Labor of Love and Other Stories: Post-Yugoslav Feminist Narratives and Art-based Practices

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Love has become a visible political issue since the October Revolution, especially when it comes to women's emancipation and social reproduction.[1] The ideology of egalitarian social relations, common ownership of the means of production, and, above all, the liberation from all hegemonic forms of human oppression resulted in a certain amount of progress in the fields of sexuality, morality, and love, at least for a while. However, this progress was by no means radical enough to instigate changes in the material conditions of social reproduction, and the nuclear family survived after the revolution as the basic social unit and the ultimate outcome of love relationships. New social ideas of free or red love that required a radical change of material practices failed to be realized, despite the hopeful prospects offered by communism at the time. Following the new social imagination of free love, the avant-garde literature in the wake of World War I called for a new approach to the old topics, a new language, and a new people who would be freed from moral prejudices and conservative or patriarchal conventions. In the spirit of the European modernist movements that emerged during and after WWI, the Yugoslav avant-garde challenged many women

1 Research for this chapter was partly conducted under the FWF Elise Richter project, entitled *The Politics of Belonging. Art Geographies*, supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF No. V730).

authors to resort to an emancipatory politics of love and its socially engaged struggle. One of the crucial interventions of interwar Yugoslav women's authorship was achieved precisely through those literary narratives that liberate love from the socially pre-constructed concepts of gender. This, in turn, opened up new possibilities for the interpretation of love in an emancipatory context.[2]

Furthermore, this new paradigm of free love introduced by the October Revolution spread throughout different women's movements and feminist networks, thus becoming an integral part of women's emancipation in interwar Yugoslavia. Articles about women's struggles, feminism, the rise of communism, and socialism from the October Revolution to the Spanish Civil War, as well as from Africa, Asia, America, and Australia, became regular contributions to Yugoslav interwar women's journals, such as: *Ženski svijet* (Women's World, Zagreb), *Ženski list* (Women's Gazette) and *Naša žena* (Our Women, Ljubljana), *Žena danas* (Women Today, Belgrade) and others (Petrović, *The Women's Authorship)*. Following the red thread of the same ideological struggle, during World War II, the journal *Žena danas* (Women Today) became the "legal" voice of the largest Yugoslav women's movement, Anitfašistički front žena (Women's Antifascist Front, abbrev. AFŽ). After WWII, this journal was continually published until 1981 and dealt with the social, cultural, and literary engagement of women in socialist Yugoslavia, but unfortunately, this time in a less progressive way, at least regarding the further emancipation of women in the new socialist, but still patriarchal society.

The revolutionary understanding of red or free love formed the basis for utopian ideas of fellowship and community that ultimately contributed to the resistance against the mechanisms of human and espe-

2 The idea of *red love* can be traced through many novels as one of the main subjects of the feminist writing in interwar Yugoslavia, to mention just a few: Sofka Kveder's *Hanka* (1917), Marijana Kokalj Željeznova's *Brezdomci* (1930, The Homeless), Julka Hlapec Đorđević's *Jedno dopisivanje—fragmenti romana* (1932, A Correspondence—Fragments of a Novel). See Petrović, *The Women's Authorship*.

cially women's exploitation that followed the October Revolution. Still, it may be argued that the repudiation of the idea of red love reflected the remnants of patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial power relations after the revolution, even if they were not always obvious during socialism. In any case, the question of labor and love, i.e., of their mutual relationship and delimitation, has remained unsolved and marginalized to this day. Nonetheless, it continues to be essential, particularly for those who continue to dream of and fight for a better egalitarian world.

Especially during the last decade, many writers, curators, theorists, and activists—and often all at once—opened a new chapter in feminist art and work, anchored in the post-Yugoslav context, that deals with the relationship between love and social emancipation, love and revolution, and, finally, between love and labor. With reference to previous revolutionary struggles, particularly to the emancipatory heritage of Yugoslav socialism, these new feminist endeavors drew attention to a singular definition of women's liberation and its understanding of red feminism.[3] Today, these post-Yugoslav individual, collaborative, and collective feminist art practices point to how the politics of red love and leftist thought have survived, despite the brutal impact of historical revisionism on the (post-)war and post-socialist society.

