Third World Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 6, 2010, pp 955–970

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Religion, Politics and Gender in the Context of Nation-State Formation: the case of Serbia

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ABSTRACT *This article argues that nationalism has connected religion with secular politics in Serbia but that their rapprochement has been a gradual process. In order to demonstrate the transition from a limited influence of religion on politics to a much tighter relationship between the two, this article discusses the abortion legislation reform and the introduction of religious education in public schools, respectively. It argues that, while illustrative of different types of connection between religion and politics, these two issues had similar implications for gender equality—they produced discourses that recreated and justified patriarchal social norms. After religion gained access to public institutions, its (patriarchal) discourses on gender were considerably empowered. The article points to some tangible evidence of a re-traditionalisation and re-patriarchalisation of gender roles within the domestic realm in Serbia.*

Social life in Serbia during the past 20 years has been marked by radical social change, instability, disintegration of the state and society, conflicts, including armed conflicts, and a deterioration of the living standards and overall quality of life for the majority of the population. The worsening of the living conditions has hit different social groups variously, and feminist scholars have already pointed to the gender-specific negative effects of socioeconomic and political changes throughout the 'transitioning' East and Central Europe.[1]

It has been noted that, because of the increase in poverty, the 'economy of survival' relies heavily on women's unpaid work in the production of goods and services for family consumption. This has a twofold effect on women—it increases their inequality within the family and affects the degree and quality of their participation in the labour force (within the public realm) and in politics. Therefore both the public and domestic realms have become generators of traditional and patriarchal values. Simultaneously public discourses have been subjected to a re-traditionalisation and re-patriarchalisation as well.[2] The re-traditionalisation and re-patriarchalisation of public

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ISSN 0143-6597 print/ISSN 1360-2241 online/10/060955–16

DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2010.502728

discourses were most notable in the processes of national mobilisation and increased de-secularisation of society which, hand in hand, started in Serbia in the late 1980s and peaked during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.

The pace and scope of de-secularisation make the Serbian case particularly interesting. From a highly secularised society, in which religion and religious institutions had been even more marginalised than in other parts of former Yugoslavia, over the course of only two decades Serbia has become a society with high rates of religious identification, while religion and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC)[3], representing the major denomination, have gained a prominent place in public life.[4] Even though the change in the position of religion and the Church occurred in a relatively short time span, their all pervasive presence and influence in society, as my analysis will show, is a result of a gradual process that can be divided into two phases. The first phase of limited influence of religion and the Church spanned the late 1980s to the 1990s; the second phase, marked by a tighter connection between religion and politics, began in 2000, after Slobodan Milošević was toppled and real processes of transformation and democratisation began.[5]

The strength of the relationship between religion and nation(alism), according to Rieffer, is measured by the extent to which religious laws and beliefs are implemented in legislation and governing institutions. She distinguishes 'religious nationalism', in which there is an almost organic relationship between the two, from 'instrumental pious nationalism', in which religion is a supporting element helping to unify a population, and is instrumentalised by national leaders in order to create a cohesive national body.[6]

I argue that in Serbia the 'instrumental pious nationalism' of the 1990s was replaced by a model of 'religious nationalism' after 2000. In order to explain how this shift came about I discuss two seemingly unrelated issues: the abortion debate in the 1990s and the introduction of religious education in public schools in 2001. Both issues were triggered by the Church which, at different times, pushed for an abortion ban and for the introduction of religious education in public schools. The immediate outcome of these efforts was radically different—denoting altered church–state relationships, but the implications for gender equality were similar. I argue that both the anti-abortion campaign and the incorporation of religious education in public schools contributed to the revival and reinforcement of traditional patriarchal values that reduce women's roles to motherhood and nurturing.

In the first part of the article I discuss how religion and politics have become intertwined. I argue that nationalism has been the meeting point between religion and secular politics in Serbia and discuss the role of the SPC within the nation-state project. I point out the centrality of reproduction for the nation-state project, arguing that reproduction is a constitutive element of both gender and nation. Thereby I provide a theoretical framework for the discussion of the abortion debate in the following section. The debate was triggered by the Church in an attempt to influence legislation and restrict access to abortion. Based on the abortion debate and its outcome I argue

that, during the 1990s, religion and the church had limited influence in society. While, on the one hand, the Church could not influence the legislation, religious views reinforcing women's subordination, on the other hand, entered public discourses through this debate, thus affecting women's reproductive rights and overall equality in more subtle ways. Since the change of regime in 2000 the SPC has exercised a more direct influence on public policies and institutions. For my purposes here the introduction of religious education in public schools is significant for two reasons. First, it marks the shift towards 'religious nationalism' and, second, once integrated into public schools' curricula, patriarchal religious discourses legitimating male dominance became aligned with state institutional power.

I do not argue that religion is necessarily oppressive towards women. However, Orthodox Christianity, like other monotheistic religions, promotes complementary gender roles, at best, which implies separation between the private (female) and public (male) realm.[7] Furthermore, within the post-socialist context, religious-cum-national(ist) discourses were instrumental in subverting the ideology of women's emancipation and gender equality developed during state socialism. In the final section, relying on empirical research, I provide some tangible evidence for the revival of traditional patriarchal relations within the domestic realm.

