

## **ON SOME FORMS OF DESECRATION OF VISUAL SYMBOLS OF THE CULTURE/IDENTITY OF THE SERBIAN PEOPLE IN SERBIA FROM THE 1990S TO DATE**

**Zoran M. Jovanović**

University of Priština temporarily seated in Kosovska Mitrovica, Faculty of Philosophy,  
Department of History of Art, Kosovska Mitrovica, Serbia  
e-mail: zmjovan@sezampro.rs

### **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is a selection of examples of misuse of some of the most famous works of Serbian sacred and secular visual art, dating from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which have been celebrated for their theme/motif as visual symbols of national culture/Serbian identity (Orthodox Christianity). This paper outlines some of the most indicative examples in Serbia between the early 1990s, i.e. since the beginning of the civil-religious war in the disintegrating SFR Yugoslavia, and the present day, which means that such a practice has been in effect for thirty years, confirming that it is not a transient phenomenon, but a process that persists in poisoning the national organism. Some of these works of art, however widely regarded as visual evidence of the history of the Serbian people and their religious affiliation, have fallen victim to various forms of desecration, banalization, and trivialization within mass (quasi) culture, to the point of being recklessly abused to manipulate the Serbian public in the service of a particular idea/ideology, which is why one may call it an offense as much against the work of art and its real meaning as against those for whom the act was intended. Moreover, it is not only an indicator of a disrespectful attitude (of the media and the so-called elite) towards their consumers, since they – understood/used as intellectually blind beings – are also placed in the context of being instigated to various atrocities against the Other, at best to spreading hatred for the Other, which too often leaves individual and collective tragedies in its wake. Some of the works of art discussed, with the peculiarities of the local spirit of the times, were created behind closed doors, and owing to the “spiritual reach” of the spirit of the place, placed in a context that has no related links to their original message/lesson. It seems that such a milieu gave rise to several recent exhibitions, which, under normal circumstances, could also be classified as manifestations with exhibits intended primarily for the fans of the so-called black tourism. In this case, however, both the art and the public were abused as much as the exhibits. *Vis-à-vis* the experience of contemporary art, e.g. in the framework of postmodernism, according to which every work is subject to a new artistic action, in our case this is a process of “long duration” in Braudel’s terms, during which the work of art has been abused/misused in various ways, and even in order to serve certain purposes

that are by no means artistic. Something similar happened with several icons of Serbian nationality, which were desecrated in various ways due to ignorance, but paradoxically through a strong emphasis on religious and/or national identity.

*Key words:* Serbia, visual art, abuse of art, culture, identity

### **Instead of an introduction**

As a member of the Committee for Doctoral Studies at the Department of Sociology of one of the faculties financed from the Serbian state budget, I recently opposed an attempt of plagiarism during the public presentation of a doctoral dissertation initial draft focused on Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the context of its contemporary status and trends. The misuse of Serbian national culture with an accompanying baseless glorification of another Christian confession and an attempt at plagiarism is not solely a characteristic of occasional “school assignments” but a growing trend often seen in the Serbian culture in its broadest sense.

The ideas I am presenting might even be considered superfluous had I not understood the aforementioned dissertation draft as an accurate indicator of everything that burdened Serbia and its residents and which, I will take the liberty to say, only occasionally underwent resolute analyses by the professional public. This is perhaps due to the fact that the publicly announced conclusions drawn from such analyses affected the future status of the analysts and interpreters beyond the confines of their professional guild. This is probably why everything was too often reduced to interpreting the particularities of key social currents in contemporary Serbia as an inevitable consequence of wars and subsequent economic transition, without delving deeper into the causes of the crisis. In other words, there were only sporadic diagnoses that would shed analytical light on at least some of the existing phenomena that persistently and ever more thoroughly undermined the key pillars of society, thus contributing to the defiling of Serbian culture and the deepening of the ethical and educational crisis. This led up to a crisis of religion and the church, in this case within the so-called Serbian Orthodoxy, even though this term, often used affirmatively and with pride, actually means nothing and implies even less. Finally, the crises that are more than apparent to anyone actively seeking truth, excluding the economic crises, include among others the crisis of understanding of the Serbian national idea in visual arts, with an emphasis on the Serbianness of the Orthodox faith, this determinant also being highly debatable.

