CONCEPTUAL PRINCIPLES OF EXCLUSION IN ANTI-MIGRANT RHETORIC EXPANDING IN SERBIA

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Abstract

Questions about cultural difference and "adaptability" of cultures and civilizations are dominating the contemporary migration debates and turning it into a debate about Muslims. Through the literature analysis and the analysis of anti-migrant rhetoric, I aim to examine these questions, define them within broader conceptual principles of exclusion and show how they are being raised in Serbia after 2015. Previous research analyzed in this paper show that crossnational far-right networks contribute to the establishment of anti-migration platform, intelectually rooted in European New Right. In a world where more and more tensions are explained by conflicting cultural identities, this paper calls for another reconsideration of less visible conceptual principles of exclusion.

Keywords: cultural difference, cultural fundamentalism, Islam, anti-migration, right-wing populism, European New Right, Serbia

Introduction

Migration from Muslim and Middle East countries has become one of the central issues in discussions about cultural difference in post-9/11 world and, lately, in the aftermath of 2015 "refugee crisis". In this paper, it is argued that anti-migrant, right-wing movements in Serbia are absorbing the existing conceptual principles of exlcusion, from European New Right, at the moment of strengthening of EU border regimes, which put the pressure on Serbia. The research goal is to examine these conceptual principles of exclusion and to review how they are being spread in Serbia.

The paper consists of two parts. In the first part, the focus is theoretical consideration of principles of exlusion behind anti-migrant rhetoric. Three main conceptual principles are identified: cultural fundamentalism, islamophobia and welfare chauvinism. Each principle is rationalized and supproted by several arguments in anti-migrants rhetoric. In the second part, I consider the position of Serbian movements using anti-migrant rhetoric, by relying on previous theoretical and empirical research on the influence of European far-right networks in the aftermath of 2015

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"refugee crisis" (Jovanović and Ajzenhamer 2017, Lažetić 2018). The term "refugee crisis" is put under the quotation marks, because I agree with the border regime school of thought, that interprets this phenomenon as the crisis of European border and migraiton policies (Apostolova 2016, 34; Kallius 2016, 136), rather than as the crisis of refugees.

Theoretical framework of this paper is a combination of contemporary post-cultural, anthropological theories (Stolcke 1995; Wright 1998; Grillo 2003; Abu-Lughod 2002), sociological and political studies of far-right and right-wing populism (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016; Yılmaz 2012; Taguieff 1990) and border regime studies (Kallius 2016; Apostolova 2016). Research is primarily theoretical, rather than empirical, so methodological tool used in this paper is literature analysis and the analysis of rhetoric. I rely most on the existing far-right and anti-migrant networks empirical research (Lažetić 2018). Anti-migration in Serbia is a new and under-researched topic, so this paper is rather a call for further research, than an attempt for sytematic understanding of this emerging phenomenon.

"Old" meaning of culture and "new" principles of exclusion

The concept of "culture", which is today a central term in immigration debates (Yılmaz 2012, 369), has been a major research topic of anthropologists for decades (Stolcke 1995, 2; Wright 1998, 7). Anthropologists have been thinking and rethinking this concept throughout the whole history of discipline. Anthropological understanding of culture can be divided in two basic categories: "old meanings of culture" and "new meanings of culture" (Wright 1998). In the first case, the culture is represented as a closed, natural system of knowledge inherent for a particular people or nation, while the latter portray culture as a process, and cultural identities as "dynamic, fluid and constructed situationally" (Wright 1998, 9). North American diffusionism and cultural relativism, Anglo-American evolutionism, British structurofunctionalism and French structuralism have all operated with old definitions of culture. Post-colonial world open up a space for rethinking of cultures (Wright 1998, 8) and alternative visions appeared (Grillo 2003, 159). Old meanings of culture mostly left the academic, anthropological discourse, but they have entered into the public, political and everyday discourses, with many people referring to "culture, in an anthropological sense" (Wright 1998, 7). The disjunction between vernacular, common-sense, and essentialist conceptions of culture dominating public discourse on the one side, and theorized and intellectualized accounts of academics on the other side, has never been greater (Grillo 2003, 168).

