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Multiculturalism and Social *Otherness*¹

On the one hand, this paper examines the impact of multiculturalism on women's role in society, and on the other, their presence in social and artistic life, the level of autochthonousness and originality, but also that of dependence on general social problems, such as copyright and intellectual freedom protection. Relying on relevant information, the information society requires respect for two fundamental privileges: freedom of information, on the one hand, and protection of personal and social interest, on the other. The role of women in the society, however, and all their life determinants by the same token, as well as their scientific and artistic proclivities, have been paid attention to since the third decade of the XX century. The lack of intellectual freedoms frustrates the existence of quality information society, so in order to protect and defend these rights, declarations, manifests, laws and regulations are defined, supported or opposed by individuals, communities, associations, all of which contributes to the establishment of a value system protecting human rights, amongst which the attitude toward women and their creations is distinctive.

Key words: multiculturalism, gender studies, bibliography, censorship, civil freedoms, copyright

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We pride ourselves on being successful when it comes to erasing national differences, but other differences come to the fore instead, such as economic, political, gender and cultural differences. Cultural differences are more visibly marked than the national ones. Gender differences are not necessarily insurmountable, but social determination, personal and family responsibility, the reproductive role, religious rules, determine a cultural level of expectations connected with gender. Cultural chauvinism and isolationism are more strongly entrenched if, on the one hand, one nation, that is to say, a country, feels more powerful and globally present in diverse spheres of activities, or if, on the other hand, gender inequality is relentlessly maintained. Thus the role of woman in society, and consequently, all the aspects of her existence, scientific and artistic inclinations, have been given prominence since the 1920s.

Global informatics society is based on a systematic perspective, which pays attention to what happens on the margins of society, not just in its developed centre; it is also based on self-education, responsibility in acquiring and applying knowledge, on the ability to anticipate changes. Consequently, this has led to the increased responsibility of both the individual and the group in the processes of copyright protection, freedom of thought and expression and free access to information. Absence of intellectual freedoms has an adverse effect on the quality of informatics society; therefore, in order to protect and secure these rights, declarations, manifestos, laws and regulations are formulated that are either supported or rejected and violated by individuals, communities and associations, all of the above giving rise to establishing a system of values that guarantees human rights, of which the attitude to woman and her creative role determines the position taken by a society and its nation. Recognising this issue as a very “embarrassing and complex one”, Marianna Tax Choldin advocates an all-embracing, well-planned and timely education of all the parties involved in the process of shaping and transfer of information as a basis of every democratic society.

Any kind of generalisation inherently carries the danger of abolishing freedom. Thus, in many legal formulations, progressive proclamations, successful standardisations, there lurk numerous restrictions of civil rights and freedoms. Occasionally, even books with appealing, freedom-loving titles that make an appeal for intellectual freedom actually represent some kind of censorship when it comes to the truth of the matter, and in that way act as a trap for the reader. The positive features of modern society such as the definition and protection of copyright, licensing of various programs and databases, limited access to certain library and archive holdings for the purpose of protecting privacy, often constitute a restriction when it

comes to access to information, and are therefore referred to with a negative connotation in the context of intellectual freedoms.

Daily reports on education in the newspapers, through web presentations or in TV call-in programmes, even when presented, or at least perceived as such by the public, as a balanced, correct and unbiased source of information, in most cases actually only boil down to a parodic realisation of the dictum: "We report, and you believe." Influencing opinions and the inflation of pseudo-events leads to cynicism, which is all the more dangerous because it is very convincing. The Internet has made the media appearing in other cultures and other languages easily accessible, but it has also done away with the traditional system of news authorisation, giving power and legitimacy to unverified information.

At the basis of every daily, newspaper, TV, educational, scientific, political, economic, religious or moral debate, there is an essentially culturological debate.

What sort of influence does multiculturalism have on the role of woman in society? In what way and in what numbers are women involved in social and artistic life, what is the degree of women's independence, but also their dependence on general social problems, among which the most recognisable ones are copyright protection and maintaining intellectual freedom?

