

# BODY IN ORTHODOX NARRATIVE

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*Summary:* Presentation of body in orthodox narrative, primarily in institutions is seen as a cultural and gender identity. This study analyzes a sample of 8 interviews, the state of becoming Orthodox and change of stigmatized identity with a new one.

*Key words:* narrative, body, religious conversion, identity, community.

## Introduction

Narrative theory assumes that people through their stories shape and understand their life. In the last two decades there has been an increase in the numbers of researchers interested in analysis of narrative/discourse. The main features of discourse analysis are surveys conducted in the real world, highlighting the central role of language and discourse, life as a set of dynamic interactions and dealing with people, not with statistics (Павловић и др. 2006: 366). Narrative approach gives us rich evidence about the relationship towards body. The purity of the Virgin Mary is today considered as a model of ideal of asceticism (Every 1988: 77). Although body is considered holy, as the body and blood of Christ, a personal body generally does not adjust this cultural form. The first part of the paper presents narrative approach of stigmatized and collapsed bodies of believers caused by stressful events. The second part examines how religion and spiritual transformation affects improvement of a body. Religion is seen as a key factor in building a new identity. Questions that seek answers are: What situations collapse body? How does body improve itself through religiosity? What is a role of community in Orthodox identity?

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## Methodology

To understand how believers construct their confessions, narrative-biographical approach is used. The sample consists of 8 participants who underwent the process of integration into the Orthodox community, and by participating in the life of church, reached a certain degree of spiritual transformation. Interviews were conducted during May 2013. The average call duration was 60 minutes. The oldest respondent was 66, and the youngest participant was 21. Within the group of 8 participants, 6 were female and 2 were male. Participants talked about everything they thought of and how they conducted their own bodies and bodies of other people, and some of them simply answered the questions. The condition was that a believer is a member of the SOC (Serbian Orthodox Church), regardless of gender, age and profession. Results of the analysis show the reconstruction and new identity.

## Colapsed Body

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that develops in response to a traumatic experience. It is a mental disorder caused by the multi-ethnic environment. After such an experience, a person becomes lazy, does not do housing, cease to be engaged in intellectual work and the like. Srđan Sremac states that one of the main human characteristics is critical element of psychological well-being, which is the affirmation through construction of meaning of crises and illnesses (Sremac 2010: 54). Converting negative experience into positive one promote mental health (*Ibid*). Most of the participants replied that stressful situation turned them toward religion.

## Theoretical Framework

Anthropologists have studied a body in Japanese animation, science fiction, intervention on a body, diet and beauty ideals, socio-cultural control of sexual relations as well as cultural body deformation (Петрић 1976 2000 Малешевић и др. 1982; Малешевић 1985, 1987; Жикић 2002, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011, 2012; Milosavljević 2011). Mario Petrić, who studied tattooing, explains that in the beginning tattoos of

cross were drawn in the simplest form by adjoining horizontal and vertical line, with fine details and coloured in green (Петрић 1976; 2000).

Bojan Žikić explains that body in Japanese animation is seen as an object of obsessive focus, that is fulfilled and outlines, becomes invisible, and that through it a force which cannot be resisted affects, and strong as petrified and immobile object. Finally, the most extreme characteristic of a body is that it wins the gravity, space and time (Жикић 2007: 83). Bojan Žikić states possible inversion in which fashion, clothing and sexual relations are more important than body (*Ibid*: 85). If we talk about a body, it is a conflict of aesthetic and moral ideal, but it is always in the center of attention (*Ibid*: 86). Bojan Žikić studied body in science fiction and he considered that the boon is well-being which improves body (Жикић 2012: 81).

