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CULTURAL STUDIES – FROM DISCOURSE TO REALITY: CASE OF SERBIA**

Summary

The paper analyses some particularly important ideas and concepts that have made the Studies of Culture or Cultural Studies part of a specific area of exploring culture. The emphasis is put on the relation which is established between the theory–ideology and reality, and in this respect it is proven that the decades-long linking of this area with the postmodern theoretical paradigms becomes redundant and inadequate for the interpretation of culture today. The motive for such analysis is related to the development of these studies in the post-Yugoslav region with emphasis on the changes brought about by the development of populism and authoritarianism in Serbia, for which the Cultural Studies are not theoretically equipped.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, globalization, identities, populism, culturalism

1. CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies made a profound change some fifty years ago, and they still exist as a vast field that deals, almost exclusively, with the contemporary world. This means that they followed the systematic change in Western capitalist culture and consumerism in the postmod-

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ern era, named “the cultural turn”.¹ That, in short, meant that the divided fields of society, politics and economy started to be seen through the lenses of culture. Focusing on contemporaneity also meant adjusting to quick and fundamental changes that occurred in the last decades and involved a fervent search for new theoretical paradigms that could offer an adequate conceptual apparatus for understanding and interpreting these changes. That is why over time the initial interests and methodologies of Cultural Studies, as proclaimed by the Birmingham Centre, adjusted to postmodern and post-postmodern theoretical ideas, incorporating themes and topics that presented themselves as “burning issues” of the day.

In the first place, it is important to stress that Cultural Studies are deeply associated with feminism, media studies, postcolonial, gender and *queer* studies, literary criticism, art theory etc., which all share radical *antiessentialism* and *constructivism* as their epistemological background. They, however, also “sneaked” into classical disciplines, such as literary theory, anthropology, politicology, psychology, and esthetics. Nevertheless, Cultural Studies never claimed to be an objective, “disinterested science, but rather a hermeneutic process of interpreting signs, symbols, and/or discourses that constitute culture seen as a multiplicity of *signifying practices*”.² Stuart Hall has defined them as a *specific discourse*.

Cultural Studies evolved through criticism of the modernist elitist view on culture, and the consequent devaluation and contempt for mass culture. This led to an important shift, which resulted in the lower strata of society being recognized as legitimate creators and active consumers of culture, which was, in effect, an act of legitimizing mass culture. The object of the theoretical revisionism of Cultural Studies encompassed all theories that derogated masses (the majority of “ordinary” people), which either came from the conservative block of *Kulturkritique* (M. Arnold, J. Benda, Ortega y Gasset, and R. Lewis), or from the Neo-Marxist criticism of cultural industries (The Frankfurt School).³

1) “The very sphere of culture itself has expanded, becoming coterminous with market society in such a way that the cultural is no longer limited to its earlier, traditional or experimental forms, but it is consumed throughout daily life itself, in shopping, in professional activities, in the various often televisual forms of leisure, in production for the market and in the consumption of those market products, indeed in the most secret folds and corners of the quotidian. Social space is now completely saturated with the image of culture.” Frederic Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*, Verso, Brooklyn, 1998, p. 111.

2) Jelena Đorđević, *Postkultura*, Clío, Beograd, 2009.

3) In practice, different political and social groups led a war against popular mass culture, especially in the interwar period, which also continued for some time after World War II. Liberals were against that culture because, in their view, it corrupted individual artistic endeavours; nationalists opposed it because it departed from the authentic national culture;

Mass culture was thought to be either the consequence of the rising social importance of the masses or a manipulative strategy of political and economic elites. Cultural Studies undertook the task of showing that masses do not really exist – that they are heterogeneous, and that people who constitute a mass are in fact *active* consumers of cultural industry products. They also insisted on the fact that the notion of culture that had prevailed for more than two centuries in the western culture was the workings of hegemonic discourses produced by elites and naturalized by society as a whole. This kind of “epistemic violence” could be perceived not only in relation to the definition of (high) culture, but also in many other ways that served for the fortification and maintenance of the bourgeois world and social exclusion of different groups – predominantly by means of culture. *Agency* of culture sees it as a productive force for maintaining the inequalities in the capitalist world. Culture is thus conceived as a battlefield of hegemonic and contra-hegemonic discourses – different affiliations and ideas that are impregnated with political meaning. Marginal groups, marked by different identity markers, each in its own right, produce and consume, interpret, accept or deny different forms of culture as constitutive elements of social reality. Every social act is understood as a signifying practice, so the complexity of the social, societal, economic, artistic and political “interpellate” the notion of culture. Culture, at some point became a totalizing concept.

