



PRIKAZI / REVIEWS



E. Wróblewska-Trochimiuk:
*Naszego nie damy. Spory i obrazy
polityczne w Serbii i Chorwacji po
roku 2000 [We Won't Give up What Is
Ours. Political Disputes and Images in
Serbia and Croatia after 2000]*

DOI: 10.17234/SEC.37.21

Warsaw: Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences,
2024., pp. 320.

Free online version: <https://ispan.waw.pl/ireteslaw/handle/20.500.12528/1994>

Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk's latest book is a phenomenal study of the struggles for visibility in the public space of various groups pursuing very different socio-political demands in Serbia and Croatia. The author – a specialist in visual culture and the use of images in political communication by contemporary socio-political movements – analyzes and explains the iconography of demonstrations and protests. The Serbian and Croatian societies, juxtaposed, despite their many differences, are united by the tension between the desire for westernization and modernization and the need to protect their values. While socio-political divisions are not unique to societies in transition, the analyzed countries have their *differentia specifica*, namely the legacy of the tragic 1990s and the difficulties of consolidating democracy.

The book demonstrates that although Serbia and Croatia differ in their political and international context (Serbia is an authoritarian state with close relations with Russia and China, while Croatia is a democratic state, a member of the European Union and NATO) the motives of the demonstrators are often quite similar: the rights of the LGBT minority, defense of tradition and values, the fight against false modernization projects based on kitsch and concrete architecture. On the other hand, the author's insightful analysis of the social protests allowed her to highlight the differences between Serbian and Croatian society. In this context, the category of cultural constellations proposed by the author, which makes it clear that culture is the result of various factors, seems extremely helpful.

The book consists of five chapters. In addition to the methodological and theoretical framework, the first one explains the title: "we won't give up what is ours" refers to the slogans raised during the protests, such as: We won't give up Warsaw Street, we won't give up Belgrade. Unfortunately, in most cases, it turned out that the protesters had to capitulate after some time, and their demands did not come to fruition. An interesting

procedure used by the author is to introduce the reader to the meanders of the subject matter not only through a grid of concepts, but also by referring to the equality parades in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Split and their social reception.

The second chapter presents the events of war veterans. While the presence in the Croatian public space of so-called defenders, known for their radical views, has been previously touched upon in many academic publications, popular science, or the media, the reflection on Serbian veterans, who, as the author writes, officially do not exist in Serbia, nor is there an official census of them. One could say that they have become victims of top-level politics and do not exist in the Serbian imaginarium.

The next chapter deals with events for protecting tradition and values, namely the retraditionalization strategies in the context of globalization and post-modernity. The author rightly notes that after the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević (5th-6th October 2000) has never happened, so the new authorities were unable to make real social, political, and economic changes. The revolutionary ideals were lost, and so the populist rhetoric of the Serbian Progressive Party, in power since 2012, came upon a fertile background. Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk illustrates her thoughts with images from the trial of Slobodan Milošević and his funeral, murals glorifying war criminals such as Ratko Mladić, rallies in defense of Kosovo's Serbian character, processions organized by the Orthodox Church (so-called *litije*), or gatherings in support of president Aleksandar Vučić. The Serbian traditionalist iconosphere is confronted with the Croatian "conservative revolution." Accession to the European Union has, in the case of Croatia, resulted in a unification of right-wing circles in the struggle for a return to traditionally understood values: the family, Catholicism, folklore, and even the restriction of the rights of women and sexual minorities. The author notes that although the Croatian right seems to be fighting in the name of national values, the "conservative revolution" was in fact adopted from South America and the United States.

Chapter four examines images from protests defending the urban spaces of Belgrade and Zagreb against controversial developments (Belgrade on the Water and the Cvjetni trg shopping center), as well as anti-capitalist protests. Activist groups in Zagreb and Belgrade tried to defend charming corners of their cities in need of renovation rather than demolition against megalomaniacal projects with corruption in the background. However, their efforts were not completely futile, as spontaneously formed social movements turned into political parties, and one Croatian activist, Tomislav Tomašević, became mayor of Zagreb.

The final chapter summarizes the previous reflections. The author juxtaposes and compares the images analyzed in the book, recognizing specific visual patterns used by the demonstrators. Protests, even if short-lived and doomed to fail, offer hope for change

and are a natural way of opposing an unacceptable reality.

At the time of writing, a spectacular wave of protests is sweeping through Serbia, which proves that the themes raised in the work are gaining relevance. Numerous scholarly texts are likely to be written about the *pumpanje* in Serbia, but Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk's book will probably be the starting point for them. It is a welcome read for all enthusiasts of the Balkans, as well as those interested in the topic of social movements and civil protest.

Magdalena Rekść