Religion, nationalism and reproduction in Serbia

Nationalism has been the meeting point between secular politics and religion in Serbia. This process of convergence between secular and religious politics was initiated by Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s. However, the relationship between the Church and the political and state realms remained complex for as long as Milošević stayed in power. While utilising Orthodox elements of the Serbian cultural tradition for the purposes of national mobilisation, he always kept the Church and its leadership at arms length. Religious leaders, on the other hand, supported his politics of national mobilisation but at the same time could not forget or forgive Milošević's communist past, his atheism and his insistence on the separation of state and church.

Since Milošević was removed from power in 2000, a much tighter connection has been established between the Church and the state. Throughout both periods, however, the political elites used religion to legitimise their claim to power, while religious communities used nationalism for their own rehabilitation and reaffirmation. Thus, the national(ist) programme as their common project has connected the high ranks of the Church with the centres of political power.[8]

Mainstream scholarship on nationalism often considers religion to be a pre- or anti-modern phenomenon. According to Rieffer, however, by associating nation and nationalism with modernity, and treating modernity as inherently secular, this scholarship has largely neglected the relationship between religion and nationalism. She argues that the role of religion can be particularly important for understanding the origins of nationalism.[9]

Indeed, several factors made religion crucial in the formation of national identities in the Balkans. First, within the Millet system of the Ottoman Empire, all social and legal affairs were handled by religious communities, which gave them considerable power at the local level. As a consequence, the 19th century uprisings were fought on both nationalist and confessional terms. Finally, national centres of newly formed states had to rely on religion to control backward religious areas, which lagged behind as a result of uneven modernisation processes.[10]

Even though the SPC enjoyed the status of state church in the late 19th and early 20th century,[11] it was subordinated to the state and the state often interfered in its affairs. It is important to emphasise that, throughout modern history, the popularity of the SPC rested more in its role as a national than as a religious institution. Like all other religious communities the SPC was marginalised after the Second World War and socialist authorities closely observed and controlled its work. The secularisation of society was broad, widespread and affected rural and urban areas almost equally.[12]

Nevertheless, in the former Yugoslavia nation and religion were tightly entangled. First, religion served as *differentia specifica* among ethnically, culturally and linguistically closely related and hardly distinguishable ethno-national groups. In such a context religious affiliation (or background) and related practices were the only obvious markers of difference between the major, constitutive ethno-national groups. Many surveys conducted in the former Yugoslavia confirmed the overlap between religious and national self-identification.[13]

At the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia religion was implicated in competing nationalisms through the official support that all three major religious institutions (Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim) gave to the project of nation-state formation of their respective ethno-national groups. At the same time religion gained a privileged position in society (openly supported by the state) not because it offered salvation but rather because it was considered an inherent part, a marker, of culture and national identity.[14] Thus, during the wars of the 1990s through which the borders of the newly emerging nation-states were established, 'religious rhetoric was widely used by all sides [and] religious mobilisation was a common enterprise both in the power struggle and on the battlefield'.[15]

An integral part of many nationalist projects is the control of women's reproductive bodies to sustain continuity and 'purity' of the nation. Therefore, according to Yuval-Davis, within nationalist politics of reproduction women are designated as bearers of the collective.[16] Throughout the former Yugoslavia at the time of its disintegration the nationalist politics of reproduction appropriated women's bodies for the purposes of biological survival of individual nations and the preservation of their ethnic 'purity'. In the wars in Bosnia and Croatia women's bodies were additionally ethnicised through rape, which, as an instrument of war, served to define the female body as an ethnic boundary and as the national territory.[17]

Reproduction supports the continuity of individuals, social groups and systems,[18] and is fundamentally associated with the identity of the nation and

the family. On the other side of the same coin is the possibility of discontinuity, which is often utilised for different political purposes.[19] Concerns about low fertility and 'population decline' have a long history in Europe and North America and are often associated with a 'nation's decline'.[20] Throughout post-socialist Eastern Europe not only low fertility but also high abortion rates have symbolised discontinuity and decline of the nation.

Needless to say, the appropriation of women's bodies through pro-natalist and anti-abortion discourses threatens women's reproductive rights and equality. However, in Serbia the abortion debate of the 1990s also appeared to be a forum where old and new political players competed for the hegemonic status of their ideas about gender and nation, and about the individual and society.

At one end of the abortion debate was a vision of a nation-state as the only possible road to modernity, projecting an ethnic, male-based image of the nation, nurtured by women's feminine virtues. Within this nation-state project, 'women [were] simultaneously mythologised as the nation's deepest essence and instrumentalised in their ''natural'' difference—as the nation's life/birth saver/producer'.[21]

At the opposite end of the debate was a feminist vision according to which men and women were equal partners in the project of modernity, and the state would not privilege or marginalise any group. Feminist groups in Serbia have been consistent not only in defending women's rights and gender equality but also in promoting the principles of the liberal democratic state which Serbia certainly was not at that time. The analysis of the abortion debate that I undertake below reveals the true nature of the political system and of the relationship between religion and nation at the time of the debate. It also makes apparent the centrality of reproduction for the nation-state project. Thus, in the anti-abortion campaign of the Serbian Orthodox Church ethical concerns and religious beliefs were put forward only second to the concerns for the biological survival of the nation.

