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FEMINIST PRODUCTIONS “IN NEED OF SAVING”: FROM #SAVEMELANIA TO #SAVEEUROPEANSEMIPERIPHERY

‘Potreba za spasavanjem’ feminističke produkcije: od #savemelania do #saveeuropeansemiperiphery

ABSTRACT: The paper discusses the issue of feminist knowledge production and reproduction in relation to the subject and her geo-political location. This discussion was prompted by Sofi Oksanen’s letter to Melania Trump in 2017. We argue that this letter is subtly based on the power dynamics of the centre, semi-periphery and periphery, and we attempt to make these dynamics visible. Namely, Oksanen addresses M. Trump as the one who made it without the necessary critique of what ‘making-it’ means, while at the same time she positions her as the potential hero that can save ‘us’ all, where ‘us’ refers to the women in the semi-periphery. This heroization of M. Trump presupposes that post-socialist countries face gender (and gendered) issues at the same time as it presupposes that these issues cannot be effectively and successfully addressed by the women in the post-socialist countries themselves. Thus, Oksanen’s heroization is based on a two-fold process of constituting a vulnerable subject stripped of her agency, i.e. the women in post-socialist countries, and an autonomous, agentic subject for whose intervention she calls for, that is, a ‘Western-ized’ subject. Such gestures, which are evident in the letter, are a part of reproducing the geopolitical dynamics between the centre, semi-periphery and periphery, or, more specifically, of constructing the semi-peripheral post-socialist countries, the construct of which neglects the vigour of feminist practices, productions and movements in post-socialist countries.

KEYWORDS: semi-periphery, power dynamics, vulnerability, agency, feminist productions.

APSTRAKT: *U tekstu se raspravlja o feminističkoj produkciji i reprodukciji znanja u odnosu na subjekt i geo-političku lokaciju. Diskusija proizilazi iz pisma*

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Sofi Oksanen Melaniji Trump, 2017. godine. Smatramo da je ovo pismo suptilno zasnovano na dinamici moći izmedju centra, poluperiferije i periferije, te zato u tekstu nastojimo da ovu dinamiku moći učinimo vidljivom. Naime, Oksanen se obraća Melaniji Trump kao osobi koja je "uspešna", bez kritičkog pitanja šta znači "uspeti". Istovremeno Oksanen pozicionira M. Trump kao potencijalnu herojku, koja bi "nas" sve mogla "spasiti", gde se "nas" odnosi na žene na poluperiferiji. Ova heroizacija M. Trump prepostavlja da su postsocialističke zemlje suočene sa rodnim (orođenim) pitanjima te istovremeno da ova pitanja ne mogu biti efektivno i uspešno postavljena od strane samih žena u postsocijalističkim zemljama. Na ovaj način heroizacija koju sporovodi S. Oksanen se zasniva na dvostrukom procesu konstituisanja ranljivog subjekta koji je lišen svoje agenture, što znači – žene u postsocijalističkim zemljama, dok su autonomni delotvorni subjekti kojeg intervenciju poziva – vesternizovani subjekti. Ovakve sugestije, koje se mogu naći u pismu, deo su reprodukovanja geo-političke dinamike izmedju centra, semi-periferije i periferije, ili još specifičnije konstruisanja poluperifernih postsocijalističkih zemalja, konstruisanja koje zanemaruje vitalnost feminističkih praksi, produkcija i pokreta u post-socijalističkim zemljama.

KLJUČNE REČI: poluperiferija, dinamika moći, ranjivost, pokret, feministička produkcija.

Introduction

The issues of power dynamics in various forms of feminist productions, ranging from the academic and predominantly theoretical to the predominantly activist-oriented or political in an institutional sense, have been increasingly addressed in the last decades. The first push in terms of recognizing power dynamics that internally structure the social group of 'women' and the women's movement was made on the basis of race, and demanded that race privilege be acknowledged and attempts be made to neutralize it by recognizing the characteristics of being racialized, where by 'being racialized' stands for being non-white, or 'of colour'. Such demands were most often made at the intersection of class background, acknowledging that 'feminism' mostly refers to the feminism of a small group of white and middle class women whose political demands were fulfilled and who made gains while neglecting the heterogeneity of 'women' and at the expense of those who were deprived across various axes of social categorization, including race (Amos & Parmar 1984). In parallel, the assumption of heterosexuality was also addressed in terms of lesbian feminism (Valentine 2007). The issue of nationality, and particularly that of wider, global geopolitical dynamics, is primarily addressed through colonial and post-colonial studies that point to the structural oppression running through the dominant Western feminism that was recognized as a mechanism and an extension of Western hegemony (Amos & Parmar 1984; Mohanty 1984; 2002, Escobar 1995).

