

**The End of the AFŽ – The End of Meaningful Women's Activism?
Rethinking the History of Women's Organizations in Croatia, 1953 – 1961**

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Abstract

This thesis, as part of emerging scholarly work on rethinking the complex relations between feminism and socialism, explores the *Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske* (Union of Women's Societies of Croatia, SŽDH), the women's organization that existed in Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1961. The SŽDH was the successor of the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ), and while there is ample literature about the activities of the AFŽ, the activities of its successor organizations are hardly researched. This thesis examines the case of the SŽDH in order to understand better what was happening in a forgotten period of Yugoslav women's history. I first discuss second-wave feminist historians' perspectives on the AFŽ, and in particular the fact that most historians who have written about the AFŽ claim that its dissolution in 1953, as an autonomous organization, was detrimental for meaningful work on women's problems in Yugoslavia. Second, I look at archival documents of the SŽDH. I approach the material from a bottom-up perspective, which goes against the hegemonic narrative on communist women's organizations as being simply obedient "Party tools". I research the activities and goals of the SŽDH, the discussions and debates within the organization as well as the problems that the SŽDH women were facing in their practical work. I focus on the SŽDH women's own perspective and the terms which they used themselves when discussing and explaining their work. Using a bottom-up approach and avoiding to apply the second-wave feminist "autonomy principle" for a state socialist women's organization, this analysis shows that the SŽDH was not simply a "Party tool". This research proves that the SŽDH women had their voices and opinions; that they had a well-thought-out strategy and ideas on how to enhance women's position in the context they lived in; and that they extensively discussed the SŽDH's position in the new circumstances of self-management in Yugoslavia.

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List of abbreviations

AFŽ - Antifašistički front žena / Antifascist Women's Front

AFŽH - Antifašistički front žena Hrvatske / Antifascist Women's Front of Croatia

AFŽJ - Antifašistički front žena Jugoslavije / Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia

AVNOJ - Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije / Anti-Fascist Council of the Peoples' Liberation of Yugoslavia

DFJ - Demokratska federativna Jugoslavija / Democratic Federal Yugoslavia

FNRJ - Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija / People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

GO - Glavni odbor / Main Committee

HR-HDA - Hrvatska-Hrvatski državni arhiv / Croatia-Croatian State Archives

KDAŽ - Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena / Conference for the Social activity of Women

KDAŽH - Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Hrvatske / Conference for the Social Activity of Women of Croatia

KPJ - Komunistička partija Jugoslavije / Communist Party of Yugoslavia

NF - Narodni front / People's Front

NO - Narodni odbori / People's Committees

NOF - Narodnooslobodilački front / People's Liberation Front

NRH - Narodna Republika Hrvatska / People's Republic of Croatia

SKJ - Savez komunista Jugoslavije / League of Communists of Yugoslavia

SSRN - Socijalistički savez radnog naroda / Socialist Alliance of Working People

SSRNH - Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Hrvatske / Socialist Alliance of Working People of Croatia

SSRNJ - Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije / Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia

SŽD - Savez ženskih društava / Union of Women's Societies

SŽDH - Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske / Union of Women's Societies of Croatia

SŽDJ - Savez ženskih društava Jugoslavije / Union of Women's Societies of Yugoslavia

“How was it possible that a tradition of struggle, of commitment with the highest personal costs, and which could have energized generations of women, had been simply wiped out of my generation's historical consciousness?”¹

Introduction

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Yugoslav feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky² started to search for the lost and forgotten history of Yugoslav women and their treatment in the historiography. She found out from another study (Polić, 1986) that in 1986 in the Yugoslav educational material women almost did not exist - there were more horses than women in history schoolbooks from the fifth to eight grades of primary school (1989b: 70). Sklevicky was the first author who wrote thoroughly about the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ), the women's organization which was formed in the Second World War in Yugoslavia and which fought actively for women's liberation. Several historians followed Sklevicky's approach to write about the AFŽ's goals, its activities and the changes in its organizational structure.

I do not remember, during my education in Croatia in the 1990s and 2000s, that we were learning about the AFŽ, nothing but the fact that the organization existed. However, at

¹ Lydia Sklevicky, 1989b: 68

² Lydia Sklevicky (1952-1990) was a feminist historian, theoretician, activist and author of the first feminist academic articles in several disciplines (sociology, ethnology and history) in Yugoslavia. She graduated in sociology and ethnology at University of Zagreb in 1976 and became an assistant at the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement in Croatia. Sklevicky was dedicated to exploring women's history in Yugoslavia, especially the history of the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ), the official women's organization that existed in Yugoslavia from 1942 to 1953. She published several articles on the AFŽ, but she didn't finish her doctoral dissertation on the same topic, because she died in car accident on January 21, 1990. The thesis was published posthumously in 1996, edited by her supervisor Dunja Rihtman Auguštin and titled *Konji, žene, ratovi* (Horses, Women, Wars), and is still the most thorough study on the AFŽ. Sklevicky was part of the second-wave feminist movement in Yugoslavia in the 1970s, one of the founders of the feminist group "Women and Society" in Zagreb in 1979 and an internationally active scholar, participating in many academic conferences and other events (see Kašić, 2006: 517-520).

least the historiography on the AFŽ started to flourish then. Historians, following Sklevicky, were discussing the AFŽ and tried to figure out what happened regarding the extremely complex issue of the dissolution of the organization in 1953. But in their work, the AFŽ's successor organizations existed only as a note that there was something after the AFŽ. These organizations have been almost completely neglected in the historiography of the women's movement in Yugoslavia. I was puzzled about this and one of the aims of my thesis is to try to understand why this happened. But first and foremost I will search for information about one of the AFŽ's successors in Croatia, the *Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske* (Union of Women's Societies of Croatia, SŽDH), and try to integrate the forgotten voices of the SŽDH's women into the Yugoslav historiography.

The SŽDH was the women's organization that existed in the People's Republic of Croatia (part of Yugoslavia) from 1953 to 1961. The SŽDH was the successor of the *Antifašistički front žena Hrvatske* (Antifascist Women's Front of Croatia, AFŽH), and, as I already pointed out, while there is literature about the activities of the AFŽH, the activities of its successor organizations are hardly researched. In this thesis I will first discuss historians' perspectives on the AFŽ, and in particular the fact that that most historians who have written about the AFŽ(H) claim that its dissolution in 1953 was detrimental for meaningful work on women's problems in Yugoslavia (Sklevicky 1996; Stojaković, 2012, etc.). Subsequently, I will research the activities and goals of the SŽDH, the discussions and debates within the organization as well as the problems that the SŽDH women were facing in their work.

Sources and Methods

Historians have done several primary researches on the AFŽ. Lydia Sklevicky made a thorough analysis of the archival documents of the AFŽ on the level of People's Republic of Croatia (1996), historian and feminist activist Neda Božinović researched the AFŽ in Serbia

(1996), and feminist historian Gordana Stojaković studied the AFŽ's magazine in Vojvodina (2012). However, the only primary research on the *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women's Societies, SŽD), that I found, has been done by Božinović. She has done research based on the archival documents of the SŽD of Serbia and the research is presented in several pages of her book about the women's movement in Serbia in the 19th and 20th century (1996: 171-184). Even though the history and historiography of the AFŽ is an integral part of my thesis, my primary focus is on the activities of the SŽDH. Since I'm interested in the activities of women's organizations in Croatia after 1953, specifically the SŽDH (1953-1961), the main data for my research are the archival documents of the *Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Hrvatske* (Conference for the Social Activity of Women of Croatia, KDAŽH), which includes activities of the SŽDH. These materials are available in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb. I am mostly focused on the documents from the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH's, held on February 27-18, 1957, the First Plenary Session held on January 27-28, 1958, and the Second Plenary Session held on December 6-7, 1960.

I use textual analysis, more precisely the close reading technique, to analyze discussions and debates which were going on during these meetings and to detect the organization's main goals and activities. Close reading is "the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" (Brummett, 2010: 3) and one of the main goals of the close reading is "a better understanding of the rhetoric of what we read" (Brummett, 2010: 4). I have tried to apply this when reading the archival documents, especially to get a better and deeper understanding of the language and concepts the SŽDH women used themselves when describing their goals and activities.

Theoretical framework

I'm framing my topic within three major theoretical fields. First, I'm dealing with the general issue of women and socialism and different elements within it. I focus on the unresolved ambiguous relationship between communism and feminism; part of which is that socialist feminists opposed to what they call bourgeois feminism, which they found limited. At the same time, I demonstrate that there was a strong support for women's liberation as something vital in socialist thought. Second, I discuss and challenge the general top-down approach (or totalitarian paradigm) to communism, in which women's organizations in state socialist countries are seen as the state's tool, which results in denying the agency of the women in that era. Finally, I look to the other side of the complex issue of socialism and feminism: the second-wave feminists and their disappointment with the socialist state and the submission of gender to class. They advocated for women being separate and autonomous in the gender struggle and, as historian Chiara Bonfiglioli recently argued, this notion was projected on the past, which again resulted in an erasure of the agency of socialist women, who were fighting against patriarchy at that time.

Women and socialism

There were different approaches to women's emancipation within state socialism and different ideas about how to achieve it. First, I will discuss Marxism/communism and the women's question on the ideological level in terms of the theorizing by Marx, Engels, Bebel, Lenin, Kollontai and Armand (Buckley, 1989: 18-27). Then, I will ask more concrete questions about the main field of dispute in the communist thought and practice: whether a separate women's organization was necessary and justified or not, with a few examples from different contexts to demonstrate how this problem was not specific only to the Yugoslav case and how it remained unresolved.

Both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels claimed that socialism was the only system in which women's liberation would be possible, which could be seen in their claim that "it is self-evident, that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e., of prostitution both public and private" (1950: 36). Sovietologist and political scientist Alfred G. Meyer, in his discussion of Marxism and the women's movement before the First World War, claims that Marx and Engels analyzed everything through the lens of the class struggle, meaning that women's oppression too "was to be understood in its functional relationship to the class structure and the class struggle" (1977: 89). Political philosopher Sonia Kruks, anthropologist Rayna Rapp and historian Marilyn B. Young, in their introduction to *Promissory Notes: Women in the transition to Socialism*, argue that Marxism as a theory proposed to solve so called Woman Question and all others social issues by introducing socialism (1989: 8). Therefore, they claim that for the early socialist thinkers "women as category had nothing to contribute to the *theory* of socialism" (1989: 8).

Working-class socialist August Bebel in 1879 published the book *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Woman and socialism), in which he criticized the bourgeois feminist idea that the liberation of women would be achieved through a battle for civil equality of men and women. Bebel saw marriage as slavery for women and claimed that freedom for women was impossible without abolishment the capitalist system (1988: 500-501). He emphasized that only the Socialist Party advocated gender equality and said that the woman question "coincides with that other question: In what manner should society be organized to abolish oppression, exploitation, misery and need, and to bring about the physical and mental welfare of individuals and of society as a whole?" (1988: 498). Even though he was aware of woman's special position, he still claimed that the solution for women's question was the same as solution for the social question (1988: 502). Bebel supposed that in the socialist state,

in which there would be no private property, women would be free because “nurses, teachers, women friends, the rising female generation, all these will stand by her when she is in need of assistance” (1988: 504). Finally, Bebel said that “in the new society woman will be entirely independent, both socially and economically” (1988: 502).

