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ABORTION, OR AN EVERLASTING PROBLEM WITH/FOR WOMEN?

Abstract. *Abortion and the legal regulation of access to abortion are even these days a matter of numerous trivial, scientific and theoretical discussions. The first part of the article aims to present the feminist perspective on abortion and the fundamental discrepancies that are thematised in feminist debates. This is followed by an analysis of critical discursive moments that have made the abortion issue visible and stimulated public debates: it focuses on anti-abortion discourses in Slovenia from the mid-1980s to September 2016. The author establishes that these discourses derive from the same interconnected ideological contexts (nationalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, biologism, anti-socialism, anti-communism), although they have started to grow in number since the early 2000s, together with topics and the audiences to which they are addressed (strategies of the interpellation of women are especially indicative).*
Key words: *abortion, feminism, anti-abortion discourse, critical discourse moment, Slovenia, nationalism*

Introduction

Birth control, including abortion, has a long history dating back thousands of years: women from the distant past through to the present time have found ways to terminate unwanted pregnancies and helped each other to abort. Abortion was discussed among physicians, lawyers, philosophers etc. for a variety of reasons, with some finding it necessary while others condemned it. (One of) the earliest written references is an ancient Egyptian document from 1550 B.C.E. which contains instructions for terminating pregnancy (at any point in pregnancy); instructions were also found at Pompei, Herculaneum (Schoen, 2008: 5; Kaler, 2008: 9). In 18th and 19th centuries, abortion was a common form of birth control in Europe (Kaler, 2008: 10). Throughout human history, state, religious and medical authorities have regulated access to abortion in many different ways, their attitudes to abortion have changed and varied from time to time and place to place.

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Schoen (2008: 5) points out the simultaneity of the toleration, condemnation and even criminalisation of abortion. In the Middle Ages, for example, knowledge about birth control was widespread and accessible; physicians (in Europe) explicitly justified abortion in certain conditions, but at the same time official church and state authorities focused on protecting the foetus (ibid.).

In the following centuries, the Church's influence on sexuality matters has increased in Europe and North America and, upon changes in the system of medical training, »knowledge about abortifacients began to fade« with one essential exception: midwives. Midwives retained knowledge about contraceptives and abortion (Schoen, 2008: 6), although they became increasingly marginalised (Drglin, 1995). In 17th and 18th centuries, medical authorities more often than before condemned abortion (and contraception) and herbalists warned about the dangerous consequences of herbal abortifacient and contraception (Schoen, 2008: 6). However, abortion and contraception and knowledge about them did not vanish, not even in the 19th century when anti-abortion legislative in Europe and North America became stricter and stricter. In 1803, Great Britain passed anti-abortion laws and by the end of the 19th century most European and North American countries had criminalised abortion and imposed prohibitive abortion laws on their colonies (Klausen, 2008: 18). In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Act 117/1852 of the Empire Code made abortion illegal and enacted heavy punishment for breaking the law (Srecek, 1988 in Jelen and Bradely, 2012: 7). Nevertheless, the criminalisation of abortion, as Schoen (2008: 6–7) argues, did not always lead to a significant number of indictments; many physicians distinguished between criminal and therapeutic abortions, abortion even became a commercial business: the number of professional abortionists increased and advertisements disseminated information about their services.

At the beginning of the 20th century state authorities in industrialised Europe and North America became seriously concerned about the declining birth rates and legislative and legal practices became more rigorous and tough, abortion became less available and more dangerous for pregnant women (first of all for poor women) and for those who helped a woman terminate her pregnancy. The only exception in Europe was the Soviet Union: in 1920 free abortion performed in a hospital was legalised (and recriminalised in 1936) (Gruber and Graves, 1998; Schoen, 2008). Two other countries which legalised abortion before the World War Two were Iceland (in 1935) and Sweden (in 1938). Criminalisation was (and still is) often justified as protecting women from dangerous procedures, crude methods and life-threatening infections. However, the attack on abortion cannot solely be explained by care for women's health – many other risky surgical techniques, considered "necessary for people's health and welfare, were not

prohibited" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1998). Anti-abortion legislation in the 19th century coincided with 'the birth of bio-politics', with its strategies of exerting power over life (bio-power) and disciplining the body (Foucault, 1976/1978: 103), primarily the woman's[1] body. From the end of the 18th century on, sexuality has been placed "at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life" (Foucault, 1976/1978: 145). This has been in the name of the biological existence of a population and in the name of the "general protection of society and the race" (Foucault, 1976/1978: 122) – and in the name of the nation.

