KORANA RADMAN
Zagreb

Discreet Charm of Nationalistic Narratives

Of Spaces, Places and Gender in Media Discourses about *Cvjetni*

Tending to media discourses about a recent gentrification project in Zagreb, the author has attempted to explore the relationship between place, identity and gender. What made this issue particularly interesting were the discourses that legitimized the project, which consistently countered the discussion about the pitfalls of gentrification with narratives about values, national interests and the importance of leaving the socialist past behind. The analysis of those discourses also addresses their potential gender aspect, which is discussed in relation as to how and through which means, places can be considered as gendered.

[*nationalism, symbolic geographies, gendered spaces, Cvjetni*]

In April 2012, a new shopping mall and luxury apartment complex *Cvjetni* was constructed and opened for business in the downtown of Zagreb city center.[1] As a very high-profile architectural project, *Cvjetni* inspired a lot of dispute and debates, as well as academic curiosity (see for instance Čaldarević and Šarinić 2008, Horvat 2007, Sviričić Gotovac 2010, Mišetić and Uršić 2010). Like many other projects built in Zagreb over the course of the last decade, *Cvjetni* is a part of a larger global trend of gentrification, that has strongly dominated urban development processes in Croatia in recent years (Svirčić Gotovac 2010:200). Gentrification aims to transform, on both functional and aesthetical levels, the "old" city centers into more "desirable" residential and business spaces, which then become more appealing for the wealthier middle and high classes (ibid.:199). In that sense, gentrification can be seen as a negative trend, as those with lower purchasing power "can only participate in symbolic window-shopping and in admira-

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tion of the specific unreachable lifestyle of the 'better offs'" (Čaldarović and Šarinić 2008:371). Some have even argued that gentrification processes have taken particular shapes in the post-socialist countries, where they seem to be accomplished through private investments rather than through public funds (see Svirčić Gotovac 2010). Even though *Cvjetni* could serve as an appropriate case study for gentrification process in a post-socialist country, here I would like to propose another, slightly different, reading of that debate.

In many ways, my own project takes those considerations as its point of departure, albeit with a different goal in mind. What I found compelling and interesting about the case of *Cvjetni* was the way in which some of the discourses created around it seemed to be more invested in building or reinforcing a particular kind of national identity, then just advocating this project. Places, or a particular kind of affiliation to places, seemed to play an important role in legitimizing this project, and in that sense can be seen as supporting a particular form of national identity. In this vein, I have attempted to demonstrate how places and architectural projects could be instrumentalized in the name of an identity, as it happened in this case, where the *Cvjetni* project was coded as a marker of Croatian progress. An important role in that process was assigned to the architect of the project himself, which is why the first part of the analysis treats discourses about him. The second part of my analysis is dedicated to exploring some of the gendered aspects of such discursive practices that bind national identities and places. Treating the gendered aspects of such discourses might be a good starting point for thinking, conceptualizing and researching gendered spaces. Admittedly, as there are few authors who have decided to pursue this kind of triangulation between national identity, gender and place, it is a somewhat risky task to which I turn to towards the end of this article. In that sense, the final part of my analysis can be considered more as an attempt to come to terms with abstract concepts like gendered spaces, then it can be considered a serious claim about the position of the project of *Cvjetni*.

Of Identities, Places and Gender

Identities and identity building processes are inherently bound to particular places and spaces that are, for instance, recognized as "ours" as opposed to "theirs". The ways in which people relate to places, "how feelings of belonging to an imagined community bind identity to spatial location such that differences between communities and places are created"

(Gupta 2006:322), is an essential part of an identity. As Alan Dingsdale notes, places enable "people to identify themselves, share experiences and form communities" (2002:3), or, as Gupta claims, to create differences between themselves and others. Each group is different, and each identity embodies "a distinctive bundle of time and spaces, practices and concepts" (Harvey 1991:204). The relationship between identity and place is never just given *a priori*, but is always created through various deliberate symbolic, material and political acts (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:47).