In addition, the author assumes that all material improvements of bodies contribute quality of human life (*Ibid*: 82). Pastime becomes a determinant of culture, which describes and develops a man in moral and spiritual way, even when he or she 'does nothing' (*Ibid*). Apart from material goods and scientific knowledge, leisure time is also needed for a human being to be fully improved (*Ibid*). By studying leisure and free time, the author believes that they are important aspect of individual development with sociocultural sense of social life, family and culture (*Ibid*: 86–86). Leisure includes generosity such things as collectibles, studying of dead languages and science as a hobby (*Ibid*: 87). Bojan Žikić explains that bodies are not insulated, airtight and unchangeable entities, since by funds of immunizations (vaccines, antibiotics) new elements are introduced into them (*Ibid*: 93). Going to church and prayer time can also be seen as a time for leisure, in the same sense as departure to musical event or listening to music at home are considered as cultural upgrade that has not adopted the classical system of education (Жикић 2011). Biomedical-immunological body as a self-regulatory system ensures that other organisms do not get a chance to attack, possess, colonize and transform it as they like (*Ibid*). Bret Luncford explains that the colour, style and choice of clothing is not dependent on our body, but on socially constructed norms of gender (Luncford 2010: 63). In our culture an extremely large value of relatives in educating future generations in present (*Ibid*: 152).

Conception prevention and socio-cultural relations involve three levels: users of contraceptives, sex ratio, and the nearest environment that includes family or kinship group (Жикић 2008b: 11). Contraception functions as a biological and socio-cultural phenomenon (*Ibid*: 14). There are certain doubts that under these population policies ge-

nocidal intentions are hidden (*Ibid*: 16). The government's policies may be such that in one country one nation supports pronatal, and the other supports antinatal (*Ibid*). Monika Milosavljević states that characteristics of a wild man are: amnesia, muteness, insanity, increased sexuality and immorality of those who are not just like us (Milosavljević 2011: 615–616).

## Narrative and Identity

Narrative theory presupposes that people through their stories shape and understand their life. In the last two decades there has been an increase in the number of researchers interested in analysis of narrative / discourse. The main features of discourse analysis are a survey conducted in the real world, highlighting the central role of language and discourse, life as a set of dynamic interactions and dealing with people, not with statistics (Павловић и др. 2006: 366). Discourse can be understood as a system of accounts that construct objects. The discourse of mental illness makes it possible to talk about some people as mentally disturbed; they become subjected as abnormal and accordingly submitted to social practice (*Ibid*: 369). Discourse connects a series of events that are important both for a person who narrates story and for one who listens. In the story the participants or persons of action are presented. The most important element is a plot or activities of participants that have consequences on themselves, as well as reactions of participants on themselves (*Ibid*: 370). A person is presented as 'deceiver', 'religious' or 'disappointed' and determines his own position within micro-context. Discursive scientists wonder what the person is trying to achieve in a certain part of the conversation and on which interpretative repertoires is trying to achieve (*Ibid*: 371). The task of researchers is to describe cultural context of a story and main characteristics of main personality and identify him with other important persons in his story, examine procedures for the objectives, causal link and pay attention to previous experiences that are manifested in the present (*Ibid*: 377).

The most significant contribution to discourse analysis is reflected in a better understanding of interpersonal domain (*Ibid*: 379). The story connects a person with the rest of the world. Every man lives his narrative, once again changes, finishes and improves it. The narrative can be historical or fictional.

## Body During the Time of Diseases and Crisis

Participants through narrative memorizes some traumatic events, wars, injury or broken part of their bodies. When they speak about past they always present a situation from a present privileged position. Periods of crisis are seen as a wake-time for the renewal of identity. People experience personal transformation through difficult periods of life. Turning a negative event into a positive one promote mental health (Sremac i dr. 2010: 55). War is the most common trigger for turning to religion, but in retrospect can be seen as a sweet torment, in order to get 'tickets' to church. Participants believe that they would pass even through worse trauma, just in order to enter into the community of believers.

### Stigma Identity

#### *Struggled like Jesus*

Construction of a new identity is successfully carried out, depending on participants and his successful understanding of messages and behavior in accordance with it. The identity is the human thought, which, through the formulation of its own narrative presents itself to itself and to the others. The transition from atheism into religiosity involves a refining their own narrative in relation to the corrupted and stigmatized identity. What is considered as a stigma in the Orthodox discourse remains the same no matter if it has Orthodox motive (tattooed cross). Thus, the physical intervention in the glory of God, also considers as stigma. Tattoos Cross or icons, and the pious inscriptions are unacceptable. Depending on overcoming their own creative identity, stigma is erased in the eyes of the religious community and 'forgiveness of sins' is gained. Orthodox