Nationalism, as an "organic ideology that corresponds to the national institution, which rests upon the formulation of a *rule of exclusion, of visible or invisible 'borders*,' materialised in laws and practices" (Balibar, 2001/2004: 23), constructs and nurtures a sense of belonging and collective identities that are, according to Balibar (2002: 221), "contextually situated individual identities". On that basis, nationalism appeals to mutual solidarity and defends against external and internal threats: a low birth rate is often considered one of the most threatening phenomena that jeopardises the body of the nation from within. In accordance with those nationalistic discourses, "people as power discourse" (Yuval-Davis, 1997) agitatess against women's emancipation and their (reproductive) rights. Since the birth of bio-politics (and bio-political nationalism), pro-abortion and anti-abortion medical, eugenic, demographic, social, moral and welfare discourses have been competing in (more or less) public space, especially during election campaigns and after elections which bring considerable political changes: according to Albanese (2004: 30), the "more 'liberal' abortion laws that were in place before a nationalist rise to power became a focus of state attention immediately after a nationalist rise to power". That explains why in feminist analyses the regulation of abortion is often thematised within the framework of nationalism.

The abortion issue is one of those issues that 'settle' in certain periods (paraphrasing Carvalho, 2008:166): discussions about them either fall silent or become limited to select circles of adherents, but after some time they become a widely and publicly discussed (political) topic. This is one of the primary reasons that in our analysis we focus on critical discourse moments, i.e. events and periods "that involve specific happenings, which may challenge the 'established' discursive positions"; periods "that are determining in the construction of an issue and therefore call for an integral analysis"; periods when an issue is "transformed from a low-attention issue into a significant political and public issue" (Carvalho, 2008: 166). In the analysis, we

[1] *Although I am fully aware of gender diversity, I use the terms "woman", "women" or "women's" reproductive rights. However, in this article these terms refer not only to cisgender women but also to transgender and non-normative cisgender persons with reproductive capacities socially assigned to cisgender women.*

are therefore interested in events and circumstances making the abortion issue in Slovenia become a popular topic, and in discourses, mechanisms and strategies used by 'pro-life'[2] activists. Namely, in conditions where abortion is legal, relatively accessible and safe, which most definitely holds true in Slovenia, 'pro-life' (i. e. anti-choice) activists »challenge the 'established' discursive positions« (ibid.). First of all, we are interested in the (mostly discursive) strategies of the opponents of abortion and social processes 'outside' the text. For that reason, our analysis of anti-abortion discourses initially focuses on the public abortion debate in Slovenia from the mid-1980s till September 2016.

Abortion (rights) from feminist perspectives

Many feminist authors, most notably Yuval-Davis (1997), similarly to Foucault (1976/1978) and Mosse (1985/2005), convincingly demonstrate how nationalisms are closely linked to gender, sex and sexual dichotomies and hierarchies. According to them, the regulation of biological (and at least covertly also ideological) reproduction or the number and *quality* of the population of a country or territory in which a particular ethnicity is settled is one of the crucial goals of nationalisms. Using the strategies of population policies, the state controls and disciplines women in particular due to their role in biological and cultural production. Women, treated as the bearers of culture, characterise the community identity and the boundaries of national identity and are thus a metaphor for the nation (e.g. Elshtain, 1991; Kandiyoti, 1991; Peterson Spike, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The woman's body, understood as a (heterosexual) fertile one, is constantly an object of pressure, control, abuse and violence (Peterson Spike, 1999: 48). For all these reasons, it is not surprising that nationalist ideologies reject the emancipation of women, especially when it is extended to the field of (biological) reproduction and anticipate a kind of normative arrangement of the family that supports patriarchal relations and heteronormativity. In this regard, they more or less effectively and openly rely on religious attitudes and religious authorities. This is also true in Slovenia, as we will attempt to show in the continuation .