When creation of national identities is at stake, as many feminist scholars of nationalism have noted, one needs to be particularly aware of the gendered dimension of those processes. Gender plays an important role in nation-state imagining processes, and has the power to naturalize the differences between men and women (McClintock 1993:61). Similarly, Susan Gal and Gail Klingman argue that the gender difference directly influences the processes through which "states are imagined, constituted and legitimized" (2000:4). As other categories, such as class for instance, gender relations are within given cultural, social and historical circumstances, one of the structuring principles of our realities that inform our perception of spaces and places (Massey 1994:182). In that sense, spaces are not only important for identity, and thus nation-state making, but are also themselves a reflection of the gendered symbolic and social order they represent. The idea that places and spaces can likewise be imbued with and reflective of gender hierarchies, opens up a possibility for the discussion on the emergence of gendered spaces.

In an attempt to analyze the discourses that link the place of *Cvjetni* and Croatian national identity, as well as notions about gender, I have decided to focus my analysis on particular media discourses. As others have argued, the media plays an important role in the production of cohesion between and across various social groups, particularly nations (Gupta 1995, Gupta 2006, Mihelj 2008, Žarkov 2007). Likewise, media itself can be considered as a powerful and meaningful site where nation-states are reproduced through various symbolic devices (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:981). In that sense, some of the texts that appeared in Croatian media seemed more invested in portraying the issue of *Cvjetni* in terms of national identity and symbolic geography, than in terms of urban development. This article will analyze such discourses, which have been published in mainstream Croatian press, such as *Jutarnji List*, *Večernji List* and *Globus*, between 2008 and 2010. As this was a very long debate spanning over more than five years, with its' peak in 2009 when construction work began at the site, it would be extremely difficult to cover and analyze all the possible media texts, aspects and implications of this debate. Instead, the goal of this paper is to draw attention to a particular articulation of an

identity, that was partly being formulated through the debate about *Cvjet-ni*. In that sense, my intention here is not to propose a holistic reading of the issue of the project of *Cvjetni*, but to offer an interpretation which would highlight how notions of place and gender figure inconspicuously in the processes of (re)creation of national identities.

Placing the Architect and Spatializing National Identity

Identity-building processes are highly fluid practices. As Aleksander Kiossev argues, "society and culture create a lot of possible mirrors for the individual or group, a lot of opportunities for identification" (2002:168). One such possible mirror is national identity. As feminist scholars of nationalism have on many occasions pointed out, the relationship between gender system and national identities is both complex and ambiguous. For instance, Thembisa Waetjen argues that "gender systems supply a set of cohesive, normative ideas and practices that assist nation-building ideologically by supplying a naturalizing metanarrative for the collective imagination" (2001:121). However "easily" gender systems and nationalism seem to go together for some authors like Spike V. Peterson (1999) and Joanne Nagel (1998), that relationship is hardly straightforward. Waetjen, for instance, offers a more nuanced perspective, claiming that gender should be approached "not as a system that is functional for nationalism but as a fragmented and conflictual field against which nationalisms strive to consolidate their vision of seamlessness" (2001:125). The ways in which gender and national identity are connected, whether as mutually constituting or conflicting categories, determines the way in which authority and power relations are created in a particular social context.

The power relations and authority created within national narrative are firmly embedded in family tropes. As Anne McClintock argues, national narrative is based on a family trope because it metaphorically and symbolically enables the naturalization of gender difference and subordination of women within the domestic domain (1993:64). As such, women are cast in a different set of roles within national discourses, most often those connected with tradition and passivity (ibid.:62). In that sense, the way in which authority and power is exercised in nationalist discourses resembles the ways in which power relations are formed in traditional families, where male figures most often assume central positions.[2] Thus,

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[2] McClintock's original point is more complex and goes beyond the purposes of my argument here.

when one is dealing with national narratives, one should also pay attention to how this authority is being construed, and how it implicates other concepts, such as places and spaces.