The aforementioned occurrence is exactly what led me to submit my own draft of a paper, which can be taken as a lament but also, as I would prefer, as an incentive to pay more attention to everything that has been poisoning the reality of Serbia via visual arts. The list of examples of misused visual arts within the so-called persuasive art is much longer. However, one should not neglect the effects of postmodernism, according to which no (artistic) content is privileged nor can it be proclaimed as anachronous or without esthetic value and even blasphemy, and which, importantly, was to play a role in some of the recent social stratifications, resolved by the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This leads to a conclusion that the postmodernist maxim “anything goes” not only jeopardized the fundamental criteria of moral behavior, but also, using skillfully channeled anarchy under the guise of democracy, subverted numerous determinants of a single nation and its future, as well as of the state in which this nation constitutes the

majority. Meanwhile, various crises seem to have become an integral part of the nation's culture and identity, lasting uninterruptedly for over three decades, most likely for the sole benefit of their creators.

### **Selected examples of misuse of visual symbols of the Serbian people's culture/identity in Serbia from the 1990s to date**

The struggle against a variety of deceits and delusions, academic and other forms of dishonesty, as well as against the propagation of pseudohistory to serve quasi-culture and pseudo-identity is what motivated this most succinct presentation of the selected examples. The misused visual art in these examples has marked the last thirty or so years of collective history in Serbia. No matter how cautionary it may sound, this period took almost two periods of coming of age, where art was used as a tool for the aspirations that may be referred to as planned abuse of collective and individual health of a nation. The abuse spread to all forms of visual art, even to the sacred art, which turned quasi-religious and was as such used to shape public opinion.

The examples included in this paper are quite notable and deserving of being studied by various social sciences. I am at the same time also aware that someone might qualify them as striking examples of freedom of opinion and expression, i.e. as indisputable evidence of the democratic nature of a region and its most powerful media. Yet, others might deem these and similar examples not only as misuse but also as a premeditated crime, as misdeeds against one's own people, all for the purpose of channeling the collective attitude in order to defend specific ideas and ideologies, regardless of the price required to achieve that goal. As a rule, such a price is never paid by the persons behind the misuse and their closer or distant relatives.

Some of the examples will potentially reveal how much the ignorance intertwined by prejudice can create a distorted *image of life*, in which art becomes a slave to different regimes and value systems and in which unculturedness and ignorance determine the collective identity. Moreover, that very art sometimes served the new social dissolutions, for instance by abusing in a special manner the altar of one confession and its pilgrims, regardless of the actual quality of their belief, which, admittedly, is too often reduced to a level that has nothing to do with the holy books they refer to, thus also challenging the *slava* (patron saint day celebration) *religiousness*, if I may take the liberty to name the phenomenon that brought nothing but harm, since it marginalized if not completely suppressed religious values.

In fact, the presented examples and those similar to them spawned a witty remark that Americans have Donald Duck while the Orthodox Serbs have the *White Angel*, since this very angel, although painted on a wall of the medieval catholicon at Mileševa Monastery, specifically as a part of gravestone iconography, could be found in places not mentioned in any of the *gospels* – from beer bottle labels, napkins, and fountain pens to restaurants and other public places (Figures 1 [a, b, and c]). One may also find woodcut crosses, as the key visible symbols of Orthodoxy, placed inside the bottles of homemade *rakija*,<sup>1</sup> even though no effects of the cross on the chemical properties of the liquid in which it is submerged have been confirmed, even less so the degree of *theosis* combined with patriotism for those drinking it.

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<sup>1</sup> For this and similar examples, see Jovanović, 2012.



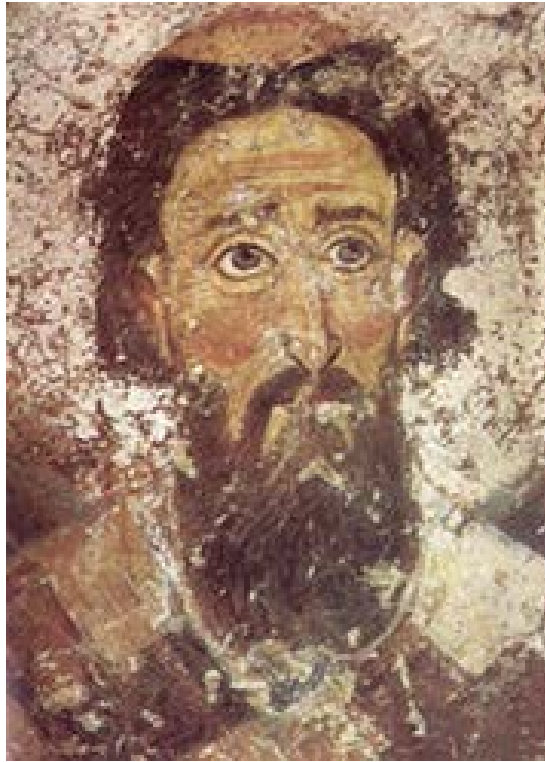
**Figures 1 (a, b, c).** “White Angel” for various occasions and ambiences.

