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SECULARISM AND IDENTITARIAN ORTHODOXY: TRAJECTORIES OF A GREAT DIVIDE OVER THE NOTION OF THE WEST[1]

Abstract

This paper presents an explorative thesis: it discusses the logic of discursive trajectories of power operations between, on one side, the Serbian Orthodox Church's involvement in politics and its hegemonic identity ideology promulgated by so called traditionalists, and on the other side the secularist politics of identity championed by progressivists who (re)present secularism as an epistemological truth and an analytical category for the interpretation of social life in Serbia as a society on a semi-periphery, i.e. as a society which is 'neither here nor there' in its comparison to the notion and image of the West. It is argued here that in their respective quests to define "the State", to vest it with power of determining public identity, and to shape worldviews of the citizenry in the public arena by defining appropriate and inappropriate scopes of reference, both secularist and identitarian ecclesiastic discourses perpetuate exclusivism in their strategies for advancement of their own worldviews.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church, identitarian Orthodoxy, secularism, societal secularity, the West, politics of identity

Diverse sets of discourses about the role of religion in Serbia and about secularism as a social phenomenon of modernity and, as some claim, a value of truly democratic societies have come to the fore in Serbia as of the beginning of the post-communist crisis. These discourses coincide, intersect, intertwine, negotiate and challenge the discussions about the general course of the 'development' of Serbia upon the fall of communism (colloquially: 'Shall we go East or West?'; 'Are we making the state symbolically fit for the true Serbs only or for all its citizens?'; 'Tradition or Modernity?'; 'Pro-life or Pro-Choice'; 'Familism or Sexual Freedom'; 'Europe or isolation'; 'The SOC as a community of faith vs. the SOC as a guardian of Serbness/srpstvo/ etc.). The quests for directions of the Serbian society initiated social divisions and cleavages between different forces of

society, and facilitated the emergence of new social forces such as far-right extremist groups and political parties, paramilitary organizations, as well as groups inspired by political and nationalist Orthodoxy. Simultaneously, the Serbian political arena was enriched by civil society anti-war groups and networks, anti-nationalist political parties, and circles of public intellectuals and media houses not controlled by the state.

This divide between nationalist groups and antinationalist forces received a label that some believe is relevant to date: "*Prva i Druga Srbija*" (*First and Other Serbia*). Roughly, *Prva Srbija* represents isolationist forces that are seen to wish Serbia to engage in wars and conquer what they see as historical Serbian lands. *Druga Srbija* stands for civil society secularist antinationalist activists, independent media and public intellectuals, and some liberal civic political parties. It is noteworthy here that it is actually *Druga Srbija* which created the notion and image of *Prva Srbija,* i.e. these labels came to being by NGOs activists and opposition politicians in the 1990s. Such labels were a reaction to the overwhelming industry of hatred in Serbian society, which made the opponents of Milošević and his cliques start calling themselves *Druga Srbija*. However, those placed under the *Prva Srbija* label pay no attention to such labels. Instead, the binary divide of patriots/betrayers circulated among the supporters of wars and the inter-ethnic division in former Yugoslavia.[2]

Religion and the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church (here and after the SOC) in society have been regular themes of contention between *progressivists* and *traditionalists*. In this paper I aim to examine performatives[3] of both secularism and identitarian Orthodoxy as political styles of thoughts, i.e. as ideologies competing for control of the public discourse in Serbia yielding the notion of *the West* as the major point of departure for advancing their respective 'agendas' grounded in two oppositional, and inherently exclusive social ontologies. Throughout the paper I argue that *in their respective quests to define "the State", to vest it with the power of determining public identity, and to shape worldviews of the citizenry in the public arena by defining appropriate and inappropriate scopes of reference, both secularist and identitarian ecclesiastic discourses perpetuate exclusivism in their strategies for advancement of their own worldviews.*

Drawing from the legacy of Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, Oliver Roy, Edvard Said[4] (et al.) in this paper I base my arguments on the distinction between *secularism* as politics and a style of thought that generates socio-political identities, and *secularity* as a state of affairs (societal condition). I

also make a distinction between religiosity as an eschatological allegiance and as a basis for social and political self-understanding of collectivity ethnic/national assemblages of imageries. *Identitarian Orthodoxy* and *secularist worldviews* in this paper I read and interpret through a magnifying lense of the concepts of habitus by Pierre Bourdieu[5] as well as through the notion of imagined communities by Benedict Anderson.[6] My analysis and arguments in this paper are based on contemporary ethnographic and anthropological research by Serbian ethno-anthropologists and sociologists as well on my own research (ethnographic participant's observation) in this field.

Secularism and Religiosity: Serbia's Background

In contemporary sociological theory secularity is associated with the process of the fading out of grand narratives as well as the process of differentiation and privatization of beliefs.[7] In secular Europe today, due to increased individualization and privatization of religious affiliations, politics and culture are seen as domains that are independent of any religious influence.[8]

Understandings of secularism and secularity are manifold. Seyla Benhabib writes that at its best secularism "can be understood as the public and manifest neutrality of the state toward all kinds of religious practices, institutionalized through a vigilant removal of sectarian religious symbols, signs, icons, and items of clothing from official public spheres".[9] Olivier Roy argues that secularization is a social phenomenon that requires no political implementation: it comes about when religion ceases to be at the center of human life, even though people still consider themselves believers. Roy writes that *laïcité* as a governmental praxis "is a political choice that defines the place of religion in an authoritarian, legal manner".[10] Roy's definitions may be coming from the French specific political experience since the claim that secularization does not require political implementation may be problematic in the sense that social changes do not take place independently from the modes of governance. Notwithstanding this remark, *laïcité* as a 'French way' of implementing secularism should be taken as an analytical notion that helps understand a specific thicker version of political implementation of secularist norms in a polity, in which case secularity as a name and label can be used for the description of dominant practices of citizenry when it comes to the doctrine, religious observance, and dominant moral ethos.[11] There are