As the views on culture were changing, Cultural Studies practitioners hoped that they would be able to play the role of “organic intellectuals”, who would act by opening the eyes of the people to the fact that culture is not restricted to the upper levels of existence, but that it intersperses the very tissue of society itself. Cultural Studies took an active, political role by working on the development of theoretical tools for the critique of western societies.⁴ In the late sixties and the seventies Cultural Studies showed the capacity to find new theoretical and interpretative methods to adjust to the thorough changes stemming from the countercultural revolution, sexual revolution, second-wave feminism, human rights movement, Europe’s student uprisings of 1968, decolonization, huge relocations of the population, growing media influence,

communists were against it because it stood in the way of the necessary good education of the working class, which was supposed to be well prepared for the fight against bourgeoisie by high culture. For many different social groups, such as priests, school teachers, administrators, and even artists, mass culture was a sign of decadence: a “Judeo-Bolshevik-black” threat, the deadly influence of American new culture, etc. See: Kaspar Maze, *Bezgranična zabava, uspon masovne kulture 1850–1970*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2008.

4) Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies”, in: *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (eds. David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen), Routledge, London – New York, 1996.

and aggressive consumerism. Facing all these changes, Cultural Studies worked on expanding horizons on the contemporary and on the meaning of culture in the changing political circumstances. Mouffe's concept of *agon* as a marker of contemporary "plural" democracies was welcome as it, in its way, strengthened the idea that no culture is innocent, autonomous, and/or independent of power relations. The central role of class struggle as the basic social, economic and historical concept, fundamental for capitalism, was transposed to the level of culture with the multiplication of social groups involved in dynamism of the "agonistic" battlefield and everlasting dialogues between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. Mouffe proposed: "to distinguish between 'the political' and 'politics'; 'the political' refers to this dimension of antagonism which can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations, a dimension that can never be eradicated; 'politics' refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political... To put it in another way, what is important is that conflict does not take the form of an 'antagonism' (struggle between enemies), but the form of an 'agonism' (struggle between adversaries). We could say that the aim of democratic politics is to transform potential antagonism into an agonism."⁵

Throughout the 1980s and onwards, in their "thrust" for new theories, CS wholeheartedly adopted postmodern and post-structural French theory, embracing, it would seem, the ideology of globalism. Constructivism and radical essentialism became a kind of sacred epistemology based on the "linguistic turn", pointing to the discursive production of reality and its connection to power. Culture became a text to be read and deciphered, interpreted in multitudes of ways dismissing the existence of reality itself independently of discourses and narratives that produce it.

Fragmented into a million pieces, the battlefield of culture became overpopulated with innumerable discourses. Identity analysis became one of the focal points of Cultural Studies, which increasingly turned to the impossibility of identifying identities. These are, in turn, perceived in post-structural and postmodern theories as fragmented, de-centered, nomadic, fluctuating, plural, polysemic, or hybrid. *Difference* became the "golden concept" that ruled Cultural Studies and bordering disciplines, such as postcolonial theory of discourse, gender and queer studies, art theory and other "post" approaches, and played a crucial

5) Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach", *Politica común*, Vol. 9, 2016, p. 113.

role in the deconstruction and dismissal of all universalistic and essentialist narratives. *Difference* proved the non-fixity of any identity which is an object of cultural sculpting and linguistic carving, which means that that an identity is detached from place, social group, religion, culture, sex, nation, subculture, and any other form of real belonging. The concept of fluctuating identity carries a twofold ideological message: on the one hand, it enables the deconstruction of any stereotypical and hegemonic view on being male, female, black, white, Serbian, French etc., discrediting thus any binary divisions that have been proved to be exclusivist and that have often induced grave injustices. On the other, insisting on fluctuating identities implies that they can adapt to globalized hybridity, as well as to a neoliberal reality of replacement, in accord with the needs of the free market.

“Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the ‘play’, of difference. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of ‘frontier-effects’. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.”⁶

Neoliberal economic unification and cultural globalization implied the need for demystifying the concept of nation state, and national culture which was broken into pieces by a multitude of different identities. As Wolf notices “the inclusiveness of Cultural Studies and their persistent work on ‘deconstructing’ identities, masks the fact that it has also... carried the work of what was used to be called ‘identity politics’”.⁷

Another important theoretical point much cherished by Cultural Studies is Foucault’s idea of power-knowledge relationship and its consequences on the idea of resistance and rebellion. Diffuse and capillary spreading of power throughout society redirects the research from recognizing the real source of power. “Political is personal” contributed to the prevailing idea of the culturalization of politics, shifting it from the reality of social struggles, public activity, political acts and decisions, and legislative order – all with practical consequences – to elusive power relations. When political conflicts are omnipresent, no one inside this agon can be named; when a conflict exists on the micro-levels of society, the real source of political power is often disregarded, while in effect it lies with the institutions, individuals, leaders, legislations, etc. This is

6) Stuart Hall, “Introduction, Who Needs ‘Identity’?”, in: *Questions of Cultural Identity* (eds. Stuart Hall, Paul Du Gay), Sage, London, 1988, p. 14.

7) Carry Wolf, “Theory as research program – the very idea”, in: *Theory after Theory* (eds. Jane Elliott, Derek Attridge), Routledge, London – New York, 2011, p. 34.

exactly what followed from the concept of *agon* which although being a political concept very well adjusted to the main aim of Cultural Studies, that is to show that “culture is an arena of consent and resistance”, as Stuart Hall defined it in many of his writings.

Such a view also influenced the idea that counter-power acts could be found in almost any symbolic form of everyday practices – in the way one dresses, in the tabloid press, in football matches, in shoplifting, or in any other way that supposedly stands against the mainstream.⁸ As I concluded earlier: “Symbolic rebellion seems to be everywhere. When everything is rebellion, nothing is rebellion. Used in numerous ways throughout a great deal of research within Cultural Studies, resistance and rebellion were emptied of meaning. This contributed to the weakening the critical potential of the discipline”.⁹

With this in mind, it could be said that theory (as used in Cultural Studies) – whose initial aim was to deconstruct the arrogance of the West, the dominance of the “white, male heterosexual”, and the binary logic that excludes minorities – became a hidden apology for the *status quo* of postmodernity and globalization. Cultural Studies “evolved over several decades from decentering innovation into a symbiosis with globalization and the new world order”.¹⁰ Alternatively, theory could also be seen as a theoretical support for the rhetoric of political correctness, which often conceals the hypocrisy of both local and global politics and, above all, of social and economic injustices.

The politics of neoliberal postmodern societies with the dominance of globalism have become techno-managerial practices detached from basic social problems, led almost exclusively by the economic interests, alienated from the ideas of “common good”. Culture as a battlefield of numerous discourses broke the political up into many pieces. Hence, the paradox is that in the post-political era “everything is politicized except politics, which has been culturalized”.¹¹ The hegemonic field that capitalism secures and intensifies is the one in which politics has ‘disappeared’: “What capitalist realism consolidates is the idea that we are in the era of the post-political, that the big ideological conflicts are over, and the issues that remain largely concern who is to administer the new *consensus*”.¹²

8) John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1989.

9) Jelena Đorđević, „Kultura/politika i otpor”, u zborniku: *Kultura, rod, građanski status* (priredile: Daša Duhaček, Katarina Lončarević), Fakultet političkih nauka, Centar za studije roda i politike, Beograd, 2012, p. 18.

10) Carry Wolf, “Theory as research program – the very idea”, op. cit, p. 35.

