesia is maybe unintentional, but it's no less misleading. The "Yugoslavia" CNN is talking about today is exactly the "phantom Yugoslavia" Milosevic would like us to take it for granted as being still alive and kicking. "Yugoslavia" does not exist any more. Serbia and Montenegro proclaimed themselves as Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, but have never been recognized by UN. Milosevic's Serbo-centric claim to be the only rightful "inheritor" of the former Yugoslavia is yet unfulfilled, as its seat in the UN is still empty.

Even more, the Kosovo war is not at all the war of this self-proclaimed Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but exclusively the war of Milosevic's Serbia. Montenegro is, in an ironic sense, a double collateral civilian victim: by Milosevic's power-system that persists in keeping her puppet-republic status, and by NATO that is bombing Milosevic-controlled military forces in Montenegro.

The series of wars in former Yugoslavia practically started when Milosevic, upon his Stalinist style taking over state-power by taking over Serbian Communist Party in 1987, decided to build up his power-system on machiavellian mutation dynamics of the communist totalitarian principle of "class struggle" into the even more lethal principle of "ethnic struggle", and it based on one basic social *reality-and-power-production* force: feed the antagonisms among people - endless series of antagonisms among Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians: cultural, historical, ethnic, national and racist antagonisms. And, at the same time, claim shamelessly to be the only "true" defender of the "Yugoslavian Idea". It represents itself as non-ideology - as the « natural order of things », a basic/true reality prior to any social act of representation. Its ideological content is well hidden, since it is not represented as the « battle of ideas », but instead, ideas became Blood, Skin, Genes, etc. The

ideology of the Nation's Pre-Sociability produces, therefore, even more totalitarian Regime of the Body: exclusionary politics leads to annihilation of the Other: war, displacement, destruction and death of the Other Body

Furthermore, the principle of "ethnic struggle" is based on politically and culturally constructed *racist* antagonism. Yes, racist first, because "race/ethnicity/nationality" today is, in fact, a political category - an instrument of the "definitive Other" with whom life together is no longer possible. That's the reason why the Kosovo crisis is at the heart of the decade long drama of the late country called Yugoslavia. The destiny of former Yugoslavia was directed towards series of wars when Milosevic started to feed and orient the hatred of Serbians against Albanians as "legitimate" feelings and even as "basic" part of Serbian national identity. When this big, undeniable (as Serbs and Albanians are not of the same "race") hatred was unleashed, the series of "minor" hatreds were imminent, and wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were made possible. Now, the circle of crime came to its starting point.

The series of wars in former Yugoslavia is a series of culturally, politically and military produced hatreds. Milosevic's power-system is based on producing, transforming and handling hatreds to its own ends. Among men, above all. More precisely, wars in former Yugoslavia are a series of ill fated, unsuccessful and deadly revengeful "broken brotherhoods". Tito's Yugoslavia laid all its hopes in multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional federation's vitality on one exclusive identity/difference, *male dominated*, principle: under the slogan "Brotherhood And Unity".

After more than a decade of "brotherly killings and dis-unifications", today is more than obvious that former Yugoslav "brothers" were the easiest decoy and the most effective tool of destructive politics of "ethnic struggle". Encouraging pro-fascist Serbian nationalism, Milosevic (ab)used the Serb's "trauma" under Tito (and their tragic destiny during the World War II) and used it as the most lethal instrument against all other nations. Instead of slowly democratic process of disillusioning Serb's from the Shangri-La of ideological brotherhood and unity, and, especially, of their historical hegemonic position and dispersive location, their waking-up was more like from a "uncontrolled" cultural delirium tremens: since 1987 Serbs didn't know exactly who they are but were absolutely ready to find that out through hating others, or being coldly indifferent to their destiny. The last decade (and even earlier) in Serbia could be defined as specific historical processuality, as the "transition" from the pro-Yugoslav communism into the politically autistic, aggressive, *pro-fascist collectivism*.

That's the reason why, among other things, there have never been significant democratic alternatives to Milosevic's war-politics based on "ethnic struggle" against all. Even the so-called oppositional "men-

leaders" could not help themselves and took part, each to his abilities, in this "I-don't-mind-if-you-are-cleansed" game. The only political subjects in Serbia who dared to challenge this deadly game, since the beginning of wars in 1991, were some (now very much marginalised) women politicians and some feminist and pacifist groups. Belgrade's Women in Black were the only ones who, ever since 1991, raised their voice against the *new culture of normality* - of ignoring, exteriorising, vanishing and hateful eliminating the Others. They were the only ones who cared enough and desperately opposed the masculinist hate-politics of former "brothers" saying: "Bosnian, Albanian, Roma women are our *sisters*".