authors that question these alleged 'neutrality' and 'individuality' traits of secularism, and who charge these terms and phenomena with political power. For example, Saba Mahmood argues that secularism is not only a doctrinal separation of the church and the state but also a "rearticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance".[12] Secularism in the understanding of Talal Asad acts as an organizing principle and politics that aims at transcending social particularities for the sake of advancing modern citizenship. Therefore, fading out of the grand narratives, as it is usual to describe the decline in affiliation with churches in the West, has to be distinguished from secularism as a designed (created) politics of societal management (be it of state or non-state origin).[13] In the Serbian case we can trace secularism back to the early 19th century with the introduction of the ideas of Enlightenment into the rebellious society still ruled by the Ottomans. In the second half of the 19th century westernization of the state institutions and public services, and advancement of Western style of education together with the spread of anarchist and socialist ideas among some intellectuals and social activists did contribute to the secularization of society in the form of anti-clericalism.[14] However, secularism in Serbia had differed from secularism as the Western theory and socio-political practices know it. Namely, due to the specific history of the region, i.e. the position and the role of the SOC in ethnic imageries and self-understanding, secularism in the late 19th and first half of the 20th had functioned, or rather has been used, as a tool in societal management without placing the SOC outside the public sphere.[15] To put it simply, the SOC has been present in politics more or less to the extent the state authorities have allowed it to be present.[16] *Laïcité* in its somewhat radical form came with the communists coming to power after WWII, which not only placed religious institutions outside the public sphere but also placed religion and religious narratives and identities fully outside the public discourse.

As I wrote in the introductory remarks, I distinguish secularism from secularity. Charles Taylor makes a distinction between the absence of an ultimate reality in the public sphere, on one side, and the condition in which people do not affiliate with organized religion, and in which God has become just one of many options of people's attachments, on the other side.[17] Kosmin claims that "secularity involves individual actors' personal behavior and identification with secular ideas and traditions as a mode of consciousness".[18] Yet in the Serbian case, I would argue, we cannot strictly speak of secularity in the understanding of these definitions,

i.e. as an absence of an ultimate reality (God as one of the options), or as identification with secular ideas as political ideas since living a life not influenced by an eschatological doctrine or without major reference to God does not mean that people do not think of an ultimate reality or that they subscribe to secular ideas and traditions as modes of consciousness. If we take a look into the ecclesiastical practices of the 'common people' in Serbia in the past two centuries (before and after communism) we might come to the conclusion that there has been a long development of the de-churching of Serbian Orthodox ethnic customs and everyday life, but we might also see a pervasive presence of Orthodoxy as a collection of images through which the people build their narratives of belonging.[19] Having this particular Serbian case in mind, I find that Coleman's definition of secularity fits well here: Coleman sees secularity as a neutral term which "serves as a reference word for domains or aspects of life under direct human control or manipulation without particular regard for any sacred order, that does not assume the eventual demise of the sacred".[20]

Religion is in theory seen as a political fact that influences people's self-understandings and identity politics. Anthony Marx argues that social bonds of religion and faith as a form of identity may provide the basis for national cohesion.[21] Nationalism and religious belief often go together and tend to comprise complex systems of thought whose intricate webs of belief and values require a specific analytical effort at interpretation.[22] Religion, nationalism, ethnicity, and political strategies pertaining to identity mobilization based on religion, nation, and ethnicity provide „a powerful framework for imagining community, and a set of schemas, templates, and metaphors for making sense of the social world".[23] The SOC as an institution historically has been seen as an intricate part of the Serb ethnic consciousness and national ethos.[24] Therefore, Serbian nationalism neither of the past nor of the present can be thoroughly understood without understanding the position of the SOC and institutional Orthodoxy in the imageries of the Serb institutions and ethnic assemblages. Given the perceived role of the SOC as a guardian of Serb national identity, Kunovich's account on the relation that religion may have for creating the basis for national identity might help in the quest for a profound understanding of Serbian nationalism. Claiming that religion as an identity can overlap with national identity (which is true in the case of the Serbs), Kunovich avers that religion can also reinforce other objective and subjective characteristics that promote a common national identity, and has the power to facilitate group mobilization.[25]

Even a glimpse into the wars of the 1990s in the territories of the former Yugoslavia would detect a seamless fusion of Orthodoxy as a collective identity and a mobilization force with nationalist industry designed for the sake of bringing the Serbs together, thereby creating a habitus of ethnic self-understanding and a 'world' of mutuality.[26] What is interesting here is also is that as the SOC claims a more active role in daily politics and the overall management of the state, it becomes more vulnerable to political manipulation by conservative and right-wing political parties, and even by mainstream civic parties that use the SOC for the sake of political gains. [27] On the other hand, the SOC uses this connection with political parties and its privileged position in Serbia's public space together with its *moral* capital to further its own agenda.[28]

Faith as an identity and as a homogenizing factor in Serbia as of the beginning of the 1990s, and as a point of departure for collective imagining and for the creation of a habitus and of a joint 'world' of intra-ethnic understanding has been contrasted, as I mentioned above, with civic, anational, areligious activist groups and intellectual assemblages with strong *secularist* and *laicist* stands that have questioned the very foundations of the discourses on what the Serb collective identity is based upon.[29] A specific resistance with secularist/laicist argumentation has been directed towards the SOC's meddling into governmental affairs and its very presence in the public arena. However, these dissenting voices against nationalism and religious political radicalism often slip into arguing that the SOC (and its doctrine) is a 'backward' institution which prevents the country from modernization and jeopardizes Serbian societal *secularity* and constitutional *laïcité*. Furthermore, the undertones of such discourses view religion as a dogma that should not have a say in a condition of societal modernity. Such assemblages of self-viewed *progessivists* yield a 'world' of *Druga Srbija*, which imagines itself as a 'world' of civility that contrast *Prva Srbija* seen as a remnant of an oppressive past. The notion of the progressive *West* plays a crucial role in the creation of such secularist discourses.