Imperial feminism was thus challenged by its subalterns, or Oriental Others, that is, from the subordinated positions the West itself had created (Amos

& Parmar 1984; Said 1996). It was challenged in and through the relations between the so-called (and predominantly conceived as geographically located) First, Second and Third World. This scheme was destabilized, at least in terms of the distinctions it aimed to capture, with the collapse of the socialist regimes that were constituted as the ‘Second World’ as well as by critiques pointing to the reductionist, oversimplifying scheme of global power dynamics, a scheme which contributed to the constitution of the West as the *First* world by exporting so-called ‘developmental issues’³ to non-Western areas as broadly categorized as those (still) ‘in development’ and those that are ‘under-developed’ (Escobar 1995). Thus, it contributed to the positioning of the West as hegemonic, with hegemony going hand in hand with the mission of ‘civilizing’ the non-West – a mission that takes various forms, including but not limited to Western institutions’ developmental plans (*ibid.*). Practices in other areas did not escape this framing either. This included feminism and its aims, which were ensnared in the ‘gender-in-development’ vision (Chowdry 1995 in Kašić 2004, 480).

To avoid repeating the potential misreading of the tripartite scheme of the First, Second, and Third World, we use concepts that better equip us to understand the peculiarities of post-socialist countries, namely, the concepts of the core, semi-periphery and periphery, although, as Blagojević warns (2009), the concept of the semi-periphery is subject to continuous changes. Using the concept of the semi-periphery enables us to think about the contingency and complexity of power relations as well as its fluidity and impermanence in terms of geographical dispersion, and its heterogeneity and differences in post-socialist countries alongside the diversity and plurality of women’s experiences within each of them (Hannam & Holden 2002; Cerwonka 2008; Blagojević 2009). Thus, the concept of the semi-periphery with which we address the global position of post-socialist countries connotes its essence as ‘transitional’. It is in an ambivalent position between the core and periphery, having characteristics of both (Blagojević 2009) and thus not fully belonging to either; that is, its position is that of seemingly never-ending ‘transitionality’, reaching for the West – sometimes with an overexcited servility – but never quite getting there.

The position of the former Second World, which was geopolitically located at the semi-periphery, was made even more ambivalent after the collapse of socialist regimes and the expansion of the European Union eastward. Such countries are ‘neither fully civilized nor fully savage’ (Owczarzak 2009, 6). The collapse was followed by a democratic transition built upon ‘capitalism-by-design’ – and not without the help of ‘feminism-by-design’, denoting the feminist ‘aid bandwagon’ of the Western feminist agenda that failed to recognize any advantages on the basis of gender in socialist regimes (Ghodsee 2004, 729–730), and thus constituted women in post-socialist countries as passive victims in

3 In a dual sense, that is, 1) exportation of the so-called ‘developmental issues’ to non-Western parts of the world as if conditions that make lives unliveable or more difficult cannot be located and identified in the West, and 2) in the sense of the ‘over-exportation’ of such issues, that is, of over-signifying non-Western areas as *in need* of development to a degree that any recognition of the agency and power of social groups is rendered difficult.

need of patronage and protection by the West and mainstream feminism. It is evident that questions of global power dynamics as they translate and spill over into the field of feminist productions are related to questions of agency and power: when a subject (the social group of women in post-socialist countries) is constituted as in need of protection, she is constituted as such on the basis of vulnerability, victimhood and passivity projected onto her (Owczarzak 2009). She cannot speak for herself, and even if she does, her speech is conceived as in need of correction and enlightening, as the emancipated subject is, supposedly, a Western subject who is at the same time an illusion of a self-sovereign 'I' (Butler 2015), rejecting its dependency and vulnerability that originates in the subject's constitutive relationality (Butler 2012). Vulnerability is established in the dual and mutually exclusive terms of those who have power and are thus seemingly independent and autonomous, and those who do not have power and are thus made dependent and vulnerable, or, better said, dependent because of their vulnerability which is constituted in an exclusionary logic that denies the potential for resistance, presupposing that those who are vulnerable (those who are constituted as such through a discourse of protection) are without agency, 'fixed in a political position of powerlessness and lack of agency' (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016; Butler 2016, 25).