Contemporary feminism mostly considers birth control (and birth control rights) a fundamental prerequisite for women's emancipation. Legalised, accessible, free and safe abortion remains at the core of feminist movements for two main reasons: due to severe restrictions in several parts of the world, and because there is no guarantee that rights once gained will not be lost in

[2] *The expression pro-life (i.e. anti-choice) is in quotation marks since we regard it as a manipulation for discrediting the pro-choice movement.*

the future. The strengthening of right-wing politics, dismantling of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal discourse on individual responsibility (for her/himself), the contradictory process of degovernmentalisation, growing nationalism, racism, biological determinism with its gender binarism, highly threaten women's reproductive (and sexual) rights. Or, as Deutcher (2008: 60) points out, regular and legal abortion "has often taken shape through the granting of a general exception to an ongoing law, which, in fact (except for the exception), continues to render it illegal". Abortion itself "has frequently existed in a state of suspension or exception to its own illegality".

However, women's rights movements did not always advocate contraception and abortion rights: in the USA, for example, the *Voluntary motherhood movement* opposed abortion and even the legalisation of contraception. Susan B. Anthony, for instance, saw abortion as "child murder" and as a mode of exploiting women (and children). Alice Paul, the author of the draft original version of the Equal Rights Amendment, considered abortion "the ultimate exploitation of women". Nowadays, self-proclaimed 'feminists for life' constantly refer to 19th century 'feminists'[3] to legitimate their anti-abortion (and even anti-contraception) attitudes and their restrictive initiatives. Thompson (2012) acknowledges that "abortion was not a major part of the early feminists' platform". Their opposition to abortion must be understood in its own context, i.e. in the context of radical 'feminists'' concern about female sexual vulnerability and defencelessness understood as a consequence of women's economic dependence on men (Gordon, 1982; 1990; Thompson, 2012). E.C. Stanton, one of the radical women's rights activists, for example, called for the woman's right to control and determine motherhood for herself (Thompson, 2012: 7). And, as Thompson (ibid.: 64 –65) concludes,

> */ ... / it is possible to argue that there is common ground between Stanton and FFL, as there is between prochoice and prolife groups more generally on 'reducing unwanted pregnancy and making it possible for women to be both mothers and equal citizens participating in economic and social life.' However, a shared appreciation for some of the causes of abortion does not mean an agreement about the solution.*

Indeed, despite broad support for legal, safe, accessible and free abortion among feminists, abortion (and many other birth control methods) is a widely discussed issue within pro-choice feminism itself. Namely, numerous

[3] *Gordon (1982: 27) points out that nineteenth-century radicals did not call themselves feminists since that word did not yet exist, and that »pro-life« activists apply this label »in order to underscore their continuity with contemporary feminism".*

feminist debates problematise simplified liberal pro-choice argumentations and policies which by advocating abortion rights often overlook the complexity of power relations. Critical pro-choice feminists insist that abortion should be accessible and that it must be a woman's choice, but at the same time they warn that human rights are caught up in power differentials (e.g. Butler, 2004a). Many feminist activists, researchers and scholars warn about forced abortions and the racist dimensions of abortion policies: the history of the birth control movement is also the history of eugenics, in which women's rights movements also took part (see Gordon, 1982; Davis, 1982; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Its target always was – and still are, as Yuval-Davis (1997) proves – poor, non-white and ethnic minority women, women in 'developing countries'.

The neoliberal individualisation of responsibility is another widely discussed issue in feminist debates. While the individualisation of responsibility shifts responsibility for reproduction, motherhood, sexuality and health exclusively onto women (*you have chosen it, so bear it*), many feminists warn about the commodification of reproduction (e.g. Rose, 2007), problematise the liberal »tacit assumption that women significantly control sex« (MacKinnon, 1989: 184) and appeal to the state's responsibility to provide welfare services and the conditions for a »livable« life (Butler, 2004b), i.e. not only to make abortion legal, accessible and safe.

