



# RECONSTRUCTION WOMEN'S FUND

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## FOCUS FOCUS FOCUS

As political environment blossomed as a totalitarian, we felt that the space was shrinking with disorientation, conformism or fear. A friendly thought came to public space from the long experienced engaged film artist **Želimir Žilnik**:

**"People in Serbia are scared and poor, but they are less twisted and mentally out of joint than the ruling class."**

*Every attempt to rehabilitate the collaboration necessarily leads to the rehabilitations of fascism, even though many people here are not aware of it. You cannot rehabilitate the collaboration with fascism without normalising the ideology it was normal to collaborate with.*

(Olivera Milosavljević (1951-2015) Historian)

## SUPPORT

Through our grantmaking programs we issued 60 grants to 43 different groups, 13 of them were our first time grantee. The groups come from 18 various cities/towns/locations, some of them working in their wider surrounding and sub-regionally. Also, in the program "Žarana Papić" 3 stipends were awarded for master and PhD women's/gender studies and 2 stipends were conditionally approved for second semester in 2016.

**2015: RWF awarded USD 131,644 in grants and issued USD 27,229 in indirect support.**

**SELF-PRESERVATION** Majority of the projects could be defined as primarily learning/capacity building programs/activities. The choice of sharing knowledge was striking already in our 2014 grantees. Important difference is that previously emanation of the knowledge was mostly directed towards an environment in need of awareness raising, public dissemination of information and visibility of the groups' statement. In 2015 it is possible to identify quite a coherent trend of investing knowledge and skills into working communities. The issues are not mostly new, but the focus is on strengthening the issues' position within professional, peer communities, to empower future development in respective domains. Paradigmatic was an initiative of informal group of young social workers "United in combating violence against women" who compiled the knowledge gained from women's groups' long-term work against violence and addressed their peers challenging them to "be the actors of social changes"; more experienced Incest Trauma Center, long-term women's activist/expert group included and trained 59 girls and 2 boys to be interviewers for the First National study on social problem of sexual abuse of children in the Republic of Serbia, who worked in 97 secondary and primary schools in 51 towns; an ad hoc team of local enthusiastic women with different professional background and activist experience from Novi Pazar, a tough town, comprehended women's contribution erased deep down in local historical narrative,

thus fighting for themselves by confronting intensive re-traditionalisation, embracing also assistance of a RWF's stipendist from PhD women's studies.

"Lesbian Spring" – It is informative to know more about. Lesbian Spring was four day serial of workshops and panels in Belgrade, April 16-19, ending with street march. It was organized by women with previous experience in activism and organizations, but also by a significant number of new women. It was estimated that in all the activities more than 200 women participated. Next to financial support, Reconstruction Women's Fund participated in creation of the program and was the initiator of the Dyke March. The timing was in coordination of the presence of the caravan of World March of Women in Belgrade and with celebration of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of lesbian activism in Serbia. Lesbians were the leading strength since the first Pride in 2001 which ended up in violence and in attempts of organizing Pride in 2009 which was banned. They lost the strength and voice in mainstreaming of Pride and political manipulation with security. This time it was LBTQ women only organizers of the Dyke March - for women only, and it was successful, with no incidents, showing their true face without media distortions and interpretations. The Dyke March was the first in Belgrade, actually the first in the Balkans. Women from all parts of Serbia, from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Europe and Canada marched publically through the central streets of Belgrade. Right after the "Lesbian Spring" a statement was sent to all our media contacts. Numerous media/portals publicized the information about the Dyke March. Here are the two very dear: info 24hours in Serbia and a Croatian portal:

<http://www.24sata.rs/lezbejski-mars-je-odrzan-u-beogradu-a-viniste-imali-pojma/9316>