Lenin developed Marxist theory further and brought it on a more practical level, according to Mary Buckley, a British historian who works on the Soviet Union (1989: 25). Even though he advocated for drawing women into the socialist struggle and for raising their political consciousness, before the 1917 Russian Revolution he rejected the idea of women’s separate organization to achieve this goal (Buckley, 1989: 25). Nevertheless, after the Revolution, Lenin was more ready to accept the idea of special work among women, even though he was striving to separate this idea from so-called “bourgeois feminism”, as can be seen from his conversation with the German socialist feminist Klara Zetkin on the women’s question in 1920. While advocating for a strong international communist women’s movement, Lenin again rejected the idea of having a separate women’s organization, but on the other side, he claimed that “we must not close our eyes to the fact that the Party must have bodies, working groups, commissions, committees, bureaus or whatever you like, whose particular duty it is to arouse the masses of women’s workers, to bring them into contact with the Party, and to keep them under its influence”, which “involves systematic work among them” (1950: 99). Additionally, he advocated for “special methods of agitation and forms of organization”, while also insisting that “that is not feminism, that is practical, revolutionary expediency” (1950: 99). Lenin offered some practical solutions for women’s problems in the Soviet Union, in terms of two tasks: to get rid of bourgeois legislation and to socialize housework in order to liberate women from the burden of household duties (Buckley, 1989: 26).

Along similar lines, two important socialist thinkers, Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand, were opposing the feminist movement, because they believed that women’s

liberation could be achieved only in a socialist system (Buckley, 1989: 33). Just to briefly introduce them, Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) was one of the most important women in the Soviet Union. She was a writer, political activist, the director of the women's organization *Zhenotdel* from 1920 to 1922, and the first female ambassador in the world (she was a Soviet diplomat in Norway from 1923 to 1925 and from 1927 to 1930) (Gafizova, 2006: 253-257). Inessa Armand (1874-1920) was the first director of the *Zhenotdel*, a socialist feminist activist in the Soviet Union and internationally, and a prominent member of the Communist Party (Pushkareva, 2006: 33-36). Kollontai argued that bourgeois feminists' demands "go no further than demands for political equality" and that "they are fighting for their female prerogatives without striving to achieve the abolition of all existing prerogatives and privileges..." (1984: 31). But these socialist women were also aware that, as Buckley claims, "liberation would not automatically 'happen' or even 'be guaranteed' by a change in the economic substructure or through legislation" (1989: 44). That is why in 1918 they advocated strongly for women-only organizations and, according to Buckley, they managed to frame their demands in a acceptable way, while claiming that "since revolution had successfully triumphed, these organizations would serve the revolution, not bourgeois feminism, because they existed in a socialist state pursuing socialist goals" (1989: 55). Buckley concludes that "although the core of Bolshevik ideology resisted special groups for women, the practical need to confront the low level of women's involvement led to support for special women's organizations, so long as they were not separated from the Party" (1989: 57).

Changes in state socialist women's organizations happened for several reasons: ideological, practical, or because of different interests and power struggles. There is no one answer, neither on a theoretical nor on the historical level, to why this happened. Not only on the national, but also on the international level, there was discussion about how to organize socialist women after the Bolshevik Revolution. As I said above, in his conversation with

Zetkin, Lenin was advocating for a strong Communist Women's Movement, which was formed within the Third International, at a conference in Moscow in June 1920 (Waters, 1989: 29). This Movement was a successor of women's movement within the First and the Second International, during which two women's conferences took place: one in Stuttgart in 1907 and the second one in Copenhagen in 1910 (Waters, 1989: 30). Along similar lines, it was clear from the *Theses on the Communist Women's Movement*, presented during the Moscow conference in 1920, that the delegates at the conference thought that the only effective way for struggling for the Woman Question was within the communist society and movement, and that at the same time "without the conscious and active participation of the mass of women who sympathize with communism... a fundamental and far-reaching transformation of the economic basis of society and all its institutions and all its cultural life is impossible" (quoted in Waters, 1989: 31). In organizational terms, the *Theses* stated that movement would be organized through Communist parties' "women's agitational commissions" from local to national level with adequate women's representation in parties' committees (Waters, 1989: 37). What is interesting is that in one section of the *Theses* the Second International was praised for making "a clear demarcation between the socialist and bourgeois women's movement" (quoted in Waters, 1989: 38). Waters argues that in the late 1920s there were attempts for isolation of women's sections from national parties, but they were unsuccessful and in the early 1930s these sections developed closer relationships with the parties (1989: 44). One example, mentioned in Waters' article, is especially important to show how discussions on this topic were extremely lively and how even the most prominent socialist women were sometimes going against general Communist Parties' lines. Namely, Waters explains how exactly Klara Zetkin was advocating for women's organizations to be separate from the Parties in the early 1920s in order to "spread the communist message

beyond the small band of the faithful and bring together women from diverse social backgrounds and with a range of political allegiances” (1989: 44).

In her book chapter about women’s organizations in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, Mary Buckley presents and discusses the ideological justification for the women’s organization’s existence; the organizational structure and different forms of these organizations as well as the content, relevance and efficacy of their work. She also describes the obstacles that women’s organizations were facing and the different forces that were against separate work among women (1989: 60-107). Buckley says that after the 1917 Revolution in the Soviet Union, the Party needed women to be active, so separate women’s organizations were temporarily allowed and ideologically justified as necessary to raise political consciousness among women (see Lenin’s words above). In order to achieve this goal and to organize and supervise work among women, the *Zhenotdel*, the Women’s Department of the Central Committee Secretariat, was formed in 1919 (1989: 65). Buckley emphasizes some structural obstacles in implementing changes on behalf of women during the existence of the *Zhenotdel* (1919-1930), such as the Civil War in the country, high unemployment and the lack of interest of Party leaders in changes in family life (1989: 61). She also mentions the power struggle within the Party and the subordination of the *Zhenotdel*, as well as strong opposition from conservative Bolshevik men, fear of separation of the women’s question from the joint class struggle, and resistance among some women to accept new roles or to obey policies that were seen as ordered ‘from above’ as problems that the *Zhenotdel*’s activists were facing (1989: 62).

Totalitarian model vs. bottom-up approach

Another way in which I discuss the women's question in state socialism is through challenging the totalitarian paradigm according to which emancipation was imposed on

women for the sake of the Communist Party. The “totalitarian-model scholarship”, which Sheila Fitzpatrick explained on the example of the Soviet Union, meant that historians viewed the Soviet Union through the lens of a top-down approach, according to which the Soviet Union was a monolith system in which “the destruction of autonomous association and the atomization of bonds between people produced a powerless, passive society that was purely an object of regime control and manipulation” (2007: 80). This approach was developed mostly by political scientists, who were, according to Fitzpatrick often funded by different US government’s agencies (2007: 80). In the 1970s and 1980s the model was challenged by so-called “revisionists”, who developed a bottom-up approach to the history of the Soviet Union. Unlike the totalitarians, the revisionists were mostly social historians who supposed that “society had to be more than a simple object of regime control” (Fitzpatrick, 2007: 81), and who accordingly shed new light on Soviet Union history. According to Fitzpatrick, the revisionist paradigm prevailed in the mid-1980s within the discipline of Soviet history, but did not change the public picture of the Soviet Union in Western countries (2007: 79).

In terms of women’s emancipation, the totalitarian paradigm assumed that the emancipation was a Party project imposed on women from above with different goals than women’s interests, as for example Romanian feminist political theorist Mihaela Miroiu claims (2007: 199). Following the totalitarian paradigm, Miroiu compares communism to fascism and argues that women’s emancipation and political participation through a system of quota aimed to make it certain for the Party to have docile supporters and “barely had to do with the political presentation of women’s interests” (2007: 199). Above all, while acknowledging possible positive consequences for mothers, she evaluates negatively the introduction of state kindergartens and crèches by labelling them as a means of “control over the entire population” (2007: 199).

There are, of course, historians who approach the history of state socialism and of women in state socialist countries from a different perspective: the bottom-up approach. The Polish-American social and cultural historian Malgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, for example, criticizes “the totalitarian paradigm” and claims that because of this approach “it is rare to find works that give voice to women as active and diverse historical agents” (2014: 167). Fidelis also emphasizes that the “conviction that ‘equality’ was given by the regime” actually “distorts agency from below and contributes to misconceptions about how communism worked in everyday life” (2014: 170). In her book on women and industrialization in Poland after the Second World War, Fidelis concluded that during women’s protests in female dominated industries, members of the Communist Party “often abandoned their official agenda to spread the state ideology among women and pursued their own notions of social justice” (2010: 97). Along similar lines, while claiming that historians can’t easily draw conclusions about the non-existence of women’s activism in state socialist countries because of the lack of research in this field, historian Francisca de Haan argues that some new evidence suggests that “there was large-scale activism of socialist women on behalf of women” (2014: 178). Similarly, Jill Massino, a historian who works on state socialist Romania, says that some of the socialist women, members of the National Women’s Council, the only legitimate women’s organization in Romania, were educated about feminism and were really dedicated to the achievement of gender equality (2014: 179).

Second-wave feminism and the “autonomy principle”

The third theoretical field I will frame my research in is the feminist critique of Marxism and state socialism. Particularly, I will position my analysis in relation with and in contrast to the second-wave feminists’ use of the notion of the autonomy in evaluating women’s activities in state socialist countries. As I already pointed out in explaining socialist solutions for “woman question” in terms of separate or integrated women’s organizations,

Marxism and feminism had/have a complex and difficult relationship. It was like this from the beginning, when Marxist thinkers put themselves in opposition to so called bourgeois feminism. But second-wave feminist critique towards state socialism and Marxism is equally important for this thesis because in this period Yugoslav feminist historians (such as Lydia Sklevicky) started to write about women's organizations in Yugoslavia and to evaluate socialist women's activities, as well as their connections with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ). First, I will explain the relationship between Marxism and feminism from the feminist side, then I will present an overview of the discussion among historians today on feminism, state socialism and women's organizations during state socialism, and finally I will provide basic facts about the feminist movement in Yugoslavia in the 1970s.

According to Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp and Marilyn B. Young, many Western socialist feminists in the 1970s and 1980s were criticizing Marxist theory for "its inability to sufficiently analyze and incorporate the centrality of the gender division of labour" as well as for "its lack of concerns with sexuality and reproduction" (1989: 8). For example, on a theoretical level, while acknowledging the importance of Marxist analytical power, feminist economist Heidi Hartmann framed the relationship between Marxism and feminism as an "unhappy marriage" and said that Marxist analysis saw women only as part of the working class and in that way "consistently subsume[d] women's relation to men under workers' relation to capital" (1981: 98). She said that Marxist categories were sex blind and couldn't answer the question why women are subordinated to men in family relations. Hartmann claimed that Marxism never actually attacked patriarchy, which she defines as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (1981: 101). She further wrote that some of the key elements of patriarchy that women experience were: heterosexual marriage, childrearing and housework and economic

dependence on men (1981: 104). Hartman says that in patriarchy “men exercise their control in receiving personal service work from women, in not having to do housework or rear children, in having access to women’s bodies for sex, and in feeling powerful and being powerful” (1981: 104).

