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A SYMBOLISM OF A HOLIDAY AS A DETERMINANT OF IDENTITY **

Abstract

The article analyzes the attitude toward the holiday on the example of March 8 as a component of women's identity. In the first part of the paper, we will give a brief historical overview of the origins of holidays. The second part of the paper will include an analysis of data on March 8 based on the author's research. The basic thesis in the paper is that the attitude towards the holiday depends on the individual attitude of women towards identity and the collective attitude towards the holidays as an intangible heritage in the wider social context. The aim of this paper is to point out that the attitude about the holiday is conditioned by the way of intragenerational and intergenerational attitudes toward memory, but also by the social position of women as a group in different historical periods. The author concludes that the main guardians of the festive cultural heritage are women as a social group, and the potential disqualification of March 8 as an irrelevant historical date, which was done through a form of celebration makes meaningless the significance of women's position in society.

Keywords: *equality, March 8, memory, society, women.*

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INTRODUCTION

International Women's Day as a holiday arose as a need to mark the uprising of women workers in New York on March 8, 1857. During this period, equality between women and men was proclaimed within the program of a few socialist parties, in France in 1879 and in Germany in 1891. Within the framework of the Second International, Clara Zetkin organized the first international conference of women social democrats in 1907.¹ According to the authors, Clara Zetkin dealt mostly with the problem of women's emancipation. Her book *Women and Students* deal with the women's emancipation movement, the social position of women and the formation of women as free persons was translated and published in the Serbo-Croatian language in 1924. During that period, her articles were published in our socialist newspapers. In the 1980s, she joined the socialist movement in Germany, which forced her to emigrate, and after returning to Germany in 1890, she led the women's proletarian movement. As part of her political activities, she was the initiator of the International Conference of Women (1907), at which she was elected secretary of the International Women's Secretariat, and from 1920 until the end of her life in 1933, she was the president of the secretariat. Based on her proposal at the International Conference of Women, held in Copenhagen in 1910, March 8 was declared International Women's Day.²

Some authors believe that “every culture of memory is closely linked to its own historical form of social time, which is a dynamic framework for using the past”.³ Within this “critical culture of memory seeks internal antagonism, studies the planned direction of the intertwining of public, official and personal memory, then the ways in which the image of the past divides people who experienced it, but also those who did not experience

¹ Božinović, N. (1996). *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku*. Beograd: Devedesetčetvrta, p. 16.

² Kecman, J. (1978). *Žene Jugoslavije u radničkom pokretu i ženskim organizacijama 1918 – 1941*. Beograd: Narodna knjiga i Institut za savremenu istoriju, p. 12.

³ Kuljić, T. (2006). *Kultura sećanja: teorijska objašnjenja upotrebe prošlosti*, Beograd: Čigoja štampa, pp. 12-14.

it, and yet accept it as part of their own identity".⁴ According to Malešević, the symbolism of the holiday changed its view in the middle of the 20th century when March 8, "Instead of the former 'battle day', is transformed, in the 1960s, into Mother's Day, the holiday of parent and nurturer".⁵ At that time, the celebration of Women's Day was divided into two levels - official and spontaneous, i.e. celebratory.

New trends in the way of celebrating holidays as changes in memory and dynamics have influenced changes in the perception of previous memories on the holiday and all the dimensions it contained, so from the "revolutionary-fighting" dimension moved to a more socially acceptable dimension of the holiday as a celebration of traditional roles of women in society. Such an attitude towards the holiday is a consequence of the attitude towards women's identity in the socialist system, but "much more scientific efforts need to be made to establish a relatively consistent and true idea of the meaning and real effects of the socialist system on changing the social position of women and their identity in ex-socialist countries in Europe".⁶ In the next chapter, we will point out the interpretations of the holidays from our research.

WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF THE HOLIDAY: RESEARCH DATA

The answers to the question *What do you think about March 8?* are clusters of memories of individuals at one time, which are the memories of women who were direct participants in celebrating holidays in socialist Yugoslavia to the "memories" of previous generations, as well as the attitudes of younger generations about the holiday, which gave rise to sporadic reminders of the symbolism and significance of the holiday every March 8 of the year in the media. We will analyze the perception of

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁵ Malešević, M. (1988). Osmi mart od utopije do demagogije, *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU*, XXXVI-XXXVII, pp. 68-70.