Even questions like »When does life begin?« or "Is the human foetus a potential person?" are not dismissed as irrelevant within contemporary (pro-choice and pro-abortion) feminism. Butler (2004b), Deutscher (2008) and MacKinnon (1989), for example, are some prominent feminists who do agree that the foetus is a *form* of life (according to Butler: "like uncounted other forms of life"). But, as Deutscher (2008: 67) concludes her discussion on reproductive rights, framed in Foucault's theory of bio-politics and Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*: when a woman figures "as a threatening and competing sovereign power over the foetus", she is reduced "to a barer" and exposed to the state's intervention. This means her status is "potentially reducible to naked life". However, some other pro-choice (or pro-abortion) feminists express their mixed feelings about abortion by labelling it a (necessary) evil (e.g. Paglia, Wolf).

Abortion in Slovenia: rights, politics and discourses

A brief history of abortion legislation in Slovenia

Slovenia's regulation of abortion is one of the most liberal in Europe: the *Health Measures in Exercising Freedom of Choice in Childbearing Act* gives women access to abortion on demand during the first 10 weeks

of pregnancy. After the first 10 weeks, authorisation by a (two-tier) commission is required, to minimise the "threat to the health of the pregnant woman and her future pregnancies". If a woman is under 16, parental notification is required unless she has been recognised as fully competent to earn her own living. Abortion can only be carried out in general, specialised and clinical hospitals with organised gynaecological and obstetric or surgical services and in other authorised health care organisations, and at least 80% of the costs of the procedure are covered by compulsory health insurance. *Freedom of Choice in Childbearing* is even a constitutional category, first enshrined in the 1974 Constitution and retained in the 1991 Constitution (following the 1991 elections), albeit not without some struggle.

As Rožman (2009) writes in a thorough analysis of the processes of legalising and liberalising abortion, Slovenia's liberal legislation has a long history of battles and debates within the women's movement before World War Two and political and medical debates during socialism. Before 1951, abortion could only be undertaken when the life of a woman was in danger; in 1951, the new Penal Act also permitted abortion in some other justified cases (upon approval by a special commission). In 1952, the *Act on the Procedure for Permitted Abortion* legalised abortion in the first three months of pregnancy for medical, legal, socio-medical and related social indications. Gynaecologists who advocated the legalisation of abortion responded to these legal restrictions by intensely and systematically introducing family planning programmes, primarily carried out in women's clinics and contraception services. In 1960, Slovenia by means of a special regulation allowed abortion based on social indicators, still upon the approval of the commission, whose discretionary rights were greatly restricted. Although abortion was still regarded "as the least suitable method of birth control" (Rožman, 2009: 312), efforts to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies contributed significantly to establishing a constitutional provision on *Freedom of Choice in Childbearing* in 1974 and the adoption of the liberal *Health Measures in Exercising Freedom of Choice in Childbearing Act* in 1977, which is still in effect. Here it is worth noting that the legislation protected pregnant women and women on maternity and family care leave from losing their jobs, applied full-pay compensation during the absence from work due to maternity or family care leave, and the network of preschools was well organised and accessible, which were all crucial conditions for the autonomy of women.

Debates on the low birth rate in the 1980s and early 1990s

After liberalisation of the abortion law, the first *critical discourse moments* (Chilton, 1987), which made the abortion issue especially visible

and opened the public space up to the topic and directed attention to it, was the debate on the low birth rate and population ageing in the 1980s. At the end of the 1980s, the low birth rate was a common media topic and the focus of demographic analyses and most political parties (see D. Bahovec /ed./, 1991). Slovenia's (socialist) government at the time also took part in the debate, issuing the policy document *Proposal for Population Policy in the SR Slovenia* (Delovno gradivo, 1990). The document expressed typical nationalists concerns over the low birth rate, defined objectives (e.g. "preserving the national identity" and raising the "net coefficient of fertility") and proposed measures to boost the birth rate of Slovenians. One version of the *Proposal* even suggested limiting the right to abortion, which was later taken out, but nevertheless the right to abortion before the parliamentary elections in 1990 and in debates over the constitution after the elections became one of the key points in dispute. The proposed measures also included those which undoubtedly arose from the idea of the biological reproduction of the nation, making references to it for example as follows:

> *migration policy / .../ will need to be coordinated with and connected to the field of population policy, since there is a constant danger that measures intended to lead to a higher degree of reproduction of the Slovenian population will lead mainly to intensive immigration primarily of unskilled and uneducated people from other republics and from abroad* (Delovno gradivo, 1990: 24).