<http://www.libela.org/preko-plota/6118-lezbejke-smo-sve-zatoponosne-smo-bre/>



**IDENTITIES** With years of activists' work from/within/for/with various women's identities and denouncing layers of multiple discrimination and intersectionality, we could reasonably say that the work of some of our grantees have been mastering identity framework. Developing "Identity Plus" (an issue, audience, beneficiaries, claims, rights, politics) has been a process that RWF followed as the groups positioned themselves and gained experience. Grants were awarded to the organisations led by women with disabilities whose programs constantly push boundaries of sexuality, violence and applied rights to education and employment. Their programs reflect the labyrinth of citizens' combat in the institutional and social systems and human beings' colorful potential and imagination. We would say that some of the processes are at work in the groups led by Roma women activists. Although the level of ethnic identities is on the rise in Serbia, accompanied by internalisation of loyalties, Roma women activists already had developed a wider scope of experience which is now a protection against falling under definite oppression of ethnic homogeneity. Their programs against domestic violence stay firmly, employment have been researched within the discourse of labor rights. The other part of the picture appearing in our grantmaking is that non-Roma women's groups undertake to fight for rights of Roma women looking at concrete realities of the women being prosecuted and exploited in the massive violations producing displaced persons and migrants. RWF's program Roma Girls' Solidarity was in tune with all of the above. One of the most devoted participants from a small town in South Serbia who joined the program in the beginning and stayed on and off involved for three years claimed that her self-respect and boldness grew through the RGS program (she was 16 when she joined). She asked for more engagement and we articulated an agenda in April as her one week study visit in Belgrade where she was involved and exposed to powerful direct learning from Lesbian Spring panels and Dyke street march and with Women in Black in encountering women coming with the war experiences from Srebrenica, Zvornik (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Vukovar (Croatia) to participate solidary in commemoration in Belgrade of victims of political crime of Serbian regime. She went through the program eyes open.

## CHANGE OF GRANTMAKING PROGRAM STRATEGY

Women's rights can not be seen as an isolated island, but as an integral (and very often initial) part of the demands and actions towards a society of equality for all, with no exceptions. Capitalist world we live in (in all its forms) has no potential for equality, even though it keeps persuading us that, despite all its deficiencies, it is the best possible world, with no alternative. Feminism does not buy it, does not accept such „fate“, but develops and connects different forms of possibilities for what we are being taught to be impossible. Feminism itself is an alternative. Therefore, the struggle for women's rights (as non-violent, active attitude towards the reality of our lives) has to be (and essentially is) a struggle for a completely different world – from our personal world, to the world of humankind and the world of nature. With absolutely clear, common idea of what is good, and what isn't, with no relativizations. With no grouping based on identities, and with no „competition“ among identities over which one is more important and/or more oppressed. With no fragmentation. It is a hard struggle, with numerous (visible and invisible) obstacles, in which we continuously make decisions – risky decisions. In order to contribute to that common objective, Reconstruction Women's Fund decided to change its grantmaking program strategy from the beginning of 2016. As usual, we'll be focused on militarism, nationalism and racism. Our goal is to understand, exchange, name and support the activities faced with some of the crucial sources of the current politics. It will be the core of our program Special Focus which will become a permanently open call (during the whole year) for submitting applications by formal and informal (unregistered) groups.

One of the main programs of support will remain the General Support, the program of annual grants to groups we continuously cooperate with, the groups dedicated to continuous work and improvement of their programs and methods. From 2016 we will support eight to ten groups within this program. Support programs that will remain unchanged are Stipends Žarana Papić and Urgent Grants Programs. Women's Initiatives and Mirror will no longer exist, but some of their experiences remain a legacy incorporated into our new strategy.



## COOPERATION IN CRITICAL THINKING AND ACTING

Articulated and stimulative words came from our peer-authorities, academic/activists interviewees. Asking Jody Williams, Gudrun Schyman, Athena Atanasiou, Judith Butler, to respond to the questions which have been our permanent care and concern, on feminist philanthropy, solidarity and giving for women's rights vs. militarism, backed up our activist/academic/grassroots approach and our planned grantmaking program changes. Athena Athanasiou: "...We have to reclaim these resources towards our critical work. ... It is a matter of creating spaces of responsiveness, accountability and mutuality." Judith Butler: "... It's important to keep in mind what it is that brought you together to begin with and to keep focused on that object."

Great!

2015 was an expressive year in massive gatherings. RWF participated and assisted in big events of Women in Black: Women's Court in May in Sarajevo, and in three massive performances on the occasion of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Srebrenica genocide in Belgrade in June and July. We were engaged in the big protest organized by Network Women against Violence, Autonomous Women's Center and Women in Black, in May when seven women were killed in two days in Serbia, calling state institution for accountability and raising the issue of femicide in Serbia on the unavoidable level. Here is the video which shows how serious it was:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qNkp68j\\_KY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qNkp68j_KY)

Always new 8<sup>th</sup> of March. RWF gathered info, printed and with help of volunteers distributed 1.500 maps of activities of women's groups in 12 towns in Serbia. We compiled a virtual regional map too. On the same occasion we sent the maps with letters and a compatible book about the life and work of Dimitrije Tucović who was a Rosa Luxemburg in Serbia to 40 public and 5 university libraries.