In the 2007 *Aspasia* Forum “Is ‘Communist Feminism’ a *Contradiction in Terminis*”, historians mostly discuss women’s autonomy on the individual, personal level and its relation to communism, but some of them also discuss the autonomy of women’s organizations and the importance of autonomy in socialist thought in general (2007). Mihaela Miroiu takes women’s autonomy as a regulative concept for feminism (2007: 197). Her conclusion on communist’s success in solving the women’s question was that “communism has indeed produced a relative economic independence of women from men, but this was not a road to female autonomy” (2007: 200). Other historians in the same Forum were opposing to some extent Miroiu’s insistence on the autonomy principle in evaluating women’s activities and the state socialist approaches to women’s emancipation. Marilyn J. Boxer, while claiming that socialism was “a contest against individualism” (2007: 242), argues that “once the concept of personal autonomy, or any form of individualism, becomes a definitional criterion, then the whole history of European socialism, and of a good many feminisms, stand in the dock” (2007: 242).

Apart from personal autonomy, which Miroiu and Boxer discuss, there is still the huge discussion among historians about a different kind of autonomy: the organizational autonomy of women’s organizations in state socialist countries. Croatian historian Renata Jambrešić Kirin applies the “autonomy principle” on the case of the Yugoslav women’s organization and argues that with loss of organizational autonomy, women’s organizations also lost an important dimension of women’s activism: at the same time to work for the sake of the society, but also for themselves (2014: 180). Moreover, she argues that the AFŽ’s successors

were just “fatefully following the Communist Party line” (2014: 180) on whose agenda the political emancipation of women didn’t exist anymore (2014: 181).

Chiara Bonfiglioli, who has researched women’s activism in Yugoslavia and Italy during the Cold War, criticizes the application of the “autonomy principle” to women’s organizations in state-socialist countries (2014). She argues that second-wave feminism contributed to the interpretation of women’s activism during the Cold War as being irrelevant or even absent by applying the notion of “autonomy” as the measure for successful work on women’s issues (2012: 22). In her study on women’s organizations in Yugoslavia and Italy during the Cold War, she tries to prove that because of their local and international significance, the “lack of political autonomy” of these organizations “cannot be equated to a lack of political agency” (2012: 280). She claims that when “the principle of women’s collective and individual autonomy from political institutions is taken as a prerequisite for women’s political and social agency, our historical understanding is necessarily limited” because the narrative of autonomy “erases the complexity, ambivalences, and nuances of women’s activism after 1945” (2014: 4). Instead of being focused on the “autonomy principle”, she suggests to take a look at forms of women’s agency that were present “within the framework of existing political movements and institutions” (2014: 4). Along similar lines, Fidelis criticizes the post-1989 approach to the socialist era and “the rejection of the communist era as a black hole in the history of feminism” (2014:170). Russian historian Natalia Novikova calls for contextualization in historiography. She emphasizes that is always necessary to pay attention to “the contexts in which concepts and opinions have been expressed, rather than simply interpreting them arrogantly in terms of what we might believe” (2007: 203).

The “autonomy principle” was very important for the young Yugoslav feminist scholars who worked in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s in Yugoslavia, in order to fight

against patriarchy, women started to organize themselves outside of the Communist Party and in opposition to the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (KDAŽ), the official women's organization that was successor of the SŽD, the organization that I am interested in. These new ideas about women's emancipation apart from the socialist organizations appeared among young intellectuals born after WW2, who started to gather and held their first public meeting in Belgrade on October 27–November 2, 1978. The conference was called “The Woman's question: a new approach”, and was also attended by feminists from other European countries (Papić, 1994: 20). After the meeting, the group “Women and Society” was formed in Zagreb in 1979 (one of the founders was historian Lydia Sklevicky, whose work on the AFŽ I am dwelling on) and similar groups were also founded in Ljubljana and Belgrade (Božinović, 1994: 18). The key problems feminists in Yugoslavia emphasized were: “gender role stereotypes; social, economic and political inequality; the myth of female weakness; and the relationship of false history to ideology” (Ramet, 1991: 205).

Žarana Papić, a Yugoslav feminist sociologist and anthropologist who was part of this 1970s movement, claims that feminist efforts were possible in Yugoslavia because of the system which was more open (Yugoslavia was not aligned with either of the Power blocs during the Cold War; the self-management economy allowed some kind of private enterprises) and because of the ideology that wasn't as strong as in other Eastern Europe socialist countries (1994: 20). On the other hand, Papić explains that 1978 conference was criticized by the socialist women's organization for being a “sex-war conference” (1994: 21). Along similar lines, Božinović wrote that the co-operation of the feminists groups in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade and their solidarity with each other was “not kindly looked upon by the governmental structures” (1994: 18).

In her next point, Papić presents perfectly what could be seen as a general evaluation of socialism by feminists in Yugoslavia, when she says that “in orthodox socialist ideology,

not only that the women's question is quite simply and automatically solved by the so-called workers' question, but also any different approach to this women's question is very, very bad, or very bourgeois or very sex-warish. One of the aims of this conference was the beginning of the critique of the socialist patriarchy and the critique of the socialist concept of women's destiny" (1994: 21). As could be concluded from Papić's claim, the Yugoslav feminists didn't "speak of overthrowing socialism" but about "the need to overthrow patriarchy and of the failure of socialism to do so" (Ramet, 1991: 204). The young feminists acknowledged the progressiveness of the Yugoslav legislation on equality, but they criticized the bad implementation of the laws, the strong influence of patriarchy in private and public life, as well as the "condemnation of feminism" by the state but also by women's organizations and the older, anti-fascist generation of women activists (Bonfiglioli, 2014: 3-4). One of the feminists whom historian Sabrina P. Ramet interviewed in Belgrade said that the "official women's organization is really a joke. They are doing nothing useful but they are very, very afraid of the feminist organizations because we are doing their job for nothing, and they are afraid that soon people will see that their organization is unnecessary" (quoted in Ramet, 1991: 204). Lydia Sklevicky, who started to research women's history, was an active participant of this second-wave feminist movement in Yugoslavia.

How to apply this to Yugoslavia?

This thesis, which deals with the specific case of Yugoslavia, could be seen as part of the emerging scholarship on rethinking the relations of socialism and feminism. Both the history and historiography of the women's movement in Yugoslavia are extremely interesting research fields. First, in Yugoslavia was a strong presence of women's organizing, as I will demonstrate further in my thesis. Second, because of the different kind of socialism, Yugoslavia was an exception among state socialist countries in Europe for having a developed second-wave feminist movement, as I demonstrated above and will elaborate more in the

chapter about the AFŽ. Actually, in this thesis I try to question the main historiographical narrative about the AFŽ and its dissolution in 1953. The hegemonic narrative, which was formed in the 1980s under the influence of second-wave feminism, presents the AFŽ's dissolution as a turning point in organized women's movement in Yugoslavia. According to this narrative, the dissolution of the AFŽ, a unique, autonomous and uniform women's organization, meant the end for meaningful work on women's issues in Yugoslavia.

I'm questioning the hegemonic narrative on the AFŽ narrative, not in order to completely reject it, but in order to understand where it comes from and how it works. In other words, I discuss the influence of second-wave feminism on writing women's history and ask questions about the AFŽ's successor organization without applying the second-wave feminist lenses that lead to denying women's agency. I approach the SŽDH from the bottom-up perspective, trying to figure out how the SŽDH women saw themselves, how they negotiated their position within the Yugoslav socialist system, and in which ways they struggled with the patriarchal society they were living in. I try to demonstrate that the SŽDH women weren't simply docile Party followers and that they had their own ideas about how to organize women within the new system they found themselves in. I locate the changes within the official women's organization in the context of self-management and decentralization of Yugoslavia and strive to demonstrate the complexity of the issue of women's organizing in state socialist countries on the specific SŽDH case. I situate the discussions within the SŽDH within the broader question whether to have separate women's organizations (that would separate women from the joint struggle for socialism) or not. I already showed that this was and still is a huge debate within the socialist movement and I put the Yugoslav case and discussions that were going on forming the SŽDH in this perspective.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will provide basic facts about Yugoslavia in order to situate the women's organization which I research. I will explain the role of Yugoslavia,

particularly, role of communists and their leader Josip Broz Tito, in the Second World War. Then I will explain the specific form of socialism in Yugoslavia, so called self-management socialism, and finally, I will provide some statistics and facts about women's position in Yugoslavia until the 1960s. In the second chapter I will focus on the history and historiography of the AFŽ. Firstly, I will briefly introduce the women's movement in Yugoslavia before WW2; secondly I will present the goals, activities and the organizational structure of the AFŽ (1942-1953); thirdly, I will discuss historians' evaluation of the AFŽ's activities and the changes that happened within the organization. Finally, I will discuss historians' interpretation of the dissolution of the AFŽ.

In the third chapter I will present my analysis of the archival documents of the SŽDH, through which I discuss its goals and activities and the debates that were going on within the organization. I will first provide basic information on the SŽDH's structure and activities, and then will analyze the discussions that were going on within the SŽDH around the complex issue of women's organizing in Yugoslavia. Thirdly, I will explore the SŽDH women's debates about the main goals of their organization. Finally, I will look at the problems the SŽDH women were facing on the ground and explain how they were trying to solve those issues.

1. A short history of Yugoslavia

In this chapter I will provide a short history of Yugoslavia until 1961 in order to be able to explain better and position properly the women's organization SŽD that I research, which existed from 1953 to 1961. First, I will present the most important facts about the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), the role of the communist leader Josip Broz Tito in the Liberation War as well as his relationship with the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. Then I will explain the specific form of socialism, so called self-management socialism, that was introduced in 1950 in Yugoslavia to some extent as a consequence of Tito's relations with Stalin and the Soviet Union. This was followed by a structural reorganization of Yugoslavia and Tito's new position in international relations as one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Finally, I will briefly elaborate on women's position in early Yugoslavia in terms of the law, labour and women's literacy rate.

1.1. The KPJ, Tito and Yugoslavia in WW2

After the First World War, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed in 1918 and this is where I start to describe the history of Yugoslavia. In April 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (the name was changed in 1929) was attacked by Axis powers and collapsed very quickly, with its territory being divided into several occupied areas (Prout, 1985: 1). One of the most powerful groups in resisting the occupiers in the National Liberation War was the antifascist group *Partisans*, led by the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), Josip Broz Tito (Prout, 1985: 1). The KPJ was formed in 1919, but was banned under the 1921 Law on the Protection of the State, and it was still banned when Yugoslavia collapsed in WW2 (Jović, 2009: 55). Tito was a communist who was in close relationship with the Soviet Union and since the KPJ was part of the Comintern (The Third International), Tito arranged a meeting of the *Antifašističko vijeće narodnog*

oslobođenja Jugoslavije (Anti-Fascist Council of the Peoples' Liberation of Yugoslavia, AVNOJ) on November 26-27, 1942 in Bihać, after consultation with Moscow (Swain, 2011: 49). Earlier that year, Soviet leader Stalin already gave Tito advice about how to organize a governmental body which would not insult the Western allies. Stalin said that Tito “should strive to organize a national committee of support for the Yugoslav people’s struggle for liberation” and that “this committee should promote, in the country and abroad, the political platform of the people’s liberation partisan army” (quoted in Swain, 2011: 49). The resolution adopted during the meeting set up the AVNOJ as “representative body of the liberation movement“ (Pavlowitch, 2008: 131) and a new system of committees, in which lower committees had to follow higher committees’ decisions, was established (Swain, 2011: 50). In December of the same year, the women’s organization AFŽ was formed.

