

WOMEN FROM NATIONAL MINORITY GROUPS AND HATE SPEECH

Introduction: The phrase hate speech encompasses terms for the verbal expression of hatred, chauvinism, xenophobia, racism and other negative collective emotions (R. Bugarski, 2002). This speech involves the polarization of US: good, clean, progressive, peaceful, disadvantaged,) and THEM: evil, retrograde, mischief-makers, aggressive, the source of our suffering... The division into "us" the good and "them" the bad, (Mary Douglas, 1993) is basically the expression of a patriarchal way of thinking about the relationship between strength and power. The division into the powerful and the weak has existed since the dawn of society, so the inventory of words used to mark one or the other side varies from language to language, from one social period to another. It is important to point out that such a division has existed for 20 centuries, which indicates that hate speech, which is immanent to it, is not a specificity of our language, our region, but part of civilization as a whole.

Hate speech escalated during the wars in the former Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (words such as: *cetniks, ustasas, enemy insiders, mujahedins, foreign spies...*), during the war in Kosovo (*Nazi camarilla, crazy monster from The White House, clouded minds, degenerated bastards, Nazi sadists...*), in the time of protests in Belgrade (*traitors, pro-fascist elements, rats, hyenas, rabbits...*) and in the period after October 5th 2000 (*tramps, bandits, criminals from the SDO¹, SDOists...*), as recorded by Ranko Bugarski (2002).

Svenka Savic (2002) approaches the same issue from the aspect of human rights, and defines politically correct speech as speech adapted to the affirmation of human rights, while hate speech is the aberration from politically correct speech, that is, from the ideology of universal human rights. While hate speech is the expression of negative emotions towards those "others", politically correct speech acknowledges individuals' awareness of the attitude that differences are respected and achieved with the help of language. When using politically correct speech, either in written or spoken, or even in non-verbal (gestures, facial expressions) form, we need to have in mind two things. One, that this is a process: politically correct speech is not an inventory of words created once and forever, being at everybody's disposal, but is an open and changeable inventory of words and phrases adapted to the changing attitudes towards differences. Speakers select a word (or phrase) from this inventory that they believe is in accordance with their intention. If they wish to insult or humiliate someone, they choose a word from the inventory of hate speech, not from the other inventory.

The meaning of the term minority, used in our title, can be defined in various ways. Here we use it to describe those groups in society, which have less power. Sometimes they are, as is the case with women, more numerous (51%) in the country and the world, but their

¹ Serbian Democratic Opposition

power is smaller than their numerosness, so the relationship of minority-majority can also be analyzed in the context of male-female gender.

It is useful, however, to record discord within a minority group expressed by hate speech: what linguistic resources does one woman use to exclude another referring to her: physical appearance, character, occupation, social status...

Our **goal** was to analyze the ways women (as a less powerful group in society) from the majority (Serbian) population, nurture, maintain and preserve stereotypes and prejudice towards women from other national communities on the territory of the city (Novi Sad).

Our **task** is to determine the continuum of different attitudes towards different groups of women –from the completely negative to the positive, in order to establish the points where the two groups may meet and become closer through cooperation.

Methodology: During 2001, the collaborators of Women's Studies from Novi Sad, a multiethnic and multilingual city, polled Serbian women (mainly younger), asking them the following simple question: *What is your first association when I say _____?* (here follows the term for the woman member of one of 10 ethnic groups: Albanian woman, Montenegrin woman, Croatian woman, Jewish woman, Hungarian woman, German woman, Romany woman, Romanian woman, Ruthenian woman, Slovakian woman). We also asked them what they thought of their own minority group: *What is your first association when I say Serbian woman?*

The 1100 answers (100 answers for each national group) were classified into several categories: physical appearance, character, occupation; dress, food and/or drink, religion; education. Answers which document the distancing of a Serbian woman from women from other minority groups based on personal experience or indirect influence (films, books, etc.) represent a separate category.

The results are presented starting from negative towards positive opinions (for details see S. Savic, 2002).

Young women from the majority population have an extremely negative opinion about Albanian, Romany and Romanian women – there are almost no positive words to describe these women.