Anti-migrant rhetoric reaffirms old definitions of culture, by emphasizing that the culture is uniform, localized and natural entity defined by ethnicity, and introduces is as a criteria for exclusion. In literature, there is a debate whether anti-migrant rhetoric, which places culture in the center of migration debate, should be classifed as cultural racism or cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995). Pierre-André Taguieff defined cultural racism as a doctrine that rejects "true", traditional racism and instead adopts the idea of cultural difference (Taguieff 1990, 111). His theoretical understanding of cultural racism is based on the study of Europen New Right. Similarly, cultural fundamentalism is a principle of exclusion, which presumes that "relations between different cultures are by 'nature' hostile and mutually destructive because it is in human nature to be ethnocentric; differenct cultures ought, therefore, to be kept apart for their own good" (Stolcke 1995, 5). Although these two concepts designate the same principle of exclusion, based on the cultural instead of the biological difference, Stolcke advocates the adoption of latter concept, because she tends to avoid any confusion with racism. The contemporary discourse against the immigrants "is not simply disguised racism" (Grillo 2003, 165), although there are certain elements. Both Taguieff and Stolcke agree that this principle of exclusion doesn't divide cultures hierarchically (like traditional racism), but spatially (Stolcke 1995, 8; Taguieff 1990, 117). Also, both are grounded in the more general and older idea of "cultural essentialism" (Grillo 2003, 165). In this paper, I will use the term cultural fundamentalism, because I also believe that it explains better the socially contested reality behind this principle of exclusion.

Cultural fundamentalism

Several ideologists and politicians, belonging to the European New Right and Anglo-American New Right traditions, were responsible for creating and spreading the principle of cultural fundamentalism in anti-migrant rhetoric. While European New Right could be understood as a "distinctive metapolitical cross-national network" (Shekhovtsov 2009, 699), that combines ethno-pluralist, culturalist and populist elements with the rejection of liberalism and individualism (Richards 2019, 2), Anglo-American New Right is rather characterized by the juncture between neoconservatism, economic liberalism and market capitalism (Wright 1998, 10). European New Right originates from French *Nouvelle Droite*, with Alain de Benoist, the founder of the think-tank "Research and Study Group for European Civilization" (GRECE), as the leading ideologist (Taguieff 1990, 111; Wollenberg 2014, 313; Shekhovtsov 2015, 37; Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 52; Richards 2019, 3). By establishing the relationships with foreign right-wing intellectuals, other "new rights" (German *Neue Rechte*, Italian *Nuova Destra*, Belgian *Nieuw Recht*) started to appear in the 1970s. Margaret Thatcher in the UK was one of the most important political figures

of Anglo-American neoconservative New Right (Shekhovtsov 2009, 699), and her famous statement that England might be "swamped by the people with a different culture" (Wright 1998, 10; Stolcke 1995, 3) shows how anti-migrant rhetoric is articulated by presenting immigrants with "different culture" as a possible threat. Both New Right traditions together "capitalized on the increasing attention paid to immigration, turned it into a cultural question, and then managed to push the culturalized immigration debate into the center of political discourse" (Yılmaz 2012, 376).

The first type of argument in anti-migrant rhetoric, through which the principle of cultural fundamentalism is expressed, is the argument about "incompatibility" (Yılmaz 2012, 376), "incommunicability, incommensurability, and incomparability" (Taguieff 1990, 117) of cultures. The idea "that differences between cultures are unbridgeable", that could be found in some older anthropological accounts (Grillo 2003, 165), today represents one of the main anti-migration arguments. An "ideological shift" that places the notion of culture to the forefront "is leading radical and far right organizations to show themselves as spokespeople of cultural identity that is supposed to show be threatened by outsiders" (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 50). Moreover, "new commonplaces concerning cultural identity and difference have crystallized around the question of immigration" (Taguieff 1990, 116). These "cultural anxieties" about immigration are reflected in the public political discourse (Grillo 2003, 168), often through "the rhetoric of 'end' or 'failure' of multiculturalism" (Pišev and Milenković 2013, 984).

