

Whence do we come? What are we? Where are we going?

Paul Gauguin

Existential question put by Paul Gauguin at the end of 19th century during his voluntary isolation at Tahiti assumes a different turnover if asked from the context of socio-political events in Serbia in the last 15 years. Such questions have lost their former metaphysic severity today and have turned into very concrete and realistic question of the collective identity and identification in many countries with changed social paradigm, mode of production and ideology, especially in the post-communistic period of transition. At the beginning of these processes the social space of these countries was reshaped, which resulted with serious inner conflicts and with confronting the citizens with the new systems of value and model of life. In the case of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, when the old system of values and the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” collapsed, changing in the field of new cohesive forces in the society and production of collective identity were unavoidable. New oligarchy that had got the power in Serbia took advantage of the fact that citizens urged to receive a new identity, and to identify themselves with political, national or other programs and aims. In that situation, when a question of collective identity became steamed up and blurred, it was easy for the most of the citizens to turn towards an overemphasized national identity recognized again as “older” than the one of other nations. Proof for such assertion was found in the rich national history, so that the process of the recirculation of national myths overtaken mostly from the Serbian medieval empire strongly started to give shape to the public opinion through all media. That way, the history “became comprehended as an active force that defines roots of the nations, feeds the constituent myths of ethnic groups and strengthens national identities.”¹ Among all Serbian constitutional myths, the myth on Kosovo is the most present in revived ethnonational stories and phantasmagoria, and it points to the Lazar’s choosing of Divine Realm as a correct path and decision for the Serbian national character². It fits perfectly a mythological, anti-historical perception of time, where the time comes back again and again in everlasting cycles, unlike the usual comprehending of the linear flow of time in Judeo-Christian civilization. Final consequence of such speech took shape in the populist stories like the one of Božidar Vučurević, Serbian leader from Trebinje: “Even the dead we lined up to preserve and defend dignity of the living; that’s why the history is not for Serbs only a teacher of life, but also a teacher of death. St Sava, Tsar Lazar, Njegoš, Karadjordje... they are still with us, reminding us who we are and what we are.”³ After the political changes of October 5th, 2000 a certain period of interregnum and a new break concerning “great national projects” occurred, together with an attempt to homogenize the citizens and to create the new models of identification. New (proto)democratic society in the public field initiated the idea that all progressive forces including artists should actively participate in carrying out the reform and contribute in producing a “better society”. However, they are still many problems in the public field and the way of its production and reconstruction. Enthusiasm that got tired after the first years of changes opened many possibilities for further critical reflection of social processes so, unlike a directly politically committed art which lost its *raison d’être* a new strategy slowly started to develop characterized by its ironic approach and consciousness of the need for a reflection of social processes, a consciousness of the need for work *in socius*. Finally, although in these years a paradigm of mythologic fabula has been replaced with much more pragmatic models offered

to the citizens for their identification, a constant state of uncertainty and expectation of a realization of foggy aims still makes an individual passive, keeps him in letargy and prevents him to join the public field more actively or, at least, to ask himself: What are we really waiting for?

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¹ Božidar Slapšak, **Changes of the past in a changing society**, *Republika*, no. 64/1993 (March 15), page 16

² Ivan Čolović, **Politics of Symbols**, Library 20th Century Belgrade 2000, pages 18.

³ *Ibid.*, page 22.