In order to explore the meaning of red or free love today, this text follows a few paradigmatic examples of feminist art-based research

3 This definition of *red feminism* unites the Yugoslav socialist legacy of women's antifascist struggle with all the progressive feminist ideas that did not materialize through the emancipation of women in the 20th century and represents the red thread of a unifying, singular movement for the future emancipation of women and society in general in the post-Yugoslav space and elsewhere. The singular definition of women's liberation and its red feminism lies beyond theoretical thinking about the limits and promises of a social utopia, as well as beyond aesthetic questions concerning non-presentable universality of great events and their images; it defines creative processes and practices that involve excess/resistance, freedom, and a yet non-existing political as well as a social singularity that has the potential to create a future beyond the multiple classes and identities in today's neoliberal, patriarchal, and colonial reality (Petrović, "What Does the Freedom Stand for Today?").

and/or performative practices from the post-Yugoslav space:[4] Olga Dimitrijević's play *Crvena ljubav* (2016, Red Love); CRVENA's *Arhiv antifašističke borbe žena Bosne i Hercegovine i Jugoslavije* (2014 ongoing, Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia) and Andreja Dugandžić and Adela Jušić's public artistic action *Rad ljubavi* (2014, Labour of Love). Reviving the crucial links between the politics of love and emancipation, struggle and labor, from the October Revolution to present day, this paper uses these examples to show that the red revolution is still unfinished for women rather than lost.

The Politics of Red Love

It is important to emphasize that the idea of red love is primarily a reflection of the women's struggle within the October Revolution. In her early political writings, the Russian writer and revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai underlines that the abolishment of private ownership in love relationships, primarily in relation to women and their roles therein, was connected to the abolition of private ownership of the means of production within relations of production. In 1916, this argument was taken a step further by another revolutionary, Inessa Armand, who proposed that the idea of free love should be developed and politically articulated as a revolutionary demand. The correspondence between the two lovers, Inessa Armand and Lenin, about an ideological pamphlet that was to define the role of women in communist society, demonstrated that the revolution was not yet ready to do away with patriarchy

4 Like numerous *post-isms*, the term *post-Yugoslav* appears as a means of both historical and political continuation of Yugoslav feminism as well as of the Yugoslav left. It is necessary to clarify the meaning of the paradigm *Yugoslav*, which, in the contemporary context, cannot be discussed unless it is determined as a social signifier, not in the etatistic but in the political sense of what Yugoslavia as an abolished revolutionary subject represents today, particularly in relation to the war process of its "abolishment" in the 1990s (Petrovic, "What is Left of the Feminist Left?").

and its institutions—marriage and family. In one of his letters, Lenin pronounced Armand's proposition to be inconceivable, as it was supposedly based on her personal wishes rather than on any objective class relations anchored in the social circumstances of the times. To counter her position that even minor infatuation and intimacy are more poetic and purer than loveless kisses in some vulgar and shallow conjugal relationship, he proposes a series of questions that support his belief that bourgeois marriage has to be replaced with civil marriage founded on love and respect, but that marriage as an institution is a necessity within the new social order. Believing the idea of free love to be absurd, politically wrong, and more bourgeois than proletarian, Lenin discredits such comparison as illogical, as these situations are, in his view, incomparable (Lenin 182–185). Although they were never fully realized, the social and ideological endeavors by Alexandra Kollontai and her female political comrades, such as Inessa Armand, foregrounded the problem in the new revolutionary society's understanding of love and sexuality, as well as social morals, at the turn of the 20th century. The idea of red love came to life more in political and literary writings than in the communist reality of the time. Their experiences demonstrated the degree to which gender and class remained (un)considered within revolutionary ideas. Additionally, they revealed that economic and ideological relations are inseparable when it comes to women's struggle for an emancipated or red love.