The second meeting of the AVNOJ was held in Jajce in November 1943, where a decision was made about the federal character of the Yugoslav state (Pavlowitch, 2008: 210). During this session, the AVNOJ was proclaimed as the legislative body, and a new kind of provisional government (National Committee of Liberation, with five communists out of nine members) was formed with Tito as president of that government (Pavlowitch, 2008: 210). This was an important moment in creating the new state, because Tito actually denied any right to the exiled government, which could be seen as problematic for the Western allies who supported the Yugoslav King Petar II and his exiled government. Stalin was afraid that the AVNOJ’s decision would cause problems with his allies, but in the end that did not happen: the Western Allies accepted Tito’s movement as the only resistance movement in Yugoslavia (Pavlowitch, 2008: 211-212).

In October 1944, the Red Army entered Yugoslavia, after Tito signed an agreement with the Soviet Union about temporary help in some parts of the country. On March 7, 1945, in Belgrade, Tito set up the new government of *Demokratska federativna Jugoslavija*

(Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, DFJ) and the AVNOJ turn itself into a provisional parliament during its last session in August 1945 in Belgrade (Pavlowitch, 2008: 297-298). The provisional Assembly called for elections, while giving the right to vote to every man and woman older than eighteen. Just before these elections the *Narodni front* (People's Front, NF) was formed. The People's Front was the successor of the *Narodnooslobodilački front* (People's Liberation Front, NOF) and consisted of several partisan groups, as well as of some non-communist groups, but with the KPJ leading the Front. The People's Front won 90% of the votes in the November 11 elections, and several days later, the Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy and declared the *Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija* (People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, FNRJ). Soon after, in January 1946, a new Constitution, based on the 1936 Soviet Union Constitution, was adopted (Pavlowitch, 2008: 268-269).

The People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a federation of six republics - Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro - and two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo. In the period between 1948 and 1950, the Yugoslav government was organized as a hierarchical chain of "state-Party joint" committees on the federal, republic and local level, and on each level it was difficult to distinguish the state from the Party (McFarlane, 1988: 45). At the same time, power was concentrated mostly at the federal level (Prout, 1985: 1). Apart from committees, mass organizations such as the youth organization, unions and the women's organization (the AFŽ) were the main forces within the People's Front (Sklevicky, 1996: 109). Pre-war Yugoslavia was a "class society based on agrarian relations" and economically dependent on Europe and this is what communists wanted to change when they came to power (McFarlane, 1988: 11). In order to transform the social structure, the KPJ decided to transform the economic system from

agrarian to industrial, with a rapid industrialization based on the Soviet model from the 1930s (McFarlane, 1988: 12).

1.2. The Yugoslav specific form of socialism

Yugoslavia's specific form of socialism (self-management socialism) was introduced in the 1950s, a decision highly influenced by Tito's international relations. Historian Stevan Pavlowitch argues that Tito "was a political leader and organizer" who "tied a popular resistance movement to the cause of world communism led by the Soviet Union under Stalin" (2008: 280). Yugoslavia, as I said above, used the Soviet model for its organizational structure and it also introduced the Soviet model of socialism. But in 1948 the Tito-Stalin break up happened, which was a turning point in the Yugoslav political and economic system. There were several economic and political reasons for this split: Stalin wanted a greater control over Yugoslavia and he opposed the idea of a Balkan Federation (a federation of Balkan communist countries, which would make Yugoslavia and her allies much more powerful). On the other hand, Tito was not satisfied with the introduction of joint-stock companies that would favor the Soviet economy, not the Yugoslav, because he saw this as a part of unfair economic relations between two countries (McFarlane, 1988: 13-14). The final split happened when Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform (the international alliance of the Communist parties formed in 1947) in June 1948, followed by a complete economic blockade imposed on Yugoslavia at the end of year (McFarlane, 1988: 15). Tito was in a very difficult situation in which he and the Party had to come up with a new approach in organizing the country in order to adjust to the new circumstances: having lost their great ally and the economic support it provided, and being isolated in the international community. This was when the idea of a new reading of Marx and the introduction of new form of socialism was adopted (Jović, 2009: 60), as well as the necessity for decentralization of the highly centralized country.

Self-management was a system in which “the economy, local communities and public administration” were organized in such a way as to prevent high bureaucratization and to restrict state control and influence (Šmidovnik, 1991: 31). In this economic system, the state was not the owner of the enterprises anymore and self-management of working councils was introduced, or, in other words, in this system “productive property [was] managed by non-state bodies, collectives or ‘groups of associated labour’” (McFarlane, 1988: 148) in which emphasis was put on a greater productivity of the enterprises. This change started in 1950 with the passing of the Law on Workers’ Control (McFarlane, 1988: 32), and despite difficulties in implementing these changes, Yugoslavia experienced economic growth during the 1950s.

As political scientist Bruce McFarlane writes, “forms of economic organization conditioned forms of social organization and political institution” (1988: 45), which is why administrative decentralization followed. Re-reading Marxist theory, the Yugoslav communists decided to give greater autonomy to the republics of Yugoslavia (McFarlane 1988: 17) and also decided that each republic could decide on its own governmental structure, according to its context and needs (McFarlane 1988: 45). The role of the central state was weakened by the Law of Constitution from 1953, since only five state ministries continued to exist on the federal level, while the ministries for Economy, Budget, Home Affairs and Administration were put on the republic level (McFarlane 1988: 33). Several other steps were taken in order to show the KPJ’s commitment to decentralization: in 1952 the Party changed its name to the *Savez komunista Jugoslavije* (League of Communists of Yugoslavia, SKJ), and in 1953 the People’s Front was reorganized into the *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda* (Socialist Alliance of Working People, SSRN) (McFarlane 1988: 17). These changes influenced all levels of the Yugoslav political, social and economic structure and it was during

this process of change that the AFŽ was abolished (in 1953) and the SŽD, as a new, decentralized women's organization, was formed.

In addition to the republics being more politically and economically free, a system of communes was introduced by law in 1955 (Šmidovnik, 1991: 25). Edvard Kardelj, the most important communist ideologist in Yugoslavia, defined the commune as “an integrated social and economic community of all the inhabitants and organizations (including enterprises) in its territory” (quoted in Šmidovnik, 1991: 25), according to the example of the Paris commune of 1871 (Šmidovnik, 1991: 26). Actually, the commune was meant to be the basic unit of society, with all other “forms of state” (federation, republics and regions) being grounded on it (Šmidovnik, 1991: 25). The commune was supposed to work on the principle of self-management, and communes on the local level, also called *Narodni odbori* (People's Committees, NO), were supposed to take over the role of local governments (McFarlane 1988: 49).

Even though Yugoslavia experienced huge economic growth during the first phase of decentralization in the 1950s and the second Five Year Plan (1957-1961) was implemented successfully, a second phase of decentralization and de-bureaucratization started in 1961 (Prout, 1985: 23-24). With the new 1963 Constitution (which had been debated since the end of 1960), the republics gained more political and economic autonomy (McFarlane, 1988: 34-35) and all of this, of course, influenced the Yugoslav mass organizations. The SŽD was reconstructed in order to achieve greater decentralization and in 1961 changed its name to *Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena* (Conference for the Social Activity of Women, KDAŽ). It was during this period that Tito's new foreign policy was introduced. Already in 1960 he established that the Yugoslav foreign policy would be focused on demilitarization, world peace and anti-colonialism and in 1961, at the meeting in Belgrade, he became one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement – a group of countries which were not in alliance

or contra the two major blocs (the Eastern and the Western block) in the Cold War (McFarlane, 1988: 180-181).

Finally, I would like to briefly explain the abbreviations I use. The Socialist Alliance of Working People (SSRN), as every other organization in Yugoslavia, had its federal, republic and local (district, county) level. I use SSRN when I refer in general to the Socialist Alliance of Working people; SSRNJ, when I'm referring to the federal (Yugoslav) level and SSRNH when I'm talking about the republic level of Croatia (*Hrvatska*). The same applies to the organizations that I will be discussing: the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ) and the *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women's Societies, SŽD).

1.3. Women's position in Yugoslavia

Historians agree that the Yugoslav authorities accepted the Soviet model of women's equality in the first three years after the Second World War (Jancar-Webster, 1990; Bonfiglioli 2014). The Soviet model included "women's equality in the public sphere" and "'social motherhood' in the private sphere" (Bonfiglioli, 2014: 8). Summarizing Vida Tomšič's (later one of the AFŽ's leaders) essay from 1940, historian Lydia Sklevicky says that in the newly formed Yugoslavia, the women's question was supposed to be solved similar to the Soviet Union model: "political equality – protection of a woman's reproductive function – socialization of child rearing – education – labour" (1996: 51).

Following the Soviet model of women's equality and the Soviet Constitution from 1936, the Yugoslav authorities included articles on gender equality in the Yugoslav 1946 Constitution. Many changes happened in women's lives in Yugoslavia after the Second World War in many fields, including the law, education and paid labour. Before the Second World War, women didn't have the active or passive right to vote. They obtained the right to vote in Yugoslavia in 1945, while the war was still going on, with later confirmation of the right to

vote in the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution (Jancar-Webster, 1990: 163). The 1946 Constitution guaranteed equality in Article 24, with the statement that “women have equal rights with men in all fields of state, economic and social-political life. Women have the right to the same pay as that received by men for the same work, and as workers or employees they enjoy special protection. The state especially protects the interests of mothers and children by the establishment of maternity hospitals, children’s homes and day nurseries, and by the right of mothers to a leave with pay before and after childbirth” (quoted in Bonfiglioli, 2014: 8).

Additionally, the 1946 Constitution guaranteed universal access to education, health and child care (Jancar-Webster, 1990: 163). In 1931, the illiteracy rate for women in Yugoslavia was huge: 54,4% of women was illiterate (Tomšič, 1980: 18, quoted in Ramet, 1999: 95-96); in 1961 this percentage had been decreased to 28,8% (Đurić and Dragičević, 1975: 10, quoted in Ramet, 1999: 96).