⁶ Milić, A. (2008). Žene u bivšoj Jugoslaviji – drugačiji pogled na učinke socijalizma u promeni društvenog položaja žena, in Vujović, S. (ed.) *Društvo rizika: promene, nejednakosti i socijalni problemi u današnjoj Srbiji*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa, p.181.

ordinary women about the Eighth of March to determine whether there are any generational nuances. Attitudes also indicate the quality of interpersonal relationships in individual and collective memory.

The data are part of a broader study by the author of the paper conducted in 2013, on a quota sample of women. They were collected by the quantitative method (survey questionnaire), and the question What do you think about the Eighth of March was answered by 165 respondents. Given the size of the sample of the general population of women, we will not subject the collected data to a broader and deeper statistical analysis, which is performed on larger samples. The data can serve as a framework for empirical research on larger samples in the future. The quota sample included 188 women, equally represented groups of women aged 36–50 years 41.0% (77) and 51 and older 41.0% (77), and the respondents aged 20 to 35 have 18.1% (34). Most respondents have completed secondary school, almost half 44.1% (83 respondents), then slightly more than a quarter of respondents with completed primary school 23.9% (45 women), and a third of 60 respondents with higher education: higher education has 5.9% (11), 19.7% of women (37) have completed college, and 6.4% (12) are women with a master's degree or doctorate.

The majority of respondents are 91.4% employed women, 3.8% retired, 2.2% female students, 1.6% unemployed and 1.1% housewives. According to marital status, married women predominate, slightly more than half of the respondents 59.7% (111), then, in a significantly lower percentage of unmarried 15.1% (28), in the extramarital union is 9.1% (17), 11.3% are divorced (21) and 4.8% are in the widow group (9). A neutral question has been formulated *What do you think about March 8?* open type, with the possibility for the respondents to define their own attitude towards the holiday. The answer to the question was given by 165 respondents. Considering that the sample consisted of women of different levels of education as well as members of the younger and older generation, the intention was to see potential differences. The answers of the respondents were then coded and a typology was made: a) a day like every other day of the year; b) a beautiful holiday, it should be celebrated, given and paid

attention to; c) an important and symbolic date, but it has lost its significance and essence; d) it is not important, it should not be celebrated; e) I don't think anything special about March 8; f) imposed and obsolete holiday; d) mother's and grandmother's day, not wife's; h) Women deserve attention every day, not just March 8th.

According to the frequency of answers, the largest number of respondents believe that March 8 is a "beautiful holiday, it should be celebrated, gifts and attention" (36.4%), followed by "a day like every other day of the year" (18.2%); Approximately the same percentage of respondents state that "they don't think anything special about March 8 (13.3%) and that it is" an important and symbolic date, but it has lost its significance and essence"(12.1%). 8.5% answered that "women deserve attention every day and not only on March 8", and the smallest percentage of women think that it is an "imposed and obsolete holiday" (4.8%), that it is not important and should not be celebrated (4.2%), and that it is "Mother's and Grandma's Day, not Women's Day" (2.4%). The tables 1 and 2 show the respondents' answers according to age and education (Appendix).

As can be seen from the data, most respondents of all levels of education and age categories believe that March 8 is a beautiful holiday that should be celebrated and that it is an opportunity to show attention to women and receive gifts. However, there is a difference in the attitude of respondents towards education, 25.9% of highly educated respondents believe that this is a very important date but that it has lost its significance and essence, compared to only 7.2% with high school and 2.4% with primary school. The answer shows a dose of the resignation of the highly educated that March 8 has no significance in society and that the essence of the holiday is lost. In order to show the observed differences more comprehensively, we will introduce the qualitative answers of the respondents into the analysis.

Several characteristic qualitative answers that describe the attitude of highly educated women that the holiday is important but that it has lost its essence are: "Follow the media more and point out the problems of women and their unequal position in society"; "Many brave women have suffered to

give us the right to vote”; “Today, this holiday has lost the significance and meaning it had in previous decades, more like Love Day than a day that marks and symbolizes women's struggle for equality”; “I support the celebration of important historical dates, but, on the other hand, in time it becomes an empty form without content, essence”; “The symbolism of that date is completely negligible in relation to the position of women throughout the year”; “A poorly interpreted holiday has essentially gone into its opposite”; “An important historical date, unfortunately, was reduced to a day of small gifts and attention out of habit”.

Here are some answers from high school respondents: “Nothing special, a day like any other day”; “He has lost his originality”; “The very concept of March 8 has lost its meaning, because women, in addition to the achieved rights, have diminished their value as human beings”; “A holiday for men's fools – a woman needs attention every day”; “Since that date, the women's struggle has begun and is still going on”; “It doesn't matter when it was created, but it should exist as one of the gestures that direct attention to a woman”.