11) Miško Šuvaković, „Epistemološka pitanja o filozofiji, teoriji i politici u graničnim zonama modernosti, postmoderne i savremenosti”, *Srpska politička misao – posebno izdanje*, br. 3/2016, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, pp. 37-52.

12) Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative*, Zero Books, John Hunt Publishing, London, 2009, p. 23.

2. FORMER YUGOSLAVIA: THE CASE OF SERBIA

It is reasonable to assume that Cultural Studies bear a certain responsibility for alienation from social reality, which used to be their initial stronghold. It is exactly in the Balkans, and especially in contemporary Serbia that the necessity of introducing new theoretical paradigms into a bulk of research can easily be identified.

Cultural Studies started to influence the Balkan academia in the 1990s when, on the one hand, former Yugoslavia became an interesting subject for western researchers because of its political and identity decomposition. On the other hand, Cultural Studies offered new and fresh points of view, which proved to be exceptionally useful for battling nationalistic explosions, serving at the same time as a mild ideological introduction to the values and principles of globalization that in fact contributed to the breakup of Yugoslavia. For the minority of new intellectual classes, Cultural Studies represented a kind of theoretical support for necessary demystifications of nationalist discourses that contributed to the war, as well as offering tools for reading and interpreting discourses that political elites used for legitimizing new post-socialist regimes.

Cultural studies introduced new methodologies to demystify ethnic, national and religious belongings taken as false identification principles that brought so much suffering. It also introduced Orientalizing and postcolonial discourses for analyzing the Balkans, as well as feminist and queer studies. It influenced memory studies and the study of applied and public history, media and popular culture studies, as well as studies of practices of everyday life. Cultural Studies also contributed to the deconstruction of the modernist art theory and esthetics which had been successfully promoting a new concept of artistic practices rather than the concept of art. All these new fields of research were supported at that time by the activism of the NGOs. All in all, it cannot be denied that Cultural Studies promoted an underlying ideology in line with globalizing processes.

This list of different fields of research does have several focal points which have changed over time. One of the main topics was connected to the decomposition of the ex-communist world, often seen through the opposition between the West and the others. Many scholars place the mechanisms of the discursive shaping of the Balkans within the analytical frame of Orientalism. The concept of Balkanism was also an important theoretical basis for many works examining the forms of “imagining” the Balkans. A steady stream of publications and a plethora of articles and book chapters followed. The Balkans have been con-

ceived less as the “alien other”, which would emphasize the absolute difference from the West, but rather as the “outsider within”, a liminal space that brings frustration and identity crisis. Treating the Balkans as a place between two worlds – in time and in space – geographically and culturally, but also politically – between the socialist past and the post-socialist present – many researches have introduced the concept of “semi-periphery” as the marker of such state of affairs.¹³

The Second focal point of the Cultural Studies research of the Balkans is the research on forms of rebellion in the socialist past, especially in popular culture and art, and much less on the existence in the post-socialist present. It is important to note that at this point it is much more interesting for researches how dominant discourses are fashioned and created, and with what purposes in mind, than the micro-popular rebellion resistances to the mainstream culture and politics. A special interest in the cultural deconstruction of the socialist past and revisionism of history as a strong legitimizing discourse of the political elites in the new states of former Yugoslavia follow the same suit. The study of nostalgia, especially in the last decade, has predominantly interpreted it as a consequence of the present discontent. It is worth mentioning that post-socialist studies are included in Cultural Studies research to a great extent, even though academically they belong to other disciplines: in most cases to Anthropology, but they also border on political theory.¹⁴

It is not the aim of this article to give a full list of works and topics that use interpretative methods of Cultural Studies, but rather to highlight some problems that arise from an occasionally rigid use of constructivist methodology and anti-essentialist epistemological basis in political and other circumstances. These circumstances demand a deeper involvement of some new insights into political, economic and social *reality*. The necessity of forming some new cultural theories could enrich the redundant repetition of certain schemes which seem to have been the obligatory *mantras* of any cultural analysis for some time now.