Source: Prodanović, 2006

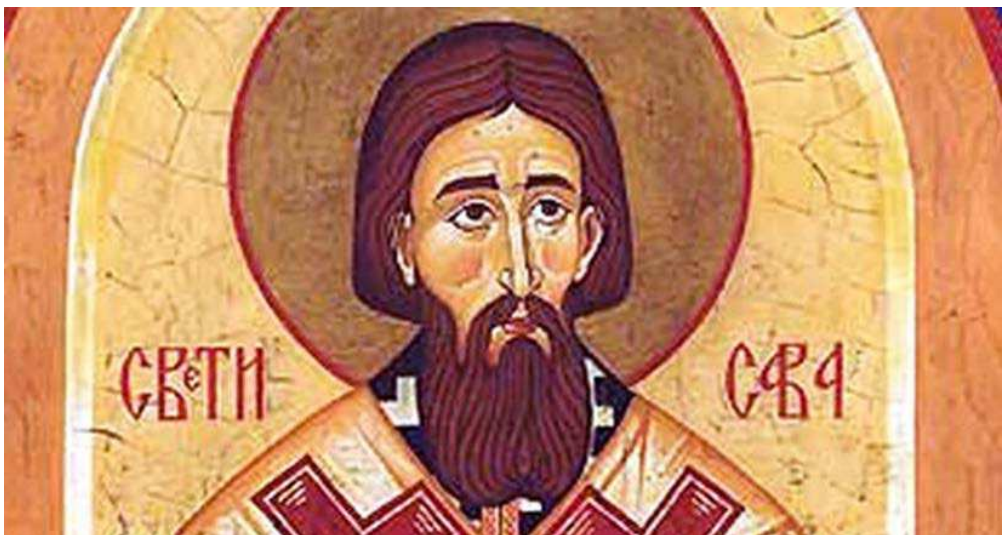
The roots of this practice, and this is purposefully emphasized, began to grow visibly at the time when a priest of the so-called Serbian Church, pressured by hardships, washed off the red and white checkered motifs from the walls of the church in which he served and which was built to resemble medieval Serbian churches, because the motif reminded him of an enemy symbol (Jovanović, 1994). He thus succumbed to the ignorance that led him to his wrongdoing against both the collective heritage and his own church. This all-encompassing set of circumstances initiated the idea of a Serbian brewery to put an image of a traditional *slava* cake with the Serbian Cross (a tetragrammic cross symbol with four fire striker shaped symbols) on their bottle caps, thus sending the message “Srećna slava, domaćine!” (approximately translated as ‘Happy *slava* (patron saint day), head of the household / patriarch!’), and Christmas greeting, transforming the *slava* beer into a Christmas beer, and Serbian on top of that (cf. Naumović, 1994). The idea behind this misuse might even be baser than that. What is certain is that the diverse war against the Other and Otherness became imminent.

This phenomenon occurred a decade or two prior to the recent celebration of St. Sava’s Day, when, during the celebratory event organized by the authorities, the central stage was adorned by the saint’s portrait. However, it was not the one considered to be the authentic portrait of him (Vlahović, 1998), i.e. the one depicting him as he presented himself to the *zographs* (Orthodox church painters) who painted him in the Mileševa catholicon (Figure 2a), but one made more recently (Figures 2 [b, c, and d]). Compared to the original portrait-icon from Mileševa Monastery, other portraits depict St. Sava without his tonsure, which denotes the shaving of a part of the scalp, resembling a wreath, as a traditional Eastern Orthodox rite for novice monks. Tonsure is nowadays ignorantly associated with the Roman Catholic church and its identity (Radojčić, 1975, pp. 19–31; Patrijarh Pavle, 1998, p. 301). Consequently, and based on the fact that tonsure was common among the *Serbian Church* clergy and monastics at least until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the inauthentic portrait of St. Sava gained significance to the detriment of its authentic version probably to avoid any indication that the most distinguished Serbian

saint and educator had a tonsure, which would associate him with the Catholic church, as his older brother Stefan received the royal crown from the papacy, garnering him the title 'First-Crowned'.