Almost a century later, Olga Dimitrijević's play *Crvena ljubav* (Red Love), performed for the first time in Belgrade's Bitef Theatre in February 2016, brought this radical idea of love from the October Revolution to the stage. Following the plot of Kollontai's novel *Vasilisa Malygina* (1923, Red Love, 1927), Dimitrijević portrays the love relationship of Vasilisa and Vladimir, who met during the revolution as passionate idealists, focusing on their social and political lives within the community. Five years later, Vasilisa remains loyal to her revolutionary ideals. Vladimir, on the other hand, has betrayed not only his principles but also his relationship with Vasilisa by using all the privileges of his executive position. But still, in the end, Dimitrijević leaves hope that the next (women's) revolution will change the world—making the idea of

red love a reality.[5] Through its main characters, this love becomes a unifying element that represents an essential social emotion for any collective or community in the new free world. Here, liberated from any kind of institutional or class oppression, primarily the institutions of marriage and bourgeois family, the idea of red love is presented as a profound social emotion, rather than a private matter between two persons in love (Kollontai 278–279).

Accordingly, Olga Dimitrijević reworked the revolutionary idea of love during the socialist revolution to show both its victories and defeats. By connecting the time of the October Revolution with the past of socialist Yugoslavia, the play creates the same sense of a lost struggle, by sharing the fact that patriarchy has resisted every leftist revolution to this day. Therefore, this *red love* points to the repetitive history of today's struggle for free love that has not yet been won. Despite some glorious moments of women's liberation in the socialist past, red love has remained an unrealized dream on the revolutionary road to the full emancipation from patriarchal and other overpowering mechanisms of social and political oppression, not only in the (post-)Yugoslav space but also beyond.

The Politics of Love and Struggle

Apart from free love, which was simultaneously propagated and suppressed by the October Revolution, the question of women's invisible labor, in the wake of many socialist revolutions following WWII, challenged the concepts of love and family. Despite being largely unknown internationally, the Yugoslav example of the Women's Antifascist Front (AFŽ, 1942–1953) is perhaps one of the largest women's movements that systematically focused on the economic aspects of reproductive and domestic labor during the socialist period from the 1940s onwards. Nowa-

5 Here, Olga Dimitrijević utilizes one of the most famous Yugoslav chansons of Beti Đorđević: *Počnimo ljubav iz početka* (1976, Let's start our love from the beginning).

days, the increasingly rediscovered and systematized archives show that the ideas originating from the AFŽ continue to be highly relevant and radical with respect to the organization of women's everyday lives, their social relations, and their new socialist roles. Thus, efforts to archive, digitalize, and systematize the AFŽ legacy have become especially relevant in recent years.

The largest AFŽ archive was initiated, designed, and digitized by members of the Association for Culture and Art—CRVENA, based in Sarajevo.[6] The idea behind this archive started in 2010 at CRVENA's 8th of March initiative *Živi solidarnost!* (Live Solidarity!) and continued through different research and artistic activities, events, and actions under the slogan: "What has our struggle given us?" In 2014, artists, researchers, and feminists Andreja Dugandžić and Adela Jušić began the work of creating a systematic digital archive of thousands of documents, photographs, secondary sources, and works of art connected to the history of the AFŽ that had been forgotten and neglected after the collapse of Yugoslav socialism. On the occasion of the 8th of March 2015, the online Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia (abbrev. AFŽ archive)[7] was launched by CRVENA. Following this, in 2016, the AFŽ archive published a book titled *Izgubljena revolucija: Antifašistički front žena između mita i stvaranosti* (Lost Revolution: Women's Anti-Fascist Front Between Myth and Forgetting) to contribute to and advance the research of this singular Yugoslav example of women's revolutionary struggle. Dealing with the revolution that marked a historical turning point for Yugoslav women, this collaborative volume critically and analytically discusses the history, lessons, and accomplishments of these women's struggles, or more precisely, the ruptures and contradictions of their revolutionary past. As an impulse for future research, artworks, and exhibitions, this archive not

6 Focusing on the relation between feminism, Yugoslav history, and contemporary art, *Crvena* was founded in 2010 by a group of friends who created this common space to deal with the politics of everyday life from different artistic, curatorial, activist, theoretical, and other backgrounds (www.crvena.ba).