Tattoo of cross

religious community of believers is seen as a new people in a bad mood and faith, indifferent to life and the world around them, which makes it difficult to fit into the new environment and changing personal identity. Newcomers are always victims, who are hurt, feared and later establish a connection with conventional people. Stigmatized identity is replaced with a new one. The new identity is changed from minimal changes such as the cessation of any intervention on the body, termination of use of pills and condoms use and premarital sexual activity, which are characterized by the believer as a wild, immoral and pagan. Triggers or turning points are mostly disappointment in people in conflict situations and emotional ties or death of a family member. The trigger point is the beginning of becoming Orthodox which includes many other lifestyle changes. Stigmatized believers always provide the resistance and rebellion when you ask them to stop the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes and start fasting and wearing new and comfortable clothes. An important aspect of getting into Orthodox is disappearing of hatred emotions against his own body, the human body and the body of the animal. Sexual relationships before marriage are practiced in the beginning. Another very important aspect of being Orthodox is the renunciation of alcohol consumption for many years. Usually it comes to irrational thinking, and believers tend to see alcohol as a drug, and a drug as poison. Besides, the men who wear long hair, dye it or wear earrings are also considered as people with collapsed identity. Stigmatized believers try hard to stop smoking; and it takes time to acquire new habits. In the beginning the addicts revolt and as a result of leaving nicotine appears obesity which is regulated by fasting later. Alcoholics, drug addicts and nicotine addicts have a desire to regain a positive attitude towards themselves and to fit into a non-addictive community. For Orthodox believers in addition to drugs, drug addiction, cigarettes and tattooing, there are many other stigma, such as masquerades, homosexuality, entry into the EU, the formation of the apes, but also messy trained believer maniac. Collapsed identity gives impression that a person feels in his body as not as at home. Transformative dressing is also considered as a stigma.



Tattoo of cross



## Construction of Orthodox Identity

Believers repeatedly question their identity and try to accept a message and restate it. A privileged position is always in present and past experiences are considered as obsolete levels. Religion offers a new identity and try to free believers from psychological crisis. Redefining the narrative and identity takes place spontaneously through a new spiritual experience gained through active participation in a community.

Informants feel reborn and very good in their own bodies. Rehabilitated identity of believers leads to a 'new life'. Getting a main role erases stigma. Furthermore, care for one's own body is individual responsibility and depends on the culture understood not as a community, but primarily on personal culture. Concern is proportional to a state of awareness, education and socio-cultural environment in which a person grew up. Participants who are born, grown up and educated in a city, take care about their home fulfilled with shelves of books, icons, artist value, framed photographs, and as well have the same attitude toward their bodies. Such people never would have allowed themselves to go unwashed, ragged or in old and dirty clothes. Theologians would never allow themselves not to change their clothes or to have body piercing or tattoo. Women believers feel equal, calling themselves Orthodox feminists and think that Orthodox cultural context protects them against discrimination. With a new identity and a new real life self-esteem grows as well. Participants reconstruct their past, but also plan the future within a community of believers. When asked what they think about the appearance and whether they dress up or not, all participants answered that they prefer neatness, cleanliness and grooming. Nevertheless, it depends on personality how much they will follow through these idea and how much they will deviate from it. Although they take care about their personality more or less, their children are always worn neat. Participants are not dogmatically dressed. They dress up and wear jewelry. Participants believe that they will resurrect in their own body, but are not sure how it will look like. They explain how confession and communion have positive influence on them, and they believe that these will prolong their life. They also believe in the Immaculate Conception. They feel that atheists' belief that the Immaculate Conception is impossible as it is explained by the school system, is absolutely unacceptable and have a very strong negative impact on their feelings. Washing the feet is considered as an integral act of neatness and is approved. A new collective identity is always more favorable than an old individual identity.

## Closing remarks

Religious or spiritual identity will flourish or it will be abused. It is in believers' interest to adopt the spiritual culture without abuse of their identity. From all these we understand what kind of obstacles believers are facing and how they correct their identity/body/personality. Religion always offers alternative solutions, so that believers instead of a forgotten identity are always offered a new alternative. Participants leave cigarettes, and with incense smoke they get 'new smoke', instead of alcohol they receive drugs and Communion, instead of intervention on their own body they wear ornaments, and instead of no culture they get culture.