In this article, we attempt to track such dynamics of centre and semi-periphery through the example of Sofi Oksanen's letter to Melania Trump, published on October 17, 2017 (Oksanen 2017). In the letter, Oksanen raises the issue of Eastern European women stereotypes, with a focus given on sexualisation of mentioned women and their attempts to escape peripheral status of Eastern Europe: 'When I was younger, I looked up to girls like you. They seemed so mature. But even though they lived behind the Iron Curtain, I didn't understand why they wanted so badly to get to the West. /.../ Most of the girls who wanted to leave had absolutely no idea what the West was really like. To hear them talk, Western men were a kind of dream job that would open up a new world of social and economic opportunities for them.' Throughout the letter, M. Trump is referred to as the one who grabbed hold of an opportunity when borders started to open up, and the author problematizes her silence when it comes to sexist practises and anti-feminist agenda of D. Trump. We argue that the letter ends up reproducing the geopolitical dynamics between the global centre and its not-West-enough-but-trying-to-get-there Other, that is, post-socialist countries. In the following sections, the letter is analysed with a focus on the discursive construction of Melania Trump and the role projected onto her in relation to her being born in Slovenia and in relation to her becoming the First Lady. Special attention is given to the interplay of vulnerability and agency, that is, to the question of being constituted as vulnerable and therefore in need of protection. Such constitution of a subject negates her capacity and potential for effective political mobilization. Therefore, we argue that Oksanen's letter (2017) opens up the questions of who is constituted as vulnerable – and at what price. With that in mind, we try to deconstruct such a discursive gesture with a brief analysis of feminist productions in post-socialist countries, with emphasis on Slovenia's feminist socialist heritage and its contemporary feminist productions.

As eloquently put by Velikonja (2005), Slovenia's position in global dynamics is strongly characterized by 'eurosis', originating from the assumed position of being a leader and a model to those Balkan (*Balkanized*) countries that are trying to enter into 'Europe', now – through reduction – re-constituted as the European Union. The concept of eurosis designates a position that manifests in a self-induced servility to the European Union's institutions *and* a patronizing attitude towards those not-civilised-enough, post-socialist, 'non-European' countries (*ibid.*). Such a dual position shows how Eurocentric and, broadly, Occidentalistic matrixes of power relations are internalized by those who are subordinated by these same power relations.⁴

Who or What Needs to be Saved?

In the letter to Melania Trump that was published in October 2017, Oksanen (2017) tries to address the issue of stereotypes of Eastern European women, for whom the accent is supposedly a telling sign that lets everyone 'know you were for sale, and cheap'. Although we do not contest the issue of human trafficking of East European women that Oksanen is raising (among others), and although she is obviously aware of the geopolitical dynamics between the West and a part of the 'Evil Empire', she finishes her letter with a direct and explicit call for Melania Trump to be 'a hero to us all'.

We do believe that the issue of Melania Trump's position is a complex one, especially regarding Western positioning of her as a passive victim in the hands of an'abusive husband', evident through numerous and telling hashtags, ranging from #saveMelania, 'freeMelania' to tweets stating 'blink twice if you need help'. This positioning of M. Trump is not neutral in relation to her nationality, of her coming from the European semi-periphery. Thus, we agree with Oksanen in this specific point: in the context of the U.S., M. Trump is the face of Western stereotypical imagining of East European women – she is an Eastern European woman under Western eyes, to paraphrase Mohanty (1984). However, as Oksanen (2017) tries to justify interpellating her into a position of being socially aware and active, she calls on M. Trump to 'lead by example' and she addresses her as the one 'who made it' – as one who achieved a certain position of (symbolic) power in the, if we play with Oksanen's previous wording, Western Empire. Oksanen (*ibid.*) positions her as the one who made it in relation to numerous women from the European semi-periphery who do not or who, even worse, end up in a human trafficking ring. But to position her as a potential 'hero to us all' (Oksanen 2017) because 'she made it' to the position of First Lady