The reality of the monopoly of the most powerful countries, exercised by economic and political pressures, soft (cultural) power, often aggressive imposition of “democracy”, and economic misuse of the underdeveloped countries generates and maintains the growing differences between the rich and the poor, the West and the others. All this, among other things, makes the whole world a *risk society*, which

13) Sanja Lazarević Radak, „Dekonstruisanje Srbije: od postkolonijalizma do poluperiferije”, *Srpska politička misao – posebno izdanje*, br. 3/2016, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, pp. 105-119.

14) For the relationship between Cultural Studies and Anthropology see: Marina Simić, „Studije kulture i antropologija: Sudar titana ili narcizam malih razlika”, *Genero* 18, Beograd, 2014, pp. 89-108.

can be easily overlooked as long as politics is transformed into culture, truths into a linguistic game, vertical hierarchies into horizontal, the local into global, the real into fictional, utopia into dystopia, ideas into advertising, and wholeness into fragments. The question of how these global processes affect countries like Serbia is almost completely dismissed from a cultural analysis that relays ready-made patterns and whose scope of research topics is limited. Jim McGuigan noticed, that it was this kind of one-sided praise of popular culture lacking any value judgement that led Cultural Studies to one kind of reductionism. He then stressed that it is necessary to explore: “the prospects for critical renewal in the field and to the possibility of a critical populism, which can account for both ordinary people’s everyday culture and its material construction by powerful forces beyond the immediate comprehension and control of ordinary people. That can only be achieved if certain artificial barriers between schools of thought are broken down”¹⁵

The theoretical platform that insists on multifocal subjectivity in relation to many different discourses complicates the antagonistic-agonistic space of culture, which becomes almost unrecognizable. However, in the contemporary *Empire*, there exists one invisible “multitude”, although it is racially, sexually, culturally, ethnically, and in many other ways heterogeneous, as Hart and Negri tried to show:

“The fact that under the category of proletariat we understand all those exploited by and subject to capitalist domination should not indicate that the proletariat is a homogeneous or undifferentiated unit. It is indeed cut through in various directions by differences and stratifications. Some labor is waged, some is not; some labor is restricted to within the factory walls, some is dispersed across the unbounded social terrain; some labor is limited to eight hours a day and forty hours a week, some expands to fill the entire time of life; some labor is accorded a minimal value, some is exalted to the pinnacle of the capitalist economy... Our point here is that all of these diverse forms of labor are in some way subject to capitalist discipline and capitalist relations of production. This fact of being within capital and sustaining capital is what defines the proletariat as a class.”¹⁶

In spite of its heterogeneity, the multitude of the poor, underfed, illiterate, socially and economically excluded, (ab)used, forgotten, including the subaltern *transitional losers*, is at the same time homogeneous in relation to the holders of power.¹⁷ Such is the case in populist regimes.

15) Jim McGuigan, *Cultural populism*, first published in 1992 by Routledge, this edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003, p. 16.

16) Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000, ctp. 53.

17) Vinay Lal, Ashis Nandy (eds.), *The Future of Knowledge and Culture, A Dictionary for the 21st Century*, Penguin, London, 2005.