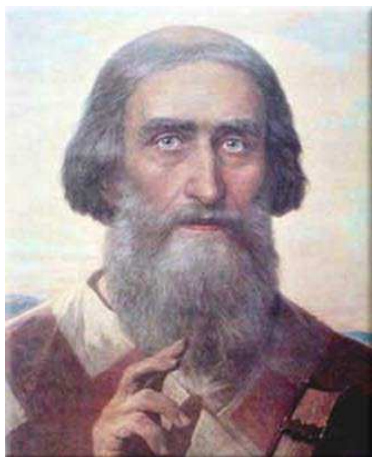


**Figure 2a.** *St. Sava, fresco painting from the Mileševa Monastery catholicon, 13<sup>th</sup> century.* Source: <http://zaduzbine-nemanjica.rs/manastir-Mileseva/index.htm>



**Figure 2b.** *St. Sava.* Source: <http://palankadanas.com/danas-je-sveti-sava-skolska-slava-ne-oblacite-nista-crveno/>





**Figure 2c.** *St. Sava, 20th century.*

Source: <http://www.zaduzbine-nemanjica.rs/Studenica/latinica/Sveti-Sava.htm>



**Figure 2d.** *St. Sava, Wax Museum, Jagodina.* Source: Archives of B.

Cvetković

For now, the question of what led to the offense against not only St. Sava but also the admirers of his life and work will remain unanswered. To make things even more interesting, so far the fact that the location of the temple erected in his honor in the part of Belgrade called *Vračar* is not the site where the Ottomans burned his relics has been obscured for the public (Jovanović, 2017, p. 293). If by all accounts strictly controlled *disinterestedness* in the possibility that the portion of his relics could have been carefully preserved is added to this, (Popović, 1998), at least sociology might offer an answer as to why things are as they are even today. To paraphrase, sociologists are not expected to deal with the visual poetics of the *Mileševa* portrait, the biophysical anthropology of St. Sava, or the St. Sava sculpture in the Wax Museum in Jagodina, but they are expected to focus on the heritage that shapes the present Serbian reality.

It is also worth noting that the Slavs were originally considered to resemble St. Sava in his *Mileševa* portrait, which means of light skin and with ginger hair (Ostrogorski, 1955, p. 29; Vlahović, 1998, p. 315), because it would suggest a change of the visual identity of those who nowadays feel as *genuine* ‘Sorabs’, due to the *dregs of history*, in poetic terms.

Likewise, no one might expect sociology to focus on the particularities of the Belgrade St. Sava temple, although its megalomaniacal size as well as some of its other features are worth examining. In search for these answers, one must also consider the fact that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the more important issue was the confessional provenance of bronze alloys and the sound of the bells of the said temple (Prodanović, 1994, p. 7),<sup>2</sup> which more than resembles an earlier issue concerning the choice of brick, stone, or concrete for the temple construction, initiated between the two world wars and assuming the symbolic significance of the defense of the nation and Orthodoxy (Jovanović, 1998, p. 12), or the collective and individual Serbian culture. Mere mention of this was deemed sinful, if not

<sup>2</sup> That the provenance of the materials is not always the issue is corroborated by the mosaic for the Belgrade Catholicicon, which was recently made of “one and a half tonnes of the most expensive Venetian glass” (Ristić, 2003, p. 16).

even treasonous in term of the national interests. Whoever would question the revised version of reality could be excommunicated altogether instead of only receiving the threatening warning that they should know which altar they serve.

Nevertheless, there were also even more striking examples from the art domain than the ones listed here, and they were once used to incite hatred toward the Other in those who had previously not been filled with it. This is best illustrated by the example from the daily newspaper *Večernje novosti* (The Evening News) from 1994 (*A Painful Reminder*, 1994). It was the time when the paper was one of the more prominent government tools, due to its extensive circulation, involving numerous other actors in addition to editors and journalists, which was also rarely the focus of public attention from experts, in this case the experts who were supposed to analyze the war that media companies were waging against their own readers and viewers.

It was exactly *Večernje novosti* that provided the necessary stimulus; during wartime 1994, they presented the renowned Serbian work of art *Orphan upon His Mother's Grave* as a recently made photograph, even though it was a painting by Uroš Predić from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by the poem "The Frozen Child" by Hungarian poet József Eötvös (Jovanović, 1998, p. 88). In an unsigned article entitled *A Painful Reminder*, *Večernje novosti* first asserted that children are the biggest victims of wars (Figure 3). The same applies, as the article continues, "in the current, most recent war, in which the Serbian people once again fight for their bare survival. The image that went around the world a year and a half ago, from the graveyard in Skelani, in which the little orphan boy mourns on the graves of his father, mother, and the rest of his family killed in a Muslim offensive, still upsets everyone who knows what it is like for a child to suffer. Meanwhile, the boy from the picture was adopted by a family from Zvornik, and he is now a freshman at a military secondary school" (*A Painful Reminder*, 1994).