The abortion debate and 'instrumental pious nationalism' of the 1990s

Triggering the anti-abortion campaign in the early 1990s, the SPC endeavoured to regain political and social influence after periods of marginalisation. Even though the SPC ultimately was unable to influence the legislation, the campaign had more subtle effects on women and their rights through the production of discourses which reinforced and justified patriarchal gender stereotypes.

The debate started in 1993 after one of the Orthodox bishops had demanded the abolition of abortions. At the time access to abortion was still regulated by the old, liberal, socialist legislation of 1977. The law granted access to abortion upon request up until the end of the 10th week of gestation and until the end of the 20th week if specific medical, personal or social reasons were met. After the 20th week, abortion was granted only in cases when pregnancy presented a threat to the woman's health or life. The right to

abortion was widely used in Serbia.[22] It was also a symbol of women's emancipation within the official socialist discourse.

Initially, the debate appeared to be a squabble between individual clergy and feminists, who were the first to stand in defence of this important reproductive right. Later on, however, the debate expanded to include many other social actors. The dominant position within the debate was pro-choice. Save for a few exceptions, participants in the debate believed that abortion should remain legal. As a result, the new abortion legislation that was introduced in 1995, while more restrictive compared to that of the old socialist legislation, remained liberal. Abortion remained available upon request within the first trimester of gestation, while a few restrictions were introduced for late-term abortions. It is still one of the most liberal legislations within Europe.

The content and the end result of the abortion debate reveal the still limited space and scope for religious influence in the 1990s. The overwhelming opposition to religious intervention in the realm of reproductive rights can be explained by the fact that religiosity, while on the rise, was primarily about ethno-national identification and not so much about identification with Christian teachings. Further, the government at that time adhered to an atheist ideology and to the socialist legacy concerning reproductive rights; it therefore maintained a pro-choice position. Finally, the relatively strong and anti-nationalist feminist movement supported by many other segments of civil society defied the public intervention of the Church. But, most importantly, while during the 1990s the regime instrumentalised religion and the Church in order to create a cohesive national body and to mobilise the population for its own political aims, it declined to support it on any other issue.[23]

While secular views on abortion remained basically unshaken and the Church failed in its attempt to influence the legislation, the abortion debate nonetheless affected social norms and values, notions of femininity and (models of) behaviour within the family. By reducing womanhood to motherhood, religious-cum-nationalist discourses placed women symbolically back into the private realm and reinforced male dominance in society. Small changes that had been made towards a more symmetrical organisation of gender relations within the family during the socialist period, for example in family organisation, residence patterns, partner relations, etc, could thus be easily reversed. I turn to this point again later in the paper.

The broad public debate on abortion subsided slowly after the mid 1990s, but the Church kept the issue alive in various ways. It has regularly been addressed in religious publications, lectures, Christmas messages. The SPC was also instrumental in launching the pro-life movement in 2007, providing funding and logistic support to a conservative youth organisation, *Dveri*, which started the movement. During the past few years this organisation has produced several video spots promoting the sanctity of life and the idea of abortion as infanticide. They are shown on *Dveri's* internet presentation, on *You Tube* and occasionally during commercial breaks on major TV channels.

The abortion issue has not disappeared from secular discourses either but its coverage has become more sporadic in the media. The topic, however, does not have the dominant status that it used to have in the early 1990s. While secular discourses have remained consistently pro-choice-oriented, they have also taken over some themes that originated within religious anti-abortion discourses.

Present secular discourses on abortion, for example, contain many more references to foetuses than before. Previously direct references to foetuses were almost nonexistent. Lately, however, secular discourses on abortion often contain verbal and visual representations of stages in foetal development, with a focus on the first 10 weeks, the period within which abortion is available upon request. These representations carry an implicit message that abortion is essentially a violent act, which destroys the tiny germ of life. Unlike in Poland (see Heinen and Portet in this issue), however, the word infanticide (*čedomorstvo*) is never explicitly used for abortion outside of religious discourses.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned representation of abortion as infanticide, even without the use of the actual term, has the potential to affect women's experience of abortion, making it more traumatic and emotionally challenging.[24] For reasons that are beyond the scope of this article, abortion experiences for many women used to be void of moral dilemmas or psychological trauma. Recent research evidence, however, suggests that there may be a change in the attitude towards abortion among younger generations of women. In a survey that the feminist organisation Women in Black conducted in 2006 on a representative sample of women, a significant number of respondents under 25 years of age declared that abortion was infanticide, and that they do not approve of it under any circumstances, including rape and incest. Women of older generations in the same survey expressed a radically different opinion.[25] Whether a real generational shift regarding abortion perceptions is underway remains to be explored, as does its consequences.[26] However, the influence of religious views on abortion has certainly been further strengthened by the incorporation of religious education in the public school system. In the next section I point to some other implications that the integration of religious education in public schools has for women and gender equality. Before that, I discuss the political circumstances that brought about this change.