Cultural Studies failed to perceive the unheard voices, marginality, and social and cultural exclusion as the main features of the majority deprived of many rights, including the right to work and feed. However, it is the majority itself that elects governments, and thus it gets a decisive role in shaping the course of politics and consequently of culture, especially under growing populism. Such is the case not only in Serbia, but elsewhere as well. In populism based on strong authoritarianism, paradoxically, it is the *majority, deprived of rights, that becomes an unrecognizable political and cultural power*. Hart and Negri define the multitude as: “New figures of struggle and new subjectivities are produced in the conjecture of events, in the universal nomadism ... They are not posed merely against the imperial system—they are not simply negative forces. They also express, nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects... This constituent aspect of the movement of the multitude, in its myriad faces, is really the positive terrain of the historical construction of Empire... an antagonistic and creative positivity. The deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, in populist/authoritarian regimes such as in the one in Serbia, the “antagonistic creative positivity”, as well as popular culture as “one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged”, as Stuart Hall insisted,¹⁹ the rebellious creativity seems to be brought into question. The assumption that popular culture – in itself a complex of interference between various minority and majority groups and their social, political, cultural (discursive) positions – always carries the seeds of rebellion and full subversive potential, even in the smallest parts of everyday life, seems to be turned upside down in political populism. The fact that those with political power rely on the majority, basically consisting of the poor, uneducated, and “silent”, implies the necessity of adjusting cultural politics to the supposed needs of the majority. By means of propaganda, by media whose purpose is not to inform but to convince, by tabloid logic that produces scandals and maintains a constant state of fear, political holders of power succeed in producing a strong unity between the government and “its people”. The division between the popular and elite cultures is as great as possible. In populism, it is the elite that becomes an outcast minority. The impositions of the dominant, hegemonic discourses are not linguistic, symbolic, and/or narrative structures, but they are the reality of the

18) Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire*, op. cit, p. 61.

19) Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructiong ‘The Popular’”, in: *Popular Culture: A Reader* (eds. Raiford Guins, Omayra Zaragoza Cruz), Sage, London, 2005, p. 26.

living circumstances. In that sense, they are not the agonistic space of multitudes of cultural conflicts any more, but they become the reality of politics which is at stake: the reality of actions, decisions and the form of rule, reality of structural social deprivation, reality of punishments and lack of freedom, and reality of impoverishment.

The influence of Foucault's concept of governmentality, which is another "golden concept" of Cultural Studies research, downgrades the importance of "big politics" – a geopolitical arrangement; political strategies for organizing world order according to the ambition of the most powerful states. Also, the dependence of politics on economic determinants, created locally or imposed by globalized neoliberalism, influences real political choices, institutional arrangements and distribution of wealth that cannot be ignored when discussing culture. Serbia is a striking example of international politics being incorporated into everyday lives of the people, provoking an open internal struggle between different, often quite opposite feelings of cultural belonging. The position between the East and West while struggling with propaganda from both sides, with a deep lack of confidence in the good will of the West, and with the prolonged process of joining the European Union deeply affects political and cultural choices and attitudes. The official rhetoric which stresses the decisiveness of Serbia to join the EU is constantly opposed by official government media that build up anti-European and anti-Western feelings. Such paradoxes create a chaotic ambience, where a surrender to the strong authority seems to be the best way out for a disoriented society.

In the case of Serbia, identity issues show that not only class, race, gender, ethnicity and religion make the web of conflictual meanings that influence the production of identity: it is *political affiliations* that influence the shaping of identity. It is clear that pro-European political orientation stresses the importance of minority groups and political correctness, with the adherence to the authentic democratic principles. The opposite orientation insists on traditional, national, and religious values, which are often expressed through defensive aggressiveness. Cultural forms and discourses produced within the limits of these opposed views and politically antagonistic blocs do show unexpected "articulations" which could be read through the lenses of hybridity and non-binary logic as Cultural Studies suggest, but the political circumstances are such that the two blocs are at war, rather than in cultural agonistic coexistence. As a matter of fact, even a poststructuralist interpretation could lead us to such a conclusion, as Woods noticed:

"'The social' is nothing other than the effect of constitutive acts of political power. The corollary of this is that is only able to conceptu-

alize social solidarity in terms of a politically imposed logic of closure and identification. The ontologization of antagonism, allied to a particular interpretation of poststructuralist theories of signification, leads into a conceptual cul-de-sac whereby, having dissolved the social into so many effects of power, one can only derive relations of solidarity from more fundamental relations of hostility.²⁰

At some point, following the avenue of research described here, Cultural Studies, reached the stage of not seeing the wood from the trees. The initial belief and intention of CS to have a mission, an active role in society, has weakened following a certain, strictly traced theoretical path. It seems that by becoming an academic discipline that is in most cases overburdened by theory, it immersed itself in a more or less nonconflictual world, which is in turn gradually succumbing to the techno-managerial *ethos* of the time and to the neoliberal doctrine of new education. This is why Cultural Studies have the best results when they “borrow” stricter methodologies from other disciplines of social sciences. In other words, Cultural Studies need some new explanatory tools, as well as a revised epistemology of radical culturalism.

