



RECONSTRUCTION WOMEN'S FUND

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INTERRUPTION UPSIDE-DOWN

Interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring, said Walter Benjamin, claiming citizens' historical potential. But, when a regime occupies both positions: to dominate the system and to interrupt it – it is totalitarianism we would say. Concerned with loss of civic political potentials, we give us a task of political clarity as a precondition for meaningful work. Searching for breathing we come to the whisper:

*The most important thing is to invent incessantly
a tolerant productive way to connect the knots!*

(Zarana Papic)

SUMMARY ON THE OCCASION OF 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF RECONSTRUCTION WOMEN'S FUND

*RWF is a local foundation reflecting and meeting needs of the feminist movement in Serbia, relying on continuity and development of anti-militarist, anti-nationalist, grassroots, academic and artistic programs and activities of women's groups. **Since the beginning, for ten years now, we have profiled all our grant making, educational and promotional programs based on these values and toward their fulfillment.** If we consider the fields which could be, or are supposed to be, identified and categorized as movements, then it must be said of the feminist movement in Serbia that it is the eldest, politically most comprehensive, socially most diverse, and dynamic in crossing all kinds of boundaries. We believe that the feminist groups/activities/interventions actually correct other movements and we don't think that they contribute a "gender aspect" only. Even among human rights organizations, feminist groups often have a better understanding of universal and holistic concepts; they nurture non-hierarchical views on human rights and practice inclusivity beyond the patchwork of identities and political correctness. To be accurate, we have to say that feminist groups not only correct other movements but when they're at their best they correct and influence each other. The deterioration of political and civic space has made it impossible to discuss progress as such therefore what we value the most is political clarity and autonomy of feminist groups as the precondition of sustainability of the movement.*

Two words are striking out of our 2014 experience: focus, freedom. Our claim from previous insights was confirmed that political clarity means sustainability of women's groups. We also saw that commitment of the groups to their key programs brings clarity, stability, advancement, meaning strength. Our programs committed to young women and girls we are exciting. Concerning RWF itself we identified our extended body to build further, consisted of readers, volunteers, close partners, new interested audiences.



PROGRAMS

Movements are mnemonic devices.

(Bruce Sterling)

In 2014 through RWF's 5 grantmaking programs 75 grants were issued to 47 different groups of which 20 groups are our first time grantees, in amount of 15.629.741 RSD (177,344 USD). All is transparent on our website <http://www.rwfund.org/eng/programs/>

Here are some of our observations:

Our oldest program Women's Initiatives showed a trend of the grantees' engagement in sharing their knowledge. Although there is quite a reproduction of already achieved knowledge, it is directed to new circles with features of self-education and refinement and deepening of experience/knowledge on the way. This we assess as a good instinct in the given context, having the balance of staying within, with focusing on learning/empowering the group/the activists/academics and going out building informed local environment (connected respectively regionally, nationally and internationally).

Our youngest grantmaking program Mirror (2014 was its second year) which is dedicated to ideas and engagement of young women and girls has its own dynamic. The activities were devoted to introduce new issues, fields and techniques to respective audiences, with clear aims of consciousness raising, public dissemination of information and visibility of their statements. The projects attracted hundreds of participants, mostly young women and girls as well as male participants in elementary and various secondary schools, students, youth in collaborative program with Italian participants, young Roma women of various existential positions, young lesbians etc. Multidisciplinary, multimedia and interactive dimensions are very present: few very active and informative facebook groups were established, on-line campaign against sexual violence is going on, mirrors with stencils with expressive feminist profiles and statements were placed in Belgrade accompanied by interest of thousands of Facebook readers. We assess that the search of young women for their audiences and their good cooperation with local schools, local libraries, communities and local media was a good instinct for opening new spaces to the discourse of women's rights and feminist activism in the overall public atmosphere of censorship and self-censorship. Numerous plans and contacts followed the projects from the Mirror program.

Grantmaking in Special Focus program, which is a laboratory for various ideas and methods, in 2014 had strong spontaneous focus on the consequences of war (including labour rights) and regional interconnectedness of people in the political environments, being it bicycle peace tour commemorating Srebrenica genocide, hosting a theater play written by female artist from Kosovo, articulating discrimination in labour rights of female workers based on their ethnic background, introducing women from new social movements from Bosnia and Herzegovina, protecting Roma housing rights etc. We very much respect such a level of political consciousness and opening the wars consequences understanding from various angles and communication and we are glad that it was palpable in Special Focus program the way it was.

Program of Rapid Response grants showed the depth of disturbance in the environment in Serbia where women human rights defenders struggle both with the system and in the communities, having to prevent harmful tendencies, repair the consequences and protect their own safety.

About the program of **stipends "Zarana Papic"** it is important in this grantmaking summary to say that the stipends supported various forms of building feminist political knowledge – by mitigating the obstacles of un-proportional fees of master and PhD studies but also enabling access to students living out of the university centres by participating in their travel costs to women's studies courses.