Religion in public schools and 'religious nationalism' of the early 2000s

The introduction of religious education in public schools demonstrates a shift from 'instrumental pious nationalism' towards a model of 'religious nationalism' which occurred after Milošević was removed from power. I argue that the incorporation of religious education in public schools represents a turning point in the church–state relationship in Serbia, opening up space for religion and religious institutions to enter all the pores of social life.

A broad coalition of 19 parties defeated Milošević and his party at both the federal presidential and republican parliamentary elections in September

2000.[27] Since he initially refused to admit defeat, he was ousted from power in massive, peaceful demonstrations on 5 October of the same year. Thereafter a 19-member coalition government was formed in Serbia. The sheer size of the coalition made it rather volatile. On top of this there were deep disagreements among the leading coalition members about pressing social and political issues, the most important among them being: the speed and direction of economic reforms, the processes of European integration, co-operation with The Hague Tribunal, and the Kosovo issue.

Under these circumstances political elites assumed a rather obsequious position *vis-à-vis* the Church and its leadership. Since, according to many surveys, the SPC was the most trusted institution during the 1990s and early 2000s, all politicians and political parties, regardless of their ideological background, were eager to gain the support and approval of religious leaders.[28]

Another source of the Church's mobilising power and political influence has been the Kosovo issue. Serbia lost control over Kosovo after the NATO intervention in 1999 when it became a *de facto* UN protectorate, while *de jure* it remained part of Serbia.[29] In February 2008, however, Kosovo declared independence which, even though recognised by a great number of other states, has not been recognised by Serbia. Different approaches regarding negotiations about the final status of Kosovo notwithstanding, all major political parties insist on preserving the territorial integrity of Serbia, thereby keeping the Kosovo issue unresolved and open to political manipulation.

As long as the Kosovo issue is unresolved, the issue of state borders remains open and, ultimately, the nation-state project unfinished. The nation-state project, as discussed above, gives political significance to the SPC. In addition, the SPC is the only Serbian (national) institution that remained in Kosovo after the NATO intervention and which will remain there regardless of what the final solution for the status of Kosovo is. Therefore the Church would actually be in a position to significantly and constructively contribute to finding the most appropriate solutions to many of the problems faced by the remaining Serbian population in Kosovo. Instead, it mostly and successfully manipulated the Kosovo issue to increase its own public presence and influence. It thus gained access to state institutions—a process which was initiated by the introduction of religious education in public schools.

After a heated public debate religious education was finally introduced in public schools by a governmental regulation published in July 2001. This regulation defined some important elements of the future church–state relationship before any law on religious organisation was even drafted,[30] or the new Constitution put in place. The regulation was passed even though public opinion did not really support it,[31] and despite critiques by the civil sector,[32] scholars, educational practitioners, and professional teacher associations.[33] It seems puzzling at first sight that the late prime minister Đinđić, who played the key role in passing the regulation, ignored public and professional opinion on this matter. He was the president of the centre-left Democratic Party (DS), whose programme subscribes to secularism and the

separation of church and state. However, Đinđić played a pivotal role in another, seemingly unrelated event that happened at about the same time—he delivered Milošević to the Hague Tribunal.

Ever since the new authorities had arrested and imprisoned Milošević in April 2001 on charges of abuse of power and corruption, the Serbian government was under pressure from the international community to extradite him to the Hague Tribunal, where he was facing three indictments related to atrocities carried out during the wars in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. While the majority in Serbia supported Milošević's prosecution on war crime charges, opinions varied regarding his extradition. Both the general public and, more importantly, some members of the ruling coalition were in favour of a domestic trial and strongly opposed extradition.[34] Among them was Vojislav Koštunica,[35] the president of FR Yugoslavia and of the conservative Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS). While Koštunica and Đinđić were the central figures in the coalition that deposed Milošević, once in power they became arch-enemies and engaged in a bitter power struggle. Koštunica, who was known as a religious, even pious person, not only maintained close ties with the high ranks of the SPC but also shared with them many ideological and political views, including opposition to Milošević's extradition. On top of this, according to polls, he was the most respected member of the ruling coalition.[36]

Delivering Milošević to The Hague was a risky political decision, which made Đinđić's position and that of his government and party vulnerable. Therefore the introduction of religious education to public schools was, for him, a pre-emptive damage control measure. The sheer proximity of the two events is more than telling—the regulation on religious education was passed on 27 July 2001; Milošević was delivered on 28 July. Moreover, one of Đinđić's close associates, who held a high post in his government, admitted later that the regulation was a result of political pragmatism. The aim was to appease the religious leadership after Milošević's extradition.[37]

The integration of religious education into the public school system, in addition to being inconsistent with the principle of separation between the church and the state has had many other negative implications, some of them gender-specific.[38] Before the regulation on religious education was passed,[39] many commentators warned that the marginalisation of and discrimination against women inherent to the teachings and instructional model of the Serbian Orthodox Church would spill over to public education. Even the SPC's campaign aimed at the introduction of religious education in public schools was discriminatory against women. For instance, it was argued in religious publications that, unlike girls, boys were interested in universal truths and theoretical knowledge. With such an attitude religious instruction in public schools may discourage girls from pursuing education after the primary and secondary levels, putting them in a disadvantageous position in a society in which the level of education is the most important element of women's socioeconomic mobility.