In general, there were two reasons for the inclusion of women into the paid labour force in all state-socialist countries: gender equality was a part of socialism as an ideology but also the systems needed women for the huge projects of industrialization (de Haan, 2012: 89). According to Vida Tomšič, who was a war heroine, partisan and one of the leaders of the AFŽ, about 27% of the industrial labour force in 1939 in Yugoslavia were women, and between 1945 and 1948 this percentage increased to 47% (quoted in Jancar-Webster, 1990: 164). In 1950 the percentage of women workers in the overall Yugoslav labour force was 23.2%, and in 1960 the percentage increased to 27% (de Haan, 2012: 89). Just to briefly compare with Western countries, de Haan explains how the level of participation reached in East Europe in 1960s and 1970s was reached in the West only twenty to thirty years later (2012: 95)

Even though abortion was prohibited in 1951, very soon, in 1952, a new law legalized abortion if it was carried out for medical reasons (Božinović, 1996: 158). But the practice was different and there were many obstacles in implementing the 1952 law in some parts of the country. In 1963, this was changed, when the practice was standardized and the abortion procedure was liberalized, and in 1977 abortion was permitted without any restriction until the tenth week of pregnancy (Božinović, 1996: 158).

Conclusion

In this chapter I strived to contextualize the organization that I research and to provide a short historical background for it. This is important for a better understanding of the changes within the women's organizations in Yugoslavia in the 1940s and 1950s, since both the AFŽ and later the SŽD and the KDAŽ experienced changes in their organizational structure, activities and goals, according to changes that were happening in the overall Yugoslav economic, political and social structure. I found it relevant to mention the role of communists in the National Liberation War and Tito's foreign policies and contacts with the Soviet Union, because both influenced the Yugoslav state, and accordingly the women's organization. I explained the meaning of self-management and decentralization for the Yugoslav system, because this is where and when the abolition of the AFŽ and the formation of the SŽD, organization whose documents I analyze, were situated. In the end I briefly explained women's position in the Yugoslav society and changes in women's lives after the Second World War; changes to which women themselves and women's organization contributed to a great extent, which will be elaborated in the next chapter on the AFŽ, as well as in the analytical chapter on the meaning of the SŽDH, its activities, goals and discussions that were going on within the organization.

2. History and historiography of the AFŽ

In this chapter I will explore and discuss how historians have written about the women's organization *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ) that existed in Yugoslavia from 1942 to 1953. Namely, I will be focused on books and articles about the AFŽ and will present historians' evaluations of the AFŽ's activities and their ideas about the meaning of the dissolution of the AFŽ for women's activism in Yugoslavia. The main historiographical question of this chapter, discussed through the most relevant literature about the AFŽ is: How have historians written about the AFŽ and how have they explained the role of the AFŽ and the meaning of its dissolution in 1953 for women's organization in Yugoslavia?

Trying to answer this question, I will first provide basic historical facts about the women's movement in Yugoslavia before the establishment of the AFŽ. Secondly, I will explain how, when and in which circumstances the AFŽ was founded, what kind of activities it carried out, what changes in organizational structure and regarding its position within the People's Liberation Front the organization was going through, and how and in which specific context it was dissolved. Thirdly, I will demonstrate historians' evaluation of the AFŽ's activities and the changes in its organizational structure. Finally, I will discuss key arguments and claims about the meaning of the AFŽ and its dissolution in 1953 for meaningful work on women's problems in Yugoslavia given by several historians who have written about the AFŽ. Following historian Chiara Bonfiglioli, I will locate these historiographical interpretations of the AFŽ in the time in which they emerged and discuss how these narratives were part of the contemporary scholarly and political (feminist or otherwise) framework.

2.1. *The women's movement in Yugoslavia before the AFŽ*

According to feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky (1952-1990), the *Antifašistički front žena* was a successor of two different, often competing, traditions in the women's movement in Yugoslavia between the First and Second World War: the bourgeois women's movement and the socialist women's movement (1996: 79-107). The women's movement in Southern Slavic countries emerged at the end of the 19th century, when women's autonomous organizations carried out activities related to traditional women's role (such as care work), but in the beginning of the 20th century these bourgeois organizations redirected their activities towards the political sphere, demanding women's right to vote and equality before the law (Sklevicky, 1996: 79). These women were active participants in the First World War (mostly as nurses on battlefields), and after WW1 continued with their activities within bourgeois women's organizations. Even though these bourgeois women's organizations' activities were separated from the activities of women in the labour movement in the interwar period, Sklevicky emphasizes that the shared fear of fascism provided common ground for the two movements and that in the 1930s they were cooperating to some extent (1996: 80).

In 1919, the women's section within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) was established; i.e. the same year when the KPJ was established (Ramet, 1999: 93). At their first conference, the socialist women accepted the KPJ's program, which stated that the KPJ "demands full and unrestricted equality for all men and all women, regardless of religion, nationality or occupation, as well as the universal, equal and secret right to vote for all citizens of eighteen years and above" (Božinović, 1996: 102). But Sklevicky claims that only during the 1930s women in the KPJ started to be more organized and that the above mentioned cooperation with the bourgeois movement was useful for the "creation of a new self-consciousness of the female Party members about women's 'double oppression' – being

subordinated to capital, but also being in a subordinated position [to men] within the labour movement” (1996: 86).

The bourgeois feminist movement dissolved itself at the end of 1940 because of the war, but Sklevicky argues that the AFŽ, which appeared two years later, was a successor of this tradition, as well as a successor of the women’s movement within the labour movement (1996: 81), which continued to exist and work on mobilizing women for the revolutionary movement (Božinović, 1996: 127).

2.2. The AFŽ (1942-1953) – organizational structure, goals and activities

The *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women’s Front, AFŽ) was created in December 1942 and dissolved in 1953, with several organizational and program changes during its existence. Women were active participants in the anti-fascist People’s Liberation Front during the Second World War in Yugoslavia, and historian Neda Božinović claims that from the very beginning they were supposed to help the army but also to work on women’s political and cultural education (1996: 135). The KPJ issued a directive in November 1942 to create AFŽ groups in every city or village, with explicit emphasis on the idea that the AFŽ was to be part of the People’s Liberation Front (Bonfiglioli, 2014: 5). The delegates from already formed women’s groups met at the conference in Bosanski Petrovac on December 7, 1942 to decide on the program and the structure of the women’s organization - and that is where and how the AFŽ was formed (Božinović, 1996: 142-143).

In this short overview of the AFŽ’s history, I will mostly dwell on Sklevicky’s work on the AFŽ, which was supposed to be part of her doctoral dissertation and was published posthumously in 1996, because hers is still the most thorough analysis of the AFŽ. Sklevicky distinguishes four phases in the organization’s life in terms of organizational structure, main goals and the activities that were carried out by the organization: (1) The AFŽ in the war

period (1942-1945); (2) Educational model of the AFŽ (1945-1947); (3) Commanding/Directive model (1948-1949) and (4) Dualistic model of the transitional phase (1950-1953). Sklevicky describes and discusses these phases in detail (1996: 63-138).

During the war, the AFŽ had two main tasks: to help the army by performing voluntary labour (help in food supplies, gathering clothes, etc.) and generally to organize life in the liberated areas, and secondly to work on women's political and cultural emancipation (Sklevicky, 1996: 25). Sklevicky claims that during the Educational phase (1945-1947), right after the war, the AFŽ was supposed to perform reconstruction work and to organize functional everyday life, which included providing assistance to working mothers, taking care of the wounded and the orphans, etc. (1996: 117). At the same time, the AFŽ had the most important role in raising the consciousness and social status of women (through improving their literacy rate and organizing different educational courses), as well as in the political socialist education and efforts to gain women's support (women in Yugoslavia obtained the right to vote in 1945) for the new Communist authorities (Sklevicky, 1996: 118). Sklevicky argues that in this period, the AFŽ was an organization with a pyramidal structure (with a wide rank-and-file membership, county, district and regional committees, and at the top the main committee and the central committee) and a certain level of organizational autonomy (1996: 119). Sklevicky further states that in this period the KPJ's aim was not to subordinate the AFŽ to the People's Front, but to demand help from the AFŽ for the Front (1996: 117). She also emphasizes that this model of the AFŽ was the most efficient for mobilizing women through an "instrumentalization of traditional women's roles" (1996: 122). In other words, women in the AFŽ were participating mostly in social and care work.

The next AFŽ's phase was that of the Commanding/Directive model (1948-1949), during which the KPJ had positioned itself as a leader of all mass organizations that participated in the People's Front. Thus, the KPJ was giving commands and directions,

according to which the mass organizations were shaping their activities (Sklevicky, 1996: 131-132). Accordingly, there were changes in the AFŽ's relation with the KPJ and the People's Front. Sklevicky claims that the AFŽ leaders changed the definition of the organization. The AFŽ accepted the program of the KPJ and defined itself as the one KPJ's organizational form for work among women (1996: 132). The AFŽ created its goals in accordance with the demands of the first Five-Year Plan and redirected its activities. The main AFŽ's task in this period was to bring women into the labour force and, in order to do that, to take care of working mothers and their children (Sklevicky, 1996: 125-127). This corresponds to what happened in the Soviet Union after the introduction of the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), according to Mary Buckley. She claims that women's liberation, until then understood to be achieved through education, joining the labour force etc., at this point started to be seen through "participation in plan fulfilment" (1989: 77).

The final, Dualistic model of the transitional phase (1950-1953), Sklevicky explains as a phase during which the AFŽ went through a lot of (self) criticism for being too formal, bureaucratized and professionalized. This criticism, according to Sklevicky, was a consequence of the ideas of "democratization, decentralization and debureaucratization", incorporated in the political discourse after the introduction of self-management socialism in 1950 in Yugoslavia (1996: 135). Sklevicky says that the AFŽ had a specific role in this period to organize its work according to the KPJ's priorities, for example, to put special emphasis on the work among peasant women and on socializing and rearing pre-school children (1996: 137). According to Božinović, however, after the Third Congress of the AFŽ in 1950, the organization especially focused on the problems of illiteracy and educating peasant women about household and child rearing (hygiene, healthy nutrition, etc.) (1996: 154). According to Sklevicky's analysis of the AFŽ, there were changes in the organizational structure in this period, which became more complex. Namely, after the Third Congress of the AFŽ in 1950

two new assistive organizational forms were introduced within the AFŽ: *sekretarijati* (secretariats) and *aktivni* ('actives'). Secretariats were special bodies that managed and coordinated the work of the AFŽ, while 'actives' were basic units that "intended to be forms of direct democracy from the ground" in order to "trigger the 'self-initiative' of the masses" (1996: 128).

Sklevicky didn't finish her work on this phase of the AFŽ's structure and activities, but Božinović explains how during the Fourth Congress of the People's Front in January 1953, a decision was made about forming special commissions for work among women within the *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda* (the People's Front changed its name into *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda* or Socialist Alliance of the Working People, SSRN, during that congress) (1996: 165-167). The organizational structure of the AFŽ was also discussed at the People's Front's Fourth Congress and the conclusion was that the AFŽ could continue to exist simultaneously with the planned women's commissions, but had to go through changes that would result in the AFŽ becoming "not a uniform and single organization, but more an alliance of several autonomous women's organizations" (Božinović, 1996: 167). Nevertheless, at the Fourth Congress of the AFŽ later that year, the organization was dissolved and a new organization, the *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women's Societies, SŽD) was formed. The Resolution on forming the SŽD emphasized that the existence of a single and uniform organization would "separate women from joint efforts in solving social problems, support the wrong idea about women's position in the society being some kind of separate women's issue and not an issue of the entire society, an issue of all socialist fighters" (quoted in Božinović, 1996: 169). It is still unknown why the AFŽ women decided to dissolve the organization, despite the January 1953 decision to keep the AFŽ.