Not all positions of authority need to be reserved exclusively for "fathers of the nation". Someone can assume the position of authority if his competences are accounted for and his identity can be placed in the service of national narrative. In the case of *Cvjetni*, the authority in question was inscribed into the persona of its creator. Boris Podrecca, the architect of the *Cvjetni* project, was assigned exactly this type of authority in media discourses, based on his competence and hybrid identity, which was grounded in his affiliation with certain places and spaces. Consequently, he was depicted in the following manner:

> In a castle, situated in a 17th century district in Vienna, resides a higher spirit embodied in the buildings – amid the powerful graphic computers reigns the warlock Boris Podrecca, surrounded by respect, that turns into awe. He fluently speaks seven or eight languages; Croatian as a Croatian intellectual, Slovenian as a Slovenian architect, German as a German professor, Italian as his mother tongue, and English as someone whose primary academic habitat was Harvard. (*Globus*, 7/3/2008)

It is not difficult to see that this enumeration of the places and languages is hardly arbitrary, particularly when taken into account that some places that Podrecca could also belong to, like Belgrade where he was born, are not mentioned at all. Boris Podrecca has been represented here through hybridity of his identity, one that Homi Bhabha has referred to in the colonial context as "almost the same but not quite" (1994:86). In this context, Podrecca's hybrid identity is being construed as a potential bridge between "East" and "West", where his professional and private identities are presented as simultaneously being both Croatian and Western or Central European. This creates a potent image of an architect of Croatian origin and a professionally established Western European authority, who, in return, could be considered the perfect choice to bring "European values" to Zagreb's city centre.

Even if it could be argued that this discourse about hybrid identity and professional authority might be somehow imposed on him, Boris Podrecca disperses those doubts when discussing his life and work in an interview given to the Croatian press:

> The Italians would say, this is *officina*, the factory of architecture. The schedule depends on the language people are using. We have 11 nations, I myself speak seven languages and each of my architects speaks a few languages (…) My mum puts on make up even today, when she is 94 years

old. She came from a respectable family and all of her six brothers studied in Vienna. (…) I grew up in a transnational milieu. I do not carry with me languages, politics, not even feelings or conflicts, I carry communication. (*Globus*, 1/6/2010)

What is at play here is what Doreen Massey has recognized as the "stretching out", or in other words, an approach to thinking about places not in terms of boundaries, but in terms of "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings (…) where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself" (1994:154). This kind of approach to places is apparent in Podrecca's own discourse, where places, people and nationalities are seen as intertwined. This is where my point departs from Massey's. In the discourses put forward by Podrecca, this kind of enumeration of places was used to demonstrate the affiliation to sites of power, wealth and progress – like Italy, the centre of culture and fine arts, or Vienna, the former capital of a wealthy monarchy – and not to propose a different approach to perceiving places.[3] It is a form of discursive dominance expressed through seemingly playful imagery of familial sentimentalities.

So far, I have demonstrated how the authority of Boris Podrecca was being presented and represented, but national narratives did not yet entirely enter the scene. As Podrecca had to be both Western European and Croatian, a fact that was being used to advocate the project, the focus of the national narrative shifted from the architect to the place of the project itself. In this, Podrecca had an important role, as his authority and hybrid identity enabled him to become the purveyor of "Western European values" in an architectural form:

Zagreb's civility is based on provincialism, simulation of the centre, which is a remarkable trait. (…) This means that if Vienna has built a huge parking garage under the Opera, so should we. If they had constructed, just on the opposite side of their Cathedral, an amazing modernist building such as *Hass Haus* (…), I guess we would have to be able to endure Podrecca's modest and modern building on the Flower Square (*Cvjetni*), the first amazing architectural project in Zagreb since Herman Bollé. (*Globus*, 1/2/2008)

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[3] For instance, Croatia and Austria have a long and complex historical relationship. On that, Milica Bakić-Hayden notes:

"From a standpoint of 'northern republics', Slovenia and Croatia, centuries under Habsburg rule have qualified them to 'join Europe' at the present time. Historical circumstances which led to industrial development in the Western Europe have been appropriated by Slovenes and Croats as the product of their superior qualities, and western-like participation in the cultural circles of Mittel Europa is stressed, without consideration of how they participated – as equal actors or otherwise" (1995:924).