The Church in Serbian Society Today

The SOC is a national, autocephalous, independent Orthodox Church in communion with other Eastern Orthodox Churches, but with a long history of ethnically exclusive church polity.[30] The common perception in Serbia as regards the role of the SOC and Orthodox Christianity in the

historical preservation of the ethnic and national being and existence is that, had not the SOC been there to guard Serbness, people who label themselves as Serbs would have perished. This perception is advanced by the education system (via the Serbian language and literature curriculum, history textbooks, etc.) and the media, and it is overwhelmingly present in the political discourse that shapes Serbian cultural policy.

Censuses and public opinion surveys disclose that more than 90% of the Serbs label themselves as Orthodox, and that they believe in God.[31] This data differs to a great extent from the data from surveys and censuses conducted prior to the fall of the communist regime in former Yugoslavia, a period when SOC's political and social influence was significantly muted.[32] Surveys of religiosity in 1960, 1965, and 1968 carried out by the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade showed that the greatest number of those who declared themselves to be religious, despite the general trends of decline of religiosity, were Catholics and Muslims. In a 1970 homily, Patriarch Germanus lamented: "Our own statistics show that only an insignificant part of Orthodox population welcomes the priest to their homes, reads religious publications, and actively participates in church life."[33] Srđan Vrcan's survey from the 1980s reveals that 62,3 percent of all of his respondents, having identified themselves as Roman Catholics, declared themselves to be personally religious and 31,4 percent were not religious. At the same time 43 percent of all respondents who identified themselves as Moslems declared themselves religious, and 45,3 percent as nonreligious. Only 26.2 percent of all respondents, having identified themselves as Orthodox believers by religious affiliation, considered themselves religious, and 64 percent not so.[34]

However, the SOC was far from inactive during communism. The SOC structures and clergy coalesced with nationalist intellectuals in the quest for the mythmaking and homogenization of the Serbs, which contributed to the revival of institutional Orthodoxy among the Serbs upon the fall of communism. The SOC knew that the best way to attract its nominal followers that went astray from the doctrine was to employ reminders of past suffering should any political crisis in communism occur. Therefore, the SOC was aware that, as its historian Kašanin argued in 1969 at the occasion of 750th anniversary of the SOC autocephaly: religious revival in Serbia would be induced through a revival of ethnic and historical consciousness.[35]

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, the industry of hatred run by the nationalist political parties in former Yugoslav republics paved the way for the shift in identification from a politically unifying, laicist regime towards

a *re-churching* of politics. This *'return' to the roots* (Serbian: *povratak korenima*) simultaneously produced a qualitative change in worldviews of many Serbs, who had, since the end of World War II, either shown little interest in the SOC and/or Orthodoxy or officially disguised their real religious and cultural orientation. In the early 1990s, a significant number of people who never went to church during Communism got baptized, religious wedding ceremonies (almost inexistent in Communism) became very popular and church attendance increased.[36] These represent increases in participation in rituals – decisions which reflect personal identification (like the fact that more than 90% of the Serbs label themselves Orthodox) but in fact say little about the doctrinal strength of the SOC or the influence of Orthodoxy in the practice of the SOC. The question here is, actually: to what extent does Orthodox Christianity shape the worldviews and decisions of the followers of the SOC? No comprehensive exploration of this issue has, to date, been conducted. More general research, however, suggests that most of the SOC followers observe so-called *folk* Orthodoxy (*narodno pravoslavlje*), a phenomena that has more to do with folk customs and traditions than with the Christian doctrine. Furthermore, many people label themselves Orthodox because of the SOC's historical role as a strong ethnic identity marker, a *differentia specifica* distinguishing Serbs from other cognate South Slavic groups. This specificity makes it possible for one to label her/himself Orthodox without actually observing any Christian doctrinal requirement (*culturally Orthodox*).[37]

Serbian sociologist of religion Mirko Blagojević claims that, after the fall of Communism, religion gained more significance in the lives of Serbs both on the level of cultural religiosity as well as on the levels of religious consciousness and ritual practice. That said, Blagojević argues that conventional (doctrinal) religiosity is the weakest link in the Orthodox revival in Serbia.[38] The research findings of Dragoljub Đorđević, another sociologist of religion, also suggest that the vast majority of Serbs who label themselves as Christian Orthodox have little doctrinal knowledge about Orthodoxy, and that most of the rituals practiced by Orthodox Serbs are reduced to repetitive customs, without much thought about their meaning.[39] The work in the early 1990s of anthropologist Dušan Bandić explores *folk Orthodoxy* among the inhabitants of 30 villages throughout Serbia and comes to the conclusion that the vast majority of them knew very little not only about the Christian doctrine, but also had a very little knowledge and understanding of Serbian national myths.[40] Examining these realities, anthropologist Ivica Todorović has produced a

three-fold classification of Orthodox religiosity among the Serbs in Serbia. His approach delineates religious practices that intersect in the Serbian religious context and identifies them as within: *theological-ecclesiastical model* (regular attendance of church services, doctrinal awareness)*, folk Orthodoxy model* (occasional attendance of church services, vague knowledge of the doctrine, Orthodoxy understood as an ethnic identity trait)*,* and/or *alternative model* (influenced by non-Christian ideas, philosophies, lifestyles and spiritual orientations). All three models exist in correlation with each other, and at times they separate from each other, drawing a 'clear line' of demarcation between each other.[41]

There are many ways people observe Orthodox Christianity, and doctrinal *zealotry* differs from parish to parish, and diocese to diocese. The revival of nationalist Orthodoxy in the early 1990s was accompanied by a revival of spiritual doctrinal Orthodoxy, especially among the relatively young population (at the time younger than forty). As theological awareness in observing the Christian doctrine became more prevalent, some of these new or returning believers took an active role in educating themselves in Orthodoxy through books and SOC lectures and religious tourism and worked to develop trans-local networks of believers with strong ties with the clergy (especially monastic clergy) and Serbian monasteries. This resurgence of theological-ecclesiastical Orthodoxy in Serbia, therefore, brought about a somewhat novel theological consciousness among lay Serbs. Even though I find Todorović's classification useful, it does need to be reformulated and broadened. I would here propose that no model of practicing Orthodoxy in Serbia stands just for itself, but that it rather stands in relation or negotiation with other models or ways of being Orthodox. Having this in mind I see four ways of practicing or performing Orthodox self-understanding: folk orthodoxy (narodno pravoslavlje in the understanding of Dušan Bandić), popular orthodoxy (popularno pravoslavlje), doctrinal orthodoxy (doktrinarno pravoslavlje), and political orthodoxy (političko pravolsavlje).