4 One of the consequences of the praxis of referring to the countries 'behind the iron curtain' as the so-called Soviet bloc, or Communist regimes or similar, that is, not respecting differences among them, including differentiated historic periods in the particular country. One of the telling examples is Slovenia as a part of the former federal Yugoslav state. Yugoslavian socialism, especially after 1948 – after the break with Stalin's Soviet Union – differ from all the other countries in this region, and Slovenia differs in many respects from the six Yugoslav republics as well, as it was known to be the most developed, the most open and the most westernized.

with a President whose agenda is explicitly anti-gender equality is problematic on another level, including the level of what counts as 'making-it', that is, making it by becoming a First Lady through marriage. Furthermore, such positioning, such a gesture, is built upon the assumption that 'we still need help, and we need it from women like you. Be the First Lady and change the world'. We argue that the discursive shaping of Oksanen's letter can be problematized on (at least) the following points, namely 1) the constitution of M. Trump as the 'one who made it', 2) the shaping of the First Lady function and 3) reproducing geopolitical dynamics of the centre – the semi-periphery (and periphery).

When Oksanen (2017) positions M. Trump as the 'one who made it', 'who grabbed hold of [opportunity]' after borders started opening up, she inevitably buys into the construction of 'the American Dream' that spills over national boundaries, becoming dream the world should strive for and the fulfilment of which draws a line between successful Westerners or, in the worst, but still and conditionally acceptable, case, Easterners becoming Westernized enough, and those who are unsuccessful in reaching towards a dream [that became] a possibility' (Oksanen 2017). When Loizidou (2016) discusses dreams as a way of freeing a political subject from the officialised forms of reality and thereby opening her up to imagining something other and imagining otherwise, such a conceptualization should be, at least in the context of the American Dream, extended by Berlant's concept of cruel optimism (2011), denoting attachments to objects, conditions whose existence and presence compromise the optimistic subject's well-being, when the 'well-being' is understood in the hegemonic terms of what constitutes the 'good life', 'which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects' (ibid., 27). The paradox from which the cruelty of such optimism emerges is therefore the affective investment into the objects and conditions that, precisely by being invested into, reproduce the conditions of the subjects wearing out and being worn out (ibid.). In the context of Loizidou's thesis (2016), then, dreams can function also as a mechanism of reproducing precarious living conditions and subordination of some by orienting and disciplining affective attachments, straightening them up into proper form, including the objects that are being invested into and by investments being shaped into a form of *desirability* – something to strive and hope for, to fantasise about (Ahmed 2014).

What Oksanen's letter (2017) reveals is that despite (cruel) optimistic attachment, being invested with affects, deemed positive, including hope (Berlant 2011), to the object – the American Dream – the attempt to 'make it' is granted to be unsuccessful and trapped in a continuous, never-ending 'making it'. Namely, M. Trump's position in Oksanen's letter (2017) is a contradictory position. At the same time as Oksanen (ibid.) addresses her as the one who successfully grabbed hold of her dreams, she also recognizes the impossibility of her truly 'making it' that is manifest in the public images of M. Trump as the 'passive victim in the stereotypical story of an Eastern European girl'. Instead of deconstructing Westernized 'dreams becoming a possibility' after the collapse of socialist and communist regimes and of Western stereotypes of Eastern European woman, Oksanen (ibid.) constitutes M. Trump as an example of dreams that became realized to a certain degree or only in a partial manner, that is, to the point

that M. Trump cannot escape the burden of (be-)coming from a postsocialist country and is as such constituted as a ‘passive victim’ and a woman who ‘looks like a supermodel but was raised by her grandmother’ through hegemonic stereotypical notions (Oksanen 2017). Oksanen (*ibid.*) does not address these stereotypical notions as being driven by and derived from the geopolitical dynamics between the centre and semi-periphery; rather, she frames it as the individual responsibility of M. Trump: ‘Unfortunately, you are the best thing that’s happened in ages for the market in Eastern European girls. You’ve become the face of the entire industry.’ Through such discursive gestures the American Dream – the object of investment with its logic of attachment, characterized by cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) – is left untouched in its place of desirability. The impossibility of its total fulfilment is framed as the individual responsibility of M. Trump, whose practices and silence reproduce the stereotypes of Eastern European women, when instead it should be addressed in relation to the stereotypes as the one that close down the possibility of its full realization.