Although the socialist government did not implement the *Proposal*, it became an important reference point for the pre-election debates at the time. The *Proposal* was the target of sharp criticisms (especially in the weeklies *Mladina* and *Telex*) (e.g. Knežević Hočevar, 2003). The public response demonstrated that any attempt to deliberalise the abortion legislation passed back in the 1970s would encounter stiff resistance. However, the debate on the threatened status of the Slovenian nation did not end: federal centralism, Serbian hegemonic tendencies, communism, and the low birth rate of Slovenian women were considered as the most serious threats. Opposition to women's rights and to immigration from other parts of Yugoslavia were treated by the conservative political discourse as part of making a break with socialism, a break with the "remnants of the totalitarian regime" as they referred to it.[4]

[4] *Similar discrediting, although less publicly visible, was also applied to the principles of solidarity and social justice, which were replaced by the principles of competition, private initiative and private property, individual merit and personal responsibility.*

Constitutional debate on abortion in the 1990s

After the electoral victory of the centre-right coalition (1990), whose conservative wing disseminated a discourse of a threatened Slovenian nation/ national identity, the debate on the right to abortion continued in discussions regarding the new Slovenian Constitution. We can treat this constitutional debate as the second critical discourse moment in the public problematisation of abortion rights. Opponents of abortion rights in the 1990s continued to refer to the threat to the Slovenian nation, i.e. to the argument based on the assumption of the biological reproduction of the nation (i.e. national essentialism): abortion in their view threatened the abundance and moral strength of the Slovenian nation (see Bahovec D. /ed./, 1991; Salecl, 2002). Even more frequent as one of the key arguments than in the 1980s was the defence of the foetus' right to life (the foetus was often portrayed as a child) and the sanctity of life. Public space for this argument was opened up by discussion of the proposal that the sanctity of life be included in the preamble to the new constitution. Proponents of this preamble explicitly opposed the demand of abortion rights advocates that the provision from the 1974 Constitution ensuring *freedom of choice in childbearing* (Article 55) be preserved in the new constitution (see Bahovec D. /ed./, 1991). As Salecl (2002: 27) notes, the concomitant reference to Christian moral values and to the good of the nation typical of anti-abortion discourses in Slovenia, in which abortion is simultaneously considered a crime against humanity and a threat to the nation, has specific effects: to be Slovenian means to fight against abortion, an internal enemy of the Slovenian nation (see Salecl, 2002).

Abortion, access to it, and the liberal legislation remained relevant political topics even after the Constitution was adopted, as demonstrated by the occasional but recurring critical discourse moments in the 2000s. One strategy for subverting the constitutional provision is to reduce access to abortion by eliminating it from the list of services covered by compulsory health insurance. The first such attempt that gained public attention was the proposal for a law on health care services presented by three parliamentarians from the Slovenian *People's Party* to the National Assembly: the proposal omitted mention of childbirth, contraception, sterilisation or termination of pregnancy among the services covered by compulsory health insurance (Matos, 2002). The legislation did not pass, but 4 years later a similar measure was envisaged in the *Strategy for Increasing the Birth Rate in the Republic of Slovenia* prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs – namely, an increase in the birth rate was one of the programme objectives of the ruling coalition under the leadership of J. Janša. The *Strategy* explicitly proposed that the costs of abortion be entirely borne by women

themselves, except when medically indicated. This proposal triggered protests by feminist groups, pro-choice activists and professional associations, and gave rise to debates in the National Assembly (see Marn, 2006). On the suggestion of the Prime Minister, the Minister for Labour, Family, and Social Affairs left the government, but the Prime Minister himself did not take a position on the proposal.