Folk orthodoxy I see as a collective memory of belonging to Orthodoxy not only in ecclesiastical terms but also in terms of performing ethnic culture built upon Orthodox consciousness as a differentia specifica of Serbness. Folk Orthodoxy has to do with folk customs practiced by Serbs which are seen as genuinely Serb in their 'nature', i.e. as something which defines Us as Serbs. Popular orthodoxy is a public performance of Orthodoxy as a differentia specifica of Serbness by public personalities be they politicians, turbo folk stars, theater personalities, writers, journalists, athletes, etc. We see

the popularization of the 'way we do things' in mediatized church weddings, references to religion made by public personalities, publicized visits to churches and monasteries paid by politicians, media personalities making confessions about their religious experiences, etc. Doctrinal orthodoxy refers to lifestyles (beliefs and practices) of theologically informed and observing members of the Serbian Orthodox Church who embrace Orthodoxy as an eschatological identify first and foremost, and to whom ethnic belonging does not necessarily play an important role in their self-understanding. Doctrinally Orthodox people constitute a minority in the Serbian society. As of the end of the 1980s, the SOC and homogenizing discourses on Orthodoxy as a differentia specifica have been used in politics, and have served the purpose of narratives about both Serb historical alterity from neighboring groups and about Serb revival and the need for regaining their strength as a nation and of their statehood. Belonging to Orthodoxy has had many manifestations in politics, some of which have had to do with mere political performatives for the sake of political gains at elections (politicians attending church ceremonies, or political parties introducing the practice of celebrating patron saints of the party, etc.). Those performatives need to be distinguished from what I call political orthodoxy.

In sum, state-incentivized *laïcité* after WWII made a significant number of Serbs detach themselves from the SOC. After the revival of nationalism and national Orthodoxy in the 1980s and 1990s, a "return to our roots" came in significant numbers as many people again began to at least nominally affiliate themselves with the SOC. Nevertheless, non-theologically informed habits, i.e. habits we would nowadays call 'secular' worldviews and practices inherited from the ancestors who lived before communism, many researchers suggest, remain strong, meaning that only a minority of the faithful took a theological position in their beliefs. On the other hand, an imagined community of Serbness with Eastern Orthodoxy as a social identity came to the fore again upon the fall of communism, and has been getting stronger ever since.

Secularist Interventions

Secularist politics and actions to put forward strategies aiming at organizing the state in such a way in which religious doctrine would not have a say have a long history among the Serbs. Historically, political systems in what is now Serbia exhibited somewhat cesaaropapist

tendencies, from the Middle Ages all the way up until the 20th century. The Orthodox Church has usually been the weaker entity in the distribution of political power, often suffering direct meddling of state authorities into ecclesiastical matters. For example, it was only after World War II that the Serbian Orthodox Church could elect its patriarchs free of official state intervention (even though there are records that say that the communist regime paid close attention to SOC internal affairs and did interfere in church politics).[42] When it comes to the question of the doctrinal standing of the SOC among Serbs, it can be said, with some reservations, that at least from early 19th century onwards, Eastern Orthodox doctrine and eschatological narratives have not been as strong as the role of the idea of belonging to Orthodoxy as a collective ethnic identity component. As I discussed in the previous pages, the specific position of the Church in the Ottoman Empire, its minoritarian position in the Habsburg Empire, uneducated citizenry and relatively poorly educated clergy, disenabled doctrinal education of the most of the Serbs, which did contribute to the planting of the seeds of secularity, or at least the de-churching of the everyday life of the Serb people.

As for secularism as a political style of thought in its modern sense, ideas of emancipation from religious doctrines in public affairs came to the territories inhabited by the Serbs relatively early. In the early 19th century Dositej Obradović (+1811), an Orthodox monk, man of letters, and the first minister of education for the Serbs, brought ideas of the Enlightenment to Serbia, and advocated education free of religious doctrine. The ideas of Obradović would prove to be the source of controversies over the role of the Church in Serbian society throughout much of the 19th century. His ideas did, however, prevail in the establishment and organization of the Serbian education system, which acquired a secular outlook.[43] Half a century after Obradović's death, the first socialist ideas were introduced to Serbia by Svetozar Marković, who was influenced by Nikolay Chernyshevsky. Those ideas had strong anti-clerical leanings, and were embraced by a certain number of intellectuals in Serbia at the time, though they did not make their way into mainstream politics. Vasa Pelagić was another socialist utopist activist from the second half of the 19th century whose ideas were anti-clerical.[44] At the turn of centuries (19th/20th) the socialist, anti-nationalist and anti-clerical ideas of Dimitrije Tucović would prove to be the avant-guard for communist activism between the two great wars, as well as after the Communists ascended to power at the end of WWII.[45]

These types of anti-clericalism and its secularist strategies of the late 19th and early 20th century were practiced by political and social forces inspired by the transformative politics of socialist and anarchist internationalist movements for the liberation of the working class (and peasants), and for the elimination of oppressive modes of production and governance. In mainstream politics there were politicians and political parties that were inclined towards political secularity. At the end of WWI the multiethnic state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later named Yugoslavia) did not establish a state religious institution, which opened room for the laicization of political life. Finally, after WWII the communist politics of placing religion outside the public sphere, and even suppressing any sort of visible public activities of religious institutions, advanced secularism as a not to be questioned societal norm.