Now, as the series of wars since 1991 came to Kosovo as its proper "birth place", the pro-fascist collectivization of Serbians under NATO bombs became an overall phenomenon, reaching in its scope further than ever, even among the previously declared democrats, anti-nationalists or pacifists, and therefore, made indifference to the destruction of the Other the most dominant political, cultural, public and private, fact of reality of today's Serbia. The "happy-to-persecute-traitors" new marshal law, promptly introduced to make sure that *fear* will be thoroughly interriorised and will paralyze any significant resistance to the final act of fascisation of the whole public/private world in Serbia, the media legitimated i denial of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, and the explicit "taboo" on, even silent remembering, not to say speaking out loud, that Albanians, rightful citizens of F.R.Y, were being brutally cleansed from Kosovo, and the seductive Serbian narcissism over being (finally) a victim of NATO bombings, shows ever so clearly the real face of all previous wars, of Kosovo war, and of what politically and historically became Serbia today.

The stages in the long process of fascisation of symbolic and material social world in Milosevic's Serbia could be defined as series of multiple structural mutations: from state socialism to state nationalism; from state nationalism to mafia etatism, from mafia etatism to oriental despotism; from oriental despotism to fascisized tyranny. Inevitably, these processes were heavily situated on four identity levels: self-identity, civic/urban identity, gender identity and the identity of the Other. All four identity levels were under extreme turmoil, under systematically violent and (only seemingly) chaotic and uncontrolled barbarization of inner/outer, public/private cultural patterns.

This systematic production of "inevitable barbarity" shows to what extent the wars in ex-Yugoslavia were a result systematic symbolic production of violent representations/narrations before and during the factual violence. The social world in Serbia was systematically constructed as the discourse of excluding the Otherness: the exteriorization of the Other, the erasure of empathy, the denial of tolerance, the amnesia of history of living together. In order to be effective, this over-all practice of negation of the Otherness, and consequently, the tolerated destruction of

the Other Body had to be prepared through a systematic (discursive, symbolic, iconic, etc) cultural production of various levels of reality upon which the *consensus* on fascist politics would arise as specific "culture of normality". In Serbia, some of the very effective features of this fascist culture of normality were legitimated through dominant political/cultural discourse ever since 1988:

- a) all Others are denominated as "impossible": suspicious, treacherous, conspirative against the "Serbianhood", or as the very negation of humanity, an unworthy animal, automatic&obedient collective agent, etc.
- b) the social world went through a systematic transgression of "civilized" taboos and their radical inversion (media produced) into taboos *against* the Otherness - against peace and tolerance, against contacts with the Other Body, against empathy, cross-connections, multi-ethnic friendships; mixed neighborhood, inter-ethnic marriages, individual emotions, etc.
- c) the depersonalization of the social life: the violent collectivity of the Nation, territory, origin, tradition, culture, etc.
- d) women as the unrepresentative Other in one's own nation, and the representative Other and the target of violence of the enemy nation (the over-sexualisation of the other nation; the emasculation of the "warrior's" male body as obedient servant, etc.

To what extent the pro-fascist cultural, political and psychological (public and private) *etat d'esprit* has been dominant in the political life of Serbia for more than the decade, shows the small document, entitled "I Confess" and made by the Center for Cultural Decontamination and Belgrade's Women in Black and in October 1998, on the occasion of the 7th year of their anti-war activity:

**WOMEN IN BLACK AGAINST WAR, Belgrade
7 YEARS OF WOMEN IN BLACK, We Are Still On The Streets
9 October 1991 - 9 October 1998**

I CONFESS:

- to my longtime anti-war activity;
- that I did not agree with the severe beating of people of other ethnicities and nationalities, faiths, race, sexual orientation;
- that I was not present at the ceremonial act of throwing flowers on the tanks headed for Vukovar, 1991 and Prishtina, 1998;
- that I opposed the politics of repression, apartheid, massacres and war of Serbian regime against Albanian population on Kosovo;
- that I fed women and children in refugee camps, schools, churches, mosques;
- that for the entire war I crossed the walls of Balkan ethno-states, because solidarity is the politics that interests me;
- that I understood democracy as support to anti-war activists/friends/sisters: Albanian women, Croat women, Roma women, stateless women;

- that I first challenged the murderers from the state where I live and then those from other states, because I consider this to be responsible political behavior of a woman-citizen;
- that throughout all the seasons of the year I insisted that there be an end to the slaughter, destruction, ethnic cleansing, forced evacuation of people, rape;
- that I took care of others while the patriots took care of themselves.