The most obvious effect of religious instruction in the public school system is the specific construction of gender in textbooks and other instructional

materials. Popular religious literature often contains an explicit model of 'Orthodox womanhood', resting on: unconditional love and sacrifice for others; subservience and modesty; biological and spiritual motherhood.[40] This is the same model as promoted in the anti-abortion campaign, but now its persuasive power had been strengthened. Needless to say, the model belongs to pre-modern and anti-modern conceptions of womanhood. As a matter of fact, religious literature is often openly opposed to and critical about all other models of womanhood, particularly those in which modern women try to successfully combine their multiple roles as mothers, housekeepers and working professionals.[41]

More research is needed, however, in order to explore the real status and effects of religious discursive practices in shaping gender relations within the public system—the first generation of students that had religious instruction completed elementary education in 2009.

'Religious nationalism' strengthened

If pragmatic reasons motivated Đinđić and his government to introduce religious education in public schools, the latter also opened up the institutional structure to the SPC's influence. During the conservative populist government with Vojislav Koštunica as prime minister, however, the Church and the government became natural allies.[42] Ideologically the main parties in the first Koštunica coalition (2004–07[43]) belonged to the populist, conservative field, within which the nation state, religion, church and family play a dominant role.[44] Thus, during this time, the church–state relationship was further fortified. It was, moreover, sanctioned by the Law on Religion and Religious Communities passed in 2006, which follows the model of 'collaborative separation' between these two institutions.

The strong ties that this particular government developed with the SPC produced specific policies regarding women's issues that ranged from neglect to more or less open discrimination. For example, the Constitution, ratified in 2006, stipulates that '*everyone* has the right to decide freely about childbirth' (emphasis added). The designation 'everyone' goes against the established norm in feminist legal theory according to which this right is defined as an exclusive right of women. In addition, this particular article contradicts the Serbian Family law which stipulates that '*women* decide freely about childbirth' (emphasis added). Even if this was an unintentional omission on the part of the writers of the Constitution, it suggests that the government, at the very least, was negligent of women's reproductive rights. Other examples indicate that this was probably more than negligence—the government was actually implementing policies that were inconsistent with already existing reproductive rights but consistent with religious dogma. For instance, the Ministry of Culture was giving financial support to the activities of the pro-life movement, although this support was not long-lasting—it was discontinued after the government's reconstruction in 2007.

An outright discriminatory decision was made by this government in 2008 when it banned a rally planned by Women in Black in order to celebrate the

centennial of the 8 March Chicago Demonstrations (at which women demanded equal political rights). More precisely a necessary police permit was not issued, under the pretext of possible traffic disturbances and endangerment of lives and property. The pretext was more than ironic since, around the same time militant, nationalist youth groups were allowed to publicly protest against Kosovo's declaration of independence—with some of these protests actually turning violent.

In addition, the government did sponsor 8 March centennial celebrations organised by other women's groups. The content of these manifestations, however, was not strictly speaking political—they focused on women's health and domestic violence. Women in Black, on the other hand, are known for their vocal and persistent anti-nationalism and anti-militarism, and for their critique of religion's interference in public life. Thus, it was actually feminist secularism and anti-nationalism that the government did not tolerate after Kosovo had declared its independence.

The change of government after the irregular parliamentary elections in 2008 which brought to power a new minority coalition led by the Democratic Party did not result in a weakening of the public position of the SPC and religion. If anything, the public position of the Church has even been further fortified. Once again power struggles and party politics are shaping the relationship between the Church and the state. By supporting the public presence of religion and the Church, the DS is trying to keep those members of its constituency who in recent years transferred from nationalist parties in order to maintain its leading position. The political power balance remains fragile and the SPC maintains its influence thanks to the still strong presence of conservative, nationalist parties in the parliament. Thus, the influence of religion on state policies has been more or less direct, but always continuous during the past several years.

The Law against Discrimination provides a good example of the direct influence of religion on state politics. The SPC managed to have the Law withdrawn from the parliamentary procedure and to delay its passing for several weeks as a result of the objections it (and other 'traditional' religious communities) expressed against articles on gay rights and religious freedoms. The Church's intervention provoked mass reactions and intensive debates in the media and in the whole of society. NGOs, liberal intellectuals, international organisations and some state officials protested against this intrusion of the Church into the matters of secular politics and legislation. The Law, ultimately, was passed in May 2009 without major changes, but the whole event illustrates well the current constellation of political forces in Serbia. It shows that the Church has the ability to interfere in matters of state politics and to stall reform processes. At the same time it shows that civil society is capable of successfully defending the secular character of the state and of restricting the scope of religious intrusion into social and political life.