Furthermore, Oksanen ambivalently characterizes the function of the First Lady. In the beginning, Oksanen (2017) seems aware of this function being predominantly apolitical and aestheticized, reduced to being ‘the most important dress in the country’ (Keohane 2017, 277), as it is evident in her discussion of the so-called ‘Melania effect’, or, the lack of it: ‘No one is rushing out to buy the dresses you wear, no matter how beautiful the garments your stylists drape over your perfect body. You aren’t a fashion icon. You aren’t an idol.’ However, when Oksanen (*ibid.*) attempts to call on M. Trump to take responsibility and push her towards some form of engagement in terms of addressing the position of Eastern European women, she seems to politicize the function M. Trump occupies: ‘Be the First Lady and change the world, as First Ladies before you have’ (*ibid.*). As Keohane (2017, 271) discusses, the function of the First Lady is continuously exposed to a masculinist view, predominantly constituted as an ‘object of observation and consumption’, and, although the position is constituted as one of power, its implementation is predominantly limited to ceremonial roles and engagement in ‘appropriate’ ‘pet projects’ (*ibid.*, 273). Primarily, the function is predominantly politicized under certain conditions and in a narrow sense allows the performance of the so-called ‘mythic first ladyship’ in terms of strictly gendered and objectified diplomacy roles, limited to the role of ‘dutiful spouse or perfunctory ambassadors of goodwill’ (Erickson & Thomson 2012, 240).⁵

Therefore, Oksanen (2017) frames M. Trump’s position in dual terms that do not enable any resolution, as M. Trump – based on Oksanen’s letter – fails on both accounts. Firstly, she constitutes the position of First Lady in terms of its fashion effects, which are absent in the case of M. Trump, while, secondly, she calls for the politicization of the function by over-stretching its political reach, that is, by calling for M. Trump to change the world as other First Ladies have done before her. Given that the function is mostly aestheticized, if we play

5 We do not contest the position being made into ceremonial roles, given that it comes into being only via president election; the main problem is this position being constituted as gendered in a way that reproduce stereotypical representation of women and as such also *gendering*.

with Keohane's phrase (2017), 'changing the world' seems limited to changing it one Dolce & Gabbana dress at the time. In this context, Oksanen (2017) calls for M. Trump to 'lead by example'. While the reach of her position is not to be underestimated, given that, as Bauman warns (2002), being a public model has a certain degree of 'natural authority' that gives messages their weight before they are even communicated, Oksanen's call to 'lead by example' fits well into the framework of mediated feminism, assimilated or even co-opted and neutralized by the market place through turning it into an object for sale (Zeisler 2016).

We argue that such discursive gestures in Oksanen's letter (2017), that is, as 1) the one who made it (or almost made it) without a critique of what *making-it* means and represents, and 2) the call for M. Trump to lead by example, where 'example' stands for the First Lady's aestheticized and depoliticized mediated images and pet projects, lead Oksanen to position M. Trump as a potential 'hero to us all', where *us* stands for women in the semi-periphery. Such a gesture is framed in a discourse made weightless in terms of the geopolitical dynamics of the centre and semi-periphery, as those dynamics are being addressed merely through Western stereotypes of Eastern European women⁶, and even in this moment, Oksanen reduces them to the individual level. Such 'heroization' of M. Trump needs to be discussed based on the background of global power dynamics, especially in relation to vulnerability and agency.

Namely, when Oksanen (2017) addresses M. Trump as a hero to us all: "You can do it. You can make a difference. You can be a hero to us all", she calls for her heroic interventions on the basis of her being the one who got as close to finally making it (in the *right* way) as the power dynamics between the centre and semi-periphery allow her to get. Thus, the heroic power projected onto her originates from her being *Westernized*, even if her *Westernization* is limited and incomplete. Such projection of power (or at least the potential of power) is made at the price of underestimating or even neglecting the agentic potential of women in the semi-periphery and their feminist and socially engaged political mobilizations, which is explicitly evident in Oksanen's letter (*ibid.*): 'But we still need help, and we need it from women like you.' Therefore, the call for M. Trump to be a hero comes at the price of constituting semi-peripheral post-socialist countries' feminist movements and productions as being in need of and inevitably depending on patronizing Western-ized interventions as if feminist issues in the semi-periphery cannot be addressed and solved without such paternalistic intervention from the centre, or, more specifically from the position of the First Lady.