7 The AFŽ archive is fully available on www.afzarhiv.org.

only made visible a huge part of the marginalized history of Yugoslav women but also brought it back to life.[8]

The AFŽ archive can also be taken as a testament to how patriarchal structures survived after WWII under the auspices of new socialist gender roles. These new gender roles, within which the responsibility for care and (the labor of) love were exclusively assigned to women, were made possible by the patriarchal patterns internalized and hidden by socialism. As a result, the AFŽ was (self-)abolished in 1953, under the pretext that it was no longer necessary, as the woman question had already been solved, according to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Despite the efforts of Yugoslav women at the time, the battle against patriarchy was lost in the early period of Yugoslav socialism. Immediately after the abolition of the AFŽ, Mitra Mitrović, one of the founders and leaders of the AFŽ movement during and after WWII, observed with resignation that the woman question was shut down without justification right at the moment when it was finally beginning to be resolved. Indeed, according to her, the exploitation of women originated from their closest and most loved ones:

> But it seems that in this question, perhaps more than in the case of racial or class issues, the enslavement is less disguised and more complex, because it does not depend solely on those who hold the power, those who are distant and foreign, rich and white, but also on the closest people, individuals such as father and brother, son even, who cannot themselves overcome the prejudice and beliefs that were imposed

8 In addition to individual and collaborative events, artworks, and exhibitions emerging from this digitized online archive, the exhibition *Polet žena* (Verve of Women) was installed as a permanent collection in December 2019 after months-long research of the AFŽ materials in the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. Consisting of numerous artifacts from the museum's holdings, archival documents, photographs, books, periodicals, posters, and three-dimensional objects, the exhibition was curated by one of the initiators of the AFŽ archive, Andreja Dugandžić, in collaboration with CRVENA's members and became a permanent part of the museum. The design of the exhibition was done by visual artist Lala Rašćić with reference to the modernist Yugoslav design of the museum.

> upon them—a long time ago, yes, but which have nevertheless become constituent parts of life, customs, and house rules. (Mitrović 5)

The struggle for women's emancipation during socialism continued for a while after the AFŽ ceased to exist. Vida Tomšič, the last leader of the AFŽ as well as one of the few women who remained politically powerful until the end of socialism in Yugoslavia, insisted on the transformation of the woman question into a so-called universal struggle for women's emancipation that should be primarily based on the policy of care (Tomšič, *O zakonski zvezi, družini in gospodinjstvu v socializmu*). The main task of this policy was to resolve the conflicting double burden of women's roles in 'work' (employment) and 'care' (housework). Within this new socialist society, marriage and romantic relationships were defined as a civil category based on true love and mutual understanding between equal partners (as defined by Lenin earlier in the text). This new paradigm of love changed pre-socialist conservative conceptions of family, personal relationships, and marriage. Thus, it promised free choice of partner, divorce, property sharing, remarriage, etc. At the same time, it rejected free love as a pseudo-revolutionary, amoral, and dangerous matter that affected women in particular. Vida Tomšič often cited the program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia to warn so-called "ultra-revolutionaries" that free or red love was unacceptable to Yugoslav society:

> At the ideological and political level, the Communists are leading and will lead the fight against those ridiculous ideological and moral conceptions which, under the pseudo-revolutionary phrase of destroying class morality, in fact, propagate immorality in relations between the sexes. (Tomšič, *Žena u razvoju socijalističke samoupravne Jugoslavije* 64)

By including various women's writings and historical documents from the late 1950s onwards, the AFŽ archive reveals that the process of universal transformation of society was defined by the socialist self-management system in which women participated in significantly fewer numbers than in the AFŽ. This system aimed at the communization of family life and the modernization of partnerships through a new di-

vision of labor between man and woman. This meant establishing new institutional support for the household and motherhood, increasing the economic independence of women, and building socialist residential areas that would meet the needs of new social communities based on gender equality. During that time, the concept of functional and socially responsible architecture primarily focused on the social problem of childcare and housework. As such, it brought some great ideas that were implemented through common kitchens, kindergartens, washinghouses, and other shared spaces of new urban communities. However, housework and motherhood were mainly viewed as women's labor of love.