The fall of communism and the crisis at the beginning of the 1990s, as I discussed above, opened up space for the return of religion into the public sphere (*identitarian Orthodoxy*), which paved the way for the reintroduction of the discussion on political secularism. However, in these renewed discussions about religion and secularism the notion of *the West* acquired a more prominent role. Just as identitarian Orthodoxy has come to represent Serbia's difference form *the West* within nationalist and far right discourses, secularism has come to represent a developmentalist linear *Western* orientated style of thought that posits imagined *West* as a model non modern societies should aspire to. The issue here is not the legitimacy of the critique of the role of the SOC structures in maintaining nationalist homogenization of the Serbs, its production and sustenance of discourses that build walls between the Serbs and their neighboring ethnic groups, the SOC institutional homophobia, and their readiness to forget Christian vows of forgiving and not judging others when, for example, the gay community is in question. The issue is the mode of representation of the SOC in the eyes and discourses of those who claim to be on the avant-garde of modernization, but who in turn are not able to see the strength of hegemony of the notion of the *West* in the discourses they themselves create.

In such discourses, as Talal Asad argued, secularism is believed to bring about transcendence of societal particularities;[46] it is seen as an epistemological tool for judging the stage of development of the society by the intellectual elite, certain politicians, and much of the pro-Western NGO scene. Identitarian positions of those who care about religion and ethnicity are seen as pre-modern and backward, whereas identiratian positions not linked to any particular ethnic/national/linguistic community

and cosmopolitan ways of life are seen as advanced forms of life. What we have here are political formations of modernist subjectivities that cast away 'backward' forms of social organization for the sake of joining the community of the so-called developed and leaving behind the mud of the previous Balkanized existence overwhelmed with false consciousness.

Such politics of imagining Serbia in developmentalist terms incarnates the views that religiosity among the faithful belongs to the past, and that it should have been outgrown for the sake of modernization, a position that is based on an assumption i.e. the idea of a modernity project. State imposed communist secularization is often valued that at times it resembles nostalgic myths that speak of the times when the SOC was not a public figure; those days are imagined as hey days of secularist social ethos, while the religious comeback is seen as flight from modernity, a step back into the 19th century, and corruption of mind that exclusively paved the way to grave war atrocities and human rights violations in the former Yugoslav territories. The SOC is seen as an unreformed institution of the past, which maintains outdated religious practices, and does not keep pace with the modern world. The question here, again, is not if such views are accurate or not since it would difficult to argue against the view that the SOC did take part in the nationalist homogenization of Serbs in the late 1980s to the present day. The question is what mode of alternative representation those views create, and to what extent those views create a hegemonic discourse of power that aims at winning the souls of the citizenry. It would take a long time to analyze the logic of developmentalist discourse in the Serbian secularist arena (academic and socio-political, i.e. NGO activist scene and so called public intellectuals interventions). One could just do a brief analysis of textual and speech interventions of activists from NGOs/independent cultural institutions such as Civic Initiatives, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the Center for Cultural Decontamination, or media such as E-novine, Republika, Peščanik, or look at the activities of a number of Serbian public intellectuals, to see that the subtext of their critique of Orthodoxy both as an institutional and as a political doctrine as well as a kind of collective identity of many contemporary Serbs goes beyond mere criticism of nationalist exclusivity and often slips into exclusivist normativity, which aims at creating desired, abstract secular subjects who either do not subscribe to any eschatological narrative or keep those deeply inside their private lives.[47]

Here I will just briefly enlist a few of the most extreme cases of the secularist developmentalist views on the role of the SOC in Serbian Society:

- In 2007, nine NGOs, one magazine, and one political party publicized their "Manifest on Secularism" as a response to a problematic and discriminatory Law on Churches and Religious Communities. The Manifest read that "the awareness that a secular society is a legacy of the modern age that reaffirms secular values as a necessary precondition of maintaining and strengthening a democratic order based on respect for human rights". The Manifest warned "the public that losing the secular character of the state entails serious consequences on peace, democracy, and human rights, especially women's rights".[48]

- The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia sponsored the publication of an analysis entitled: *What the Serbian Church should (not) be consulted about.* This thorough examination of the SOC's politics of permeating the political sphere and taking part in shaping the worldviews of the population did not manage not to fall into a trap of representing secularism (dubbed a strict absence of religious narratives and religious institutions for the political sphere) as the cure for the alleged clericalization of society. In the introduction of the analysis the authors ask a rhetorical question: "If Serbia wishes to join the EU, is the SOC or any other community allowed to promote anti-European discourse, thereby causing rifts and confusion among its faithful, the citizens of the country"?[49]

- The Anti-Fascist Action, an NGO from Serbia, published the *Critique of the Clericalization of Serbia.* One of the authors in this publication stated that: "Because dehumanisation is one of the most important results of the degenerative influence church has on humans: by preaching a characteristic type as an ideal each believer should aim for, the Church plays its ideological role and thus realizes its function in a class society. Namely, by preaching the mentioned ideals to its believers, the Church practically directs its followers towards one passive-homosexual direction characterized by masochistic attitude and passivity, as the types of behavior that make up the mass-structural basis not only of Christianity but of any other patriarchal religion…..one can observe exceptional similarity between the Orthodox believers and their practice on the one hand and persons with a diagnosis of obsessive neurosis on the other"[50]

- In a discussion chaired by representatives of the Peščanik independent radio show, Biljana Stojković, a biologist, stated that: „Religion is totalitarian. A state that goes down a totalitarian

road automatically gets into a coalition with religion...There is a correlation between the democracy level and diminishing of cognitive ability. Why? Because democracy is based on a rational model of human agency... I do not want to say that religious people are stupid.... But they are less intelligent in an academic sense."[51]

- Vesna Pešić, a politician and considered by some to be a public intellectual, once stated that: „Serbia is dominated by a very backward church, which is the Serbian Orthodox Church. This Church has not said anything new in 600 years. We need to strengthen atheism in our society simply because the dominant church is so conservative that it does not allow us to breathe."[52]

- Atheists of Serbia, an association of citizens, wrote an official letter to the Basketball Union of Serbia, expressing their protest against religious performatives of young basketball players at sporting events (making the sign of the cross, raising a hand with three fingers stretched). The Atheists of Serbia called upon the constitutional definition of Serbia as a secular state in their outcry against, as they put it, the "Orthodoxization" of sports.[53]