2.3. Historians' evaluation of the AFŽ's activities and the changes in its organizational structure

Lydia Sklevicky, whose work on the AFŽ is the most detailed (1996), Neda Božinović, who explains thoroughly the AFŽ's work (1996), and other historians who have written about the meaning of the AFŽ for women's emancipation and have provided their evaluation of its activities, all give a general positive evaluation of the AFŽ's early years. Neda Božinović (1917-2001), who was an active member of the AFŽ and a feminist activist in Serbia, claims that Yugoslav women were actively fighting for all rights that they received in the socialist Yugoslav state and that the AFŽ was the organization through which they articulated their needs and demands (1994: 15). Božinović further writes that the AFŽ, besides its role in helping the army during the Second World War, since it was created was fighting against women's oppression, and after the war started to fight against patriarchal customs in Yugoslavia (1994: 15). American political scientist Barbara Jancar-Webster, who has written about women and revolution in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, argues that even though the AFŽ "was not a spontaneous organization of women" (1990: 157), it was an excellent example of what could happen when women who were organized under the Communist Party's sponsorship "inject their own needs and goals into operation" (1999: 78).

Even though Jancar-Webster (without substantive evidence) claims that the AFŽ was never meant to be an organization in which women would represent women, but an organization with an hierarchical top-down structure and the KPJ's "tool to educate and mobilize women for its side of the conflict" (1999: 82), historians argue that the organization made a difference in women's lives. Sklevicky, Božinović, Ramet, and Stojaković agree on the positive influence of the AFŽ on women's position in the political and social spheres. For example, Sklevicky, who raised questions about the reasons for the invisibility and lack of

historians' research on the AFŽ, and while herself providing the first serious historical work on the AFŽ, claims that the AFŽ was the only organization in the post-war period that was a successor of women's hundred years long efforts to become part of the public sphere and to achieve equality in all aspects of social life (1996: 62). Similarly, in her evaluation of the AFŽ's impact on women's everyday life, Božinović writes that the AFŽ gave women opportunities to be active on the local level and to change their communities (1994: 15). She also emphasizes that AFŽ's activists were in direct contact with many women and that because of this "they uncovered the specific problems that the women from various social backgrounds were facing, brought them to public attention, and sought for ways to solve them" (1996: 262).

While analyzing the meaning of the changes in the AFŽ's organizational structure and while criticizing the gradual loss of the AFŽ's autonomy, Sklevicky acknowledges that the AFŽ (and through the AFŽ - women themselves) played a role in achieving positive changes in women's lives until 1949, such as increased literacy rate, entrance in the labour force, better health care, and socialized childrearing through the opening of kindergartens and crèches (1996: 134). Along similar lines, Sabrina Ramet, a US scholar who has focused on East and South-East European affairs, emphasizes that the AFŽ played a very important role for women in many spheres, such as health care and in opening facilities such as restaurants, collective laundries and many others (1999: 93).

Gordana Stojaković, a feminist historian who has been doing research about the AFŽ in Vojvodina for many years, argues that the AFŽ women were working on the reconstruction of the country in the key years after the Second World War and that the AFŽ was the organization through which the idea of a new life for women in socialist society was introduced (quoted in Marčetić, 2013). In her work on the journals of the AFŽ, Stojaković analyses what kind of messages were sent through the journals *Glas žena* (The voice of

women) and *Zora* (The Dawn), how these messages were received and how much influence they had on women's everyday life (2012: 14). She claims that through the AFŽ, women had an opportunity to express themselves and to discuss different issues, and that through the AFŽ's journals opinions about and ideas for solutions to women's problems were available to a large number of women in Yugoslavia (2012: 38).

However, historians have evaluated negatively the changes in the AFŽ's organizational structure after 1948. Sklevicky interprets negatively the changes that happened during the Directive model (1948/1949), specifically, the KPJ positioning itself as a leader of all mass organizations and issuing directives towards them, according to which the AFŽ defined itself as the organizational form of the KPJ's work among women and fulfilled its directives (1996: 132). Sklevicky evaluates these changes as loosening the vertical hierarchical structure of the AFŽ and lowering the level of the organizational autonomy (1989a: 101). She also criticizes the changes that happened in 1950, when the AFŽ introduced a new organizational form, called 'actives'. Sklevicky explains this change as detrimental for the AFŽ, because the organization lost its own vertical lines, 'actives' were "mutually unrelated" and "integrated into the PF [People's Front] on respective hierarchical level" (1989a: 103).

2.4. Historians' interpretation of the dissolution of the AFŽ

After the above mentioned changes in the AFŽ's organizational structure, goals and activities (Sklevicky, 1996; Božinović, 1996), the AFŽ was finally dissolved in 1953 and replaced by the *Savez ženskih društava* (SŽD), which was integrated in the SSRN. Sklevicky, who started to research the AFŽ in the context of the late 1970s, when the first feminist groups appeared in Zagreb, presented the changes in the AFŽ's organizational structure as gradual loss of the organization's autonomy, which transformed the AFŽ into an organization

that “was obediently fulfilling the Party’s directives” (1996: 132). Sklevicky has a very clear position on the changes in the AFŽ’s organizational structure and relations with the KPJ and People’s Front. She claims that the AFŽ could have provided the institutional space for the struggle against women’s discrimination and for the fight against patriarchal society, if only it had insisted on being an “independent mass political organization” (1996: 36).

Other historians have followed Sklevicky’s approach. Barbara Jancar-Webster, for example, in her book about women and revolution in Yugoslavia (1990), relies mostly upon Sklevicky’s earlier work on the AFŽ.³ Jancar-Webster’s narrative about the AFŽ is also a narrative of gradual loss of autonomy until the final subjugation of the AFŽ to the KPJ (1990: 163-167). Even the name of the chapter in which she explains the end of the AFŽ (“The Reassertion of Patriarchy and the End of the AFŽ”) suggests clearly her interpretation of the AFŽ’s dissolution. Jancar-Webster emphasizes that the AFŽ lost its autonomy in 1950, when the organization became just “a transmission belt” of the KPJ (1990: 166). She evaluates the disappearance of women’s separate organizations in 1953 as detrimental, because it “deprived women of an independent organizational base from which to develop a women’s position and to make claims as women upon government and society” (1990: 174).

Along similar lines, Božinović argues that the final shift of women’s issues to the SSRN and the abolishment of the AFŽ in 1953 was “the beginning of the end of organized women’s work in which they defined their own problems and found their own solutions”

³ Lydia Sklevicky died in 1990, and her unfinished doctoral dissertation on the AFŽ was published posthumously in 1996. But she wrote several articles on women’s movement in Yugoslavia, especially on the AFŽ, that were published in 1980s and were available for other historians.

Sklevicky, Lydia. 1989a. “Emancipated Integration or Integrated Emancipation: The Case of Post-revolutionary Yugoslavia” in Arina Angerman et al., ed. *Current Issues in Women’s History*. pp. 93-108. London and New York: Routledge.

Sklevicky, Lydia. 1989b. “More Horses than Women: On the Difficulties of Founding Women’s History in Yugoslavia”, *Gender & History* 1(1): 68–73.

(1994: 16). While framing the dissolution of the AFŽ as a result of patriarchal backlash and claiming that patriarchal society welcomed the abolishment of the AFŽ (1996: 170), Božinović emphasizes that the main problem with this dissolution and the redistribution of responsibilities was that the SSRN was now responsible for conducting activities for women's conscience raising. She argues that the Socialist Alliance didn't pay much attention to these duties "since the most rigid, patriarchal concepts regarding the woman held on obstinately among the members and leadership, and they had no motive whatsoever to renounce their privileged position in the family and in the society" (1996: 263).

Gordana Stojaković explains how women's political engagement and the importance of the AFŽ started to decrease after the introduction of self-management and decentralization in 1950 in Yugoslavia, when the previously established social standards (kindergartens, crèches) became an expensive project for the state (Stojaković, 2012: 18). Stojaković also claims that the idea of a strong fight against patriarchy, which was very present during the war and during the post-war reconstruction of the country, started to disappear in the 1950s Yugoslav state (2012: 18). Very similar to Sklevicky, she concludes that with the dissolution of the AFŽ, women "lost the space for collecting experiences and discussing problems and successes on their way towards women's emancipation" (2012: 38).

What I found equally interesting in Božinović's work on the AFŽ, however, is her remark about contradictions in one essay that was read during the Fourth (last) Congress of the AFŽ in 1953. Božinović points out that the decision was made that work among peasant women would be focused on enlightenment, without any political characteristics, but Bosa Cvetić's essay (who was one of the AFŽ leaders and later one of the SŽD leaders) concluded that "women have to be educated to be fighters for achieving full equality for themselves, the equality that is already recognized by our revolutionary laws" (quoted in Božinović, 1996: 169). Unfortunately, Božinović only briefly mentions this point and doesn't develop it clearly,

but what I found extremely important here - in order to evaluate the dissolution of the AFŽ, as well as the work of its successor organizations - is to ask questions about the boundaries between and meanings of “enlightenment” and “political work” in this context. In other words, we could ask what the idea (and the decision) that the women’s organizations should cease with political work among women actually meant, when we can read in the same essay about the necessity for women to be educated enough to be able to fight for their rights. I think that finding this kind of contradictions could complicate the narrative about the AFŽ’s dissolution as the end of successful work on women’s position in Yugoslavia, because it raises the question about the extent to which the AFŽ’s successors continued and followed the AFŽ’s work and can offer directions for understanding this history in possibly more nuanced ways.

Indeed, recently there is a new approach in historicizing women’s activism in the Cold War era. Young historian Chiara Bonfiglioli, born in 1983, in her doctoral dissertation explores women’s activism in Yugoslavia and Italy during the Cold War and challenges the idea that during this period women’s activism didn’t exist (2012: 22). As I explained in the Introduction of this thesis, Bonfiglioli criticizes second-wave feminist historians for applying the “autonomy principle” while evaluating activities of women’s organizations during the Cold War (2014: 4).

Through this lens, Bonfiglioli is criticizing second-wave feminist historians in Yugoslavia and strives to contextualize their work into the political situation of the time in which they emerged. Particularly, she explains Lydia Sklevicky’s work on the AFŽ and says that Sklevicky started to write about the AFŽ in the context of late 1970s, when the first feminist groups appeared in Yugoslavia (2014: 3). As I mentioned in Introduction, Sklevicky was researching women’s history that was erased from the Yugoslav schoolbooks. She claimed that this erasure of women from the official history corresponded to the general

opinion on women's position in Yugoslavia, which stated that women's liberation came as a consequence of the revolution, not as a consequence of women's struggle for their emancipation (Bonfiglioli, 2014: 3). Bonfiglioli argues that Sklevicky wanted to confront this version of history, but, in the end, by insisting on explaining the dissolution of the AFŽ as a sign of patriarchal backlash, fell in the trap of a new tradition - one that claims the non-existence of women's activism during the Cold War (2014: 4).