Unlike the highly educated, respondents with lower levels of education (primary and secondary) in their answers more often interpret the holiday as “a day like any other” or “they don't think anything special” about it.

The answers within the same category of education and between different levels are very diverse, but there is a difference in the qualitative answers of respondents with the primary and secondary school where the emphasis is more on the way to celebrate holidays (day off work, gifts, attention) compared to respondents with higher education that emphasizes the historical significance of the holiday, but also the need for its revitalization in that direction. However, based on the frequency of responses, we can conclude that the common thread in the responses of respondents of all generations and levels of education is that the holiday is an important date and should be celebrated.

Based on this question, we tried to see the reflectivity of the general population of women on International Women's Day and how women of different

ages recalled similar events and holidays and the interpretation of some events and holidays change over the generations. The question allowed us to indirectly, through the opinions of different generations of women and levels of education, gain insight into the symbolism of this holiday in different socio-historical circumstances.

WHOSE HOLIDAY IS MARCH 8?

The social and historical contextualization of the symbolism of holidays can be seen in the following two definitions of holidays in our country, the first is from 1975, and the second was created 35 years later. First is the definition within the determinant International Women's Day – March 8 in Political encyclopedia 1975. According to this definition, March 8 is “the day of international solidarity of women in the fight for economic and political equality. At the Second International Conference of Women in Copenhagen in 1910, at the initiative of Clara Zetkin, a resolution was adopted establishing an international day, emphasizing that it was organized in cooperation with workers' parties and unions to achieve economic, political, and social equality for women. The first celebrations of International Women's Day were held in 1911. in Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland under the slogan of winning universal suffrage, and in Russia in 1913. Until the Second World War in Yugoslavia, the March 8 celebrations were marked by the struggle against reactionary regimes, the fascism of the country, the conquest of political freedoms and the demand 'for equal work – equal reward'. During the Second World War, the basic content of the celebrations was the activation and mobilization of women in the national liberation struggle. With the victory of the socialist revolution, the women of Yugoslavia achieved legal and political recognition of full equality, so the content of these celebrations was manifested in a broad gathering of women to rebuild the war-torn country, build socialism and fight for equality between nations and peace in the world.”⁷ Given that the determinant is included in the Political Encyclopedia, this indicates

women's political significance, their participation in the Second World War, and their proclaimed equality in every sphere of society.

One other definition of holiday created 35 years later is: "Women's desire for equality lasts as long as the human race. 102 years ago, in 1908, textile workers marched in New York under the slogan 'bread and roses'. They demanded shorter working hours, higher salaries, and a ban on the exploitation of child labor. A year later, workers demonstrated in Chicago. In memory of these, but also some other events in which women tragically lost their lives due to poor working conditions in 1910, in Copenhagen, at the initiative of Clara Zetkin, at the Second Conference of Socialist Women, March 8 was established as a holiday of women's rights. The following year, 1911, over a million workers celebrated Women's Day in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Denmark. March 8 was celebrated in Serbia for the first time in 1914. March 8 was accepted as the International Women's Day of 1917. In Russia, the so-called February Revolution (according to the new calendar on March 8) begins with demonstrations on the occasion of the International Women's Day. After the October Revolution, Bolshevik feminist Alexandra Kollontai fought to make March 8 a national holiday. Feminists of the second wave of feminism are restoring dignity to the Women's Day, calling it the day of actions for women's human rights. The year 1975, which was declared the International Year of Women, the United Nations officially began to mark International Women's Day. In the SFRY, after the Second World War, March 8 was celebrated first as a day in which the equality of women was discussed, so the emphasis was shifted to Mother's Day. This dimension of the holiday was insisted on in the education system from kindergartens to high schools. When the Anti-Fascist Women's Front was transformed into the Conference for Women's Social Activity, the holiday acquired the characteristics of a holiday in a consumer society. Trade unions organized women's trips abroad, women received cashier's checks for purchases in companies and institutions, and union organizations organized collective lunches, dinners, and parties in hotels and restaurants. The women

⁷ *Politička enciklopedija. (1975). Beograd: Savremena administracija, p. 556.*

received flowers”.⁸ We can notice that this determination of holidays form example no longer mentions the historical role and struggle of women in the Second World War and their role in society in previous periods, except for the transformation of Anti-Fascist Women's Front, but emphasizes the way of celebrating holidays and passing patterns and symbolism to younger generations, which partially effects lost of the essence of holiday symbolism and it's significance for female identity.