These problems, among many others, have been singled out, in order to open up some questions: are prevailing methodologies and epistemology of Cultural Studies still sufficient to act as an agent of change? Is discursive construction of reality the only reality? Are discursive, symbolic capillary resistances the topic that deserves specific attention while naked propaganda and manipulation shape cultural politics and public sphere? Is it not necessary to rethink the symbiotic unity of political and cultural? Could we overcome the redundancy of Cultural Studies which, at times seem endlessly to be repeating the same? Could Cultural Studies fully grasp the growing tendency of revitalization of national feelings treating them as an open tendency provoked by the wrong arrangements of neoliberal misuse of the Second- and Third-World countries? What changes does populism bring into popular culture and everyday life? How do Cultural Studies deal with propaganda: do they need to revitalize some older criticisms of mass culture? Could Cultural Studies re-acknowledge economic dependence of many cultural processes?

It can be noticed that all these changes have brought home the awareness that an introduction of a more sociological mode is necessary in order to move away from the monopoly of textual concerns of Theory. The political events and the dangerous social, geopolitical and economic shaping of the contemporary world have helped to create a

20) Brennon A Wood, “Stuart Hall’s Cultural Studies and the Problem of Hegemony”, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49 (3), 1998, p. 78.

sense of “post-theoretical urgency” that should include anti-capitalist ethics, post-humanities, and new readings of Marx. The criticism of the fact that Cultural Studies focus on texts, discourses, and instability of any meaning (which I labelled as “radical culturalism”) is the object of criticism coming from “harder sciences”. Often, when political efficacy gets involved in a myriad of different agonistic conflicts seen as attributes of a radical democracy, which is devoid of a firmer ideological value substance, this state of affairs most frequently results in relativism, making it impossible to make a right judgement as to what is good and what is bad for society and its members. As Sokal noticed long time ago:

“Politically, I’m angered because most (though not all) of this silliness is emanating from the self-proclaimed Left. We’re witnessing here a profound historical *volte-face*. For most of the past two centuries, the Left has been identified with science and against obscurantism; we have believed that rational thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality (both natural and social) are incisive tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful – not to mention being desirable human ends in their own right. The recent turn of many ‘progressive’ or ‘leftist’ academic humanists and social scientists toward one or another form of epistemic relativism betrays this worthy heritage and undermines the already fragile prospects for progressive social critique. Theorizing about ‘the social construction of reality’ won’t help us find an effective treatment for AIDS or devise strategies for preventing global warming. Nor can we combat false ideas in history, sociology, economics and politics if we reject the notions of truth and falsity.”²¹

Finally, it seems that Cultural Studies manifest the current absence of emancipatory theory on the world-historic scale. It has been noticed by those Cultural Studies practitioners aware of the exhaustion of dominant theoretical patterns that it is important to adjust, once again, to the actual world. Cultural Studies did take different “turns”, such as the introduction of biopolitical issues and views, as well as searching for new inspiration in philosophical works of Agamben, Rancière, Badiou, Negri, Deleuze, Levinas, and Žižek, who insist on the “return to politics” from different perspectives.²²

Unfortunately, it seems that the sense of awareness of the redundancy of CS has not reached the Balkans yet, as they are still pre-occupied by political and ideological clashes between two hegemonic discourses and political options: globalization *versus* nationalism. The

21) Alan Sokal, “A Physicist Experiments With Cultural Studies”, *Lingua Franca*, May – June, 1996.