**Figure 3.** *Večernje novosti*, November 19, 1994.

Source: <https://akovidiskej.wordpress.com/2010/10/01/bolno-podsecanje/>

Even though it would be ethical toward the public for *Večernje novosti* to publish the current status of the orphan boy, the question remains why the supposed photojournalist, the newspaper editors, and all the rest who allowed this crime against art, but primarily a misdeed toward those who lost their families in the latest Balkan war, were not deemed worthy of closer examination within sociology and similar disciplines. This way, everything was reduced to a joke that was supposed to hearten the war-afflicted population, although it was in fact a case of clear instigation of something much worse than the compassion toward a non-existent orphan child. After all, something similar happened when the same newspaper used a doctored photograph on their front page in 2000, in which the people gathered at a political rally were cloned to make it seem as if there had been more of them. This occurrence closed the cycle of the abuse of fine arts, while the consumers were condemned to be treated as passive and ignorant recipients of content without any capability of reasoning.

There were indications of something symptomatic in the media at the time the Orphan was supposed to become the symbol of suffering, with a simultaneous promotion of his joining the army as an incentive for the conscription of *every young man able to walk*. This was confirmed by the information at the time, provided in the magazine called *Zona sumraka* ('Twilight Zone'), whose readers, soon after the publication of the *fate* of the boy from Skelani, were introduced to the *circumstance* of a winged child, named Jovan, who, according to the said source, was taken to the Hilandar Monastery under the protection of the Serbian Orthodox Church immediately after his birth in the small town of Bratunac, current Republic of Srpska. Subsequent generations of *Zona sumraka* staff saw to it that their articles keep lifting the patriotic spirit and 'strengthening' the culture and identity of their readers, this time in the struggle against the new-old enemies. Hence the conclusion of the *Zona sumraka* successor, who asserted, with regard to the winged boy Jovan, that the hatred toward the Serbian people "is not subsiding, so much so that a secret Albanian organization abducted the Serbian angel," commenting that it was done "out of fear that Serbia, with the help of God and the winged Jovan, would exterminate all Shqiptars from Kosovo" (*Albanian Gypsies Abduct the Winged Child*, s.a.).<sup>3</sup>

Incessant warring against one's own people did not stop even after two and a half decades since the last example mentioned above. Instead, it continued following the more or less same pattern. This was confirmed by *Večernje novosti*, in their 2017 article entitled *Hilarious: A Survey from Protest Rally Keeps Serbia in Stitches*.<sup>4</sup> Someone might say that *Novosti* only reposted a TV news clip by one of the most influential media companies in Serbia, whose ratings exceed those of Radio Television Serbia, Serbia's public broadcasting service. The hilarity was found in the use of the name of the author of the painting *Orphan upon His Mother's Grave* and the purpose was to show to the public that the participants in a political rally of a political party from the opposition block were so uninformed that they deserved to be humiliated. This is corroborated by the article's subheading, which states that the current Serbian President coerced Uroš Predić, who died in 1953, to paint a portrait of him, and that Predić even became an aide at the Ministry of Culture, which the surveyed protestors allegedly commented on. Those who are better equipped to perform a more layered analysis of this example, primarily

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<sup>3</sup> For more, see: *Albanian Gypsies Abduct the Winged Child*, s.a.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see: *Hilarious: A Survey from Protest Rally Keeps Serbia in Stitches*, 2017.



sociologists and political scientists, as well as those who deal with the segments of the special war even more profoundly, might interpret this journalistic quip not as intended to smear the political party belonging to the opposition, regardless of how deserving it might have been due to its announced but unaccomplished goals, but rather as an attempt to show the ruling parties' voters how little they differ from the opposition voters.

The epilogue of the supposed hilarity was published by one of the lower-circulation dailies, stating that the presented street survey was most likely edited, because "soon after, the pieces of evidence began to disappear from social networks, the evidence that could reveal that the context in which the questions were asked was, in fact, completely different from the context presented in the news clip broadcast on TV stations supporting the government" (Popović, 2017; cf. Vesić, 2017), and which was reposted and commented on by *Večernje novosti*.