The abovementioned Manifest on Secularism aimed at defending secular values without really defining what those values stand for in their own understanding. Furthermore, the Manifest failed to argue for a better understanding of the idea that the failure of societal secularity would jeopardize democratic order, and failed to explain how and why women's rights would be endangered. The Manifest, with all its good intentions, appeared to be a political pamphlet from those who believe they know the formula for successful democracy in which secularism stands as an indispensable and singular legitimate public policy and societal worldview. In a similar tone, the publication sponsored by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights defines not only what the SOC should not be consulted about, but also claims that the SOC should not be allowed to speak against the EU, which is clearly a censorship politics proposed by an organization tasked with the protection of human rights. In a radio show produced by journalists who claim that they wish to see Serbia become an open society, free of discrimination, a scientist brings a view that people believing in God are less intelligent. We see an anti-fascist organization claiming that the faithful dwell in this life in the position of passive homosexuals, which is a comparison that ridicules the lifestyle of those who were once persecuted by the fascist. We also witness a prominent Serbian politician expressing publicly her idea of the need to spread atheism; having in mind

that she is a politician it does appear concerning what strategies she might employ to make people become non-believers. An atheist organization in Serbia urges a sports association to teach their athletes not to express their identities at sporting events, whereas it is ok to write a public letter in which one openly comes out as an atheist. As I said above these are the most extreme cases; however they have remained uncontested by those who represent themselves as *progressive* pro-open society activists. What we see is an incarnation of a habitus of mutuality dwelled by those who see themselves on the opposite from the majority who employ secularism in developmentalist terms with the aim of advancing Serbia's journey towards modernity. These *progressivists* produce narratives of belonging to the 'world' of *Druga Srbija*, as alternative space of those who contest what they see as social backwardness of *Prva Srbija.* In those narratives the notion of *the West* for the most part plays the role of a major socio-political as well as cultural reference.

Concluding Remarks

As I discussed above, contemporary controversies and political discussions in Serbia related to the meddling of the SOC into Serbian politics revolve around the binary *modern-traditional* divide, which uses the imagined and essentialist *West* as a reference in the creation of "pro-modern" or "pro-tradition" discourses, thereby simultaneously creating both *Us* and *Them*, *the True Serbs* and *the Serb Westerners,* i.e. the *progressivist* and the *traditionalists. The West* stands as an indispensable entity and cultural norm in social ontologies of *modern-tradition* divide. In the case of *progressivists,* desired social ontology is imagined as *secular* in the 'Western' terms. On the other hand, however, it seems that, apart from the SOC itself, *traditionalists* do not constitute opposition to secularism per se, and that anti-secularism does not fare high on their agenda, if at all (i.e. anti-secularism is not a political ideal of *traditionalists*, nor do they, apart from a few far right organizations, aspire to question constitutional *laïcité* in Serbia). That said notwithstanding, certain *traditionalists* do pave the way to the SOC's challenging of constitutional *laïcité* and societal secularity. Even a brief analysis of political involvement of the SOC would indicate that the SOC does aspire to influence political structures, and does use its "moral authority" to advance its position in society. The opposition to such tendencies comes out through secularist discourses that call for the

modernization of society and the state in Serbia for the sake of integration into the realm of the developed societies and states.

Having the aforementioned insights and specific Serbian experience into account I aver that:

a) In Serbia secularism and *identitarian Orthodoxy* are styles of thought and ideologies that are to be distinguished from quotidian secularity/religiosity;

b) Secularity/ (*volk*) religiosity in Serbia are products of the development of a specific (different from 'Western') historical *volk* - (pseudo) – ecclesiastical 'consciousness' and state incentivized constitutional and public outward political *laïcité* that took place after WWII, and which finalized the de-churching of religious practices of much of the Serbs;

c) Current secularism/identitarian Orthodoxy are discursively shaped political paradigms that in the Serbian case serve as ideological strategies employed with an aim to put forward identity politics to be employed for the creation of desired subjectivities.

The image and resonance of the SOC comes out of a hegemonic regime of self-representation that aims at homogenizing the worldviews of 'ethnically conscious' Serbs. Likewise, secularism promoted by *progressivists* in Serbia stems from a regime of power in which the powerful are able to validate and impose their own definitions of normality, and draw boundaries aiming at excluding others.

Definitions of normality such regimes of power incarnate put to the fore a defense of privilege either directly or through the operation of codes, or through the norms and rules that may appeal to universalism.[54] These norms in exclusivist versions of secularist/identitarian Orthodoxy discourses bring about oppositional, antagonistic social ontologies of mutually exclusionary *ways of being* which designate "various quotidian acts through which people live their lives" as well as *ways of belonging*, which represent "the realm of cultural representation, ideology, and identity through which people reach out to distant lands or persons through memory, nostalgia, and imagination".[55] The notion of the *West* (memorabilia, nostalgia, and imaginations pertaining to it) operates as a 'distant entity' in both sets of oppositional discourses presented in this paper: either positively, i.e. by remembering imagined times when we were close to it, when we were just like it (or by expressing a wish to get close to it); or negatively, i.e. by recalling the imagined times when we were independent of it, or superior to it.

NOTES

1   I thank New Europe College, Bucharest for hosting and sponsoring this research. I am also grateful to the Harriman Institute, Columbia University and CREES of the University of Kansas for hosting my research stays in New York City and Lawrence respectively.

2   On October the 5th, 2000 after mass-demonstrations throughout Serbia, the regime changed, and Serbia, as it is often iterated in political science scholarly works, took a path towards democracy. After the defeat of the old regime, Serbian political scene opened up a space for different political options which did exist when Milošević and his Socialist Party were in power, but their ideological foundations were not as clearly visible due to the authoritarianism of the regime (the control of the media). Moreover, diverse ideological foundations and political worldviews of the Milošević many opponents were at the time when Milošević was in power in a way put aside, meaning that the regime's opponents coalesced despite internal differences just for the sake of toppling down the power of the Socialist Party. Once Milošević was out of the picture, ideological and differences in political aspirations crawled out, disclosing that open multicultural society and pluralist democracy were not necessarily ideals of certain political actors who claimed that their dream was to see Serbia become a democratic country recovered from opportunist quasi socialism and from the remnants of authoritarian communism. The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) stepped up on the political scene, supported by and supporting certain political actors and political options championed both by those who are in power as well as by those in opposition. Even though Milošević's regime tried and at times succeeded to manipulate with institutional Orthodoxy for the sake of political gains, the SOC did not see the Socialist Party as a true guardian of the Serb national identity, but engaged in an anti-Milošević activism through pulpit sermons of low and mid-profile priests, and through the flirt with Milošević's opponents who had a strong identification with the Serb national heritage, and were socially conservative. Nowadays it seems that, apart from openly anti-clerical Liberal Democrats and ethnic minority parties, almost all major politicians and their parties cautiously act in way which would not offend the SOC. Moreover, it also seems that the politicians in power count on institutional Orthodoxy and the individual representative of the clergy by providing them with concessions in access to political power and in goods (financial support, in kind donations, advancing the visibility of the SOC's doctrinal agenda etc.).