CRITICAL ISSUES

Importance of 8th of March. We connect activists' strength to keep the street march as massive as we can: *Women, Labor, Hunger!* For documenting and archiving feminist history, RWF compiled for the 5th time the Map of 8th of March women's groups' activities, printed and distributed on the national level, and regionally constructed as GPRS map of activities of women's groups from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Monte Negro.

This is Socrates philanthropy. 10 virtual publications were launched, continuing our serial "Disobedient to History" and establishing actual and contextual serial "Antiwar Centenary of the First World War": Dragan Stojković - Anti-war and pacifist ideas in the history of Serbia and anti-war movements until year 2000; Rosa Luxemburg - The Crisis of Socialdemocracy (Junius - pamphlet); Nikola M. Popović - Dimitrije Tucović, His Life and Work; Dimitrije Tucović - Selected articles on militarism and nationalism; Jasmina Tešanović - Lili from Belgrade; Dimitrije Tucović - Serbia and Albania.

Education on Critical Issues is part of Special Focus program and publishing is one of dynamic parts of the area. What the books have to do with a Fund: this is Socrates philanthropy, for all to learn, like Creative Commons. Printed books we sent to the libraries all over Serbia, 52 libraries which in the parcel we invite for activism of women's human rights by adding 8th of March Map of activities and the leaflets of 16 Days of activism against Violence against Women, all in cooperation with women's groups. The books we publish in large circulations for the feminist theory to stand in front and in the middle of mainstream, wise and loud. Virtual editions are our contribution to the future of an Off-line Library. On RWF's website one could find over 30 selected books and articles in Serbo-Croatian language.

10 years now. The focus was set for RWF's 10th anniversary with 3 newsletters <http://www.rwfund.org/eng/join-in/newsletter/>, re-design of website and celebration program. Short format of the newsletter demanded precision and thick interaction of the "chapters" on politics, programs, activities, fundraising, the method reflecting the profile of our work. We connected the 10th anniversary of RWF with the fifth year of our annual "Joyfulness Crazyness" event. It was speech of our journey, about the dark times and resistance and cooperation. Intervention in the space presented our fundraising actions and our critical issues work and the art program was statement of freedom. It was the summery and opening of a new era and the reactions in the audience of 200-300 people were remarkable. We redesigned our website keeping our political profile, using consistently our visual performance and presenting our programs, educational resources and news in a clear structure. Statistics show steady growing of interest in the website: 10,463 sessions (unique visitors: 7,151). 31,267 pageviews. 65,99% new sessions. Our Facebook exceeded 2120 likes, and in 2014 RWF started twitter communication as well.

Young women and girls. Through annual "Mirror" grant making board we have been involving young activists/artists/academics and there grow a long-lasting relationship and mutual understanding and learning. For educational part of Roma Girls' Solidarity program a wide range of new people were engaged from civic groups, school, academia, as well as international artists. Role of our volunteers became wider and more complex, some of them becoming so to say collaborators, some new came with their skills and became part of our public programs, now being invited by other organisations for their actions. It's a lot of communication. And in last two years RWF has been recognized as a resource for young women and girls. Profiles of both programs Mirror and Roma Girls' Solidarity has been worked on, sharpened and structured. We treat them delicately: as our standing programs with raising ambition but open and experimental. From 2014 the girls participants of Roma Girls' Solidarity program are themselves responsible for the logistic of the meetings (informing and organizing girls and recruiting new participants). We are working on the idea to increase their role in the program part. Also, RGS had a new leap with Argentinian engaged artist Ana Woolf and her Brazilian colleague Vera Ribeiro in a week training followed by theater and street performance *Presence in Life* in south Serbia, in Nis, Vlasotince and Pirot. Legacy of the work to be cherished: persistence, strength, cohesion - to work on it, to keep and to transfer. Sequences of the work are presented at <http://www.rwfund.org/eng/critical-themes/rwfund-video/presence-in-life/>

Roma Girls` Solidarity

Roma Girls` Solidarity is a part of the Special Focus support program - it's an educational program organized by RWF for the last three years in southern Serbia, attended by more than forty Roma girls, aged 14 - 21, from Niš, Jelašnica, Pirot, Vlasotince, Vranje, Bujanovac, Aleksinac, Vladičin Han, Predejan, Grejač. It's intention is to create an open space for active learning, gaining knowledge and skills, using art to express personal experiences, energies, feelings and memories, needs and opinions, as well as questions addressing the immediate surrounding, but also broader public. Through this program, girls are being empowered to step out in public, to raise their usually suppressed voices (suppressed because they are Roma, they are young, they are women, they are poor) and speak out about topics they probably never spoke of before, to make friends, to connect with each other and support each other, as well as to meet various artists and activists.



CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “emergency situation” in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against Fascism will thereby improve. Not the least reason that the latter has a chance is that its opponents, in the name of progress, greet it as a historical norm.