Within the analysis of the basis and origins of March 8, it is necessary to distinguish two layers. The first layer of the origin of the holiday is connected with the historical dimension – the reasons for founding holiday and its establishment as an element of women's collective consciousness, within the revolution and the struggle for a better socio-economic position of women. Then marking Women's Day as a feminist holiday also. The second layer appears as a consequence of the interpretation of holiday in different ideological and social arrangements and depending on the educational and generational distance between women in terms of marking this holiday. Our research also includes the perception of holidays through the importance that women attach to their various social roles.

How the respondents perceive the holiday is visible in the way they define their opinion, namely, part of the respondents, through the answers is oriented on way of celebrating the holiday, part of the respondents to whose “ownership” is holiday and part of the answers on the period of active (public) celebration of the holiday. The way individuals collectively remember, forget, and recall events, people, places, etc., has been a prominent topic of research on collective memory. In that sense, intergenerational agreement of women on the importance of March 8 should contribute to their collective memory. The appearance of the same (re)interpretation of March 8 only as an insignificant holiday that represents a relic of socialism, in the long run shapes a “new” collective memory that can influence attitude of younger generations who do not remember the time of socialism towards

⁸ Jarić V., Radović N. (2010). *Rečnik rodne ravnopravnosti*. Beograd: Kulturni centar Beograda, pp. 109-110.

this holiday – in that manner they can only get a “narrow” picture of it's symbolic. A similar case is with other holidays that were celebrated in the former SFRY.

When the older generations pass on to the younger ones that the celebration of a holiday was an indicator of closeness, warmth, and through sociability the formation of a community, then the pattern of collective connection with the holiday is transmitted. This way of transmitting knowledge about various social phenomena can be classified as tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is not visible and cannot be easily expressed, it is a knowledge of an individual that is difficult to formalize, it can include subjective insights, hints, intuition. An adequate combination of tacit and explicit knowledge would be an ideal case type through two combined processes – knowledge perception and knowledge interpretation.⁹

For the formation of identity, it is necessary that the process of women's emancipation takes place “from within” – through personal and independent definition of the boundaries of identity where women are an active social actor in the process. The collective identity of women is considered in research in which the subject is the social position of women and the influence it has on the formation of women's identity. In this process, the role is played by the political socialization of women as a social group which, according to research, is primarily influenced by the family situation which is a consequence of the action of existing social patterns. The desire of an individual to develop identity in different social circumstances is directed on the basis of the value system propagated by the social community.¹⁰ Ignorance of the history of women – participants in politics and other influential social spheres and failure to convey the collective memory of the roles that women played in society in different historical periods affects the disintegration of women's identity.¹¹

⁹ Vuković, A. (2020). Knowledge Management Concept and Subculture: Police Profession Example, *Nauka i društvo*, Vol. VII, br. 1(12), pp. 16-35.

¹⁰ Vuković, A. (2013). Pitanje ženskog političkog identiteta u Srbiji i SAD – jedno poređenje, *Sociološki pregled*, vol. XLVII, no. 2, pp. 249-251.

¹¹ Vuković, A (2009). *Potisnute ili samopritajene? Žene u politici prema mišljenju političke elite u Srbiji*. Beograd: Službeni glasnik, pp. 15-30.

CONCLUSION

The potential disqualification of Women's Day as an unimportant historical date, which essentially was done through the form of celebration, makes meaningless the importance of women's social position, and can continuously question whether women built history or were an unimportant factor in it, or they were completely prevented from actively participating in history. That's why this holiday is important – so that there is a trace of when and why women changed historical trends and were active subjects of history. The main guardians of that cultural heritage are women as a social group. Considering that during the intensive and continuous celebration of Women's Day during socialism, we do not have enough data on the attitudes of women in that time period, then the transmission of oral memory is an important communication channel among women, which can indirectly shape attitude of the younger generations towards this issue and future cultural code of holiday.

Therefore, the collective memory towards this holiday is divided through the prism of memory of women of different generations – those who had the opportunity to celebrate the holiday, and those who lived in a different social context. The attitude towards Women's Day is shaped, to a different extent – by the culture of celebrating holidays in different periods of a society, personal memories, and intergenerational transmission of memories. Part of this series is the attitude of official policy towards historical events and holiday celebrations. This intertwining is also enriched by the meaning that, in this case for the women's identity, can have a manifest and latent attitude towards the holiday. Since identity consists of several components, it is a question of each individual whether through the attitude towards the holiday expresses the entire attitude towards his life memory in one or more different socio-historical contexts.