At the same time as being constituted as *in need of*, women in the semi-periphery are constituted as vulnerable, while their feminist productions are made incomplete, ineffective or even non-existent. Thus, a constitution of a vulnerable subject is at the same time a constitution of a subject who lacks (political, feminist) agency – vulnerability is 'the site of inaction', while a vulnerable subject

6 Even when Oksanen (2017) discusses the issue of human trafficking, she seems to problematize women's turn to prostitution and their vulnerability to human trafficking, rather than a system with its conditions of precariousness and inequalities, which constitutes women as vulnerable.

is (made into) a passive subject, a victim (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay 2016, 1) whose status is fundamentally characterized by its semi-peripheral status, by gender-in-development (Chowdry 1995 in Kašić 2004, 480). Instead of approaching vulnerability as inherently being a part of resistance, Oksanen's framing of M. Trump as a hero (2017) is built upon the constitution of semiperipheral subjects as without political agency.⁷ Such constitution is enabled by the hegemonic status of the centre in a dual sense, that is, 1) framing vulnerability in a way that a priori negates and excludes resistance, as the latter is framed in a Western ideal of un impressionability by social structures and the living conditions they enable (Butler 2016) and which is also concentrated in the idea of ‘the American Dream’, and 2) framing the semi-periphery as being in need of patronage and help from the enlightened and enlightening centre at the price of neglecting the vigour of feminist productions at the semi-periphery.

Is there any feminism in ‘semi-peripheral’ Slovenia?

The answer to this question depends on the definition of feminism and on several other factors. We recognize that feminisms, despite the privilege of Western feminism to construct the definition of what ‘feminism’ means (or should mean) (Olsen 1997) are plural in their aims and ways of achieving them. We have to acknowledge that in different parts of the world, in their different positioning within the global power dynamics and their heterogeneity within (center, periphery, semi-periphery), there is different emphasis on attitudes, means, sectors of activities, organisations and/or actors, ways of diminishing inequalities and achieving equality among (transgender and cisgender) women and men (as well as those who identify as neither), and the empowerment of women in their public and private lives. What is important at least in the context of this paper are the results of all these activities.

Despite the fact that women's activities that one can trace in the socialist period (second half of the 20th century) in so-called Central-East Europe (and especially in Yugoslavia and Slovenia) were not (all) called ‘feminist’ (at that time) but the ‘women's question’ we must not overlook the effects of their activities on women's lives. We have to acknowledge that separate women's organisations were not welcomed (especially in the age of Iron Curtain and in the states that were under strong control of the Soviet Union), but there were enlightened and active women inside communist parties (one of the most visible in Slovenia being Vida Tomšič) and other social forums (for example at that time socio-political organisations in Yugoslavia and Slovenia) that carried women's issues as important

⁷ As emphasised by Butler (2016), vulnerability does not necessarily exclude resistance, although the specific idea of vulnerability (defined as a lack of political agency, victimhood, etc.) may be mobilized in such a way. Moreover, Butler (*ibid.*) constitutes the subject's vulnerability as a condition for resistance, when vulnerability is understood as unavoidable impressionability by the conditions we live in, that is, as the subject's potential for acting and being acted upon.

ones and influenced the changes. It is less important that the improvement of the position of women was initiated from above but gradually also got support from below, which demanded the enormous effort of women activists – they were women who benefited. Although there were no women's or gender studies courses at universities until the mid 1980s, this does not mean that there was no knowledge on gender issues, as female gender sensitive professors (at that time mostly social scientists) learned 'how to smuggle gender issues' into courses that were primarily focused on other issues such as social inequalities, work or family (Antić Gaber 2017). Acknowledging all these, one has to admit that there had to be a certain 'feminist' or gender sensitive knowledge production that was less dependent on Western thought, especially knowing that there were not many feminist books and journals from the West accessible at that time and little academic cooperation and exchange (at least not prior to the end of the 1980s and access to the internet). But there were some prominent and knowledgeable female professors, activists and writers that dealt with women's questions in their own ways and criticized the state of affairs as well as the policies and the practices that were applied by the communist party and their followers. The list of their names in Yugoslavia (Slovenia) depends on the focus and perspective but at minimum must include the following: Lidia, Sklevicky, Žarana Papić, Slavenka Drakulić, Rada Ivezković, Vesna Kesić, Dubravka Ugrešić, Andjelka Milić, Maca Jogan, Svetlana Slapšak, later followed by their younger colleagues. Exploring our history through the eyes of Public Opinion Surveys (which began to be carried out in Slovenia as early as in the late 1960s), we discover that the equality of women and men was largely accepted as an important community value (Toš in Vovk 2014, Antić Gaber 2016) and incorporated in many policies that were developed at that time. These were recognizable and visible in many rights that women had at that time (reproductive rights including abortion on demand, criminalized rape in marriage, one-year long and fully paid maternity leave, good and accessible kindergartens, to name only a few).