Cvjetni **– from Ruination to Feminization**

After Podrecca's authority was established, the discourses shifted their focus to the location of *Cvjetni* – a downtown block of buildings on the Flower Square. As many of the capital cities of the former Habsburg Monarchy, Zagreb is a typical Central European city modelled after late 19th and early 20th century cities like Vienna and Budapest. In that sense, it might seem somewhat unclear why that specific downtown block in the strict centre of Zagreb, already fashioned in the Secession style typical for that period in Central Europe, needed to be imbued with more noticeable markers of "Western Europeanness". Even though the author of a newspaper artticle makes a comparison between Zagreb and New York, she quite visually describes the atmosphere of Zagreb as being fairly bleak:

> It wasn't like that in Zagreb on New Year's Eve, when I attempted to have a drink with my friends at 7 p.m. All the bars were closed, even *Flores*, only the tents at the Main Square were open. It was cold, empty, all the bars were covered in dark, not even lights were left turned on. My friend who travelled from Zurich (…) has returned into a dark, forsaken and rotten city. (…)
> Each day for months now, I've been driving across town to the Hospital "Rebro" and watching the façades in Vlaška and Maksimirska Street, covered with graffiti like deserted buildings in Harlem, destroyed, mostly without finishing and with plaster falling off the buildings. The city looks terrifyingly derelict. Only Krleža[4] could have captured this ruination adequately. While every third window remains broken and covered in torn old posters as if the owners were running away from a plague epidemic, we are only preoccupied with thinking about how to prevent changes. (…) We are protesting because a rusty backyard will be turned into a lavish arcade, designed by a worldly renowned architect. We are bothered by change. (*Jutarnji list*, 10/1/2009)

It is not hard to argue that Zagreb and New York are two very different cities, with their own distinguishing appearances and atmospheres. However, the description above leaves little to the imagination. After reading this passage, the reader has nothing else to conclude but that Zagreb is in a state of almost dangerous ruination.[5] The author of the newspaper article shifts from her own personal recollections to almost "ethnographic" observations about Zagreb presented in an ironic manner, mocking

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[4] Miroslav Krleža is a famous Croatian novelist.

[5] Putting ruination in the context of "lavishing arcades" also has a strong class dimension, as the authors like David Harvey (2006) or Setha Low (2006) have noted in their own studies of gentrification processes. Even though I do keep this perspective in mind, it is a subject that needs broader analysis that would go beyond the purpose of this article.

those who consider preservation of the downtown blocks important and presenting them as opposing changes. Furthermore, through author's use of the personal pronoun "we", as ironic as it may be, it is implied that this collective, on behalf of whom she is speaking, is somehow culpable for the supposed ruinous state of the city's centre. Even though it is not explicitly stated whom the author considers as "we", be it the protesters against *Cvjetni*, the citizens of Zagreb or Croatia as a whole, other narratives have been more explicit.