Bonfiglioli's approach demands a questioning of the main narrative about the AFŽ and the idea that its dissolution meant the end of meaningful activities of women's organization in Yugoslavia. Instead of being focused on the "autonomy principle", as I already pointed out in the Introduction of this thesis, she suggests to search for different forms of women's agency that existed within the political, economic and social context of the time (2014: 4). Bonfiglioli criticizes the narrative in which the AFŽ was dissolved as a result of patriarchal backlash, the AFŽ leaders' loyalty to the KPJ and fear of feminism, and advocates for a better understanding of the social and political circumstances that led to the dissolution of the organization (2012: 210-211).

Based on her analysis of documents from the Fourth Congress of the AFŽ, Bonfiglioli claims that its leaders dismissed the organization in order to adjust work on women's issues to the new self-management model of socialism (2012: 216). Bonfiglioli emphasizes that the AFŽ's leaders were aware of the difference between the official KPJ's discourse on women's equality and the real conditions on the ground, where local Party leaders didn't support women's liberation, and that exactly *because of this* the AFŽ's leaders considered the AFŽ's dissolution as the best option in that moment (2012: 213). They explained that a separate women's organization was not useful anymore and that work on women's issues should be done by political authorities in a more systematic way (Bonfiglioli, 2012: 214). In short, Bonfiglioli claims that "the fear of being labeled feminist and that a separate women's

organization could foster critique of the socialist authorities certainly played a role, but so did the AFŽ leaders' faith in the possibility to "'mainstream' the issue of equality within the institutions of socialist self-management, and the fear that a separate women's organization would isolate female activists from universal party politics" (2012: 216).

Nevertheless, Bonfiglioli is clear in her evaluation of the meaning of the dissolution of the AFŽ for women's everyday life, which corresponds to some extent to earlier analyses of the AFŽ's dissolution. Namely, Bonfiglioli argues that the dissolution of the separate women's organization didn't mean much in the more developed parts of Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia), where women were already integrated in political life, but the separate organization meant a lot for women in the less developed parts of the country (BiH for example) and its dissolution left them without state support in the fight against patriarchal local structures (2012: 217). In addition, Bonfiglioli advocates for thorough research on the AFŽ's successor organizations (the Union of Women's Societies and the Conference for the Social Activity of Women), which are hardly researched (2012; 2014), and insists on her criticism of the second-wave feminist historians for their a-historical application of the "autonomy principle" in the evaluation of women's organizations during the Cold War.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed books and articles about the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ), published since the 1980s. I first provided basic historical facts about the women's movement in Yugoslavia before the AFŽ and then provided information on the AFŽ's goals, activities and the changes in its organizational structure. Thirdly, I presented historians' evaluations of the AFŽ's activities and changes in the level of autonomy of the organization and finally, I discussed their ideas about the meaning of the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953 for meaningful work on women's problems in Yugoslavia.

The AFŽ was a women's organization formed in 1942 and dismissed and replaced in 1953 with the *Savež ženskih društava* (Union of Women's Societies, SŽD), which was integrated in the SSRN. As I presented above, most historians who have written about the AFŽ claim that its dissolution in 1953 was the end of meaningful work among women in Yugoslavia. Acknowledging the importance of the AFŽ for women's emancipation, historians generally evaluate the AFŽ's early years positively and claim that the organization enhanced women's position in the Yugoslav society.

But the assumption of most historians has been that the dissolution of the AFŽ and the end of women's autonomous organization had a detrimental effect on the work for women's rights and enhancing their position in the society. While researching women's activism in the Cold War era, historian Chiara Bonfiglioli challenges the dominant idea that during this period women's activism was irrelevant or didn't exist. She claims that second-wave feminist historians contributed to this interpretation of women's activism during the Cold War by applying the "autonomy principle" as a measure for meaningful work on women's issues (2014). Bonfiglioli discusses what the notion of autonomy means, and whether it is applicable when we talk about women's organizations in Yugoslavia (2014). By accepting Bonfiglioli's approach to historicize and contextualize women's agency, I think that historians could open a space for researching the activities of the AFŽ's successor organizations - that are still hardly researched (several pages in Božinović, 1996) - and evaluate those activities in more nuanced and complex ways. This is why I decided to follow her approach and to research the SŽD, but without using the term or searching for "women's activism" as such. I will be focused on the SŽDH women's own perspective and I will discuss their activities in the terms which they used themselves when explaining their work.

3. The SŽDH (1953-1961): position, activities, goals and discussions

In chapter 2, I presented the AFŽ in general and I discussed historians' perspectives on the AFŽ and its dissolution in the 1953. In this chapter I move towards the *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women's Societies, SŽD) (1953-1961), the AFŽ's successor organization that is hardly researched. I approach this organization on the level of the *Narodna Republika Hrvatska* (People's Republic of Croatia, NRH) so I analyze documents of the *Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske* (Union of Women's Societies of Croatia, SŽDH). My research is based on the material from the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH's, held on February 27-18, 1957, the First Plenary Session held on January 27-28, 1958, and the Second Plenary Session held on December 6-7, 1960, through which I discuss several topics.

Since there is barely any information on the SŽD in the Yugoslav historiography, I will first provide basic facts about the SŽD in general and the SŽDH in particular: how it was organized, which activities it carried out and when it was dissolved. Secondly, there are different questions and approaches to women's emancipation within state socialism and different ideas about how to achieve it, as well as how to evaluate socialist women's activities, discussed in the introduction of this thesis. In this chapter I will discuss the main field of dispute in the communist thought and practice – whether separate women's organizations were necessary and justified or not – on the example of the discussions and debates, that were going on within the women's organization the SŽDH. Thirdly, I will analyze the debates about the characteristics of the SŽDH's activities and about the main goal of the SŽDH's work, from the perspective of the SŽDH's leaders and rank-and-file members. I'm interested in how those women evaluated themselves and their work and which terms they used in describing their activities. Finally, I will present problems the SŽDH women

were facing in their work. I will ask to what extent these problems and the SŽDH's approaches to them can clarify what kind of activism was possible, suitable and preferred at the time, and how we can evaluate the engagement of the SŽDH women in dealing with the patriarchal society. The bigger issue I aim to answer with this analysis is whether second-wave feminist historians' perception of the AFŽ's dissolution in 1953 as the end of meaningful work on women's issues is justified or not.

3.1. The SŽDH's structure and activities

The *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women's Societies, SŽD) was the women's organization that existed in Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1961. It was the successor of the *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Women's Front, AFŽ). Briefly, at the Fourth Congress of the AFŽ in 1953, the organization was dissolved and the new organization, SŽD, was formed. As I already explained in chapter 2 of this thesis, at the Founding Congress of the SŽD (the last Congress of the AFŽ) it was emphasized that women's organizing should be done differently in order to prevent an understanding of women's issues being only women's concerns and in order to act upon the idea that women's position in society was the responsibility of the entire society.⁴ That is why the SŽD was supposed to exist and work simultaneously with the newly formed *Komisije za rad među ženama* (Commissions for work among women) within the *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda* (Socialist Alliance of the Working People, SSRN). However, according to the decisions of the Fourth Congress of the SSRNJ in 1953 and of the Fourth Congress of the AFŽJ later that year, the SŽD would be responsible for women's enlightenment and the SSRN's women's commissions for the political work among women.⁵ Like the AFŽ, the SŽD had its federal (SŽDJ), republic, and several local levels, but unlike the AFŽ (which was one unique organization), the SŽD was an

⁴ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-1, 1.1., GO SŽDH, February 19, 1957, p.1-7

⁵ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-1, 1.1., GO SŽDH, February 19, 1957, p.1

alliance of a number of organizations, that were searching for solutions for different concrete problems related to women's position within the Yugoslav communist society, such as *prosvjećivanje* (enlightenment), opening child rearing facilities, improving the household etc.⁶ In this thesis I focus on the *Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske* (SŽDH), the SŽD organization on the level of the People's Republic of Croatia.

Since there were no strict rules in terms of organization and activities of the SŽD on the republic and lower levels, each organization could choose its own preferences in work “according to the problems and issues of each city and village”.⁷ In Croatia, the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH was held on February 27-18, 1957, more than three years after the SŽDJ was formed at the federal level. One of the reasons for this delay was precisely this lack of directions and rules for organizing, which I will discuss in the second part of this chapter. The Founding Assembly was attended by delegates from the lower committees, who were supposed to choose new members of the *Glavni odbor* (Main Committee, GO) of the SŽDH, but representatives from other organizations and committees within the SSRN were also invited to attend the meeting.⁸ At the Founding Assembly, the main assignment was to decide on the role and tasks of the Main Committee of the SŽDH. The decision was made that the main tasks of the GO SŽDH should be: to assist working families and to solve the problems of household work in order to help women workers (Krajačić, 1957: 25-27). The GO SŽDH was seen as the body whose role would be, first of all, to initiate and launch different kind of social actions, according to specific contexts in which local SŽD's committees were operating (Berus, 1957: 63).

Even though there were discussions on how to organize work among peasant women (Krajačić, 1957: 33; Jančić, 1957: 51-53), village and peasant women's problems were not in

⁶ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-1, 1.1., GO SŽDH, February 19, 1957, p.1

⁷ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-1, 1.1., GO SŽDH, February 19, 1957, p.1

⁸ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, October 2, 1956

the focus of the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH, which was clear from the very title of the published book of essays that had been read during the Founding Assembly: *Pomoć radnoj porodici i radnoj ženi – naš osnovni zadatak* (Assistance to the working family and to the working woman – our main task). Soka Krajačić, a member of the Presidency of the Main Committee of the SSRNH and also a president of the GO of the SŽDH, in her evaluation of the SŽD's past work, claimed that one of the major problems was that most of the women's societies were formed in the cities, whereas the villages were neglected (1957: 23).

The SŽDH was helping working women and working families in several ways: through organizing crèches and kindergartens; through advocating and taking steps towards socializing household work in order to ease the burden of working mothers, but also through providing courses for better dealing with the household work, which was contested within the organization, as I will discuss in the third part of this chapter (Krajačić, 1957). In her essay, Soka Krajačić presented mostly similar tasks and achievements of the SŽD on the local levels: taking care of nutrition, schools' restaurants and restaurants within the commune or enterprise and organizing household courses (1957: 21-22).

At the Plenary Session one year later, on 27-28 January, 1958, similar topics as at the Founding Assembly in 1957, were discussed, with slightly more emphasis on the duties of the commune (discussed in Chapter 1) in solving working women's problems, in accordance with the general idea of including the entire society in solving women's problems (discussed in Chapter 2 and further in the second section of this chapter). More attention was paid to villages and women's role in collective farming.⁹ Jela Jančić, one of the leaders of the Women's section within the cooperatives, in her essay "Referat o problemima žena-seljanki i Sekciji žena-zadrugarki" ("Essay on the problems of women peasants' and the women's section within cooperatives"), explained how the Women's section within the so called

⁹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958

zadruga (cooperatives) was the best suitable organizational form of the SŽD for work among and for peasant women. Jančić emphasized how the main task of the Women's section was to draw women into cooperatives through advocating for the opening of services that could make it easier for them to enter the cooperatives.¹⁰ Basically, the Sections were conducting very similar activities as the other SŽD's organizations, but in accordance with the new rules of adapting to the needs of women in specific contexts, they found this form being most suitable for the work among peasant women.