Another paradigmatic example of prevailing cultural fundamentalism and related cultural racism is the argument about "clashing cultures", derived from Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory, popularized by Bernard Lewis (Wollenberg 2014, 309). Huntington's basic hypothesis, that the fundamental source of conflict in "new world" will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic, but cultural (Huntington 1993, 22), was willingly embraced by politicians and ideologists of the European New Right. According to Huntington, differences among eight major civilizations ("Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization") are "not only real", but "they are basic" (Huntington 1993, 25). Hence, according to this cultural fundamentalist picture of the world, national cultural identities are grouped into larger-scale, conflicting cultural identities.

Islamophobia

The second conceptual principle of exclusion present in anti-migrant rhetoric is islamophobia. Gabriele Marranci offers an interesting explanation of islamophobia. She defines it "not as unfounded hostility against Islam", but as fear of multiculturalism and its potential to transrupt and challenge the existing social norms (Marranci 2004, 105). Consideration of islamophobia in contemporary political discourse in Europe is important, especially if we have in mind that "the immigration debate has turned into a debate on Muslim immigrants and Islam" (Yılmaz 2012, 370). In this political postulation, inspired by Huntington, Islam, Europe and West appear as natural and conflicting "cultural entities" (Marranci 2004, 106; Wollenberg 2014, 316). Anti-migrant and anti-muslim rhetoric "claims moral issues, which often hides a conception of the clash of civilisations" (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 57). Although immigration has been traditionally the topic of the far-right, Muslims have been "constructed as the quintessential 'other" (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 50), through which the questions about cultural difference are being raised.

Generally, the rise of islamophobic immigration discourse could be traced back to the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 58). Since then, islamophobia has become institutionalised (Marranci 2004, 110) through the securitisation practices (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 63), not only in the United States, but also in Europe and elsewhere. The 9/11 attack became a turning point for spread of the fear of terrorism, but also for framing migration as a security threat and Muslim immigrants as potential terrorist. For right-wing actors, "terrorist attacks have been used as 'proof' of cultural incompatibility" (Lažetić 2018, 27). The protection from terrorism and 'Islamisation' of Europe. is, therefore, the first argument through which islamophobia is rationalized.

According to islamophobic right-wing actors, Muslims pose a security, political and cultural threat because "Islam does not separate religion from politics, mosque from State [...] Islam is seen and represented as a 'totalitarian ideology', in which religious radicalism easily transmogrifies into political radicalism, and ultimately in the "Trojan horse" of Islamic fundamentalism, inevitably culminating into terrorism" (Forlenza 2018, 136). When Victor Orban declared that migration is the "Trojan horse" of terrorism (Brunsden 2017), he legitimized restrictive border and migration policies, which resulted in creation of a distinct "buffer zone" against migrants seeking asylum in EU member states (Kallius 2016, 143). Annastiina Kallius argues that Orban's anti-migrant border policy is not as an exception, but "a direct continuation" of EU asylum policy (Kallius 2016, 147), meaning that he consistently applied the existing asylum policies such as safe third country readmissions, designed to deter migrants from seeking asylum in EU. Orban's rhetoric and actions show exactly how islamophobia is institutionalised (Marranci 2004) in Europe — by framing of Muslim asylum seekers as the destroyers of European Christian heritage (Forlenza 2018, 137) in order to provide "a way of legitimising exclusionary policies and practices against certain categories of migrants, which would otherwise be condemned as racist and/or unlawful" (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 65).