(Valter Benjamin)

The floods in Serbia in May created a demanding and provocative environment and we defined our approach based on field-reports and critical standpoints of women’s civic activism. The program was named Sisters Act the Best, to shift the focus from the omnipotent officials and their manipulation with national unity. In the process, our partnerships were clearly set based on comprehensive politics and true commitment. The first fundraising event was organized in June, presenting the women who during the floods reported from the ground. Video from the event (with Engl. subtitles): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuCsU44uAp0> Sisters Act the Best 2 in July presented the women who with their actions, work, energy and knowledge make visible social changes. Our engagement in 16 Days campaign was set as the peak contextual statement as Sisters Act the Best 3, since we organized a public fundraising event on November 25th which gave floor to activists representing three points from Istanbul Convention: network of local groups working against male violence against women, intersectionality in violence introduced from two angles, women with disabilities and Roma women. It was informative/consciousness raising event which addressed live audience and informed TV and social networks audiences, supported also by women journalists who volunteered as DJs and by committed artists. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6YvNbWewlo>

Oak Foundation offered a discretionary grant to RWF concerning the floods. RWF developed a program of assistance to the women and their families and communities who became the top of the marginalized and deprived, mostly invisible, on-going survivors of destructive politics and policies which hit them regularly.

How Floods Became Part of the Special Focus!

Floods floated to the surface the problems of the political life in Serbia, particularly censorship. RWF focused the experiences in the field, also trying to look into the future. This statement determined our course of action: Those who lost everything have already had nothing. Therefore we decided to cooperate only with the groups and individuals whose ability to create and think critically goes beyond projects. Intervention in the field is our power. And when it all started, we entered a broad invisible world: the world of displaced, evicted, repeatedly flooded or burned down, elderly deprived of their rights, asthmatic kids, cancers, heart attacks, widowed ones, big families. Settlements are in horrible conditions, on the edges of towns, very poor. One can see a long history of exclusion and negligence, and the solution is either to remain invisible or to expose themselves to threats. They struggle on their own. For them our interventions are unexpected, for us they are unusual: buying a cradle, looking for a chimney sweep, building roof over a ramshackle house, lobbying for a water channel to be cleaned, for finding accommodation and against obstructing repair works. This is just the beginning.



KNOTS WITH FUTURE: WE ARE NOT GOING BACK, WE WANT A FREE SPACE

Our plan:

Our thinking about future is based on experience:

If the activism stops, it is hard to restart.

A place where work is alive invites new brilliant agents.

RWF is not vulnerable to any political takeover, we are structured to protect.

We protect and promote what we see as unique, the comprehensive feminist platform written and exercised in Serbia: against the war, nationalism, militarism, racism, all kind of discrimination and violence against women.

Based on that platform, feminist activism/academism gained experience and endurance. It was never cherished by any power elite in Serbia and never let itself be seduced.

Lot has been learned about mainstream/ing. We always have a street as our playground. Progressive public spaces has been intensively kidnapped, we don't have money anymore to have meetings in cafes, we are not going back again into our kitchens to start from the beginning, we don't have spacious flats of our own.

So RWF decided to buy a working space. Based on research of the market we need 130,000 USD for 70m2 apartment. Such a space meets our needs and is flexible for hosting different working initiatives and smaller public events.

We have nearly half:

The Rita Fund donated 50,000 USD

Through our individual fundraising for Future fund we collected 5,000 USD

We invite those who learned from us, those from whom we learned, who will learn, those who were/are our friends and friends of our friends, those who have trust and/or curiosity, those who care about maintaining history/knowledge, those who had a chance and want to give a chance to others, those inclined to utopia, those who concur with us theoretically and politically, the peer foundations who respect our work, those interested in epistemology, critical thinking, transnational experiment. We recommend our legacy of the legacy of the legacy – JOIN!

The sooner the better. Our rent contract expires June 30, 2015. This would be the perfect moment to buy the apartment without losing any money and time.

Why did we start: The decision to establish Reconstruction Women's Fund in 2004 was motivated by respect for feminist activism in Serbia and the experience of value of autonomous money in sustaining activist/academic political standard. RWF relied on visions of activist groups and never positioned itself as a leader but as one of the firm points in the movement and it has to stay this way.

Common history: Reconstruction Women's Fund is lucky to have engaged women to rely on. Their legacy has been passed from one to the others. Amidst the pattern of discontinuity regularly imposed over women's activities, by minimizing or by bans, above all by erasing, a clear picture could be seen of the position of engaged women in Yugoslavia and later in Serbia towards militarism/party/state. All of them transgress the dominant i.e. allowed discourse of the structures of political power. Antifascist Front of Women by the nature of its engagement advocated for women in the framework of women's human rights. Although never designated as a concept of human rights, their position was punished by abolishment of AFW. Twenty five years later the actors of the conference Comrade Woman self-initiated new language closest to the concept of civil society, which protruded in the routine of the party power and the avalanche of threats and disqualifications hit them, but due to the nature of their self-organizing, public abolishment was not possible. Thirteen years later, Women in Black introduced the most dynamic model possible: antimilitarist actions – amidst, immediate and daily – against the war. WiB's directness and their position *Let us not be deceived by our own* are irritating to all the regimes in Serbia which count on national homogenization as a handy tool. So the engaged women escaped control and opened perspective for all of us.