After protests against the project have became an almost regular occurrence between January and July 2010, at some point resulting in a permanent peaceful sit-in on an adjacent street, the previously mentioned "we" gained additional layer of meaning as exemplified by the following discourses:

> Horvatinčić[6] wants to know who will want to invest in Croatia when a local investor is facing such strong opposition and wonders whether "it would be better to place there [on Flower Square] a French project and a French flag above the Flower Square. (*Jutarnji list*, 11/2/2010)

> Horvatinčić (…) has the will power, takes risks, builds, but he is constantly being targeted by a small, but loud, group of citizens, some kind of remnant of the previous Socialist Alliance [*Socijalistički Savez*], which believes that only they have the right to the city, including the right to proclaim that both the investor and the renowned architect are social nuisances. The resistance to turn rotten sheds into crystal windows has culminated in a recent violent blockade of the construction site. (*Večernji list*, 16/02/2010)

> I think that the protests are an assault on the investors and employers in Croatia and that this creates an anti-entrepreneurial atmosphere, which can be devastating for a state in this time of recession. Currently we have employed 500 people, and we will employ even more. [*commentary of Tomislav Horvatinčić on continuing protests against the project*]. (*Jutarnji list*, 30/5/2010)

By emphasising that *Cvjetni* was a project implemented by a Croatian businessman and in Croatia's best economic interests, those discourses were attempting to argue that any opposition to this project was not only contrary to national interests, but was also threatening the existence of Croatia as a state. The implications of those discourses were manifold and relevant, if put together in the context of those that depicted Zagreb as ruinous. Opposing this project was interpreted by those discourses as an assault against capitalism and private investments, and thus indirectly

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[6] Tomislav Horvatinčić is a Croatian businessman and the main investor and financier of the project *Cvjetni.*

disabling the attack on the well-being of the nation-state, which clearly saw the opposition as "some kind of remnant of the previous Socialist Alliance", referring explicitly to the Yugoslav Communist party.

In Croatian context, references to Yugoslavia and state-socialism are frequently regarded as derogatory and dismissive, and they have been previously used to explain economic regression and lack of progress in Croatia since the 1990s on account of an inherited "socialist mentality" and "bad socio-cultural capital" (Prica 2007:178-179). However, references made to Yugoslav socialism were more than just references to the past Croatia would like to disavow:

> In the houses where tenants are literally falling through the ground (…) [where] miserable pensioners and, lumpen proletariat and squatters are nesting (…) As long as the centre remains a ruinous ghetto, there will be enough people for those leaders to take into the brighter future, to save the city in its backwardness, in the manner of Balkan Havana. (*Jutarnji list*, 6/2/2010)

The depiction of Zagreb as the "Balkan Havana" stands out as a powerful reminder of the unsuccessfulness of the "socialist project"[7], one that has supposedly prevented Croatia from earlier claiming its rightful place among European nations (Bakic-Hayden 1995:924). In fact, from the 1990s onwards, Croatia continually struggled to "prove" its political, cultural and economical belonging to the European Union and to distinguish itself from other countries in the region often called the Western Balkans (see Razsa and Lindstrom 2004, Obad 2009). This resonates with several of Maria Todorova's observations on the connotations of the term "Balkan". Over time, "Balkan" has become "a synonym for reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (1994:453), which media discourses continually point when emphasizing the derelict condition of Zagreb's centre and the supposed unwillingness of its people to change that. On the other hand, after the Second World War, as Todorova has argued, the term "Balkans" was expanded with an additional layer of meaning, as it became known for its communist regimes (Todorova 1994:478). This was appropriated and promulgated by some groups in Croatia for whom after the 1990s the term "Balkan" became synonymous with the "dark

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[7] It is an interesting metaphor and in my opinion, Havana is not accidentally combined here with the term "Balkans". This metaphor might be interpreted as a warning or a reminder to the Croatian public of exactly how Croatia might have had ended up if it had stayed in Yugoslavia and supported the communist ideology, isolated and impoverished as Castro's communist Cuba is today.

ages of Yugoslav Communism" (Jansen 2002:43).[8] In that sense, the term "Balkan Havana" encompasses exactly that conflation, where the socialist past and historically established backwardness of the Balkans are presented as almost synonymous.