RWF was part of the organization of the march of protest which was documented in the video we recommend:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X3QTR9jDek>

Colossal floods in Serbia in May 2014 provoked a prolonged work of RWF with/for the most neglected people. The complex work could be done only in cooperation with trusted groups (concerning politics and humanitarian aid transparency: Roma Center for Women and Children Daje, Women in Black), assistance of specialized human rights organisations (Yucom, Praxis, Regional Center for Minorities). A team of students of architecture volunteered persistently on the ground and from the work they summarized a book as a manual for all, titled „A Model of Temporary Housing. From Concept to Realization: The Roma Settlement Example“

<http://www.rwfund.org/2016/01/25/model-privremenog-stanova-od-koncepta-do-realizacije-na-primeru-romskog-naselja/>

In June 2015 massive passage of refugees, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq through Belgrade provoked our search for meaningful support we could give. For the political and humanitarian initiative RWF joined Women in Black activities and journeys as a modest permanent partner, acquired assistance in reliable information from our colleagues of the group Atina who work daily on the ground, connected with Miksalište resource center and made contacts for distribution of the aid from Belgrade to the refugees on the borders, keeping the notion of militarism as our big concern.

We started a new serial of multimedia virtual library to serve as educational materials backing up our work: "Origins of Epistemology: Critical Life".



## LOCAL FUNDRAISING IN THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Highlight of the year: Reconstruction Women's Fund acquired our own space. In this big step in strengthening RWF, in the moment when we got the determinant gift from The Rita Fund combined with approval from Oak Foundation and Global Fund for Women, we were prepared to contribute our own "Future Fund", which has been growing from local individual fundraising, making nearly 5% of the cost of the apartment.

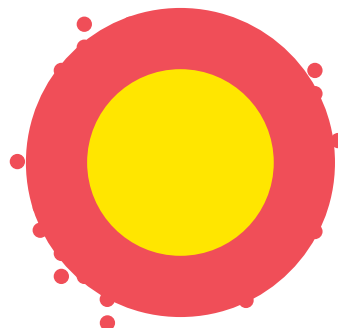
In our new office we installed a donation box „Cakana“ for our guests and various visitors or as a mobile recognizable device for our events. The wooden box was a gift made and painted by our colleagues/collaborators, a carpentry master and a steet artist.

Fundraising/informative/educational wide spread info goes through our quarterly **newsletter** which we started last year. A new compatible format developed intensively in 2015 is a **serail of interviews** in personal encounters with high profile activists/academics mentioned above, making statements on feminist philanthropy and giving for women's rights from various angles as consciousness raising and learnign process for all our audiences and for ourselves as well.

Our annual public event **Joyfulness Craziness** always invites new artists and brings new audiences. The latest one we organized in a public park in our new neighborhood and it was received friendly by the new audience. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqUnVzAPZik> – beautiful video. An enthusiastic citizen from auto-repairing shop gave us free electricity for the concert and offered assistance in our future activities.

We continued to develop events **Sisters Are Doing It Best** and organize them three times a year with political-humanitarian causes – <http://www.rwfund.org/eng/category/news/> – the money was handed to the partners and reported publically. Each event brings an issue, precisely selected panel participants and accompanying artists (musicians, DJs, performers). These fundraising encounters paralleled our programs and partnerships: with the help of the team of students of architecture; with Autonomous Women's Center strengthening together the campaign 16 Days of activism against violence against women; closing of the year was our benefit support to the Social Center Oktobar, the space where collective strength exists, is advocated for and invests itself in a point of meeting, thinking, learning, giving, discussing.

Within the long term action of developing local feminist philanthropy, we try to bring activists from feminist foundations and introduce their various models. For a long time we have been curious to meet The Maypole Fund since we were impressed by their roots, endurance and politics. The Maypole Fund was founded in 1986 by women active in the peace movement. It was founded by women and women donate to it for other women. Projects they invest into are the ones advocating for peace and justice, anti-militarism and actions against male violence, against nuclear threats and for the safety of our environment, as well as social and political autonomy for women. Four women from The Maypole came to Belgrade and it was very close encounter and inspiring thee day conversations <http://www.rwfund.org/2015/06/08/rwfund-maypole/> On that occasion we organised a meeting with our "Circle of friends", individual donors with whom we build further our enthusiastic "Future Fund". International exchange on local philanthropy continues with extensive skype conversations with Mongolian Women's Fund MONES and HER Fund from Hong Kong, both very engaged in the issue. Our PR Manager was in a study visit to Astrea Lesbian Foundation for Justice in New York and presented RWF's work in San Francisco fundraising event organized by colleagues from Global Fund for Women, Urgent Action Fund and IDEX. International Network of Women's Funds launched new research about the local resource mobilization efforts of women's funds in the Global South and East and RWF was invited among ten women's funds to present the case study, to provide an in-depth look at the strategies, successes, challenges, and opportunities experienced: <http://www.inwf.org/resource-center/publications/>



Website at [RWFund.org](http://RWFund.org) – read, watch and apply!  
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