

Challenging the Growing Power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Public Life: The Case of Women in Black-Serbia



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Women in Black-Serbia

Staša Zajović and Katie Mahuron

Women in Black is a worldwide network of women committed to peace based on justice and actively opposed to war, militarism and other forms of violence. From its beginnings in 1988 in Israel in protest of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the movement later emerged in other countries, including Canada, the United States, Australia, and many European countries, where vigils were organized in solidarity with those living under Israeli occupation and with Israelis against the militarization of their own government.

Women in Black-Belgrade (Žene u Crnom Beograd)¹ was formed in 1991 in response to the conflict between the former Yugoslav republics. The network began with a non-violent public protest against war, nationalism, militarism and all forms of discrimination, and continues to challenge the growing power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in public life. Actively working to research and document the impact of religious fundamentalism, it also maintains an extensive program of activities, including education, street actions, coalition building and lobbying. In this effort, Women in Black has built important local and international networks that will continue to be critical in the ongoing fight against fundamentalisms throughout the world.

Religious Fundamentalisms in the Serbian Context

“Fundamentalism is an ultra-conservative, ultra-right-wing political movement which abuses religion, tradition, ethnicity (and) customs with the aim of acquiring and maintaining power (governance). It does so by limiting and abolishing women’s human rights through sex segregation and gender apartheid, limiting and abolishing civil liberties, endangering democracy, and abusing democratic institutions.”²

In 1982, 24% of the Serbian population self-identified as religious. In 1993, that number had increased to 71%. In 1999, it had risen again to 97%.³ This dramatic change reflects the growing influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church within Serbian society. This process of “clericalization,” or the shift from secular to religious approaches to issues in the public sphere, moves forward as the church and other fundamentalist groups take on an increasingly powerful role, presenting a growing threat to women and human rights in Serbia and the extended region.

The theoretical union of religious and state power in the Serbian Orthodox Church is called *Svetosavlje* or Saint-Savaism⁴ and claims a history dating back to the 13th century. Portraying itself as the saviour and keeper of Serbian identity, the church uses the nationalist rhetoric of a divinely ordained “Greater Serbia,”⁵ constructed from myths of a Serbian society in the pre-Ottoman Western Balkans, which would today take up much of the region within the boundaries of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). At the core of this discourse is the unbreakable unity of nation, state and church, a construction that excludes those who are not Orthodox from claiming a Serbian identity.

The discourse also portrays the Serbs as a persecuted people, under constant threat of extinction. In 1997, Patriarch Pavle’s *Declaration against the Genocide of the Serbian People* describes the threat of annihilation that the Serbs have faced in diverse and brutal ways: “Throughout their history, [the Serbs] have faced the fiercest forms of genocides and exoduses that have jeopardized their existence, yet they have always been self-defenders of their own existence, spirituality, culture, and democratic convictions.”⁶ This statement, however, came only two years after the Srebrenica Genocide in Bosnia, where Serbian forces killed over 8,000 Muslim men and boys.

Church leaders promoted this construction of Serbian identity through a militant propaganda campaign that began in the late 1980s and intensified during the Slobodan Milosevic regime⁷ and the Yugoslav wars⁸ of the 1990s. After the death of Josip Tito⁹ and the fall of communism

in the region, the Serbian Orthodox Church supported the violence of the Milosevic regime in the hopes that it would bring about a religiously conceived “Greater Serbia.” Priests and church officials blessed soldiers and men before they went off to fight during the wars in the 1990s, and repeatedly released statements supporting and justifying the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo.



Indeed, in 1991, Zeljko Raznatovic, an indicted war criminal and founder and leader of the paramilitary Serb Volunteer Guard, was quoted as saying, “Our highest commander is Patriarch Pavle.”¹⁰ In 1992, when church officials called for Milosevic to resign, the move came not in response to the mass atrocities being committed in the region, but rather to the fear that this violence would not bring about its stated aims.