However, besides being a signifier of backwardness, this specific framing of ruination has a strong gender dimension. When the previously mentioned discourses emphasise the fragility of the location involved ("houses where tenants are literally falling through the ground"), its lack of light and rough exterior ("with graffiti like deserted buildings in Harlem"), they are doing so with a specific purpose in mind. The fact that the ruination of the downtown block on Flower Square seems to threaten not only inhabitants of Zagreb, but also Croatia's national and economic interests, invites an intervention. This specific kind of intervention has already been recognised in many other national narratives, where:

> Feminine spaces remain open to invasion – and this image of vulnerability is particularly inviting to ethnocrats or those engaged in crafting nationalist rhetoric and expanding national boundaries or in waging war on behalf of the nation. The vulnerability and seductiveness of women/borders (space/nation) require the vigilance of protectors or border guards. (Mostov 2000:91)

Even though Julie Mostov is here discussing feminine spaces in the context of war in Yugoslavia, a similar principle can be applied to discourses about the *Cvjetni* project. Through its fragility and ruinous state, an appeal for change and intervention was made using a similar kind of national rhetoric that put national interests and economy at the forefront. In that sense, indirectly, those discourses imbued the downtown block with values that could, among other things, be read as "feminine".

Emergence of gendered spaces?

Reading places and spaces as gendered is not an easy task, as they might appear only when and if the analysis seems to be pushed a little further. In fact, there are only a few cases in which certain spaces and places can be recognized as "feminine" or "masculine", keeping in mind that our notions of what constitutes masculinities and femininities vary across times and cultures. What makes any attempt to discuss gendered spaces even more difficult is the fact that little theoretical and analytical atten-

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[8] Jansen (2002) also discusses other possible appropriations of the term "Balkan" in the region of former Yugoslavia.

tion has been invested in expanding this concept, in ways that would, for instance, go beyond the discussion about public-private domain. Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga define gendered spaces as "particular locales that cultures invest with gendered meanings…or settings that are used strategically to inform identity and produce an asymmetrical gender relations of power and authority" (2006:7). However intuitively sound this definition seems, it is, at the same time, rather unclear how those processes are translated into practice, and through which discursive or practical means. More importantly, if all these concepts are construed through symbolic and material practices in particular socio-historical circumstances, how can they be rendered permanent and apparent enough to argue that those places or spaces are indeed gendered? Are "feminine" and "masculine" spaces as relational as concepts of femininity and masculinity within a given society?

Unfortunately, I have no sage answers to these questions. In a way, each time gender is used as an explanatory category for certain social phenomena in which that dimension is not immediately apparent, the analysis often tends to be perceived as enforced. To a certain extent this might be true of my own analysis as well, as there are no clear designations or signposts pointing to *Cvjetni* as that kind of gendered place. In spite of that, I do think that in certain ways the location that hosted the *Cvjetni* complex was being "feminized" in order to enable a stronger argumentation to argue for going through with this project at the time.

One of the key devices through which *Cvjetni* was portrayed as "feminine" was through ruination. In *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey proposes that time and space are themselves gendered dichotomies:

> With time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ("simple") reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (…) Thus, where time is dynamism, dislocation and History, and space is stasis, space is coded as female and denigrated. But where space is chaos (which you would think was quite different from stasis; more indeed like dislocation) then time is Order…and space is still coded female, only in this context interpreted as threatening. (1994:257-258)

In that sense, what was being said about the downtown block where *Cvjetni* was eventually built resonates with the ideas proposed here by Massey. As seen from the previous chapter, ruination and socialism were both being construed as "out of time" in the current context of Croatian nation-state, since the city, in such a state, fails to unequivocally reflect "Western European" values. On the other side of that rhetoric, the architect and his

professional authority were being portrayed as dynamic, progressive and modern, embodying thus the "proper" values that can be translated into *Cvjetni* and achieved through its implementation. In that way, the location of *Cvjetni* was being construed as "feminine" in its ruination and lack of values that were deemed desirable, but also through the discourse about progressive (architectural) intervention that was supposed to amend the current situation.