New topics in anti-choice discourses after 2010

In recent years opposition to abortion has increased once again, which may suggest that in the next election period the abortion issue may (once more) become a serious campaign issue. At least conditionally we could define the 2014 election campaign as a 'critical discourse moment', when a reader of the daily newspaper *Delo* posed a question to the political parties about whether the abortion legislation violates the constitutional principle of the inviolability of human life. The greatest public attention was given to the response by the *Party of Miro Cerar* (SMC), for whom public opinion polling had indicated the best election results. In its statement, the party agreed that "allowing abortion of course contradicts the principle of the inviolability of human life" but warned that the "other constitutionally protected principle of the freedom of choice in childbearing" favours it. The party defended the idea that "women who experience an unplanned pregnancy" must be "advised of the advantages of giving birth but if the child is genuinely not wanted it is better to allow abortion" (Delo, 9 July 2014). The feminist group FemA (2014) responded to this statement with an open letter warning of the contentiousness of invoking Christian beliefs about the beginning of life and the patronising attitude to women expressed by the idea of mandatory counselling (in Mladina, 11 July 2014).[5]

As a critical discourse moment in abortion debates we can also designate the protests by abortion opponents gathered in front of the *Clinic of Gynaecology and Obstetrics* in Ljubljana in 2015 and 2016. Prayers, according to the organiser *God's Children Institute (Zavod Božji otroci)*, prayed "for life – for the ending of abortion in Ljubljana Hospital". The actions form part of the internationally coordinated 'pro-life' project *40 Days for Life*, which has strong support among the Catholic media and ecclesiastical authorities. This form of public condemnation of abortion and especially the location of these events generated general media attention after a group of abortion

[5] In response to the question from the Mladina magazine (11 July 2014) on what the president of the party Miro Cerar thinks about abortion rights, the party responded that the president "believes that the question of abortion is adequately resolved in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia and the currently valid legislation. He would not restrict these constitutional rights since, as already said, the currently valid arrangement is adequate".

rights defenders warned in an open letter that this way of asserting freedom of expression disproportionately infringed the human rights of others. Signatories of the open letter also warned about the pressure on doctors and other health workers, and on the women they were ostensibly trying to protect, and demanded that the institutions responsible take action to protect the women's constitutional rights. The letter met with different public reactions, among which two are particularly noteworthy: the response from *God's Children Institute* and a sharp attack in an article entitled *List of members of the abortion lobby who oppose the right to life of unborn baby girls and boys!* (posted on the website *www.24kul.si*). The first response referred to the negative early 'feminists'' attitudes to abortion and claimed that the right to abortion does not follow at all from the constitutional provisions on freedom of choice in childbearing. The second response accused the letter's signatories of "advocating the extinction of the Slovenian nation and culture", and of being responsible for a "culture of death" and suffering due to post-abortion syndrome. Both responses indicate themes that have been ever-present in public anti-choice discourses in Slovenia (the foetus is a person and has rights, abortion is a threat to the Slovenian nation). However, a few of them are relatively new, at least if we compare them with the public anti-abortion discourses in the 1980s and 1990s: ignoring "pro-life feminists"; abortion is a traumatic experience for the woman; the *Constitution* makes no reference to the right to abortion; abortion rights advocates are responsible for a "culture of death" and threaten Christianity. These themes are raised primarily by the Catholic media and organisations appealing to Christianity: besides the two institutes already noted, it is worth mentioning at least the institute *I'm Al!ve (Zavod Živ!m)* and the institute *Iskreni.net.*[6] The following institutions are mentioned because in the continuation we will show that they are indirectly associated with the last critical discourse moment analysed in this article: the public presentation of the *Movement for Children and Family (Gibanje za otroke in družino)* (English acronym MCF), which explicitly declares itself as a political movement.

In its declaration *Hope for children and families* (www.24kul.si), the MCF emphasises biological family ties and traditional marriage as the basic foundation of the family, and dedicates itself to the Slovenian nation and country and to Christianity. In accordance with these commitments, the MCF rejects "interference with the lives of unborn children, the ill, and the elderly" and demands implementation of the right "to life of every unborn child"; advocates the "replacement of the controversial word 'foetus' or 'embryo' with

[6] *In 2012 the Institute proposed to the Slovenian government a provision whereby the cost of hormonal contraception and abortion would be entirely covered by the insured person herself (instead of by compulsory health insurance) (Vovk, 2012).*

the phrase 'unborn child'" and rejects "pro-abortion mobbing of pregnant women".