We can conclude that the symbolism of Women's Day in our research was formed on the basis of individual experience of women, but also on the basis of the prevailing social climate in which the holiday was determined as desirable or undesirable, i.e. important, or insignificant. Thus, the perception

of the significance of this holiday in different social periods is somewhere between the memory of active participants in the celebration, the transfer of memories of the holiday (oral history, traditional heritage) to women who were not direct participants and contemporaries of celebrating the holiday in the form it had in socialism (obligated, public celebration and continuity in celebration). As well as the attitude of all social actors towards the past and the celebration of holidays in the past and today are permeated through documented records and media presentation and (re)interpretation. All these factors in an individual in a specific way connect the collective memory transmitted orally by families, or between the generations and institutionalized memory within the dominant culture holidays, monuments, books. The intertwining of these actions shapes personal and collective projections of the importance of holidays as component of identity and the celebration of holidays as a cultural phenomenon in the future.

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Appendix

Table 1.*Opinions on March 8 by age (N and %)*

	20-35	36-50	51 and older	In total
A day like any other day of the year	(4) 14.3%	(14) 20.3%	(12) 17.6%	(30) 18.2%
Nice day, it should be celebrated, gifts and attention	(9) 32.1%	(22) 31.9%	(29) 42.6%	(60) 36.4%
An important and symbolic date, but it has lost its significance and essence	(8) 28.6%	(7) 10.1%	(5) 7.4%	(20) 12.1%
It's not important, it shouldn't be celebrated	(1) 3.6%	(2) 2.9%	(4) 5.9%	(7) 4.2%
I don't think anything special about March 8 th	(3) 10.7%	(12) 17.4%	(7) 10.3%	(22) 13.3%
An imposed and obsolete holiday	(0) 0.0%	(1) 1.4%	(7) 10.3%	(8) 4.8%
Mother's and grandmother's day, not women's	(0) 0.0%	(1) 2.9%	(2) 2.9%	(3) 2.4%
Women deserve attention every day, not just on March 8 th	(3) 10.7%	(9) 13.0%	(2) 2.9%	(14) 8.5%
In total	28	69	68	165

Note. From the author's calculations, the database.

Table 2: *Opinions on March 8 by education (N and %)*

	Completed primary school	Completed secondary school	Higher education and faculty	Total
A day like any other day of the year	(15) 35.7%	(12) 17.4%	(3) 5.6%	(30) 18.2%
Nice day, it should be celebrated, gifts and attention	(16) 38.1%	(27) 39.1%	(17) 31.5%	(60) 36.4%
An important and symbolic date, but it has lost its significance and essence	(1) 2.4%	(5) 7.2%	(14) 25.9%	(20) 12.1%
It's not important, it shouldn't be celebrated	(1) 2.4%	(2) 2.9%	(4) 7.4%	(7) 4.2%
I don't think anything special about March 8 th	(5) 11.9%	(11) 15.9%	(6) 11.1%	(22) 13.3%
An imposed and obsolete holiday	(1) 2.4%	(3) 4.3%	(4) 7.4%	(8) 4.8%
Mother's and grandmother's day, not women's	(0) 0.0%	(3) 4.3%	(1) 1.9%	(4) 2.4%
Women deserve attention every day, not just on March 8 th	(3) 7.1%	(6) 8.7%	(5) 9.3%	(14) 8.5%
In total	42	69	54	165

Note. From the author's calculations, database.

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СИМБОЛИКА ПРАЗНИКА КАО ДЕТЕРМИНАНТА ИДЕНТИТЕТА

Апстракт

У чланку се анализира однос према празнику на примеру 8. марта као састојнице женског идентитета. У првом делу рада даћемо кратак историјски преглед настанка празника. Други део рада обухватиће анализу података о Осмом марту на основу истраживања аутора. Основна теза у раду је да однос према празнику зависи од појединачног односа жена према идентитету и од колективног односа према празницима као нематеријалној баштини у ширем друштвеном контексту. Циљ овог рада је да укаже на то да је став о празнику условљен начином унутаргенерацијског и међугенерациског односа према сећању, али и друштвеним положајем жена као групе у различитим историјским периодима. Аутор закључује да су главни чувари празничног културног наслеђа жене као друштвена група, а потенцијална дисквалификација 8. марта као небитног историјског датума, која је учињена кроз форму прославе, обесмишљава и значај положаја жене у друштву.

Кључне речи: 8. март, друштво, жене, једнакост, сећање