Although it seemed that socialism would bring about gender equality and change gender roles with regards to labor, leisure, and (im)possible relationships, it did not. In fact, the classless society, in which all issues of inequality under capitalism or any other circumstances should have been resolved, was all too eager to internalize patriarchy through gender roles when it came to both labor and love.

Labor of Love

A few decades later, the problems of reproductive labor, romanticizing the exploitation of women and normalizing heteropatriarchal notions of sexuality and love, became part of a new women's and feminist struggle under the somewhat different circumstances of capitalism. In the 1970s, criticism of the labor of love reframed sexual, love, and romantic relationships as labor relations and thus gave impetus to the international *Wages for Housework Campaign*, initiated in Italy in 1972. Among other things, the Marxist feminists demanded that the questions of gender roles and reproductive labor be resolved; that women should be allowed to work outside their homes; that they should receive unemployment benefits; that they should have equal salaries and be entitled to pregnancy leave; and that all those social formations that were based on gender roles, desires, and the redistribution of leisure time, reflecting gender inequality, should be changed. Many Western Marx-

ist feminists framed reproductive labor as unpaid productive work that women unconditionally perform as a labor of love. Consequently, like the AFŽ in Yugoslavia, they saw the conditions of unconditional and invaluable love as nothing more than a romanticized version of the exploitation of women, within which unpaid, invisible, affective, reproductive, or domestic labor could be perpetuated with impunity.

Inspired by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Silvia Federici, the co-founders of the *Wages for Housework Movement*, Andreja Dugandžić and Adela Jušić performed the public artistic action *Rad ljubavi* (2014, Labour of Love) a few decades later.[9] Making public the political struggle for the denaturalization of women's unacknowledged labor, this performance is also reminiscent of the emancipatory achievements of women in the Yugoslav past, some of which had been lost in the meantime. Dealing with the issue of women's unpaid, flexible, and invisible labor in the (post-)Yugoslav space, these two artists intervened by using sprays and acrylic colors to create a public collage of images and texts from the Yugoslav educational publications on home economics. The black and white print outside the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (measuring about 45 square meters) was used as a public surface for well-known Marxist feminist statements about women's reproductive and domestic work. This public performance re-articulates not only the 1970s Marxist feminist thoughts about motherhood and housework but also unpaid labor, domestic violence, and family care. It directly points to women's exploitation for the benefit of the brutal transition to capitalist accumulation in the post-Yugoslav space during and after the 1990s war(s).

Over time, through historical narratives of feminist resistance, this collaborative work also restores sexuality as an important political issue of women's social lives. As such, it focuses on re-centering the politics

9 Realized for the first time within CRVENA's exhibition *Moja kuća je i tvoja kuća* (My house is your house, too), curated by Danijela Dugandžić, this print and graffiti artistic action, entitled *Rad ljubavi* (Labour of Love), was repeated in different contexts and traveled the world in various exhibitions.

of desire and sexual freedom, which are essential in defining today's women's struggle for an egalitarian and emancipated life. Accordingly, Dugandžić and Jušić, through a range of public feminist statements, emphasize, among other things, the following:

> Systemic attack on women is directed towards their entire being as well as their sexuality. Within the patriarchal and capitalist framework, female sexuality is reduced to passivity, receptivity, sublimation, and almost resistance to her own sexual needs. Sexuality is in the service of capitalistic objectives, which consider functions of the uterus, vagina, and clitoris only in the reproduction of the workforce. Within an isolated sphere of the home, the woman is an object over which a man expresses dissatisfaction towards the system which exploits him, or over whom he exercises the power that he is deprived of by that very system (Dugandžić and Jušić).

This radical feminist and leftist approach to the relationship between love and sexuality opens an important social and political discussion about women's history in a revolutionary society. In order to revise the 1970s Marxist feminist practice and thought, as this recent example shows, it appears indispensable and essential to salvage precisely this singularity of red love (Nancy 32).