Muslims immigrant's assumed "lack of secularity" is another "proof" of cultural incompatibility between "Western" and "Islamic" civilization. In book "Why the French don't like headscarves: Islam, the state, and public space", John R. Bowen showed how controversies around veiling and the law against religious signs in public schools in France were permeated by questions of multiculturalism, integration, secularity, democracy and gender equality (Bowen 2007). The "veiling" argument (Abu-Lughod 2002, 785) is often used by right-wing populists to construct the otherness of Islam and "its allegedly illiberal nature", where "Europe is presented as the fortress of democracy and tolerance, while Islam is portrayed to be the religion of bigotry and intolerance, a 'barbaric' or 'medieval religion'" (Benveniste, Lazaridis and Puurunen 2016, 62). Lila Abu-Lughod further elaborated how the mission of liberating and saving of Muslim women became one of the excuses for military intervention, but also how cultural relativism in anthropology prioritized culture over agency (Abu-Lughod 2002). In right-wing anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric, the discourse on barbaric nature of Muslim men is fueled by the alleged rape stories, which often turn out to be fake news.

Welfare chauvinism

The last conceptual principle of exclusion elaborated in this paper is welfare chauvinism. At first glance, this conceptual principle is different than the previous two, in a way that it employs the socio-economic, rather than cultural criteria to delegitimise the presence of migrants. However, we can not observe welfare chauvinism apart from other principles of exclusion used in anti-migrant rhetoric. Welfare chauvinism is "the unwillingness of natives to share welfare state benefits with certain immigrant groups and asylum seekers who are perceived as 'intruders'" (Faist 1994, 61). This "unwillingness" is perceived as natural and logical for many natives. Furthermore, welfare chauvinism is "a strategy of introducing cultural identity criteria in an area in which belonging is determined on the basis of social policy criteria, such as health, age, disability and employment" (Huysmans 2000, 786). This conceptual principle of exclusion is about who has the right to social welfare. It appears in the moment of the "crisis of the welfare state", economic recession and unemployment, in the late 1970s (Faist 1994, 53-54). Conservative and right-wing parties in Germany who used the discourse of migrants as economic competitors to native population took over "key terms such as 'difference' from the French New Right" (Faist 1994, 63).

Today, welfare chauvinism is reflected in institutionalized division between "genuine" refugees (escaping political violence) and economic migrants (escaping bad economical situation). In the aftermath of 2015 "refugee crisis", many muslim migrants are being labelled as "economic migrants". Therefore, migrants are pre-

sented not only as a threat to cultural, moral and security order, but also as a threat to material order. However, the division between true refugees and economic migrants is politically constructed in order to exclude Muslim migrants (but not only them), and it does not correspond to multiple realities behind complex migration movements (Apostolova 2016). It is important to emphasize that this division exist not only in far-right populist discourse, but also in official, government and legal discourse. Asylum seekers are often rejected for asylum on the basis of that argument.

Welfare chauvinism also reflects popular distrust in welfare government institutions. It has been recognized that "there is a growing propensity in the popular mood in Europe to blame all the socioeconomic ills resulting from the recession and capitalist readjustments — unemployment, housing shortages, mounting delinquency, deficiencies in social services — on immigrants who lack 'our' moral and cultural values, simply because they are there" (Stolcke 1995, 2). Many scholars agree that far-right populist parties managed to introduce anti-immigration and anti-muslim discourse to the political mainstream because they turned social and economical anxieties into immigration anxieties (Yılmaz 2012, 371). For example, high unemployment rates are fueled by the fear that migrants will "steal our jobs".