Considering that the true determinants of culture and identity under the Balkan skies were undermined for many decades through the strengthening of various forms of manipulation, pseudo-culture, and quasi-identity, there is another example worth mentioning that could potentially tie all the previous examples together.

Through multiple different threads, this example connects the Battle of Kosovo, when the Serbian and Ottoman armies clashed in the Kosovo field in 1389, to the diverse layers of Serbian daily reality, primarily those layers that are characteristic of Orthodox Serbs. Investigators and interpreters of culture and identity have too often neglected the fact that those who currently feel as belonging to Serbianness but are of different religion are by no means less important than those who constantly display, for instance, the icons/portraits of St. Sava. One should equally remember the fact that there have been many atheists who deserved much more prominence as parts of the Serbian culture and identity than the members of some other communities.

Albeit indirectly, this also concerns the memory culture, another important determinant of culture and identity of a nation, which would not be reduced to the memory that reaches only as far as yesterday's newspaper front pages, or yesterday's primetime TV news by national broadcasters. This context also provides the opportunity to highlight the fact that the Serbian people does not yet possess a list of the disasters they experienced over the last hundred or so years, with a definitive but so far still undetermined number of victims of the creators of the art of killing, political officers, and event curators who, together with their auxiliary staff, promoted such art. Accordingly, this poses a question of whether it is at all possible to speak of a culture and identity of a nation.

Whatever happens, which largely depends on sociologists, who are justifiably expected to steer the social currents using their findings so as to avoid being considered relevant only when analyzing electorate behavior, the following paragraphs will focus on the *Kosovo Maiden*, the central figure of a well-known Serbian epic poem, who was made even more prominent through the painting by Uroš Predić, who is frequently mentioned in this paper.

It was seldom stressed that the first painting of the Kosovo Maiden was created in 1879 by Croatian artist Ferdo Kikerec (Figure 4a). However, Predić began to paint his *Kosovo Maiden* on the eve of World War 1 in 1914, with the final version completed by the end of the decade. The former version was intended for the Circle of Serbian Sisters, while

the latter ended up in the Belgrade Municipal Museum, currently the Belgrade City Museum, where it was inventoried in the list of “compositions, landscapes, and flowers” (Jovanović, 1998, p. 122; Medaković, 1990, p. 22), which, as we shall see, may have affected its present-day fate (Figure 4b).

At this time, one needs to be reminded that the Kosovo Maiden is the protagonist of the eponymous folk poem. She is a young maiden, who roams the Kosovo battlefield after the battle looking for her fiancé, her godfather, and her fiancé’s brother, or Milan Toplica, Miloš Obilić, and Ivan Kosancić, respectively. In her search, she comes upon a mortally wounded warrior Pavle Orlović. According to one description, she gave him and other surviving warriors some wine, only to have him expire in her arms, but not before telling her that all of the three men she was seeking had fallen victim to the Ottoman saber. In a way, these were Pavle Orlović’s last rites, which is how Uroš Predić’s *Kosovo Maiden* is to be understood (Loma, 2002, p. 186).

There is an opinion that the *Kosovo Maiden* is a Serbian icon, a symbol of the fatherland, and that Predić was inspired exactly by the first nurse from the national myth. In that context, it is deemed inappropriate to interpret more than merely a dying warrior, even if the warrior is Pavle Orlović, as a “symbol of all the fallen Serbian knights, whose heroic sparks have not died out to this day, casting their light far beyond the site of the ancient battle” (Rajić, s.a.).

To make all the musings about culture and identity fall into place, it needs to be stated that there are numerous tavern and restaurant interiors from northern Kosovo to Belgrade displaying a replica or a copy of this very painting, Predić’s *Kosovo Maiden* with the dying Serbian soldier, who appears to have his own personal troubles, unimportant to the patrons of the restaurants and taverns whose walls he inhabits through force of circumstance. Therefore, it is as if whoever procured Predić’s *Kosovo Maiden* for the Belgrade Municipal Museum understood that Pavel Orlović would one day serve a decorative function among other “compositions, landscapes, and flowers”, although ethnologists might claim that the dying hero adorns the walls of catering establishments so that their patrons could make frequent toasts *to his soul* in their moments of compassion (Figure 4c).