The Law on Gender Equality offers another example of a stalled legal reform process under the influence of conservative politics to which the SPC subscribes. It was passed in December 2009, almost four years after the first draft had been written. Serbia thus became the last country in the region to

adopt such a law, even though it was among the first to draft one. However, the Law entered the parliamentary procedure with a delay and underwent many changes along the way as it was being assessed by various ministries. The Law finally entered the parliamentary procedure as one of the pre-conditions that Serbia had to fulfil in order to accede to the *Schengen white list*, which provides visa-free travel to EU countries. Without this precondition the Law would probably still be on hold.

The last two examples, as well as the earlier described case of the abortion legislation, suggest that secular segments within the civil society in which women's organisations have a prominent place, and the EU accession process represent important barriers against the influence of conservative, religious politics in Serbia. The power balance between these competing forces, however, has been rather tight, affecting the pace of reform processes within which women's issues often take a back seat to begin with.

Concluding remarks

The above analysis shows that the state realm in Serbia has determined the scope of religious intervention into secular politics and social life. Milošević opened the door through which religion entered secular politics but kept it ajar, manipulating religion for the purposes of national mobilisation. After he was removed from power, the door was pulled wide open, initially as a consequence of pragmatic politics pursued by the new authorities. With the conservative populist government in power, however, ideological affinity brought secular politics and the Church even closer together. This was the time when, in addition to cultural domination, Orthodoxy earned institutional significance and influence, and the Church greater political and economic power,[45] moving Serbia from 'instrumental pious nationalism' towards a model of 'religious nationalism'. The Church has used its newly gained power to exercise influence in all domains of social life.

There are numerous examples of the encroachment of religion into every pore of social life in Serbia: the introduction of religious education in public schools, priests appointed to the governing boards of public companies, the increased presence of religious content in the media, collective baptism of children in the Centre for Family Housing in a small town, organised by the municipal authorities and Centre officials (with parents' consent), religious ceremonies for the inauguration of municipality leaders, religious services in the army, the establishment of a chapel in the main dormitory of the University of Belgrade, and public celebrations of patron saints (*Slava*) by institutions ranging from government and opposition parties to trade unions and booking and gambling companies. The list goes on.[46]

The overall social influence of the SPC has been marked by its deep seated anti-modernism, political conservatism and anti-reform orientation. The political and social conservatism to which the SPC subscribes has contributed to the revival of traditional, patriarchal values that reduce women's roles to motherhood and nurturing, situating them symbolically within the private

realm and, thus, limiting their opportunities to participate in public and political life.

Representative, country-wide sociological research indicates a return to traditional, patriarchal values and models of behaviour in all aspects of family life in Serbia for the period between the mid 1990s and mid-2000s: from family organisation and residence patterns, to relationships between partners, to child–parent relationships. The re-traditionalisation and re-patriarchalisation of gender roles is most apparent in the area of the domestic division of labour.[47]

In a survey conducted in 2004, on a representative sample of 3639 respondents, 60.5 per cent showed moderate to high patriarchal value orientations.[48] Another survey, conducted in 2003 on a representative sample of 1500 respondents, revealed the practical ramifications of such a value orientation. In almost 70 per cent of households a traditional division of labour existed (women performed most domestic chores); in around 20 per cent there was a transitional division of labour (women perform most, but other household members also participate in domestic chores); while in only one per cent did a modern division of labour prevail (family chores equally divided between the household members).[49] These data represent significant changes compared to the results of similar research conducted more than 10 years earlier, when in 60 per cent of the surveyed households a transitional, in 10 per cent a modern and in only 30 per cent a traditional division of domestic labour existed.[50]

This empirical evidence indicates that religious-cum-nationalist discourses have been successful in undermining not only the socialist ideology of women's emancipation but also the achievements that were made under socialism towards more equitable gender relations.

Having said this, I should add that the post-socialist context in Serbia produced a variety of gender discourses and regimes—both patriarchal and non-patriarchal. This article has revealed a (re)production of patriarchal discourses at the interface between religion and national(ist) politics.

Notes

For helpful information, insightful comments and suggestions I am grateful to Anne Jenichen and Shahra Razavi.

1 See B Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movement in East and Central Europe*, London: Verso, 1993; and S Gal & G Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comaparative-Historical Essay*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

2 See M Blagojević, 'Promena vrednosti i rodni režimi u zemljama u ''tranziciji'': komparativna perspektiva' ['Changing values and gender regimes in countries in ''transition'': comparative perspective'], *Putevi ostvarenja rodne ravnopravnosti i jednakih mogućnosti—od ideje do prakse*, Belgrade: Savet za ravnopravnost polova [Ways to Achieve Gender Equality and Equal Opportunists – Turning Ideas into Practice] Vlade Republike Srbije, OSCE, 2007, pp 87–97; A Milić, 'Uvod' ['Introduction'], in Milić (ed), *Društvena transformacija i strategija društvenih grupa: svakodnevica Srbije na početku trećeg milenijuma* [Transformation and Strategies: Everyday Life in Serbia at the Beginning of the Third Millenium], Belgrade: ISI FF, 2004, pp 7–16; and V Miletić-Stepanović, 'Strategije upravljanja rodnim/ženskim rizicima u Srbiji' ['Strategies of managing gender/women's risks in Serbia'], in Milić, *Društvena transformacija i strategija društvenih grupa*, pp 405–444.