3   Performative here refers to the social performance of the Self, which is "interactional in nature and involving symbolic forms and live bodies, provides a way to constitute meaning and to affirm individual and cultural values". See more at: STERN, C.S, and HENDERSON, B, *Performance Texts and Contexts,* New York, NY and London, 1993, 3.

4   ASAD, T, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity,* Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003; MAHMOOD, S, *Politics of Piety,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004; ROY, O, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, Hurst and Company, London, 2004; SAID, E, *Orientalism,* Vintage, New York, 1979.

5   Habitus: "Structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them". See at: BOURDIEU, P, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977.

6   Imagined community: "The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". See at: ANDERSON, B, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Verso, London, 1991.

7   CASANOVA, J, *Secular Imagineries: Introduction,* International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Vol. 21, No. 1/4, 2008; VOAS, D. and DOEBLER S, *Secularization in Europe: Religious Change between and within Birth Cohorts*, Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe 4 (1), 2011.

8   KOSMIN, B, and KEYSAR, A (Eds), *Secularism and Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives,* Hartford, Institute for Study Secularism in Society and Culture, 2007.

9   BENHABIB, S, *The Return of Political Theology: The Scarf Affair in Comparative Constitutional Perspective in France, Germany, and Turkey,* Philosophy Social Criticism, 36:451, 2010 . 458.

10 ROY, O, *Secularism Confronts Islam,* Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, p. 7-8.

11 Secularity is an important object of analysis in influential works of normative political theorists, and stands for the most part as an indispensable factor in rational deliberation on the common good. For example, Habermas avers that"the constitutional state must not only act neutrally towards worldviews but it must rest on normative foundations which can be justified neutrally towards worldviews - and that means in post-metaphysical [that is, secular] terms". In cases in which citizens use religious narratives in the public sphere they need to "accept that the potential truth contents of religious utterances must be translated into a generally accessible language before they can find their way into the agendas of parliaments, courts, or administrative bodies". See more at: HABERMAS, J, *"The political": The rational meaning of a questionable inheritance of political theology*, In: *The power of religion in the public sphere*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 15-33.

12 MAHMOOD, S, op.cit. p. 65.

[13] In post WWII Yugoslavia secularism was perceived and taken for granted as an epistemological category for scientific socialism and as a politics around which state identity politics revolved. With an aim of creating a common social identity and a supra-ethnic communist ethos new state rulers after the WWII proclaimed God dead, and pursued a politics of secular development towards a society of equals. For that reason the socialist state established institutional *laïcité* and provided incentives and designed policies for the purpose of sewing secularism into the social fabric of the society to serve as grounds for the novel ethos of a socialist future.

[14] PEROVIĆ, L, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka: Prilog istoriji socijalističke misli,* Službeni glasnik SRJ, 1995.

[15] RADIĆ, R, *Verska elita i modernizacija-teškoće pronalaženja odgovora*, In: *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. Veka*: Uloga elita, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Belgrade, 2003, p.153-191.

[16] See: FALINA, M, *Pyrric Victory: East Orthodox Christianity, Politics and Serbian Nationalism in the Interwar Period.* A dissertation in history submitted to and accepted by the Central European University in Budapest, 2011; For contemporary situation see: BUCHENAU, K, *Orthodox Values and Modern Necessities: Serbian Orthodox Clergy and Laypeople on Democracy, Human Rights, Transition and Globalization,* In: *Civic and Uncivic Values*: *Serbia in the Post-Milošević Era*, CEU Press, 2011.

[17] TAYLOR, C, *A Secular Age,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2007.

[18] KOSMIN, B, op.cit. p.1.

[19] ČALIĆ, M. Ž, *Socijalna istorija Srbije* 1815-1941, Clio, Belgrade, 2004.

[20] COLEMAN, J, *The Secular: A Sociological View,* 1990, p. 18.

[21] MARX, A, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

[22] LANE, J.E. and ERRSON S, *Politics and Society in Western Europe,* Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1999.

[23] BRUBAKER, R, *Religion and nationalism: Four Approaches,* In: *Nations and Nationalism 18/1,* 2012, p. 2-20.

[24] Serbia is a small, economically developing country in Southeast Europe, struggling to become part of the European Union, while carrying a huge luggage of problems related to its relatively recent past (communism, dictatorship and the war in the 1990s, the loss of a part of territory-Kosovo), and symbolically divided around the issues of the past, present and future. In the beginning 1990s Serbia as a society swam out of a supranational federation, frustrated for not being able to maintain control over the Yugoslav federation, economically and politically shattered, engaged in wars against populations of its neighboring countries, trapped in narratives of historical victimhood, and ruled by an authoritarian opportunist nationalist who tried to pass of as a socialist (regime run by Slobodan Milošević). Destruction of old social capital together with insecurity of learnt cultural solution to

social dilemmas has paved the way to the quest for new solutions within a changing setting of power. In this quest for new solidarities people may turn to radical solution to their problems.

[25] KUNOVICH, R, *An exploration of the salience of Christianity for national identity in Europe*, Sociological Perspectives 49.4, 2006.