Based on this and on the growing engagement of women in civil-society, mobilization in relation to women's issues increased in the 1980s and 1990s in Yugoslavia and in Slovenia (Jalušič, 2002) also due to the fact that deterioration of the women's position and their rights had been envisioned. Numerous women's groups, although not with large membership and mostly concentrated in the capital, emerged, ranging by their scope of activities from self-help groups (SOS – helplines for battered women) to those dealing with identity questions (LL – Lesbian Lilith) to the more institutionally-politically oriented (Women for Politics). Their activities were strongly focused on some crucial points: firstly, the protection of the constitutional article regarding access to abortion on demand (Bahovec 1991); secondly, activities fighting against the first wave of traditionalist attempts to 'domesticate' women (Jogan 2000); and thirdly, activities focusing on establishing and institutionalizing mechanisms that were present before but needed to be protected during the transition. In this regard, Slovenia was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to establish a special Women's Policy Office (in 1992) (Jalušič and Antić Gaber, 2001). This was also due to the enormous efforts of the organized women's groups in the central-left political

parties. Lately, feminist activities in the context of Slovenia have successfully defended the recently threatened already mentioned constitutional article regarding abortion, and in this specific fight, Slovenia is far from being alone in terms of the European semi-periphery. The full scope of feminist productions nowadays is evident in other already established and emerging feminist groups and initiatives that do not limit themselves to feminist productions and practices within the field of institutional politics, but, rather, ‘live’ and work to destabilize the heteronormative and cisnormative⁸ social order from below and through various interventions at the level of everyday life, i.e. the Anarcho-queer-feminist collective, based in the Rog Social Centre (2017), the Feminist choir Z’borke (2017), the Lesbian-feminist University (2017), Red Dawns, etc.

Despite such activities that show and serve as proof of long-standing pro-gender equality and feminist activities that had and still do relatively successfully establish, defend and continue to fight for oppressed groups, Oksanen has established a European semi-periphery on a general level (and Slovenia specifically) as a vulnerable population that needs a hero we did not know we actually needed, with and through the gesture of calling for an individual hero, Melania Trump, that can save us all.

Conclusion

What the brief and in no way complete mapping of feminist productions and activities show is that feminism is alive and kicking in Slovenia, which is no exception when it comes to post-socialist countries. Such vigour can be traced in other post-socialist, semi-peripheral countries as well. In this regard, Oksanen’s letter to M. Trump (2017) manifests a form of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011), evident through her attachment to M. Trump as a potential hero based on her being the one who made it, that is, the one who grabbed and held on to the opportunity, in the West. Her gesture of positioning M. Trump as a hero is evidently based on our need for help and is thus a gesture that calls for a hero and at the same time neglects and devalues the agency of the subject – women in post-socialist countries – now constituted as vulnerable and passive. Therefore, in this case, vulnerability is not only a position but also the effect – a mechanism and a manifestation of geopolitical dynamics as they are being played out (also) in the terrain of various feminist productions, practices and reactions. It is a manifestation of the ‘not-quite-Western’ position of post-socialist countries that keeps haunting its feminist productions. At the same time as Oksanen (*ibid.*) is being critical of M. Trump being made into the literal figure of a stereotype of an Eastern European women, she is including the women of the semi-periphery into the same stereotype of the population that needs to be saved, thus #saveeuropeansemiperiphery. We argue that it is not semi-peripheral women

8 Cisnormativity denotes social structures grounded in the idea of gender being fixed, naturally given and encompassed within gender binary, consisting of mutually exclusive but complementary male and female gender. As such, it privileges cisgender persons, that is, those who identify with a gender that was assigned to them at birth, and deprives transgender and cisgender non-normative persons. (Perger 2016)

and/or feminist productions that need to be saved from the never-ending 'lagging behind' in relation to the West, but rather, they need to be saved from paternalistic and hegemonic gestures made 'in the name of' vulnerable women, as it is precisely these gestures that constitute them as being in need of saving.

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