3 The abbreviation comes from the Serbian designation: Srpska pravoslavna crkva.

4 Mirko Blagojević, 'Current religious changes in Serbia and desecularisation', *Filozofija i društvo*, (31)3, 2006, pp 239–257; M Đorđević, *O religiji i ateizmu*, Niš: Gradina/Belgrade: Stručna knjiga, 1990; and M Vukomanović, *Sveto i mnoštvo—izazovi religijskog pluralizma*, Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2001.
5 Milošević held high-ranking political positions and had control over political life in Serbia between 1987 and 2000.
6 BA Rieffer, 'Religion and nationalism: understanding the consequences of a complex relationship', *Ethnicities*, 3(2), 2003, pp 215–242. The third type of nationalism in Rieffer's classification is secular/anti-religious nationalism. Late 19th century Germany and Italy, as well as 18th century France, according to her, provide examples of this type nationalism (p 224).
7 Z Spahić-Šiljak, 'Žene, religija i politika: analiza uticaja intrpretativnih religijski tradicija na angažman žena u javnom životu u BiH: Judaizam, Kršćanstvo, Islam' ['Women, religion and politics: analysis of the interpretative religious traditions on women's engagement in public life in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Judaism, Christianity and Islam'], doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia, 2007.
8 S Barišić, 'Uloga države u zaštiti verskih sloboda' ['The role of the state in religious rights protection'], *Nova srpska politička misao*, 1, 2007, pp 11–23.
9 Rieffer, 'Religion and nationalism', p 224.
10 N Loizides, *Religion and Nationalism in the Balkans*, Cambridge, MA: Kakalis Program on South East Europe, Harvard University, 2000, at www.hks.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW2/Loizides.PDF.
11 The modern history of Serbia begins with the popular uprisings against Ottoman rule in the early 19th century. Serbia gained the status of an autonomous province in 1817, independent principality and kingdom in 1878. The SPC was granted the status of the state Church for the first time by the Constitution of 1869. However, the SPC lost much of its privileged status and had to accommodate to religious pluralism in 1918 when the first Yugoslavia was established.
12 S Marković, 'Srpska pravoslavna crkva u Srbiji i država' ['Serbian orthodox church in Serbia and the state'], *Vera-znanje-mir* [Faith–Knowledge–Peace], Belgrade: Beogradska otvorena škola, 2005, p163; and Blagojević, 'Current religious changes in Serbia and desecularisation', p 251.
13 N Dugandžija, *Religija i nacija u zagrebačkoj regiji* [Religion and the Nature of Religion in Zagreb], Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1986; S Vrcan, *Od krize religije ka religiji krize* [From the Crisis of Religion towards the Religion of Crisis], Zagreb: Školska knjiga 1986; and D Marinović Jerolimov & S Zrinščak, 'Religion within and beyond borders: the case of Croatia', *Social Compass*, 53, 2006, pp 279–290.
14 S Vrcan, quoted in O Karabeg, 'Zajedno na Oltaru i na tronu' ['Together at the altar and on the throne'], *Zarez*, 139, 2004, p 7.
15 M Falina, 'Svetosavlje: a case study in the nationalisation of religion', *Schweitzerische Zeitschrift für Religions-und Kulturgeschichte*, 101, 2007, p 509.
16 N Yuval-Davis, 'Women and the biological reproduction of ''the nation'', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 191(2), 1996, pp 17–24.
17 D Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. See also J Benderly, 'Rape, feminism and nationalism in the war in Yugoslav successor states', in LA West (ed), *Feminist Nationalism*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp 59–72; R Hayden, 'Rape and rape avoidance in ethno-national conflicts: sexual violence in liminalized states', *American Anthropologist*, 102(1), 2000, pp 7–41; and J Mostov, 'Our women/their women—symbolic boundaries, territorial markers and violence in the Balkans', *Peace and Change*, (20)4, 1995, pp 515–529, among others.
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21 Ž Papić, 'Europe after 1989: ethnic wars, the fascitization of civil society and body politics in Serbia', in G Griffin & R Braidotti (eds), *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, London: Zed Books, 2002, p 128.
22 On high abortion rates and their multiple usages in Serbia, see M Rašević, *Ka razumevanju abortusa u Srbiji* [Towards an Understanding of Abortion in Serbia], Belgrade: Centar za demografska istraživanja, 1993.
23 For a detailed analysis of the abortion debate in Serbia in the 1990s, see R Drezgić, at www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/240884775.
24 See N Antonovski., 'Reproduktivno ponašanje urbane populacije žena došlih na kliniku radi artificijelnog abortusa' ['Reproductive behaviour of urban women who came to have an abortion induced'], *Demografija*, 22(1–4),1984, pp 75–92, M Rašević, Ka razumevanju abortusa v Srbiji.