Since the wars in the 1990s, the Serbian Orthodox Church has become heavily involved with the Democratic Party of Serbia and has prioritized increased involvement with youth in the form of neo-Nazi youth groups and movements. While this is not the only form of youth involvement that the church undertakes, the blatantly violent and nationalist propaganda of these groups is extremely worrisome in a nation and region still recovering from recent wars. Two of the youth groups most closely linked to the Serbian Orthodox Church are *Obraz* (Honour) and *Krv i cast* (Blood and Honour). Founded in 2001, *Obraz* is an anti-communist, anti-globalization and clero-fascist youth organization. Under the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, it has been active in the “Kosovo is Serbia” movement, and has supported the neo-Nazi group *Nacionalni stroj* (National Front). *Krv i cast* is the Serbian branch of a youth-oriented worldwide neo-Nazi organization, and has been active in the Greater Serbia movement. Most recently, the group has appeared in anti-Kosovo independence rallies and marches, and has also been involved in violent attacks on gay rights activists. Part of the Serbian Orthodox Church openly provides logistical and moral support to such clero-fascist organizations. It also channels support through the Serbian Ministry of Religion led by Minister Bogoljub Sijakovic, who has fundamentalist ties.

The strength of the church in national politics grew in 2004 when Vojislav Kostunica became prime minister of Serbia. Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia have become closely tied to the church and frequently use religion and religious ceremonies to both legitimize their own power and to encourage citizens to view themselves as a united Orthodox Serbia. Under Kostunica’s leadership, the Serbian Parliament passed the Law on Churches and Religious Communities in April 2006, recognizing the Serbian Orthodox Church as having had an extraordinary historic and state-constituting role. The law recognizes only those religions with “centuries-long historic continuity in Serbia” as traditional churches and religious communities,¹¹ classifying all other groups as “confessional communities” and “religious organizations” without official status. It also privileges the Serbian Orthodox Church in specific ways. Under this law, church and religious community leaders are granted immunity before the law, receive funding from local communities and tax-free funds from private donors, and are included in the state budget, which provides funds for pensions and health insurance for priests. State institutions are required to yield confiscated property

to churches or religious communities; and churches remain fully or partially free from paying taxes and are not obliged to keep financial records when selling products. Churches and religious communities can independently build churches or other edifices, and can establish experts and scientific institutions for the protection of sacred inheritance. Under this law, a faculty of orthodox theology was reinstated as part of the University of Belgrade, and the Serbian Orthodox Church was given authority to hire and fire faculty and personnel.

The Law on Churches and Religious Communities thus not only gives the Serbian Orthodox Church extraordinary legal rights and legally legitimizes the church by recognizing it as historically connected to Serbian culture, but also potentially puts a financial strain on national and local governments. Women in Black and other civil society groups in Serbia actively fought against the passing of the law. Put forth with the aim of positioning Serbia as a European country, this false image of pluralism reflects a growing awareness among the right-wing of the language of international human rights, and an understanding of how to appear to appease while actually thwarting the demands of human rights groups.

Women's Views of Fundamentalism

Women in Black-Serbia's educational and research programs have yielded a unique understanding of women's perspectives on religious fundamentalisms in Serbia. Over the course of the 2006-2007 educational seminar project that traveled through Serbia, Women in Black was able to identify the forms of fundamentalism that women consider most prevalent.¹² These can be grouped into five categories: attacks on women's human rights (in particular, their reproductive and sexual rights); attacks on the secular character of the state; a clericalization of public life; a growing monopoly on spirituality and values by the Serbian Orthodox Church; and attacks against "difference."

The women identified a growing trend in public discourse that limits the identity of women to the spheres of motherhood and marriage. This conservative propaganda holds that a woman's most basic role is to give birth in the name of the nation and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The notion of a woman's role as breeder and mother is reinforced by nationalist discourse on the "white plague." The idea of a falling fertility rate among "white" Serbs and rising or higher fertility rates among Roma, Albanian, and Bosniak populations is meant to produce fear of an eventual subjugation or extinction of the Serb people in Serbia. This fear has only been exacerbated by the responses of Obraz, Krv i cast, and other such groups to Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008. Kosovo continues to hold an important position in the nationalist and fundamentalist myth of "Greater Serbia" and these

groups use the statistics of the majority Albanian population in Kosovo to support their racist rhetoric.

The concept of women as mothers and breeders in the face of the "white plague" is of course not unique to Serbia. Nationalist movements throughout the twentieth century have echoed this discourse, allotting women a reproductive role of the behalf of nation, one that positions them as guardians of tradition, honour and morality. During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, women's bodies were used as instruments of ethnic cleansing. Knowledge of how nationalist groups deploy the discourse of motherhood for political purposes is essential for the struggle in Serbia. The combined forces of militant nationalism and fundamentalist religion serve to make the position of women and women's rights activists in Serbia doubly tenuous.