Anti-migration in Serbia: the influence of European New Right and Neo-Eurasianism

Serbian far-right populist movements which use anti-migrant absorbed these three principles of exclusion because of the strong influence of European far-right and Russian far-right. A recent empirical, theoretically and contextually grounded research on European far-right movements showed that Serbian far-right organizations and parties consolidated collaborations with far-right actors from Europe in the aftermath of 2015 "refugee crisis" (Lažetić 2018). One of the most prominent collaborations with the European far-right was the opening of the Serbian branch of Generation Identity, a widespread far-right political movement originating from France, with strong anti-migrant agenda (Vio 2019). The need for preservation of national and cultural identity, which is at the heart of Generation Identity's political rhetoric, is the embodiment of the principle of cultural fundamentalism. GI anti-migration rhetoric is strongly anti-Muslim and dedicated to the spreading of the idea that Muslim immigrants are part of the "Islamization of Europe" plot (Richards 2019, 10). Its entire political agenda is a paradigmatic example of the conceptual principles that I presented in the previous section. Generation Identity ideologically derived from French New Right (Nouvelle Droite), but it is also using the ideas of non-Western Europe ideologists such as Alexandr Dugin (Richards 2019, 7).

Dugin is a Russian political pseudo-philosopher, with strong anti-Western attitudes, and an important figure for both European and Russian new right. In his most influental books, "Fourth Political Theory", Dugin opens the introduction chapter by quoting Alain de Benoist (Dugin 2012), which undoubtedly confirms his special connection with French New Right (Laruelle 2010, 22; Shekhovtsov 2015, 35). Although he builds his arguments on "the 'Atlanticist New World Order' (principally the US and the UK) against the Russia-oriented 'New Eurasian Order'" struggle (Shekhovtsov 2009, 697), deeper analysis of his work in different phases reveals the rootnes of his ideas in European New Right tradition (Shekhovtsov 2015). "Fourth Political Theory" combines the elements of Russian imperialism, Eurasianism, populist nationalism, non-Marxist socialism, (selective) anti-Westernism and post-structuralism (Dugin 2012; Laruelle 2010; Lažetić 2018). Also, he employs Huntington's idea about eight civilizations (Dugin 2012, 64), by emphasizing that the Islamic world is "undoubtedly, united religiously with the constantly growing awareness of its own identity" (Dugin 2012, 66), which is the argument that uses "unification of Islam" mechanism (Jovanović and Ajzenhamer 2017). Even though Dugin's rhetoric is not exclusively nor explicitly anti-migrant, Laruelle points to recent ideological shift on Russian far-right "in the image of the enemy from the West to the migrant" (Laruelle 2010, 22).

Anti-EU and pro-Russian Serbian far-right organizations focusing on anti-migrant rhetoric (such as "Eurasian way"/"Evroazijski put"), however, heritage Dugin's political ideas (Generacija Identiteta 2017). Serbian pro-Russian right-wing scene is under his influence, which can be seen through his frequent visits in Serbia (Lažet-ić 2018, 11). He founded a branch International Eurasian movement, within which "Balkan School of Geopolitics" is organized in Belgrade. On the accompanying online platform of this project, it is claimed that the platform proceeds "from the basic principle of cultural anthropology (F.Boas and his school), which states that there is not and can not be a common universal measure when comparing cultures and civilizations" (Savin 2019). This interpretation of classical anthropological concepts shows how cultural relativism can become "huntingtonized", politically instrumentalized and transformed into cultural fundamentalism. However, as Shekhovtsov notices, Dugin does not emphasize culture and cultural identity as prominently as French New Right, and when he does, it is in order to show that culture is "the manifestation of an ethnic comuunity, an *ethnic*" (Shekhovtsov 2009, 703-704).

Another noteworthy collaboration, according to Lažetić, is the hosting of the European Solidarity Front for Syria (ESFS) representative Rima Darius, organized by local Serbian anti-migrant movement in September 2015 (Portal Pravda 2015). In her speech, Rima Darius, a Syrian herself, claimed that people coming from Syria are economic migrants who do not fight for their own country and that EU and Serbia

should not welcome these people. Her speech was a part of anti-government protest organized by the members of the Serbian Radical Party (Lažetić 2018, 23). In fact, the founder of that local Serbian movement "Anti-Imigracija" ("Anti-Imigration"; later, the name was changed into "Movement for Freedom and Independence" / "Pokret za slobodu i nezavisnost"), was the member of the Serbian Radical Party (Lažetić 2018, 22-23), which confirms the already existing connections with crossnational far-right networks, reinforced by the moral and cultural panic behind the 2015 "refugee crisis" construct.

