

Female Bodies and Angelic Likeness: The Place and Role of the Body in Everyday Life of Orthodox Women Monastics

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Topic

The PhD study focuses on the subject of contemporary Christian orthodox female monasticism in Serbia and its particularities by researching the embodied faith experience of nuns and the processes of embodied monastic socialization that generate the concepts of God, world and self.



Research Questions

The research attempts to answer questions:

- How does everyday monastic ascetic practice constitute self-processes and forms of self-perception of nuns?
- How do actions of nuns function as world-making activities?
- How do the normative elements of monastic social order influence the way in which the self-world and self-God relationships are individuated and lived?
- How do the normative elements of ascetic knowledge influence the way in which the self-world and self-God relationships are individuated and lived?
- What are the most efficient social mechanisms that ensure the maintenance of the established order and relations of power within female monasticism?

Data / Material

The fieldwork conducted in three female orthodox monasteries during 2018 for a period of two months provided the basic material for the PhD research.

In the fieldwork the employed methods were

- participant observation,
- personal semi-structured interviews,
- informal interviews,
- conversations, and discussions.

Aim

The study aims to open the investigation of power related questions in the contemporary orthodox female monasticism by:

- Researching the possibility of resonant relationships within strict hierarchical institution;
- Critically questioning the processes of establishing hierarchical power and symbolic power within female monasticism;
- Inquiring the factors that determine the ideologically constructed gender comprehension in monasticism.

Methods

A specific framework for the collection and analysis of data is the comparative research design. This design encompasses the ethnographic research in two contemporary orthodox female monasteries.

- Research methods for the collection of data: personal semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, participant observation.
- Research methods for the analysis of data: content analysis, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis.



Results

The results of the analysis show the prevalent influence of the church institutional relations of power over female monastic life.

- The power behind the monastic conventions belongs to the power-holders in monasticism (bishops or priest-monks)
- They shape the self-perception of nuns and influence all aspects of the relationship of nuns to the world including their corporeal, existential, intentional and evaluative aspects.

Source: www.eparhija-zicka.rs

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