The dangers of these discourses for women in Serbia go beyond simply narrowing options for women's personal and collective identities. They also have an important impact on women's sexual and reproductive rights. Within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, women were guaranteed certain legal rights, among them the right to abortion. At Women in Black-Serbia meetings, seminars, and other gatherings, women often discuss the rights enjoyed by the previous generation and reflect on their mothers' attitudes to abortion, which used to be seen as a natural and accepted right. With the rise of religious nationalism and the growing influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church in state affairs, this right is no longer secure. In 2000, the Serbian Orthodox Church started refusing communion to doctors, nurses and midwives who performed abortions. This act of religious exclusion came in tandem with a public campaign in local and national media outlets against the right to legal abortion, where women making a personal choice to have an abortion have reportedly been called "baby killers." While the church has the right to practice the Orthodox religion as it determines, the presence and weight of its religious opinions is growing in Serbian culture and politics.

The singing of the anthem *Boze pravde* ("God of Justice"), the increasing rhetoric of religion within speeches given by politicians, the participation of the military in church ceremonies, the public celebration/observation of the "family *Slava*," now celebrated with solemnity as a kind of nationalistic indoctrination,¹³ all demonstrate the encroachment of religion into public spaces and institutions. This appropriation of public space has played a pivotal role in the clericalization of public life, which gives the Church and its officials an increased monopoly over spirituality and values within Serbian culture. The introduction of religious education in 2001, the establishment of St. Sava Day (27th January) as a school holiday, and the appearance of religious programming and church officials on public service television

and radio¹⁴ are just a few signs of the growing presence of religious values in public life. As the role of media in both reflecting and shaping public opinion and identity has been well documented, the presence of church doctrine in all forms of media continues to have a significant impact on the growing linkage between the identities of Serbs and followers of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Women in Black Activities

Education

Women in Black believes that the distinction between private and public spaces must be maintained. Recognizing the importance of education as a preliminary step toward change, the network focuses its educational activities on recognizing the warning signs of religious fundamentalisms, understanding the effects of these fundamentalisms upon the lives and bodies of women, and becoming educated about the larger concept of fundamentalisms. An essential first step in the struggle against fundamentalism is that activists and citizens be able to recognize the warning signs of fundamentalisms in their own communities. As more women are educated on the basic concepts behind fundamentalism, Women in Black expands this educational programming to include democratic and feminist responses to fundamentalisms. It is essential that women understand the context of fundamentalism within their own communities and not think of fundamentalist trends as a pattern, product, or struggle of an “other” (i.e., other town, region, country, culture, religion, etc.). It is equally essential that the women of Serbia understand local fundamentalism as a part of a growing global trend of fundamentalisms. Women in Black believes that understanding one’s place in both local and global contexts and struggles, and that enacting this understanding in educational programming and networking is the only way to combat fundamentalism.

The goal of the program is to gain conceptual and methodological insight from other struggles against fundamentalisms, while maintaining a local focus. Religious and nationalist fundamentalists are interconnected, even when they spout hatred toward each other. Activists, educators, politicians, and other civil society groups who stand against these trends must situate themselves within the larger global dialogue and work with the knowledge that in isolation each struggle is weakened. For Women in Black, this means situating not only their work in Belgrade, but also the education and work of each woman in the Network, whether they live in Leskovac in southern Serbia or Subotica in the north.

The main components of Women in Black’s educational programming are seminars, trainings, lectures, panel discussions and debates, film screenings, and publications. This multi-pronged approach allows the network to reach a broader audience. Educational seminars have been held in towns and cities throughout Serbia, and participants have come primarily from within the Women in Black-Serbia network and other civil society activist organizations. The first cycle of seminars took place in 2006 and 2007, and focused on expanding general knowledge on fundamentalism and its effects upon women. The second in 2008 and 2009 encouraged a more in-depth examination of feminist and democratic responses to fundamentalism within Serbia and in a global context. These educational activities had a clear impact on creating a critical attitude among women toward the political misuse of religion, the Serbian Orthodox Church and certain traditional rituals.

After each seminar, more women joined the Serbian Women in Black network. It was clear that these activists preferred a proactive approach, expressing more comfort with the feminist perspectives on secularism than with feminist critiques of fundamentalism and clericalization. Since 2008, the network’s educational activities have thus focused on feminist approaches to secularism and the importance of secularism for women’s human rights.

