

An Intellectual, Organizational and Transnational History of Feminism in Interwar Yugoslavia (1918-1941)

While recently there has been an increase in the interest in the history of women's organizations and practices and the intellectual history of feminism in the period of socialist Yugoslavia (Chiara Bonfiglioli, Zsofia Lorand, Ivana Pantelić), as well as in the history of feminism and women's writing in Serbia before World War I (Ana Stolić, Biljana Dojčinović, Ana Kolarić), disproportionately little has been written about feminist ideas and practices in interwar Yugoslavia. The image of the feminist project in interwar Yugoslavia has been so far embedded into state-socialist narratives and largely shaped by concerns about the workers' movements. Moreover, feminist historians in the 1980s and 1990s have been mostly preoccupied with the previous, socialist interpretation and have not tackled many of the complexities of the interwar period, such as, probably the most obvious, multiple identity building projects in Yugoslavia.

By looking at numerous publications written by Yugoslav women, I as well as the work of various women's organizations, the aim of my proposed research is to explore feminist ideas and practices in interwar Yugoslavia and to understand what the concept of feminism meant and how it was used in this historical context. Historians often characterize Yugoslav interwar women's movements and practices simply as "conservative," "socialist" and "liberal." I intend to examine this division by investigating these currents of thought in Yugoslavia up to the beginning of World War II, with a special focus on the collaboration between the established "liberal" organization *Ženski pokret* [The Women's Movement] and young women from the Yugoslav Communist Party who joined *Ženski pokret* from 1935, during the Popular Front. My intention is to explore how the ideals of these women activists changed within the social and political contexts they operated in, arguing that the difference between women historians have labeled "liberal" and "socialist" was not for the most part ideological but rather a difference between two generations of women.

Under the term "Yugoslav women" I consider here all women who were citizens of The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia, and not specifically those who identified themselves as Yugoslav.

In order to understand the concept of feminism in its relation to the categories of "liberalism," "socialism" and "conservatism," the research will be organized around these questions: What were the continuities and discontinuities of these political categories and their specific relation to feminism in the period before and after World War I in this geographical area? Which intellectual and organizational networks existed in different parts of the country? Having in mind that interwar Yugoslavia struggled with often contradictory cultural, national and legal legacies, my aim is to explore how these networks functioned and how they related to the conflicting identity and nation-building projects within the country. Special focus will be on interethnic and interreligious

relations, especially the position of Muslim women within the organizations and the discourses about Muslim women in public space.

The comparative aspect of my intended research concerns the work of Yugoslav feminist organizations in an international context, emphasizing the specificity of Central and Southeast European women's organizations and alliances. The focus here would particularly be on a transnational alliance that still awaits a detailed research - the Little Entente of Women (1923-1927). Regarding this alliance, I intend to explore the ways the cultural and intellectual connections of Yugoslav women and women's organizations with those from Czechoslovakia and Romania lasted throughout the 1920s and were, as some periodicals indicate, strengthened again after 1935 during the Popular Front. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to examine whether and to what extent did the Yugoslav women active in this transnational alliance represent only the dominant ethnicity/class of Yugoslav women. Finally, putting Yugoslav feminist ideas and practices in an international perspective would bring into view the influences and the transfer of ideas within the international women's movement.

Concerning literature, Jovanka Kecman's *Žene Jugoslavije u radničkom pokretu i ženskim organizacijama 1918-1941* (1978) [Women of Yugoslavia in the Workers' Movement and Women's Organizations 1918-1941] approaches the woman question in interwar Yugoslavia through the lens of the history of workers' movement, while Neda Božinović's *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* (1996) [The Woman Question in Serbia in 19th and 20th Century] offers a description of women's organizations in interwar Serbia systematically dividing the organizations into "proletarian" and "bourgeois." Lydia Sklevicky's *Konji, žene, ratovi* (1996) [Horses, Women, Wars] contains more nuanced short essays on women who were active in the interwar period, although it is primarily in a dialogue with previous interpretations. I believe, however, that the history of feminist movement in interwar Yugoslavia encompasses thought-provoking ambiguities that remain hidden when approached through a binary division on "proletarian" and "bourgeois."

Furthermore, publications *Žene Srbije u NOB* (1975) [Women of Serbia in the National Liberation Struggle], *Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* (1955) [Women of Croatia in the National Liberation Struggle] and *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi - sjećanje učesnika* (1977) [Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the National Liberation Struggle – Memories of the Participants] offer a subjective, but valuable narrative about socialist women's activities in interwar Yugoslavia and in the national liberation struggle, while the unpublished material steadily collected for these volumes over the years and preserved in the Serbian and Croatian Archives might offer valuable insights into what has remained unsaid in the official narratives. Regarding recent publications, Stanislava Barać's *Feministička kontrajavnost. Žanr ženskog portreta u srpskoj periodici 1920-1941*. [The Feminist Counter-Public. The Female Portrait Genre in Serbian periodicals 1920-1941] and Marina Vujnović's *Forging the Bubikopf Nation. Journalism, Gender and Modernity in Interwar Yugoslavia* are essential, even though they focus only on the Serbian and Croatian context, respectively.