Very often censorship is introduced under the auspices of science, or even justified by statistical indicators established through case studies. We gradually accept an idea justified by surveys of many years. Namely, the Association of American Psychologists has decided that the so-called APA standard for bibliographical quotation should contain only the name initial of an author, accompanied by her/his full surname. The reason for this is that it has been established that less credence is given to female authors' works than to those of their male counterparts; in this way, gender difference based on one's name cannot be established anymore. On the one hand, it could be said this is a democratic approach to bibliography, protecting the equality of men and women in quotation analysis systems, but on the other hand, it means insufficient information and admission on the part of society that it is unable to provide real impartiality in science in spite of all the proclamations of gender equality.

Danilo Basta, writing about Slobodan Jovanović, concludes that democracy is “neither a regime of the past, nor a regime of the future, but a regime of the present”.²

The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, discussed and adopted at the General Conference of the UNESCO (33rd session, Paris, 3-21 October 2005), stresses the importance of culture for social cohesion in general, and particularly its potential for the improvement of the role and position of women in society.

Culture set up in opposition to nature, as cultivation of matter and spirit alike, represents the most powerful, most interesting, most rewarding and most enjoyable aspect of our personal and group experience. The awareness of a growing need for education and culture, as opposed to social inequities, religious fanaticism, racial inequalities, has been growing not only in individuals or in teaching, cultural and scientific institutions, but also in the programmes of international organisations and certain governments.

The postmodern localisation of culture within time and space, according to its basic characteristics such as: language, myth, tradition, ritual, customs, morality, habits, laws, art, knowledge, mutual understanding, solidarity, uniqueness in comparison with another cultural community, leads to a division into traditional, modern and national culture as normative communities, based on custom-related formations.

The library is also a custom-related formation. In the very definition of the library, every user is already guaranteed the freedom of religious, political and sexual orientation because the library cannot and should not shut its door to anyone. In spite of that, even in modern society, we still get libraries for women only or men only because of religious teachings; libraries in which parent associations censor the books that their children are allowed to read. And freedom refers, as Kolakowski says, to the situational and spiritual conditions of choice and creation. The main features of modern culture are not electronic, digital libraries anymore. The so-called alternative libraries emerge, which are, in terms of both their conditions and intellectual potential, head and shoulders above the existing privately owned or state-run libraries, which we were taught to respect by preserving peace and quiet and order in them. It might be said that alternative libraries are the result of a lack of finances, of

² Danilo N. Basta, “Slobodan Jovanović kao analitičar totalitarizma”, Književne novine, 1.02.2001, p. 30.

insufficient means; it might well be the case, but they also reflect the freedom of choice, unrestricted by walls, library membership cards; they are multicultural centres.

Alternative libraries are public places, open to everyone, without any membership requirements, without insistence on declaring or recognising one's social affiliation. Nowadays, they are also a consequence of squatting, the anti-globalist movement, particularly developed in South America and Western Europe, which became more widespread through common house movements, even through entire streets being squatted, in which libraries remain alongside theatrical and music troupes. Squatting is mainly a characteristic of the late 20th century and the early 21st century, and it means that poor people rejected by society move into empty buildings and districts, in which socio-cultural centres develop afterwards, such as Golgonoosa in Milan, six apartment buildings in Grenoble, Prestes Maia, a squatted 22-floor skyscraper accommodating 1600 people since 2002 in Sao Paolo; ABC No Rio in Manhattan; the Ernst Kirchweger Haus in Vienna since 1990; army barracks and demolished or abandoned cultural centres in the former Yugoslav republics, for example, Barake in Sarajevo since 2004; Kuglana, Taxi Remont, Tvornica Jedinstvo, Vila Kiseljak in Zagreb; Pekarna since 1994 and Rog since 2006 in Ljubljana; Rebel House, ACT Action and KUDRUC in Serbia. In each of these squatted places there have been plans to have a library besides a bakery, an art gallery, shops providing goods free of charge, a computer centre, a bicycle workshop, a public kitchen, and a vegetable plot. The principles that such communities, always including libraries, have survived on are: no charges, self-sufficiency, solidarity, autonomy, democracy, ecological and vegetarian sustainability, free-of-charge economy and functioning based on the principle that money is worthless and everything is free of charge. Alternative libraries, politically motivated like those on Cuba, located in intellectuals' apartments, are at the disposal of everyone wishing to use them. Traditional ways of communication give way to a modern exchange of opinions, so that infoshops emerge from squatted places, offering alternative publications, especially in the fields of politics and economy, always accompanied by political discussions and music events.