Women in Black’s educational seminars focus on training local women community leaders to recognize and combat fundamentalisms within their own communities. Seminars typically involve 15 participants, with a diverse representation across different generations, ethnic groups, social statuses, levels of education, religious backgrounds, and sexual orientations. Over the course of two days, sessions combine lectures and workshops, including video materials (interactive exhibitions, documentaries, etc.), and employ a multi-disciplinary approach that nurtures a kind of “theory-based activism” with a balance of academic knowledge and activist experience. Participants in these trainings learn to identify and challenge fundamentalism and to educate others in their community about local and global fundamentalist trends. Women in Black believes that this is an essential component of the educational programming, as it allows the network to not only pass on knowledge to diverse groups of women, but also to ignite a larger pattern of resistance to fundamentalism that is rooted locally and thereby well positioned to combat local fundamentalist trends.

Public lectures, panel debates and discussions allow Women in Black to bring together academics, artists, activists, politicians, and ordinary citizens into a single space and a single dialogue. These generally appeal to persons of similar value codes and political orientation: anti-nationalistic, anti-fascist and secular. Unfortunately, in Serbia

there is a wide gap between the values of Women in Black and similar organizations and those of the dominant culture of ultra-nationalist and rightist political elites and organizations. The Serbian Orthodox Church refuses any contact with Women in Black, and discredits the network's activities in their sermons and journals. Women in Black is thus faced with frequent attacks (both physical and verbal) by non-state actors and clero-fascist organizations (Obraz, Krv i cast), as well as attempts by state institutions to criminalize the network, make accusations against its activists, and intimidate them through financial inspections of their work.

Writing Back

Writing and publishing have long been a central component of Women in Black's activism. This strategy serves the dual purpose of inserting an alternative narrative into the literary sphere and of reaching wider and more diverse groups of individuals. Women in Black produces books, anthologies, booklets, pamphlets, leaflets and articles, and whenever possible, attempts to publish in Serbian, English, Albanian, and Hungarian, in order to be able to reach a broader audience.

Women in Black believes in the power of media, history, and the printed word, and sees writing and publication as a category of work that cannot be neglected by activists.

Just as historians and mainstream media have long used publishing to mythologize the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbian identity, Women in Black sees its activities as one method of "writing back" to these recognized authorities. The network writes back to challenge what is said in other published works and writes back to protest the idea that there is a single recognized authority over published histories. *What Every Citizen Should Know* is an important series of publications produced by Women in Black in collaboration with the Coalition for a Secular State. It includes *What Every Citizen Should Know about Secularism* (translated into English with WLUML¹⁵) and *What Every Citizen Should Know about the Serbian Orthodox Church*. The latter booklet contains quotations from religious leaders and documents on key issues such as abortion, gender roles, tolerance,



war, and the relationship between church and state. The quotations illuminate the retrograde and intolerant views of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As an artistic activist statement, both booklets are printed in the style of the prayer books and religious pamphlets handed out by the Serbian Orthodox Church. This ironic aesthetic deconstruction is a part of Women in Black's politically engaged artistic approach.

Women in Black began in the street in 1991, and continues to believe that street actions are essential for increasing public awareness and energizing a movement. Women in Black uses both traditional and creative street actions to momentarily disrupt the daily lives of Serbian citizens. One street action involved activists removing items of clothing while standing in front of the Patriarchate in Belgrade. This was a form of peaceful resistance to the church's public stance on appropriate clothing for women, which discourages the wearing of shorter skirts/dresses and sleeveless tops. Women in Black activists removed their clothing—some stripped down to their underwear—to demonstrate that there is nothing sinful about a woman's body and that the church's role should not extend to dictating what Serbian women can and cannot wear on public streets. In this specific case, the activists involved did not face any immediate backlash, although verbal and physical attacks are a common experience with such street actions.

Research and Documentation

Each year, Women in Black co-ordinates a nationwide research project, recognizing that the network has a unique capacity to hear and document the voices of a diverse population of Serbian women, and that this work is key to maintaining an effective political struggle. In 2008, it launched *Reproductive Rights and the Revival of Traditionalism*, a research project that focused on younger generations of women. A survey was conducted between March and May of 2008, with sample of 987 women. Nearly half of these women were up to 30 years old; 27% were between 30 and 50; and 26% were over 50 years old. Of those surveyed, 47% were from major cities, 19% from smaller cities, 21% from villages, and 13% from small towns. In terms of educational diversity, 48% were high school graduates, 19% held a college degree, 15% held a university degree and 14% had an elementary education. With regard to engagement in public life, 72% were not engaged, whereas those engaged were mostly political party activists, or activists in culture or humanitarian organizations or NGOs.