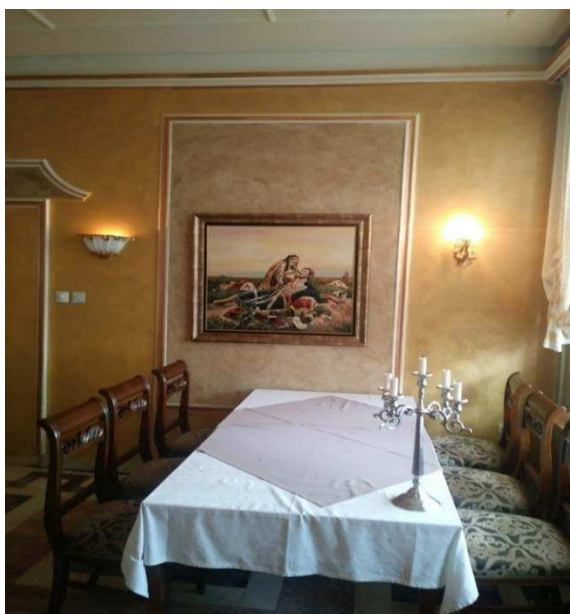


**Figure 4a.** *Ferdo Kikerec, Kosovo Maiden, 1879.*

Source: Author’s archive, postcard photo

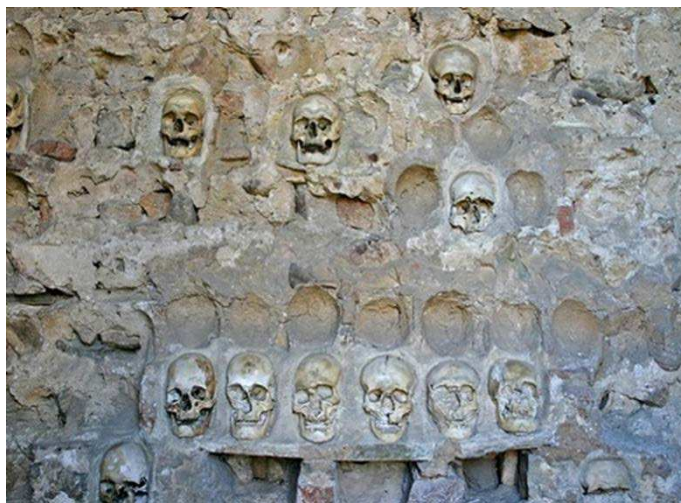


**Figure 4b.** *Uroš Predić, Kosovo Maiden, 1917.*  
Source: “Uroš Predić”, by M. Jovanović



**Figure 4c.** *Replica of the “Kosovo Maiden” in a renowned Belgrade restaurant.*  
Source: Author’s archive

To make the previous assumption even more plausible, Pavle Orlović is not the only historical character from the region that includes Serbia whose suffering can raise someone’s spirits, because it is much more real than the final moments of the mythical hero. I remember a recent exhibition during the *Night of Museums*, where the young schoolchildren from Niš were given the opportunity to wait for the midnight hour having refreshments and snacks next to the Skull Tower in Niš, the one built from skulls of the Serbs beheaded in retaliation from the Ottomans in 1809 (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** *Skull Tower.*

Source: <http://www.panacomp.net/cele-kula-scul-tower-nis/>

Within the same Night of Museums, the Belgrade Military Museum exhibited the bloody clothes of King Aleksandar I Karađorđević, which he was wearing when he died after being assassinated in Marseilles. The long line of curious visitors, who were leisurely chatting while waiting to see the visible proof of the death of the Other, is perhaps the consequence of the desire to find peace in the clear evidence that dying is what awaits everyone, whether naturally or by force.

Another line of *art appreciators* formed almost simultaneously in front of the Museum of Mining and Metallurgy in Bor, instigated by the exhibition of a funeral ritual in eastern-Serbian villages. As one newspaper reported, the organizers “deserved to be congratulated for everything, from the idea to the content and the exhibition,” but mostly for showcasing “an interesting ritual of taking group photos with the deceased, so that the photos could later be looked at in a group with family, friends, and neighbors”. The photos depict the deceased placed on their deathbed, surrounded by the surviving family members and other people, who are looking at the camera lens. This was interpreted as representing the social status of the family as well as the deceased in the community (Photos of the Deceased for Night of Museums in Bor, 2011).