25 J Stevanović, 'Reproduktivna prava u Srbiji', *Neko je rekao feminizam*? *Kako je feminizam uticao na žene XXI veka*, Belgrade: Žene u crnom, Centra za ženske studije, 2008, pp 83–90.
26 For reasons beyond the scope of this study, many women actually rely on abortion for family planning. See more on this in Rašević, *Ka razumevanju abortusa u Srbiji*; and R Drezgić, 'The politics of abortion and contraception', *Sociologija*, 46(2), 2004, pp 9–114.
27 At the time Milošević was president of the FR Yugoslavia, which was founded in 1992 and made up of Serbia and Montenegro, the two remaining republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 2003 it was transformed into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The Union was dissolved in 2006, after Montenegro had declared independence.
28 See Marković, 'Srpska pravoslavna crkva u Srbiji i država'; Mirko Blagojević, 'Current religious changes in Serbia and desecularisation', and Z Kuburic & M Vukomanovic, 'Religious education: the case of Serbia', *Sociologija*, 47(3), 2005, pp 229–255.
29 See the UN Resolution 1244.
30 See M Vukomanović, *Religija i crkva u transformacijama društva* [Religion and Church within the Processes of Social Transformation], Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, IP Filip Višnjić, 2005, p 119.
31 According to a research one-third of parents from a sample were in favour of the introduction of religious education in public schools; one-third was against it and one-third was either undecided or uninformed. S Gredelj,' Slova i brojke oko veronauke' ['Letters and numbers on religious education'], *Filozofija i društvo*, 19–20, 2002; and S Mihailović,'Vera u veronauku o demokratiji' ['The faith in catechism on democracy'], *Danas*, 29 August 2001. At the same time 80 per cent of the surveyed teachers were against confessional religious education and for the introduction of some form of comparative history of religions. S Todorović, quoted in B Aleksov, 'Religious education in Serbia', *Religion, State and Society*, 32(4), 2004, pp 341–363.
32 A number of organisations from within the civil sector and a few private law offices brought the case against the regulation to the Constitutional Court. The Court, however, confirmed the regulation as being constitutional.
33 Aleksov, 'Religious education in Serbia'.
34 According to surveys, between 40 per cent and 45 per cent of respondents were against the extradition. See *Glas javnosti*, 14 June 2001.
35 Koštunica has been the president of the conservative Democratis Party of Serbia since its formation in 1992.
36 See *Nezavisne novine, Srbija – istraživanje* [Independent Journal, Serbia – Research], at www.novine.ca/arhiva/2001/28_12_01/yu.html.
37 Kuburić & Vukomanović, 'Religious education'.
38 See O Popović-Obradović, 'Crkva, Nacija, Država—Srpska pravoslavna crkva i tranzicija u Srbiji' ['Church, nation, state-Serbian Orthodox Church and transition in Serbia'], in S Zajović (ed), *Pretećі znaci fundamentalizma: feministički odgovori* ['Warning signs of fundamentalism: feminist responses'], Belgrade: Žene u crnom, 2006, pp 53–67; R Radić, 'Crkva i "srpsko pitanje"' ['Church and the "Serbian Question"'], in N Popov (ed), *Srpska strana rata: Trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju* [The Serbian Side of the War: Trauma and Catharsis in Historical Memory], Belgrade: Samizdat, B92, 2002; Aleksov, 'Religious education in Serbia'; and Kuburić & Vukomnović, 'Religious education'.
39 Serbia opted for a confessional, segregated, multi-denominational model covering seven 'traditional' or 'historical' religious communities. Initially confessional religious education was elective but in 2003 it was made mandatory for the first four grades of elementary school and throughout high school, interchangeable with civic education.
40 L Radulović, '"Učenje veri"—konstrukcija rodnih identiteta putem popularizacije pravoslavne teološke literature' ['"Learning religion" – gender identities construction through the popularization of orthodox religious literature'], in D Radojčić (ed), *Tradicionalno i savremeno u kulturi Srba* [Traditional and Modern in Serbian Culture], Belgrade: SANU, 2003, p 40.
41 *Ibid*, p 41.
42 After Đinđić's assassination in 2003, the country was led by an interim government until the 2004 elections.
43 In 2007 the government was reconstructed. It was joined by representatives of the Democratic Party, which undermined the conservative populist hegemony.
44 D Vukomanović, 'Legitimacijska matrica relevantnih političkih partija u Srbiji' ['Legitimation strategies employed by relevant political parties in Serbia'], in Z Lutovac (ed), *Političke stranke u Srbiji: sturktura i funkcionisanje* [Political Parties in Serbia: Structures and Functions], Belgrade: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung/Institut društvenih nauka, 2005, pp 31–59.
45 Blagojević, 'Current religious changes in Serbia and desecularisation'.
46 Women in Black compiled an exhaustive list of examples which is published in *Fundamentalism at Work in Serbia*, Belgrade: Women in Black, 2007.

47 Milić, 'Uvod'.
48 See J Pešić, 'Persistence of traditional value orientations in Serbia', *Sociologija*, 48(4), 2006, pp 289–307. Analysis of *patriarchal* orientation relied on a composite index made of empirical statements: if in marriage one person is employed, it should be the man; most of the housework is naturally a woman's job; women and men should be equal in marriage, but it is best if men have the final say; men should do public and women do private work (p 295).
49 Miletić–Stepanović, 'Strategije upravljanja rodnim/ženskim rizicima u Srbiji', p 418.
50 *Ibid.*

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