All anti-migrant movements in Serbia have a strong anti-Muslim sentiment, often drawn from the alleged suffering of Serbs under the Ottoman empire. Scholars noted that "to right-wing populist parties, movements and politicians the influx of refugees and asylum-seekers from Muslim countries is a threat to Christian European civilisation, not dissimilar to the Arab (in the seventh and eight centuries) and the Ottoman (in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) invasions" (Forlenza 2018, 133). Current immigrantion debates are portrayed as "virtually eternal and unresolvable struggle between Judeo-Christian Western heritage and Islam" (Wollenberg 2014, 310). Hence, Islamophobia used in anti-migrant rhetoric, fits perfectly into the existing narratives of the right-wing interpretations about the Ottoman conquest in Serbia.

Even though Serbia has never been a welfare state with strong mechanisms of social and economic support to those who need it, welfare chauvinism as a principle of exclusion does exist in Serbia. The most common targets of welfare chauvinism in Serbia, fueled by far-right propaganda, were Muslims and Roma communities (Lažetić 2018, 5). From 2016, migrants coming from Muslim countries have become another target of welfare chauvinism. Anti-migrant movements often write fake news how migrants are receiving several hundred euros per month as a financial aid. They compare this false information with low salaries in Serbia, trying to prove how Serbian government is being generous towards foreigners and hostile towards its own people. Often, these issues are connected with EU skepticism and anxieties derived from distrust in political institutions.

Anti-migration movements in Serbia is a relatively new and under-researched phenomenon. Usually, they are connected to other groups, which may or may not be exclusively anti-migrant. However, the creation of anti-migration platform is a strategy of constructing the common enemy from outside of the Europe (Laruelle 2010, 29), and a question of interest "of all the far right actor, regardless of their differences in relation to certain internal or external political issues", which has a potential to unite actors on national and cross-national level (Lažetić 2018, 71). Farright movements, right-wing movements and right populist movements often have different agendas and disagree about certain issues, but they do find a common ground when it comes to anti-migration attitudes. "Whereas some of these groups

are openly neo-fascist or neo-Nazi, others represent a new right: populist movements that distance themselves from the post-Holocaust taboos of explicitly racist or fascist imagery and language to appeal to a wider electoral base" (Wollenberg 2014, 312). Even though some members Serbian anti-migration groups are openly using fascist symbols, their basic rhetoric is culturally fundamentalist and harmonized with the tools established by European New Right.

Conclusion

"Old" meaning of culture almost completely abandoned contemporary anthropological thought and found their place in "new" principles of exclusion on the basis of national and ethnical belonging. Extreme interpretations of cultural relativism, which naturalize and overemphasize the concept of cultural difference, today can be found in work of far-right ideologists and their followers, such as Alexander Dugin. European New Right, and French New Right in particular, popularized cultural fundamentalism. By introducing culture as a criteria, New Right distances itself from classical racism and fascism. Although cultural racism, in a way that Taguieff explained it, persists (sometimes even in a combination with traditional or nazi racism), in a case of Serbia, it is perhaps more accurate to speak about cultural fundamentalism and islamophobia. Also, although Serbia has never been a welfare state, the principle of welfare chauvinism is being reproduced. Expansion of conceptual principles of exclusion comes from the European Far Right, ideologically and practically. Presenting migration from Muslim countries as a cultural problem masks processes of securitization that stand behind border and migration policies. Moreover, cultural fundamentalism justifies these processes, which would otherwise be perceived as unlawful and fascist.

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