The sources I will consult in my proposed research are mainly publications from the interwar period and archival sources from the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian Archives. Writings of women such as Julka Hlapec Djordjević, Ksenija Atanasijević, Fani Politeo-Vučković, Mitra Mitrović in Serbia, Marija Jurić Zagorka, Vera Stein Erlich, Zdenka Smrekar in Croatia, Angela Vode, Ajlojzija Štebi and Vida Tomšič in Slovenia provide crucial information not only about the work of interwar Yugoslav women's organizations in Yugoslav and in international context but also about their understandings of the concept of feminism and their ideas of what women should do regarding their beliefs. Novels and short stories written by women such as Jelena Dimitrijević and Milka Žicina would serve as a source for a more nuanced understanding of feminist ideas of changing and "liberating" Muslim and peasant women in interwar Yugoslavia.

Moreover, there are monthly periodicals edited and published by and for women, which historians have labeled "socialist," "liberal" or "conservative." However, the fact that the same women often wrote for both "socialist" and "liberal" or both "liberal" and "conservative" periodicals underlines the contradictions that cannot be explained within these given categories. These periodicals include *Jednakost* [Equality] (1910-1912, 1919-1920), *Ženski pokret* [The Women's Movement] (1920-1938), *Jugoslovenska žena* [The Yugoslav Woman] (1931-1934), *Seljanka* [Peasant Woman] (1933-1935), *Ženski list* [The Women's Paper] (1926-1935), *Ženski svijet* [The Woman's World] (1939-1941). The most interesting is *Žena danas* [Woman Today] (1936-1940), a fascinating journal that is possibly the best indicator of the collaboration between the "liberals" of the organization *Ženski pokret* and the young women from the illegal Yugoslav Communist Party. This periodical is a product of collaboration of women who would have different futures: most of them were killed during the WWII, some of them were later in the Yugoslav government (Mitra Mitrović), some of them emigrated (Vera Stein Erlich), and some others were communists who were excluded from the party after the war (Angela Vode).

Regarding archival sources, I plan to research thoroughly the state archives of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia given that few scholars actually know what these archives contain concerning interwar Yugoslav women's organizations. References in Jovanka Kecman's 1978 book about women's organizations suggest that the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian archives could provide information about the work of organizations such as *Ženski pokret* [The Female Movement], *Splošno žensko društvo* [General Women's Society], *Udruženje jugoslovenskih žena* [Yugoslav Women's Union], *Alijansa feminističkih društava SHS* [Feminist Alliance of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes], *Alijanska ženskih pokreta Jugoslavije* [Women's Movements Alliance of Yugoslavia], and *Udruženje univerzitetски obrazovanih žena* [Association of University Educated Women]. In order to research the work of Yugoslav women internationally and the Central and Southeast European transnational networks, I will rely largely on the valuable database *Women and Social Movements, International – 1840 to Present*. Also, the Fond Františka Plamínková (1875–1942) in the National Museum Archive in Prague as well as documents in Atria, institute on gender equality and women's history in Amsterdam would be useful for tracing the transnational networks of Yugoslav, Romanian and Czechoslovak women in the interwar period.

My project presents the first comprehensive overview on the history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia. Apart from contributing to the general history of Yugoslavia and the history of feminism and women's movements in Yugoslavia and Europe in the interwar period, this project would create a basis for a more nuanced understanding of the changes that came with World War II and the establishment of the socialist Yugoslav state. Secondly, by focusing on the Little Entente of Women and especially on the relationships between Yugoslav and Czech women's activists and intellectuals, this project would bring the transnational entanglements of Central and Southeast European women's activists into light, thus revealing some of the specificities of women's organizations and alliances in this part of Europe. Furthermore, the focus on the Central and Southeast European women's networks in the context of broader international movements would contribute to the history of international women's movements as we know today.

Ultimately, I believe that the relevance of my proposed research lies in rethinking the received categories of socialist/communist, bourgeois/liberal and conservative, with the aim of discovering what these categories, along with and in relation to the concept of feminism, meant in interwar Yugoslavia. Instead of projecting the received and often binary political categories on the historical period, my intention is to recognize and comprehend the ambiguities and contradictions of the historical period and interpret the ideological self-positioning of the historical actors as a dynamic process, thus bringing new knowledge to the history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia while at the same time rethinking the existing narratives.