The survey results showed a gap between the stance of the Serbian Orthodox Church on sexual and reproductive rights and the views held by younger women in Serbia. The results also challenged the idea that the church has had a significant effect on society's ideas and beliefs.

While official census data states that 95% of the Serbian population is religious, only three-fifths of the women surveyed by Women in Black professed their faith, and some said this was due to the pressure to conform and the fear of standing out.

Although the church and nationalist-oriented demographers, gynaecologists, and propagandists maintain that the overall low birthrate is of concern, as are “the separatist tendencies of the minority peoples who multiply unreasonably” (i.e., Albanians, Roma, Bosniaks), none of the women surveyed cite this cause. Whereas only 17% of women cited causes similar to those put forth by the church, nearly 80% believe that the drop in birthrate is primarily caused by economic and social factors, and the low standard of living. The research of non-nationalist demographers in Serbia confirms that economic reasons, as well as changes in the value system, are the main causes for the drop in birthrate. This suggests that the tendency towards clericalism in society has not managed to destroy women’s self-awareness.

The study concluded that many of those who count themselves as believers think that their faith gives them the right to abortion, which points to a divergence between the church’s position on this issue and the real needs of women. Most female believers think that abortion is not murder and that they have the right to make decisions regarding themselves, their bodies, and their reproductive choices.¹⁶ This demonstrates that they do not accept the church’s rigid position on reproductive rights. On the contrary, they are aware of their right to have control over their bodies and make their own decisions.

Slightly more than half of the surveyed women think that abortion is not murder. It is interesting that when asked whether a believer is allowed to abort, most of the women answered yes, which demonstrates that, regardless of the church’s position that abortion is murder (and bearing in mind that 60% of the women stated they were believers), women make decisions in real life based on their needs.¹⁷

The study revealed that the fundamentalist model of sexuality, advocated as a part of the clericalization of Serbian society, has nothing to do with the experience of the female population. Indeed, the Serbian Orthodox Church speaks in a language that does not connect with the reality of women and “the Christian Orthodox flock” in general. The imposition of reactionary attitudes on reproductive rights in Serbia has not yet had a significant impact on women’s self-awareness.

What lessons might civil society and autonomous women’s groups draw from this?

Given the growing trend of clericalism and the coming to power of Kostunica,¹⁸ the data obtained by this survey is more positive than one would expect. The Serbian Orthodox Church has become one of the main players in influencing state policy. It directly interferes with the work of pedagogical, educational, cultural and information-providing institutions. The results of the survey and field work suggest several imperatives for the struggle against fundamentalism. Civil society should:

- be much more effective in advocating secularism, i.e., a complete separation of the church from the state, which is the basis of democracy;
- actively oppose the interference of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religious communities in state affairs, especially in the sphere of pedagogy, education and culture;
- exert pressure upon political institutions in order to protect the constitutional principle of separation between the state and the church, and to enshrine the church’s neutrality in political and government affairs; and
- prevent the interference of the Serbian Orthodox Church in taking away women’s human rights, especially reproductive and sexual rights, both in the legislative sphere and in terms of reactionary influence.

Network and Coalition Building

Women in Black recognizes the importance of participating in the democratic process, and engages in lobbying campaigns. In response to the Law on Churches and Religious Communities, Women in Black helped to found the Coalition for a Secular State, a civil society coalition in Belgrade. In 2006, the Coalition for a Secular State held a series of public meetings to discuss the law, drafted a number of amendments, and subsequently lobbied the Serbian Parliament to pass the amendments. While the coalition was not successful in its lobbying effort, the campaign served as an important learning experience for Women in Black and the Coalition for a Secular State.