On 9 October 1998 at 6:30 p.m. on Republic Square we will make visible our non-violent resistance to war

We Are All Women In Black!
Women in Black
Belgrade

This singular document in the form of extraordinary political public/private narration testifies to the complex interplay of the continuity of the violent culture against Otherness in Serbia, and the urgency for exceptional ethical mobilization of the individuals and political subjects. The exclusivity of this document lies in its "discursive loneliness". It is one of the rare public statements that so strongly oppose the culture of exclusion. Moreover, this document transparently shows that the dominant taboo in the political/social life in Serbia is for years the taboo on respecting the Other: the "virtue" is exclusion, and the "crime" is inclusion of the Other. Its discursive loneliness shows the hidden effects of tolerated violence against the Other, and point out to the invisibility of the destruction of the personal and social fabric in Serbia.

Therefore, the expression "I Confess" in the Women in Black's document marks the fundamental inversion of dominant pro-fascist social codes, and at the same time, the articulation of the political sensibility which demands individual responsibility and public counter-action. It shows how the basic intertwining of personal and political/historical in traumatic times could become an articulate feminist political action, although very marginal, but with powerful symbolic potential. It makes us aware that in the times when the culture of violence and exclusion becomes the "legitimate narration" there is exceptional need for the ethical mobilization of the subject, for the continuous self-reflection and self-narration.

The other document, made by Belgrade's Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence during the NATO bombing of F.R.Y, is another example of feminist resistance to the internal fascisation processes in: against the "new" oblivion of the Other and indifference to the fate of Kosovo's Albanians, the "narcissistic homogenization" of many Serbs under NATO bombs, the denial of the organized crime against Kosovo's Albanians before and during the NATO bombing, and the final domination of the *vandalist culture* aggressive towards anything that is taken as foreign, western, un-Orthodox, non-Serb, mixed, civil, civilian, etc. But, above all, this document is not only a testimony of political and psychological effects of the NATO bombing, but evenmore a testimony of the reality under *martial law* promptly introduced the day when the

bombing started, as the structural state's violence aimed to paralyze every possible resistance to its politics of ethnic cleansing.

**Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence
Belgrade**

*Activity Report During the War Time
(from 25 of March - 24th of April 1999)*

ACTIVE SUPPORT IN OVERCOMING FEAR OF WOMEN

After the first night of bombing, 24th of March the law of war was ordered. Fear became the fact of life overnight... the activists of Women's Center decided to start calling women over the phone to ask them how are they, to give them space for overcoming fears. Until this moment, already six years, the work of Autonomous Women's Center was based on ethical principle that implies that the service is give to women when they ask for it, when they call or come to the Center. The fear in the wartime has moved the borders of private and public and therefore we transgressed the principles of work. Every women became a possible client, at least for a moment. Connecting with each other, calling on the phone, asking women how do they feel... became legitimate activities of the Women's Center. Once again, the women's solidarity inspired many women. That is how we started the active telephone support for women in overcoming fear.

Active Phone Counseling

counseling phone work is based on the feminist principles of psychological counseling as well as on the experiences in working with women in fear in the war in Bosnia from the therapists in the Women's Therapy Center Medica Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Fear Counseling Team decided on active calling women for different reasons. First because in the war situations women are less mobile and do not leave their homes often. Second, they feel their homes as the only safe place, most of the times, then, the telephone bill is paid by the Women's Center, which is a very important factor in the times of war when the poverty is increasing and women cannot relax to talk about themselves if they know they cannot pay the bill.

Documenting the Feelings of Fear

Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence, from its foundation in 1993, believes in the anti-war anti-military politics, in multi-nationality as well as in spreading solidarity with women from the other side of the front line. In the present situation Women's Center is documenting feelings of women who are in fear of NATO bombing and entire war situation, as well as feelings of women in Priština and other parts from Kosovo that are going through particular processes of fear, terror and pain.

Documenting Calls

In the first 25 working days, five counselors gave 378 telephone counseling to women from 34 towns in SR Yugoslavia. Statistics of Women's Center show that 232 counseling phone sessions were done with women in Belgrade and others from women in other towns including regions Vojvodina, Sandzak, Montenegro and Kosovo. From all the calls, 87% of calls were initiated in the Center.

Documenting Statements of Fear

The Women's Center is documenting all types of fears and forms in which fear is manifested.. in body, in dreams, in behavior, in thoughts... From the statements it is easy to conclude that life of every women has changed, that emotional states are changing very often during a day, that emotions that are most dominant is the desperation and anxiety as well as tendency to survive and to adapt to the limited conditions of life.