Not all of the citizens of Zagreb accepted this solution equally, as protests and actions were organized to draw attention to the excessive character of those architectural changes. This, in return, incited those who saw the project as a proper solution for Zagreb to intensify their argumentation:

> (…) in Zagreb, left, liberal citizens and alternative groups are trying to stop the penetration of capitalism into the city centre, to prevent a luxury building being built and attempting to stop a plutocracy which would turn abandoned shops with smuggled shoes into designer boutiques. (…) Let's keep the atmosphere of a remote nest; it would be best if nothing would change because the wealth of the elites does not bring progress to the people. (*Globus*, 1/2/2008)

The term used here to describe the project as "penetration of capitalism into the city centre" has several important implications. First of all, the metaphoric image created through this discourse has a strong gender dimension, where the place of *Cvjetni* was obviously being regarded as "feminine", otherwise "penetration of capitalism" as a metaphor would not make much sense.[9] However, this metaphor can be anatomized even further as the relationship between masculinity and capitalism, as well as the logic of intervention itself are further explored.

Terms like intervention and "penetration" are indeed reminiscent of colonial "civilizing" interventions and paternalistic sentiments that accompanied it. Lila Abu-Lughod has very successfully criticised the attempts made by the Western scholars and activists to unveil the Muslim women in Afghanistan and elsewhere, denouncing those types of interventions as paternalistic and aimed at reinforcing a "sense of superiority by Westerners" (2002:789). Following on that, every similar discourse that claims to bring progress and civilization to a space or place that is perceived as devoid of those qualities, should be recognised as an attempt of

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[9] Naturally, this colloquialism might be more generally used as a metaphor for gentrification processes in architecture, which however does not diminish its gendered perspective.

domination. As Anne McClintock shows, this kind of paternalistic logic constitutes an integral part of national narratives:

> Women, it was argued, did not inhabit the history proper, but existed, like colonized peoples, in a permanently anterior time within the modern nation, as anachronistic humans, childlike, irrational and regressive – the living archive of the national archaic. White, middle-class men, by contrast were seen to embody the forward-thrusting agency of national "progress". (1993:67)

In that sense, the logic behind the paternalistic intervention found in nationalism and its claims to bring progress, are inherently gendered. In that way, men are granted the ability to intervene, in the name of the country's progress and well-being, in spaces that are perceived as being devoid of those values. Taking into consideration that *Cvjetni* was construed as a project of national importance and given that its intermediary Boris Podrecca was presented as a powerful male architectural authority, it comes as no surprise that paternalistic undertones emerge in those discourses.

As those discourses were explicitly making a relationship between progress and urban development with capitalism as its driving force, formulated in a paternalistic manner, they were relying on the established gender hierarchy as a symbolic support for this kind of rhetoric. In fact, forms of masculinity have been connected historically to the rise of capitalism (Wood and Connell 2005:384) that allowed for "identification of the male/masculine with the production in the money economy and the identification of the female/feminine with reproduction and the domestic" (Acker 2004:24). This resonates with both points made by McClintock about "white, middle-class men" that "embody the forward-thrusting agency of national 'progress'" (1993:67), as well as observations on the gendered differentiation between culture and nature made by Sherry Ortner, where the very ability to overcome nature is coded as masculine (1974:73). In relation to *Cvjetni*, this production of difference, in an attempt to assert discursive dominance, was centred on the ruination of the downtown block where the architectural complex was eventually built. This ruination was therefore equated with state-socialism, as a "natural" state of that specific past, and identified as unfit and unbecoming of a country aspiring to become a part of Western Europe. The threatening fragility of *Cvjetni* was coded as "feminine" in that sense to enable an invocation of intervention, one that would simultaneously bring it up-to-date with the new socio-political order and deal with the relics of the unwanted past. The key role in this process was ascribed to a male architect, likewise presented as an embodiment of everything that was considered to be missing in Zagreb's downtown centre. In that sense, the rhetoric pre-

sented and analysed here already contained a gendered dimension, and relied substantially on the general understanding of gender difference to argue for a certain outcome.