### **Instead of a conclusion**

The question certainly arises whether the last included examples, in addition to the previous ones, also reveal merely one of the *faces* of culture and identity or whether they are the central *mirror* of the general reality in Serbia during the last thirty or so years. Hence, it is not difficult to generalize the thread that ties together all the aforementioned examples, and which could most succinctly be defined as a tendency toward unscrupulous political manipulation through (cultural, religious, artistic) visual symbols that mark an entire historical epoch, reaching the level of thanatopolitics (Kuljić, 2014), when the visualization of death and suffering is used to justify group (read: political) interests. Therefore, it rests upon the conscience of all researchers from social sciences and humanities to recognize such examples and analyze them in order to explain the backdrop of political manipulative patterns, regardless of how diverse the contexts in which they

are used may be and regardless of how many concrete semantic outcomes the (mis)used visual symbols may offer. Accordingly, scientific plagiarism, as much as any ignorant repurposing of the original meaning of cultural symbols, even within the futile 'hiding' behind the (positive) legacy of postmodernism, deserves utter condemnation, among other things, because it constitutes an unacceptable act against one's own (national) culture. Such a direction also leads toward the destruction of overall normalcy, especially the one that shifts to the brighter side of national identity, which allows people to hope that the bottomless pit is not the only viable option for the future of one nation.

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## **O PONEKIM VIDOVIMA SKRNAVLJENJA VIZUELNIH SIMBOLA KULTURE/IDENTITETA SRPSKOG NARODA U SRBIJI OD 90-IH GODINA XX VEKA DO DANAS**

### **Apstrakt**

U fokusu rada je izbor primera zloupotrebe nekih od najpoznatijih ostvarenja srpske sakralne i profane likovne umetnosti, nastalih od Srednjeg veka do početka XX veka, koja su – po temi/motivu – slavljena i kao vizuelni simboli nacionalne kulture/identiteta srpstva (pravoslavne vere). U tekstu će biti navedeni neki od najindikativnijih primera, upriličenih u Srbiji između ranih devedesetih godina XX veka, tj. od početka građansko-verskog rata na području raspadajuće SFR Jugoslavije i današnjeg doba, što znači da takva praksa opstaje već punih trideset godina, potvrđujući da nije reč o prolaznoj pojavi, već o procesu koji uporno truje nacionalni *organizam*. Poneko od tih ostvarenja, ma koliko ona uvažavana i kao vizuelni dokaz istorije srpskog naroda i njegove verske pripadnosti, postalo je žrtva raznovrsnog skrnavljenja, banalizacije i trivijalizacije u okviru masovne (kvazi)kulture do njihove bezobzirne zloupotrebe radi manipulisanja vlastite javnosti u službi određene ideje/ideologije, zbog čega ju je moguće nazvati i zlodelom prema umetničkom delu i njegovim stvarnim značenjima, koliko i prema onima kojima je taj čin namenjen. Štaviše, rečeno nije samo indikator nipodaštavajućeg odnosa (medija i tzv. elite) prema njihovim konzumentima, budući da su oni – shvaćeni/korišćeni i kao intelektualno *slepa bića* – postavljeni i u kontekst podstrekivanja na raznoliko zlodelo prema Drugom, u najboljem slučaju radi raspirivanja mržnje prema Drugima, za kojom su prečesto ostajale individualne i kolektivne tragedije. Pojedina umetnička dela koja će biti predmet naše pažnje su uz osobenosti lokalnog *duha vremena*, kreiranog u kabinetima, kao i zahvaljujući „duševnim dometima“ *duha mesta*, postavljana u kontekst koji nema srodnih veza s njihovom izvornom porukom/poukom. Iz takvog miljea kao da su proistekle i pojedine nedavno upriličene izložbe, koje bi u, uslovno rečeno, normalnim okolnostima mogle biti podvedene i pod manifestacije s eksponatima namenjenim najpre poklonicima tzv. crnog turizma. U ovom slučaju, međutim, zloupotrebljeni su i umetnost i javnost, koliko i eksponati. Spram iskustva savremene umetnosti –



npr. u okviru postmoderne, po kojoj je svako delo podložno novoj *umetničkoj akciji* – u našem slučaju reč je pre svega o – Brodelovski rečeno – procesu „dugog trajanja“, tokom kojeg je umetničko delo na različite načine zlostavljano/zloupotrebljavano, pa i radi služenja određenim nimalo umetničkim pobudama. Slično se događalao i s pojedinim *ikonama* srpstva koje su i usled neznanja na različite načine sknavljene, ali uz, ma koliko paradoksalno, istovremeno isticanje verskog i/ili nacionalnog identiteta.

*Ključne reči:* Srbija, vizuelna umetnost, zloupotreba umetnosti, kultura, identitet