The MCF arose from the *Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children* (CIFRC) and the *Coalition for the Children* (CC), which played a crucial role between 2012 and 2015 in the campaign against same-sex marriage and same-sex parental adoption. The institutions mentioned above actively participated in these campaigns, and all of them based their opposition on equality in biological discourses and discourses of what is natural: the naturalness of heterosexuality, the naturalness of gender differences, the naturalness of the traditional family as a unit consisting of a married man and woman and their biological children, and biological reproduction (of the nation) (see Mencin and Kuhar, 2010; Vezovnik, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that the leader of the MCF also counts on their cooperation in the MCF (Primc and Janičijević, 2015). The leader himself avoids directly answering the question of whether he supports an abortion ban, and reiterates that the MCF works for the right of every unborn child to life. In the course of clarifying the MCF's positions on the Slovenian television show Studio City, he showed the audience a photograph of a 12-week-old foetus and expressed the wish that Slovenia recognises it as a child (Studio City, 30 May 2016). Photographs of smiling foetuses, of foetuses sucking their thumb, and photographs of bloody, dismembered foetuses[7], stories that an "unborn daughter" or an "unborn son" tell their mother just before being aborted, and stories of abortion survivors (see www.24kul.si) are some of the most effective and convincing strategies for personifying the foetus that up until now in Slovenia have been in the domain of media that openly oppose abortion. This approach has paved the way for political propaganda without words – it can influence voters from all parts of the political spectrum. Not just because the use of images creates an impression that photographs 'speak for themselves', that they speak the real truth, but above all because we identify with a foetus. In images of a baby-like foetus we recognise in "the foetus a human form like our own" (Bracher, 1993: 111). Images of dismembered and bloody foetuses more than many things threaten the viewer's fragile body integrity: many a person experiences it as a threat to their own (body) entirety and integrity, which is "grounded in the earliest mnemic traces laid down by their infant body's experience of chaos and dismemberment" (Bracher, 1993: 114).

Current anti-abortion discourses are thematically diverse, located in different ideological frameworks and address different social groups, and

[7] *In 2014 during the time of a conference of the International Association of Professional Abortion and Contraception Associates, the God's Children Institute held a protest with huge panels of photographs of aborted foetuses, intended to show "the real truth about abortion" (in Kajtazović, 2014, photo Krajnc).*

they also vary in how they express anti-abortion beliefs and anti-abortion attitudes. On one side, there are discourses that forcefully and aggressively attack and discredit advocates of abortion rights, articles that obviously manipulate the facts,[8] and those that try to create moral panic.[9] On the other side, we have photographs and summaries of studies that reveal the “truth” about the “suffering of unborn children”, their mothers[10] and even their fathers, and somewhere in between are intimate stories of women who suffer from “post-abortive syndrome”. This shift towards women, addressing women’s suffering and addressing women who in their hearts (supposedly) want to become mothers but who have been prevented from doing so by cruel circumstance, is the new characteristic of the current anti-abortion discourses that deserve particular analysis, primarily because they are true and manipulative at the same time. True because many women do indeed suffer, because women’s bodies are often abused, and because in unequal power relations we are often left with no alternative but to trust those we depend on. They are manipulative because many women do not suffer, and manipulative also and mainly because this same ‘empathic comfort’ constantly encourages and maintains women’s feelings of guilt by labelling abortion ‘murder’. Anti-abortion and anti-choice discourses are manipulative because they constantly extort the answer to the implicit question (but they never answer it): if abortion is murder, then who is the perpetrator?

Conclusion

Alongside the restoration of capitalism and the rise of nationalism in Slovenia, there has been a strengthening of a patriarchal ideology that interprets the emancipatory legacy of socialism as an attack on the ‘natural essence’ of a woman; as an undermining of a social order conducive to life that was replaced by a ‘communist abortion culture’ whose goal is seen as destroying the family, the nation, and Christianity.