Networking and coalition building has proven essential in Women in Black’s work against fundamentalism in Serbia. The Coalition for a Secular State is made up of the following Belgrade civil society organizations: Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Belgrade Center for Human Rights, Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights, Queeria Center for the Promotion of a Culture of Non-Violence and Diversity, *Republika*

Journal, Social Democratic Union, Urban In, Center for Peace and Democracy Development, Center for the Advancement of Legal Studies, and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. Each of these groups has served a pivotal role in the fight for human rights in Serbia. By forming the coalition, Women in Black and the other organizations were able to combine their experiences, resources, networks (local, national and international) and knowledge bases. The Manifesto on Secularism, drawn up on the founding of the coalition, states as the coalition's aims:

- A secular state: complete division of church and state, no interference of any church in state affairs, as well as no interference of the state in religious affairs;
- A secular education system: schools with no religious indoctrination and no interference of church or religious institutions, with education based on the principles of science and rationalism;
- Freedom of religion: re-affirming the right of each individual to belong to a religious community, to change it or abandon it, as well as to not believe and not belong to any religious community;
- The equal treatment of believers and non-believers: there should be no discrimination whatsoever, nor any privileges based on public expressions of religious beliefs or lack thereof; and
- A society where religious expression is an exclusively private matter of each individual woman and man, especially as far as state officials are concerned.¹⁹

The coalition's stated goals are to warn the public that losing the secular character of the state entails serious consequences for peace, democracy, human and women's rights; to bring attention to the constant abuse of religion, tradition, national and cultural heritage for political purposes; to support real freedom of belief and secularism as a key legacy of modernity; and to encourage and multiply similar coalitions within civil society in Serbia. Women in Black and the member groups of the Coalition for a Secular State believe that coalition building is the best way to protect peace, democracy, and human rights.

Serbia is certainly not alone in the fight against the growing power of fundamentalisms. In the past few decades, religion has gained in official influence in government and civil society throughout the world. In its efforts to confront religious fundamentalism, Women in Black has built networks and coalitions not only within Serbia, but also internationally. An important partner is [Women Living Under Muslim Laws](#) (WLUML). Marieme Helie-Lucas, one of the founders of WLUML, is

an activist and sociologist who has worked tirelessly against religious fundamentalisms. While her main focus is Muslim fundamentalisms, Helie-Lucas, like Women in Black, believes that the best way to combat the global trend of fundamentalisms is through solidarity networks and coalitions. "In all cases," she writes, "what we see at work is by no means religious movements, but political extreme right forces that manipulate religions to further their political agendas and to gain political power."²⁰ This use and manipulation of religion is simultaneously a local and a global phenomenon and must be dealt with on both a local and global scale. Women in Black has been able to gain important international information, learn new methodologies, and get support from Women Living Under Muslim Laws and Helie-Lucas.

The Serbian Orthodox Church and connected fundamentalist groups in Serbia may claim to be the guardians of the "history" and "tradition" of Serbia, but they have adapted and continue to adapt over time. Recognizing the influence and limitations of international bodies such as the United Nations, the European Union, and international human rights organizations, fundamentalist groups have taken on the language of the left (i.e., "multiculturalism," "fascism," "genocide") to serve their own political purposes and with the aim of paralyzing or winning over the left.

Looking Ahead

Women in Black and other rights organizations need to understand and monitor the continuing changes in the language of fundamentalists. While the struggle against fundamentalists should not be viewed as a mere battle of words (as peoples' lives are at stake), much of the struggle does occur in laws, media, books, and speeches. Anti-fundamentalist groups must be aware of how their own language and rhetoric is co-opted by the right, and continue to think creatively in the coming years.

Women in Black plans to continue its educational programming and to increase its writing and publishing activities to raise awareness on the issues of fundamentalism, secularism, and women's rights. The organization is also considering ways to monitor the publications of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to organize new law-making initiatives, and to create youth-directed programming in the area of anti-fundamentalism.

The Serbian Orthodox Church and fundamentalist groups in Serbia seem only to be growing in power, but there is also a strong and active anti-fundamentalist movement in the country. Within this movement, Women in Black is a leader and believes that through education, coalition and network building, working both locally and internationally, and continuing to think creatively, fundamentalist trends within Serbia can be halted.

Endnotes:

¹ The text of the case study references Women in Black, Women in Black Belgrade, and Women in Black Serbia interchangeably.

² This was the definition that emerged during a Women in Black educational seminar in Sijarinska Banja, South Serbia in June 2006.

³ Staša Zajović, "Fundamentalism and the Gender Order: Ethnic Fundamentalism in Serbia," Women for Peace: 2007.