22) *New Cultural Studies* (eds. Gary Hall, Clare Birchel), Edinbourg University Press, 2016.

awareness of the aggressiveness of neoliberal impositions, dramatic differences between the rich and the poor, terrorism, growth of populism, fortification of the borders, historical revisionism, ecological and technological risks, renewal of Cold War adversaries and growth of nuclear weapons seem not to have received a *local* interpretation and understanding so as to be included in the new Cultural Studies.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper underscores that there is a huge disproportion between the theoretical and methodological apparatus of CS which was employed to analyze the “plural democracy” on the one hand, and the current political and social reality in Serbia, which found itself trapped in the populist-authoritarian regime on the other. This paper points to the necessity of taking the political reality into account so as to be able to grasp culture in the given social and political context, but no longer as a discursive product of different centers of power that spreads in a capillary fashion throughout society as a whole, but quite conversely: as a product of the real political situation that affects the creation of cultural responses. A populist and authoritarian regime, like the one in Serbia, presumes a discursive production of knowledge, conflicts, and cultural divides different from those referred to by the dominant theories that reflect the ideas of hybridity, fluctuating identities, absolute heterogeneity of cultural discourses, and non-fixity of any meaning whatsoever. This real political situation calls for new theoretical models which would more heavily rely on the ones that postmodernism disqualified by putting forward the ideas of unstable structures, values, and meanings. Authoritarianism and populism result in firm structures: the “elite” and the “people” are strictly divided; culture is not merrily immersed in a monolithic celebratory culture of consumerism, as CS used to claim. Pointing to the difference between “antagonistic” and “agonistic” politics, C. Mouffe stresses: “When the agonistic dynamics of pluralism is hindered because of a lack of democratic forms of identifications, passions cannot be given a democratic outlet and the ground is laid for various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type, and for the multiplication of confrontations over non-negotiable moral values, with all the manifestations of violence that such confrontations entail.”²³

Antagonism seems to be reborn in present Serbian politics where political efficacy is not a product of “discursive negotiations”, but it resorts to much more forceful methods of persuasion. In order to remain

23) Chantal Mouffe, “Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach”, op. cit., p. 113.

political to an extent, which is something that CS have always purported to be, they have to fortify their critical potential, and in the case of Serbia, they will have to enrich and possibly even alter the hegemonic academic patterns that have over time become redundant and repetitive.

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КУЛТУРНЕ СТУДИЈЕ – ОД ДИСКУРСА ДО РЕАЛНОСТИ: СЛУЧАЈ СРБИЈЕ

Резиме

У раду се анализирају неке посебно значајне идеје и концепти који су учинили да студије културе или културалне студије постану специфична област истраживања културе. Акцент је на вези која се успоставља између теорије–идеологије и реалности и у том погледу се доказује да вишедеценијско везивање ове области за постмодернистичке теоријске парадигме постаје редундантно и неадекватно за тумачење културе данас. Повод за такву анализу везан је за развој ових студија на постјугословенском простору са акцентом на променама које доноси развој популизма и ауторитаризма у Србији а за шта студије културе нису теоријски опремљене. У раду се полази од радикалног антиелитизма, што, у највећој мери, дефинише првобитне намере студија културе. С тим у вези истиче се политизација културолошког теоријског и аналитичког дискурса што је, касније, у међусобном садејству са пост теоријским ставовима, посебно са феминизмом, студијама рода и постколонијалном теоријом, учинило да се политичко посматра кроз призму културе. Текстуралне анализе културе отупиле су политичку и критичку оштрицу студија културе, које су, како се у раду показује, постале својеврсна апологија глобализма. Даље, наводе се основне теме којима су заокупљене ове студије на Балкану, посебно на постјугословенском и српском простору да би се указало да одустајање од демократских принципа, налет популизма и ауторитаризма захтева неке нове теоријске парадигме које би утицале на дубље разумевање ових друштвених поремећаја. Поставља се низ питања која указују да је због реду-

ндантности ових културолошких анализа нужно укључити неке моделе из чвршћих друштвених дисциплина. Полазна поставка да је друштво поље непрекидног агона, тражи ревизију у условима у којима се јавља гола пропаганда и у којима се однос између културне елите и „мноштва” преокреће у правцу монопола културе већине као основно обележје популизма. Наводе се још неке специфичности српског друштва и културе које указују на нужност проширења визуре ових студија.

Кључне речи: студије културе, глобализација, идентитети, популизам, културализам

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