Anti-abortion discourses in Slovenia remain within the ideological frameworks in which they appeared in the 1980s and 1990s: nationalism,

[8] *E.g. the article entitled “In 64 years more than 700,000 children have been aborted in Slovenia!” in which the author outlines the socialist conspiracy against Judeo-Christian values, and historically and spatially implicitly limits abortion to the period after the partial liberalisation of Slovenia (M. T., 2016).*

[9] *E.g. the article “Abortion and the demonisation of family life are the main reason for the decline in economic growth” (Jo.Be., 8 June 2016, www.24kul.si).*

[10] *The website www.24kul.si regularly publishes the results of studies on the effect of abortion on the mental health of women. Among the authors of the studies Priscilla K. Coleman frequently appears. However, she is criticised by many researchers for making unfounded causal conclusions. For example, in one of the studies summarised on www.24kul.si, Coleman and colleagues did not distinguish between mental health outcomes that occurred before abortions and those that occurred afterward, but still claimed to show a causal link between abortion and mental disorders (see APA, 2008).*

patriarchy, gender binarism, heteronormativity, biologism, anti-socialism and anti-communism. At the same time, anti-abortion discourses have multiplied; they have extended their network and reinforced their ideological foundations; they mounted a successful referendum campaign against same-sex marriage and have diversified their strategies to gain access to the broader public space.

The current anti-choice activists in Slovenia can be roughly divided into two groups, which chiefly differ with regard to whom they address (in accordance with the addressee they also adapt their themes and methods of legitimisation). The first group is openly aggressive in their defence of the thesis that abortion is murder, a crime against the child, against nature, against the nation, against women (since it is directed against their essence, i.e. motherhood), and even more aggressive against the assumed culprit, i.e. the liberal legislation and the advocates of abortion rights, who are assumed to be part of a communist conspiracy. Although these discourses (implicitly) threaten opponents, it seems they are mainly intended for the angry supporters. These can be recognised among them as activists against the enemies of the nation or, as Salecl (2002: 33) puts it, these discourses for them "construct a point of view, *from which*" they "could appear likable" to themselves. The strategy of the second group is at first sight less aggressive since it uses a passive-aggressive discourse to persuade, i.e. the "discourse of politeness, the patronising discourse, trying to get that you want while trying to tell somebody else that they are getting what they should want" (Cope and Kalantzis, 1997: 280).[11] It addresses the *moral majority*, particularly women: the anti-choice activists standing in front of the maternity hospital who attempt to prevent women from having an abortion; articles and images that tell the truth about "baby-killing propaganda"; counsellors familiar with the true essence of a woman and thus know that every woman feels guilt about abortion even if she herself is unaware of it. It also addresses the *moral, sensitive Slovenians*: e.g. the one aspiring to political office who wants nothing else but for all Slovenians to recognise a child in the image of a 12-week-old foetus held in one's hands, and to create a world in which every child conceived would also be born. This discourse involves, if we once again refer to Salecl (2002: 34), "the image of an ideal traditional community / ... / 'where love and morality reign'". This is, according to Salecl, precisely that place where people who identify with the moral majority wish to see themselves – the construction of this position is, as Salecl emphasises, a condition for the success of the political discourse. Who could legitimately oppose the wish that every conceived child also be born? After all, even feminism, which insists on women's right to legal, accessible and safe abortion,

[11] *The authors analyse the passive-aggressive discourse in the context of workplace conflicts.*

wants there to be no unwanted pregnancies. But this of course is not the same as what is demanded by a anti-choice activist using the image of a foetus being held, by someone praying outside a clinic using the 'real truth' about abortion, or by a counsellor who implicitly tells a woman that in fact she wants a baby, not an abortion. Reference to 'the real truth about abortion' and to motherhood as the essence of womanhood paves the way to a considerably narrower goal, if necessary also via a shortcut: limiting access through what at first sight seem to be justified arguments (conscientious objection of medical staff, making abortion payable), if not through the outright banning of abortion.

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