⁴ St. Sava is the saintly designation of Rastko Nemanjic (1175-1235), an Eastern Orthodox monk and noble who became the first archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In addition to being venerated by the Serbian Orthodox Church, he was also a diplomat, writer, lawgiver and founder of several medieval monasteries.

⁵ "Greater Serbia" is the mythologized concept of a Serbian homeland heavily steeped in Orthodox imagery and history. The construction of Greater Serbia also portrays the region as ordained by God, and thereby under the control or influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

⁶ Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*, New York: New York University Press, 1999: 123-124.

⁷ Slobodan Milosevic served as president of Serbia (1989-1997) and president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1997-2000).

⁸ The Yugoslav Wars (also referred to as the War of the Balkans or Wars of Yugoslav Secession) were a series of violent conflicts in the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) between 1991 and 2001.

⁹ Josip Tito was prime minister (1945-1953) and then president (1953-1980) of SFRY.

¹⁰ Snezana Tabacki and Kosta Donkic, eds., "What Every Citizen Should Know about the Serbian Orthodox Church," Women in Black/Coalition for a Secular State, Belgrade, 2007.

¹¹ See Article 11 on Traditional Churches and Religions Communities, [Draft Law on Churches and Religious Communities of the Republic of Serbia \(English translation\)](#), European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), Council of Europe, April 2006.

¹² More details regarding our seminars can be found on the Women in Black website, www.zeneucrnom.org.

¹³ "The most important Serbian tradition is the yearly observance of Krsna Slava, the Patron Saint's Day. This uniquely Serbian religious holiday, reminiscent of the prehistoric harvest festivals, is celebrated once a year in commemoration of the family's conversion to Christianity, when each family chose its patron saint, which derived from the custom of worshipping protective spirits. Passing from father to son, this joyous holiday is observed with friends and family enjoying sumptuous foods, often with music and dancing as well." From "Slava" article, Serbian Orthodox Church official website, undated.

¹⁴ Religious programming on public radio includes Vekovnik on RTS. Private media programs include Voice of the Church, TV Bridge, Fokus, and New Spark.

¹⁵ Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) was founded in 1984 as an international solidarity network that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam.

¹⁶ When expressed in numbers, the survey shows that 60.69% of the examined women consider themselves believers, 26.44% do not, and 12.6% say they don't know; 45.59% of the women think that their faith allows them to abort, whereas 24.01% think it doesn't allow it; 56.2% of the women think that abortion isn't murder, while 42.76% think it is murder; 55.93% of the women think that a believer is allowed to use contraception, whereas 13.17% replied that she isn't allowed.

¹⁷ Staša Zajović, "A Gap between Reality, Women's Experience, and Clericalism in Serbia," Unpublished paper.

¹⁸ Vojislav Kostunica is president of the Democratic Party of Serbia. He served as the last president of the SFRY (2000-2003), succeeding Slobodan Milosevic, and held two terms as prime minister of Serbia (2004-2007 and 2007-2008).

¹⁹ Snezana Tabacki, "Manifesto on Secularism," Women in Black/Coalition for a Secular State, Belgrade, 2008.

²⁰ Marieme Helie-Lucas, "The Enemy of My Enemy is Not My Friend: Fundamentalist Non-State Actors, Democracy and Human Rights," in *Preteci znaci fundamentalizama - feministicki odgovori (Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms - Feminist Responses)*, Women in Black Belgrade, 2006.

Author Bios:

Staša Zajović is a co-founder of Women in Black-Belgrade and serves as the network's co-ordinator. Staša has lengthy experience in grassroots mobilization and solidarity work and has also written extensively, covering diverse areas such as refugee rights, anti-militarism and peace initiatives, and women's human rights.

Katie Mahuron served as a full-time volunteer with Women in Black-Belgrade for a year (2007-2008) through the Brethren Volunteer Service. She is originally from Indiana, United States.

Organizational Bio:

Women in Black (WiB) is an activist group and a feminist anti-militarist network that brings visibility to women's non-violent resistance to war, nationalism, sexism, militarisms and fundamentalisms. WiB creates space for women's voices and actions, builds peace networks and coalitions, organizes feminist-pacifist education, and creates an alternative women's history. WiB-Belgrade is working to preserve the secular character of state. In 2006, in association with the Coalition for a Secular state, it advocated against the Law on Churches and Religious Communities and against the clericalization of the state. www.zeneucrnom.org