In alternative libraries, dilemmas and quandaries with regard to the question of whether culture is a feature of an ethnic group, a geographical region or a social, religious, political, economic institution, will yield to the interpretation, confirmed here as well, that it is a set of inherited concepts people use in communication.

Interpretation of multiculturalism is also based on two views: according to one, there are static relations between cultures that retain their uniqueness; according to the other, it is a fluid mutual fusion of cultures.

Diverse cultures coexist in multiethnic states, but are not always accessible to everyone, due to a primarily written form of expression which is only characteristic of some of them, or due to a language barrier. Popular culture is declared to be archaic; high culture is declared to be national, universal, taking into consideration its significance and values, its written text being a form of externalisation; mass culture and postmodern life are based on the media and electronic communication as means of conveying meaning, notions, beliefs. The notion of cultures as petrified monoliths no longer applies; cultural borders are blurred and vague, which is contributed to by migrations, transnational communities and diaspora, education and socialisation.

The category of popular culture that is familiar to the public at large is marred by “reality television”, whose imaginary, almost bizarre world is reflected in different cultural, moral and religious contexts, erasing the dividing lines between genres, combining the dramatic, the poetic, the documentary, the fantastic through the fiction of a hidden camera. By giving legitimacy to eavesdropping, control and surveillance, by interfering with other people’s lives and beliefs in a manner that no previous culture made feasible, “reality television” violates all the moral principles of civic life, boosting competition, though not always in a positive way, instead of solidarity, and reaps the benefits in terms of high ratings, popularity and a large profit.

A similar effect is created by making national TV movies and series copying the style of international ones, the style of the predominant culture in a given genre. This approach is not new, but is now perceived in a different manner. Nowadays, this is a result of globalisation. In the 19th century, the method applied in literary translation that foreign names, events, locations were to be Serbianised could be interpreted as the Serbian writers’ need to show their original talent of a creator, not a translator, or, on the other hand, could be interpreted as a need to make popular literature amenable to a small readership through situations and characters they are familiar with. Nevertheless, this practice of making foreign terms sound Serbian was based on assuming authorship in a manner similar to the modern practice, the main difference being in the medium of communication, while the social and

commercial implications pertaining to the respective time periods and circumstances could even be compared.

Culture, be it mass, high or popular culture, is not to yield to numerous exacting requests of the individual and society, is not to be gender motivated, but has to spawn and develop alternative, more or less technologically conventional or advanced projects, which give priority to humanity.

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Мултикултуралност и друштвена *другост*

Са једне стране, у раду се посматра утицај мултикултуралности на улогу жене у друштву, а са друге њена присутност у друштвеном и уметничком животу, степен аутохтоности и оригиналности, али и зависности од општих друштвених проблема, какви су заштита ауторских права и интелектуалне слободе. Почивајући на релевантној информацији, информационо друштво захтева да се поштују две основне привилегије: слобода информисања, с једне, и заштита личног и друштвеног бића и интереса, с друге стране. Улози жене у друштву, пак, а самим тим и свих њених животних одређења, научних и уметничких склоности, поклања се пажња од треће деценије 20. века. Глобално информационо друштво почива на системској перспективи, у којој је важно оно што се дешава и на његовим маргинама, а не само у напредном центру; на самообразовању, одговорности у примању и апликацији знања, антиципирању промена. Отуда су сразмерно повећане одговорност појединца и колектива у процесима заштите ауторства, слободе мишљења и исказивања мишљења и слободе приступа информацијама. Неодстатак интелектуалних слобода нарушава постојање квалитетног информационог друштва, те се у циљу заштите и одбране ових права дефинишу декларације, манифести, закони, прописи, њих подржавају или им се супротстављају и нарушавају их појединци, заједнице, удружења, а све то доприноси успостављању једног вредносног система којим се чувају људска права, међу којима је за једно друштво и народ одређујући однос према жени и њеном стваралаштву.

Кључне речи: мултикултуралност, женске студије, библиографија, цензура, грађанске слободе, ауторско право