[26] TODOROVIĆ, I, *Rezultati savremenih istraživanja narodne religije Srba-opšti presek*, Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU, LVI, Beograd, 2008; RAKOVIĆ, S, *In the Haze of Serbian Orthodoxy: 'Conversion' to the Ancestral Faith and Falling from the Church: Four Formerly Devout-to-Church Christians Speak*, Anthropology of East Europe Review Vol. 30,No. 2, Bloomington, 2012.

[27] POPOV, N, op.cit; RAKOVIĆ, S, op.cit; RADIĆ, R, *Pripadanje bez verovanja i poznavanja*. In: *Novosti iz prošlosti*. Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, Belgrade, 2010.

[28] RAKOVIĆ, S, op. cit.

[29] See: POPOV, N, (Ed.). *Srpska strana rata: trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju*, B92, Beograd, 2002; JANSEN, S, *Antinacionalizam: etnografija otpora u Zagrebu i Beogradu.* Biblioteka XX Vek, Beograd, 2005.

[30] The Serbian Orthodox Church as such came into being only in 1920, after the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (previously Serb inhabited territories were divided into several dioceses, controlled by the Greek Constantinople Patriarchy in Istanbul). The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (name used after 1929) was a multinational and multireligious polity, which did not remain neutral to religion. On the contrary, it in a way went on with the collective identity politics inherited from the Ottoman Empire that ensured the exercise of group rights based on religion under the umbrella of the Ottoman sultan (*millet system*). Instead of the Ottoman sultan the royal families struggled to represent all existing religious groups (even though the royal family was Serb), by granting representative legitimacy to all traditional faith communities. Hence separation of religious institutions and the state existed in a mild form, meaning that officially (only officially) no religion had preference in treatment in the public sphere. Collective identities of different ethnic South Slavic groups maintained to be based on religious affiliation, regardless of one's own religiosity, while in the case of what is today Serbia the SOC has retained its position as an identity institution rather than a community of salvation.

[31] SIMIĆ, P, *Srbija i Evropska unija između nacionalnog i evropskog identiteta.* In. *Religioznost građana Srbije i njihov odnos prema procesu evropskih integracija*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Belgrade, 2011, p. 11.

[32] BLAGOJEVIĆ, M, *O sociološkim kriterijumima religioznosti: Koliko ima (pravoslavnih)vernika danas?,* Filozofija i društvo 1/2009, Belgrade, 2009; BLAGOJEVIĆ, M, *Religiozna Evropa, Rusija i Srbija. Argumenti empirijske evidencije: slučaj Srbije*, Filozofija i društvo 3/2008, Belgrade, 2008.

33   Bročić quoted in: PERICA, V, *Balkanski idoli I-II.* XX vek, Belgrade, 2006, p. 50.

34   Vrcan quoted in: PERICA, V, *Balkanski idoli I-II.* XX vek, Belgrade, 2006, 50.

35   PERICA, V, op. cit. p. 51.

36   See: BLAGOJEVIĆ, M, op.cit; ĐORĐEVIĆ, D.B, *Religiousness of Serbs at the Beginning of the 21st Century:What is it About?*, In: Revitalization of Religion (Theoretical and Comparative Approaches, YSSS Annual– Year XVI, Niš.

37   See: PAVIĆEVIĆ, A, *Da li su antropolozi dužni da budu nereligiozni ili Prilog proučavanju antrpološkog materijala,* Teme, Niš, 2009; RADULOVIĆ, L, *Hiperprodukcija čuda i čudesnih dela: Značenja narodnih i crkvenih interpretacijai njihov značaj za proces desekularizacije u Srbiji,* Etnoantroploški problemi 7/2, Belgrade, 2012; SINANI, D, *O proučavanjima porodične slave u Srbiji,* Etno-antropološke sveske 18/8, Beograd, 2012.

38   BLAGOJEVIĆ, M, op. cit.

39   ĐORĐEVIĆ, D.B, op. cit.

40   BANDIĆ, D, *Narodno pravoslavlje*, XX vek, Beograd, 2010.

41   TODOROVIĆ, I, op. cit. p. 67.

42   RADIC, R, *Izbor patrijaraha Srpske pravoslavne crkve u XX veku, Rasprave i članci 2009/1,* Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Beograd, 2009, p. 17-36.

43   STOJKOVIĆ, A, *Životni put Dositeja Obradovića: Od šegrta i kaluđera do filozofa i prosvetitelja i Karađorđevog ministra prosvete,*Istorijski muzej Srbije, Beograd, 1989.

44   PEROVIC, L, op. cit.

45   TOMIĆ, Đ. And STOJAKOVIĆ, K, *Iz povijesti jugaslavenske ljevice od početka 19. Stoljeća do izbijanja Drugog svjetskog rata: Skica poglavlja koje nedostaje*, Perspektive 07/2013, Belgade, 2013.

46   ASAD, T, op. cit.

47   See the following links, for example (all accessed in May and June 2014): < http://www.021.rs/Novi-Sad/Vesti/Veronauka-bespostedna-borba-za-decje-duse.html>; <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/tema_sedmice_vjeronauka_u_skolama_srbija/24208039.html> < http://www.sekularizam.org/fundamentalizam-i-rodni-poredak.html> < http://www.e-novine.com/drustvo/87511-Pravoslavlje-kou.html> < http://www.republika.co.rs/444-445/20.html>

48   See at: < http://pescanik.net/2007/10/manifest-o-sekularizmu/>

49   See at: < http://pescanik.net/2005/07/o-cemu-crkva-nemoze-da-se-pita/>

50   See at: < http://www.csi-platforma.org/sites/csi-platforma.org/files/publikacije/kritika-klerikalizacije-srbije.pdf>

51   See at: < http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVTRQ2BofJY>

52   See at: < http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/272939/Vesna-Pesic-SPC-je-retrogradna-treba-da-pojacamo-ateizam-u-drustvu>

53   See at: < http://www.e-novine.com/sport/sport-kosarka/87591-Zatucani-mladi-koarkai.html>

54   SOLOMOS, J, *Race, Multiculturlaism and Difference,* In: *Culture and Citizenship,* Sage Publications, London, 2001, p. 109.

55   On ways of being and ways of belonging see: SCHILLER, N.G, *Transnationality*, *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2007, p. 480.

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