Faith in God involves self-control, composure, peace and morality. Believers give up the idea to believe in wild God of non-culture and to love the good, gentle God-Word. The Church as an institution is a framework in which they are not only taught, but as well they listen to the Gospel and the Apostle and also get support of the religious community, which by interviews with personalities gives meaning to existence and belonging to the society. Believers in addition to popular literature can adopt professional literature of the Institute for Theological Studies dealing with the unfathomable, love for animals, terrible sin of nationalism which provides support for the domestication of believers. There are three levels of cultural religion in Serbia, namely: pagan understanding of religion (rural), semi-pagan conception of religion (urban) and theological understanding of the same (eschatological). Biblical and theological texts help believers through identification with mythical figures, which defines them and establishes the relationship with God.

Acceptance of their own bodies by the religious community aims to promote new and narrative identity that provides self-esteem. What distinguishes a body in Orthodox narrative from a body in Japanese animation is that the body has a specific context outside which an actual body is not considered. The body must not be subjected to any neglect, torture, inequality, or not homosexual relationships. One aspect of Orthodoxy insists that a person remains in his body whatever the body is, therefore, fetuses must not be aborted, animals are not killed, body is decorated, and a person with physical defects is humanly fostered within the family rather than given to institutions. Collapsed bodies are updated and improved. Similarities between a body in Japa-



nese animation and a body in Orthodoxy are these fantastic properties that through it warm force operates, it becomes invisible and goes through the closed door. Inversion in which clothing is more important than body cannot be acceptable in any way, considering that every kind of slavery contradicts the ideal of freedom. Conflict of aesthetics and morality does not exist, so the moral man is refined as esthete.

What an Orthodox body has in common with science fiction, is precisely this boon that fills the body and makes sure it is not empty. In both cases, we see that leisure is the component in which the spiritual and physical rises. Leisure is the time when believers pray, listen to spiritual music and believe in something that until recently was not included in the school curriculum. Believers accept socially constructed norms and therefore clothing adapts this form darker and more closed clothing.

Although, despite the regulations, we see that there are four types of clothing. The first style is academic- obsessively dressed men and women in coats, shirts, ties, suits. The second type is an alternative, which involves young people in a certain musical style. The third type is a national dress, which includes scarves and skirts and fourth wild style involves delinquency, neglect, wearing old jacket from the time of the bombing of Belgrade in 1999 and clothing such as a Serbian national male hat (but not out of practice). Orthodoxy adds another specificity to a body of monk, which is that people without children are as well respected as people with children, while within a pagan society these people feel totally misplaced.

Orthodox Christians believe that behind the use of abortion are really hidden genocidal intentions and that evil enemies persuade young people to promiscuity and abortion of their own nation, without the use of hatred, and a key weapon is of course a television that promotes devil. Another virtue for wild believers is precisely this fact that, after so much unrest, in the end even the wildest are tamed. They understand and ultimately come tidy to church but only for religious celebrations. Many trauma could destroy identity of atheists and make her/him to accept the religion of their own nation and their country, but this usually happens after the deep collision with other religions, cultures and nations.

Hard life experiences collapse body, in situations when people are not aware what happened to them their bodies are neglected and untidy, but after a while everything returns to normal. The construction of identity is successfully restored and the body becomes bathed, neatly decorated, purified by fast and rescued. Participants do not beli-

even when it comes to Darwin theory, considering the fact that they do not feel like monkeys, which monitors allegations of cognitive anthropologists like Robin Dunbar.

Believers find that with their body should promote their gender role, and an ideal is to feel perfectly well in their own body.

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# ТЕЛО

## У ПРАВОСЛАВНОМ НАРАТИВУ

**Ања Абрамовић**

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**Апстракт:** Представљање тела у православном наративу, првенствено у институцијама посматра се као културни и родни идентитет. Анализира се узорак од 8 интервјуа, о православљивању идентитета и мењање стигматизованог идентитета новим.

**Кључне речи:** наратив, тело, религијска конверзија, идентитет, заједница.