"I am in a horrible fear" "I fear the night" "I am afraid to go out further than the grocery shop" "I don't go out" "I sleep in the house of my friend" "I cannot concentrate" "I am sensitive on all the sounds" "I have fear of mobilization for my brother" "when sirens starts I feel nauseatic" "I have lost 4 kilos, I broke down psychologically" "every night I go to the shelter, I feel bad" "when I see soldiers on the street I shudder" "I feel I dropped out from the tracks, everything changed in my life" "I am worried for my future" "I am constantly on the sleeping pills" "I sleep all dressed up" "children in the shelter are very disturbed" "On my work place men started to drink intensively" "I am nervous" "I am not afraid of death but I am afraid of sudden sounds" "It is killing me that I cannot work anything any more" "My emotional state is changing every hour" "I threw out the TV set, I cannot listen to that language anymore" "neighbors are talking apocalyptic gossips all the time" "I am nervous, I go from the shelter to the flat three times in one night" "I feel like leaving this country forever, it is so nauseate" "new fears are coming"

Documenting Statements About Mechanisms Of Survival

Active role of the Fear Counseling Team of the Women's Center is to support mechanisms of survival in women and their positive experiences. Supporting healthy dimensions of behavior, feelings and thoughts is the main form of the active support of women.

"I am feeling good, I have gone through one war already, I know the rules" "I am concentrated and rational I have enough information" "I feel good, I am supporting other women" "I am cleaning the house all day" "I am walking up and down the town all day" "I spend hours on e-mail" "I have planted many plants" "I am taking my children to the hills" "We are hugging all day" "I am taking sleeping pills, and it works for me"

Documenting Statements Of Women Of Albanian Nationality In Kosovo

The Fear Counseling Team has been calling women and activists in Pristina and on Kosovo actively first two weeks after the beginning of the NATO bombing. The Women of Serbian nationality have stated their fears of bombing, the women of Albanian nationality apart from fears of bombing had much stronger fears of Serbian officials, army and police ("of green, blue and masked men"). After first two weeks many women of Albanian nationality have been forced to leave their homes, as they said, in front of the soldiers who had Machine-guns and spoke Serbian language. After that, with their families they were forced to go to the buses of trains that took them close to the Macedonian border. From Macedonia some of them have called us to tell us that they are alive and healthy and from some of them we heard parts of the humiliation stories and terror they had to go through in the meantime.

"I am terrorized" "strange silence is horrifying me" "we are sitting in the dark every night, I cannot sleep nor eat, but I have coffee and cigarettes" "we don't get out of homes at all, not even during the day" "I don't know what to tell you nor what to think, I am still alive"

Workshops About Feelings

In the first month the Women's center has organized four workshops with the title *How do we feel*. The exchange of negative and positive experience have been of paramount importance for participants to feel they are not alone in their fears and to be supported for their positive feelings.

Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence continues the active telephone support of women and will continue to issue reports and analysis of data obtained.

The Fear Counseling Team:

Biljana Maletin, Bobana Macanovic, Bosiljka Janjusevic, Lepa Mladjenovic, Sandra Tvitic

belgrade, 1 of May 1999
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These examples of feminist political resistance to the inner processes of fascisation of the political life and minds of people, shows to what great extent the "normality" of excluding and eliminating the Other has become the dominant pattern, even the specific *normative* standard of public and private life in Serbia. During the 77 days of NATO bombing in Serbia we were witnessing and going through a new experience of "state of war", which aimed to make each of us individuals interiorize the fear of state's violence and paralyze us in every cell of our bodies. It was the experience of the organized oppression in which violence and fear are so strongly intertwined in many directions, defragmentising and affecting every level of our realities, an atmosphere of the instrumentalist threat of overall terror forcing us towards one very precise goal: auto-fixation only on "our" victimization by NATO bombing. The martial law in Serbia as its primary aims had the paralization of the political resistance, fascisation of "ordinary" people, among them even some 'democrats', and cleansing Albanians from Kosovo.

The two months of the *state of war* in Serbia could be, therefore defined more accurately as the *state of fascism*. Fascism is, in fact, a very *active* process, a co-operation constantly invoked for the normalization of its codes, an untransparent but powerful demand for each and every individual, for each and every political subject, to *share* its norms up to the point of no return when consensus/silence of the annihilation of the Other is reached, and the collaboration becomes "forcefully voluntary" (forcement volontaire).

Belgrade, May 20th-August 5th, 1999

WOMEN IN BLACK AGAINST WAR

Belgrade

7 YEARS OF WOMEN IN BLACK

We are still on the streets

9 October 1991 - 9 October 1998

Republic Square 6:30pm - 7:30pm

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