Other Stories

All previous approaches to the issue of love show that feminist criticism and theory, as well as artistic practices, became more demanding and complex over time, as the dialectics of love emerged as a mode of political struggle. In addition to the critical approach to the relation between labor and love as well as between love and sexuality, an affirmative approach is increasingly developing that highlights the crucial connection between love and revolution, the social and the subjective, the political and the subconscious, the rational and the affective.

On the one hand, Angela Davis—considered one of the most revolutionary feminists in the West—believes that love and labor should

Andreja Dugandžić and Adela Jušić Rad ljubavi (Labour of Love), print and graffiti artistic action, realized as part of Moja kuća je i tvoja kuća (My house is your house, too)

Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 2014

be reclaimed and essentially altered because it is still women who are in possession of the means necessary for the reproduction of society. According to her, women's appropriation of the family—especially regarding black women who constantly encounter violence and racism in the outside world—could create a new counterpublic sphere. For example, anti-racist family units that are not supremacist, capitalist, and heterosexist could liberate a future common society from multiple systemic inequalities (Davis). On the other hand, Kathi Weeks, a contemporary feminist thinker of Marxist orientation, points out the need to separate the concepts of love and labor in order to reach an understanding of the essential meaning of love today. According to Weeks, only love that is based on a logic of political desire immanent to existence could produce the social imagination of (non-)labor and (non-)family in

a commonly shared and solidarity-based post-capitalist society. Weeks further claims that only political reorganization/redefinition of (non-) labor, as well as the affective turn towards the transformation of complex relations of power, subjectivity, and emotions, can trigger radical change in society and lead to a revolution that would truly change the social position of women and of all those who are oppressed by capitalism and patriarchy.

There are, of course, many other theories and practices of contemporary feminist thought which resolve, complicate, and interpret the problem of love—with or without labor. Moira Weigel, the author of *Labour of Love: The Invention of Dating*, argues that these Marxist and feminist theories of "labor in love" and "labor of love" from the past need to be revised and modernized, in line with today's ways of loving, working, and living. She claims that putting the equal sign between labor and love in our contemporary world can often lead to misconceptions and a conservative understanding of their mutual relationship, which implies that we do not have an agenda or even the power to shape and change the world while we keep (re)producing it. Love is an emotion that necessitates a community or other forms of collectivity, "even if it's just a primitive communism of two," because this is the only way of not letting love be completely closed off and co-opted by the meanings which are systematically imposed through today's heteropatriarchal and neoliberal mechanisms of social exploitation (Lennard and Weigel).

From the (post-)Yugoslav feminist perspective, based on previous examples, it is apparent that the meaning of love originates in the dialectical process of pushing the existing borders, by means of questioning, feeling, fighting, and imagining, beyond the gap between so-called Western and other less privileged parts of the world. As these examples show, the need to mark the field of love singularly as a means and the goal of social emancipation has survived primarily in this sphere of feminism, particularly those of leftist orientation. In this dialectical

process of becoming, certainly love can give shape to a common struggle for its red singularity, politically and socially.[10]

Finally, it is important to stress that, unlike materialist and collectivist visions of the relationships of both (re)production and love, most contemporary and particularly postmodern conceptions of love and sexuality overlook the economic (class) basis of "the emotional and psychological," in favor of the individual and economically untouchable desire.[11] Although many contemporary theories, to which we have more access, can be complementary to the understanding of love and sexuality—and therefore also desire—they are not sufficient for revolutionary change of the everyday lives of women when it comes to love. Neglecting the importance of the woman question, labor, and economy, in relation to love, leads to its de-politicization as well as its mystification and return to the sphere of the private and intimate exploitation of women. In the end, the social process of emancipating love and sexuality is impossible without interrogating love's economic and libidinal complexities and their resultant power relations within the neoliberal state of today's patriarchal and violent world.

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10 The term *red singularity* has been coined to underline the common ground for a range of feminist and Marxist theories, radical artistic practices, and revolutionary events which lead to the singular (being plural) experience of love that contributes to the permanent emancipation of society. For the term singularity, see the previous definition by Jean-Luc Nancy (32).

11 This generally refers to the psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, and identity approaches to love and sexuality, in particular to those outside of feminist thinking.

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