Conclusion

There are of course many different aspects that could have (or should have) been included in this analysis. As it is the case with any academic endeavour that is always by nature a "work in progress", this has been more a platform for thinking about certain relationships and connections than a serious attempt to formulate any type of causal relationship between the phenomena described here. This is not due to any attempts on my side to avoid responsibility towards this analysis, but more to do with my intimate belief that all the issues mentioned in this article require more rigorous and more thorough analysis before any attempts at claiming what is at stake can be made. However, even with the recognition of my own limitations, some things can be pointed out based on the evidence and the analysis provided in this text.

In that vein, following Thembisa Waetjen's postulation about the nature of nationalism, I attempted to argue that nationalistic discourses are inconspicuous in as much as they inform discreetly our notions of places, spaces and the social reality we live in. Even though it might be inferred from my analysis that national discourse caused the particular depictions of *Cvjetni* analysed in this article, I do not believe that is the case, since national narratives are fluid processes and not petrified discourses. What I do argue here is that nationalistic discourses provide a way of tying different (and sometimes unrelated) interpretations into one seemingly coherent whole. In the case of *Cvjetni*, the nationalistic discourse provided an over-arching interpretation that tied together various discourses about progress, Croatian-ness, symbolic geography, socialism and capitalism, in order to create a more coherent and stronger argument about why *Cvjetni* should be built. In that way, this kind of argumentation was given additional validity through the nationalist perspective that naturalized some of the differences and incoherencies between segments of that argumentation. As nationalist narratives usually have a strong gender component, I argued that this was the case with the *Cvjetni* project as well. Through discourses about ruination and socialism, juxtaposed with progress and capitalism, the place of the *Cvjetni* project indirectly became "feminized" through constant emphasis on intervention and out-of-date appearance of the block itself. While it can be contested whether the location was ul-

timately "feminized" or not, and whether in the way I described here, the intention was not to propose that there was only one possible way of reading gender into notions about places. The intention was more to hint at the seemingly invisible utilization of gender difference as part of a powerful argument that ultimately settled the debate about *Cvjetni*. Given that *Cvjetni* project was constructed in the end, and that the discourses analysed here provided considerable legitimacy for this, the material consequences of those discourses are important. Whether narratives that imply gender differences between places can be building blocks in construing an over-arching explanation that can justify particular material practices and reconfigurations of social realities remains to be further explored.

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Diskretni šarm nacionalističkih narativa. O prostorima, mjestima i rodu u medijskim diskursima o *Cvjetnom*

Sažetak

U ovom članku analiziraju se medijski diskursi stvoreni oko projekta *Cvjetni*, arhitektonskog projekta Borisa Podrecce izgrađenog na Cvjetnom trgu u Zagrebu. Iako se ovaj projekt može smjestiti u širu analizu gentrifikacijskih procesa u post-socijalističkim zemljama, to je poslužilo kao ishodišna točka za promišljanje odnosa između nacionalnog identiteta i mjesta, kao i za promišljanje koncepata poput "orođenih" prostora. Kroz medijske diskurse o Borisu Podrecci, autoru projekta, stvoren je privid moćnog stručnjaka – autoriteta koji povezuje "domaći" prostor i prostor zapadne Europe. Zauzvrat, samo mjesto na kojem je projekt nastao prikazano je kao ruševno i zapušteno, kao svojevrstni zaostatak iz socijalističkih vremena. Takva argumentacija poslužila je stvaranju ideje o samom projektu *Cvjetni* kao o nositelju suvremenog hrvatskog napretka, ali i otvorila mogućnost za rodnu analizu koja u takvom opisu mjesta prepoznaje elemente ženskog, odnosno "orođenog prostora".

[*nacionalizam, simbolička geografija, orođeni prostori, Cvjetni*]