Albanian women are: dirty, they have a lot of children, uneducated, subordinated to her husband, "woman from Albania". (Otherwise, in Novi Sad we see them everyday – refugees and displaced persons from other parts of former Yugoslavia).

Romany women are dirty, uneducated, they do not like to work but beg, steal, tell fortunes, sing, dance. The only positive opinion is that they are pretty, beautiful.

Romanian women black-market, they are dirty.... (at the time they sold goods from Romania in Novi Sad).

Attitudes towards women from other national communities vary from less close to completely positive.

A **Montenegrin woman** is: physically beautiful, has an outstanding character, pugnacious, self-confident, brought up in a patriarchal manner, lives there in Montenegro, a close acquaintance.

A **Croatian woman** is: pretty, dressed-up, modern, educated, as far as closeness is concerned she is a relation. They are present in our homes through the mass media we watch on our TV receivers. (Though men's opinions are not presented here, I cite the answer of an elderly man: "My first love:")

In the answers for this group there is no intolerance, no indication that they are in any way responsible for the wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia. As far as territory is concerned, they do not associate them with Vojvodina, but with Croatia, and refer to them as "woman of Croatian nationality".

A **Jewish woman** is educated, pretty, respects her tradition, is usually unhappy and close to us (someone has a grandmother or a cousin...they are known through literature, films about their history, suffering).

A **Hungarian woman** is part of a more intimate environment: "My brother's wife"; "szervusz" (basic greeting), with a great variety of stereotypes typical for jokes about Hungarian women (temperamental, hungry for sex).

A **Ruthenian woman** is mainly not visible in modern city life, but she is defined by her national garb, beauty and the colour blue.

Thoughts on **German women** are positive: pretty, fair-haired, plump, clever, educated, they are not brought into connection with Germans in Vojvodina but those in Germany or the tourists we meet at the Adriatic. One person gave the following answer: "I think only the best of them, but if you had asked me about German men I would have given a different answer". It is clear that Serbian women do not consider German women to be responsible for the situation in World War II.

Associations concerning **Slovakian women** are all positive. They are most frequently recognized based on their national symbols: clothing (national garb: wide skirt and kerchief) and dances. They have reached deep into the intimacy of the Serbian family – they look after children, participate directly in providing food (*make good cheese or have fresh eggs*), clean the house (*maids*): "Zuzana who looked after me when I was little"; "the woman we regularly buy eggs and cheese from at the market"; "she irons our clothes". They are also recognized by art (*naïve woman painters, Zuzana Chalupova*).

We were surprised by the data that **Serbian women** do not think well of themselves. They feel like sufferers, not respected enough, they make sacrifices for others, especially in the preservation of tradition (*Kosovka devojka*², *Countess Milica*, *Jefimija*...).

Conclusion: Women from the majority population have different associations about women from other national groups in the city. Some of these groups are new in their environment (for example Albanian women), while most of other national groups have lived on this territory for several centuries.

It was very surprising to find that Serbian women do not think well about themselves, and consider themselves victims of higher goals the community has set for itself.

It is a fact that the mentioned stereotypes of Serbian women about women from different national communities are connected with the political situation that actually preserves them. This is especially evident in the case of Albanian women, but also Romanian women who most frequently sold different goods brought from Romania at markets after 1990.

Considering the political situation in 2001, the time we collected this material, we expected a great number of negative opinions about Croatian women, but also German women because of the bombardment. However the results were quite the opposite. Serbian women admire Croatian women! There are no indications whatsoever that they are in any way responsible for the wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia.

The gathered data indicates that there is a stereotypical understanding of others we live with on the same territory: in the same building, street, city, province, country, which is strengthened by the current political situation in the country. Historical distance also plays an important role: half a century after WWII attitudes towards German women are positive, they are not tense like in the period right after the war when the German national minority was put out of law in the practice of everyday life and even the mention of it was not allowed.

It is important to point out that in their answers, Serbian women exclude German and Croatian women from responsibility for the tragic historical events – that is the domain of male politics. This is where I see a link for cooperation with the aim to erase the stereotypes that women from the majority population have about women from national groups with whom they have lived in the city for years.

Bibliography:

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² Girl from Kosovo