Apart from the essay on peasant women, the majority of the essays were discussing how to help working women and working families through including the entire commune in solving a number of issues. One of the members of the GO of the SŽDH, Milka Planinc (later the prime minister of Yugoslavia, 1982-1986), explained how this idea came from the Fifth Plenary Session of the SSRNJ held in 1957, where it was discussed how to enhance women's position by including the entire society in solving a number of social and economic issues.¹¹ Approaches and ideas given during the SŽDH's Plenary Session in 1958 were actually similar to those proposed at the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH a year earlier: together with other social factors (local people's committees of the SSRN, enterprises) to take care of children and child rearing facilities, as well as to maintain already existing services and open new services for socializing household work.¹²

What was specific for the SŽDH was its unusually good relationship with the women's section within the Unions. Historian Neda Božinović points out in her book on the women's movement in Yugoslavia that the SŽD in general didn't pay much attention to women workers, since this was supposed to be an Union's duty. But, unlike the SŽD in other Yugoslav republics, the SŽDH was giving strong support to women's sections within the

¹⁰ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 2.day, morning, p. 17-24

¹¹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, morning, p. 1

¹² HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, morning, p. 14-44

Unions, and these sections were very successful in solving women's workers problems within the self-management enterprises (1996: 175). As I already explained, it was clear from the discussions and essays, both in Founding Assembly in 1957 and Plenary Session in 1958, that easing the burden of women workers was the main activity of the SŽDH, but apart from that, the SŽDH cooperated successfully with the women's section within the Main Committee of Unions. The member of that section, Ružica Turković, praised the SŽDH during the Plenary Session in 1958 for the good cooperation and the support in advocating for more services, better qualification courses for female workers, etc.¹³

As discussed in chapter 1, Yugoslavia experienced economic growth during the 1950s, which resulted in fulfilling the Five-Year Plan (1957-1961) one year before its official end. The next plan was supposed to start already in 1961, and that is why the next (and according to documents last) SŽDH's Plenary Sessions on December 6-7, 1960 was mostly focused on it. The SŽDH women discussed how to integrate solutions for a number of problems women were dealing into the next Five-Year Plan (1961-1965). Again, a book with essays from the Plenary Session was published with, entitled *Što petogodišnji plan donosi porodici i kakve perspektive otvara ženama* (What the Five-Year Plan brings to the family and which perspectives it opens for women). Irena Bijelić, member of the GO of the SŽDH and president of the Council for Social Security of the NRH, in her essay (with the title the same as the book's title) emphasized two main issues to deal with: how to help the family and how to make it possible for women to enter manufacturing and social activities in high numbers (1960: 11). The problems Bijelić emphasized did not differ much from the problems discussed at the SŽDH's Founding Assembly in 1957 and in First Plenary Session in 1958. At all three SŽDH's meetings that I analyze, the problems to deal with and the solution provided were similar, but this time the Plenary Session was all about emphasizing all these issues in

¹³ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.30-33

order to make them an official part of the Five-Year Plan. Bijelić articulated “constantly present issue of women’s position in society” and said that the main problems which should be addressed in the Five-Year Plan were: women’s segregation in female dominated industries, the low qualification of the female labour force, the inadequate school system which put female students in a disadvantaged position, and the bad attitude of cooperatives towards women producers (1960: 22).

At the same Plenary Session in 1960, it was clear that new changes in the women’s organizations would be introduced. I will say more about the discussions on this topic in the next part of this chapter, but here it is important to state that changes in the work among women were debated at the Fifth Congress of the SSRNJ in April 1960. Soka Krajačić informed her *drugarice* (female comrades) at the Plenary Session of the SŽDH in December 1960 about those possible changes.¹⁴ She said that the name of the SSRN’s Women’s commission for work among women had been changed into Commission for the social activity of women and that, according to the new rules, neither the SSRN’s commissions; nor the SŽD’s committees should be vertically connected.¹⁵ In other words, hierarchical vertical structure, in which lower committees communicate and receive directions from the higher committees, shouldn’t exist. Krajačić said that all the changes were made in order to achieve a higher decentralization and to put emphasis on solving the problems of families and women at the level of the commune, according to each local context.¹⁶

Krajačić also mentioned that, during the Fifth Congress of the SSRNJ, it was proposed to dissolve the SŽD, but the decision was left to the next Congress of the SŽDJ.¹⁷ Among the SŽDH’s documents I couldn’t find information on that following Congress of the SŽD of

¹⁴ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.183a-198

¹⁵ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.190-193

¹⁶ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.185

¹⁷ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.194

Yugoslavia, but, according to historian Božinović, it never happened (1996: 184). Instead, the Assembly of SŽDJ was held in April 1961, where the decision was taken to abolish the SŽD and to form the *Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena* (Conference for the Social Activity of Women, KDAŽ), which continued to exist, with several changes in its name, until 1990 (Božinović, 1996: 184).

3.2. How should women be organized?

The Yugoslav socialist state (federal level) was searching for an answer to the complex question of how best to deal with enhancing women's position in society. Should that be done through separate women's organizations or not? This question was also ubiquitous on the republic and district level and occupied lots of space in the archival documents from the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH, held on February 27-18, 1957. Even though the SŽDJ was officially formed in 1953, it took three years for the Founding Assembly of the organization on the republic (Croatian) level to happen. Some of the issues discussed during the Founding Assembly, which I will present in this part, were: Why is important to have women's organizations? Is it necessary and if so, why? If we decide to have them, which type of structure should we introduce? Should it be an uniform and autonomous organization or an alliance of different organizations/associations which will be dealing with specific women's issues in each district, while leaving the political work among women to the SSRN?. These discussions continued at the Plenary Sessions in 1958 and 1960.

At the Founding Assembly in 1957, the leaders of the SŽDH discussed these issues several times. In her essay "Naš rad je društvena aktivnost – u izgradnji socijalističkog društva i pomoći radnoj ženi" ("Our work is social activity – in the construction of the socialist community and in assistance to the female worker"), Soka Krajačić, president of the Main Committee of the SŽDH, explained that this was the first assembly of the women's

organization in Croatia (republic level) after the last Fourth Congress of the AFŽH in 1949. She presented what the AFŽH did until the dissolution of the AFŽ on the federal level in 1953. While emphasizing its main activities: the enlightenment of women, literacy courses, assistance to female workers, but also political work among women, Krajačić said (similar to the conclusion of the AFŽJ last Congress in 1953) that:

“[...] a series of these problems, which the women’s organization was solving, were treated as specifically women’s and not as societal issues. Thus, searching for the solution of these problems didn’t have the full support from the overall society. Within this process, the AFŽ - which was active as a part of the People’s Front at the time and worked on women’s political education and elevation and many other practical issues related particularly to women’s position – was actually separating itself from the framework of the general social fight for women’s rights. The AFŽ secluded itself in this struggle” (1957: 18).

Additionally, Krajačić emphasized that the AFŽ had to be dissolved. Despite its excellent success in the work among women, the organization became too “narrow” and was unable to deal with all activities that were necessary for solving women’s many problems (1957: 19).

Women from the lower SŽDH’s committees expressed the same opinion. A document from the Founding Assembly of one District Committee of the SŽDH in *Hrvatsko zagorje* (a region in the north of Croatia), for example clearly said that “women’s social activity has surpassed the narrow frames of specific women's organizations and today women are participating, in almost all social activities and there is no topic that our women would not be interested in”.¹⁸ Additionally, the document explained that the SŽD, as a new type of organization, was “not as sturdy as the AFŽ, but adjusted to the needs of women of some

¹⁸ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, October 1, 1956

particular region. The SŽD consists of many associations which are dealing with particular questions”.¹⁹

Soka Krajačić, president of the Main Committee of the SŽDH, also explained the somewhat extraordinary fact that the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH was held three years after the Founding Assembly of the SŽD on the federal level. She explained how the GO of the SŽDH didn't want to insist on forming associations just to have them, but instead wanted women to gather around certain activities and then form associations according to the specific issues they were struggling with (1957: 20). Members of the GO of the SŽDH were thinking that, if the GO insisted on forming societies, women could be directed to form separate women's organizations, which would reduce their participation in political organizations, where they worked to solve many problems related to women's position (1957: 20).

The statements presented above could be seen as support for historian Chiara Bonfiglioli's claims about the dissolution of the AFŽ, which go against usual the interpretation of the dissolution of the AFŽ, discussed in chapter 2. While analyzing documents from the Fourth Congress of the AFŽ, Bonfiglioli claims that it is evident that its leaders dismissed the organization in order to adjust work on women's issues to the new self-management model of socialism (2012: 216).

But although all SŽDH leaders argued against a uniform and separate women's organization like the AFŽ was, at one point they were justifying their own existence as an alliance of women's associations within the SSRN, hence still in a way a separate women's organization. Anka Berus, member of the GO of the SŽDH and member of the Executive Council of the NRH's Parliament, started her essay “Treba se boriti za radnu kvalifikaciju žena” (“We have to fight for women's professional qualifications”), with the question whether

¹⁹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, October 1, 1956

Croatia needed specific women's associations, since women had all rights and participated in political life. She explained that according to data, women's associations justified their existence since in every place where they were formed around specific problems that women had, women were participating in high numbers (1957: 48). She concluded that through women's societies, many problems could be solved much faster and easier than through other organizations (1957: 48).

Along similar lines, in the material from the Founding Assembly of one District Committee of the SŽDH in *Hrvatsko zagorje*, leaders of the District explained that there always was the question of whether it was necessary or not to have women's associations, since women had already attained all rights, but the practice actually showed that women's societies could be very helpful in finding solutions for women's specific problems in particular counties.²⁰ Additionally, the document said that the women's organization was necessary because the situation on the ground was difficult for women and in practice they were not equal to men. Many problems prevented women from participating in social and political life and the biggest problem was the overload of domestic labour.²¹

Similarly, a separate document from the Plenary Session in 1958, also stated that there were lots of discussions about how to approach women's organization. It said that "there were opinions that all [women's] problems are problems of the entire society", which was why some people asked, "why then to have a women's organization, since it can't solve those problems".²² The question was "why not to solve all problems related to women's role and position within the socialist society through the SSRN". However, the answer provided in the next paragraph was that in the districts, where discussions were not going on and the SŽD had

²⁰ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, October 1, 1956

²¹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, October 1, 1956

²² HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, p.1

begun to work, “the initial work justified the organization’s existence through the SŽD’s good results and its cooperation with the local people’s committees and other social institutions”.²³

Soka Krajačić justified the existence of the SŽDH towards the end of her essay by claiming that in practice, there were often no other organizations that would deal with problems of women’s position in society. Still, she said that there were no reasons why this should stay only in the framework of women’s organizations, since these were the problems of the entire society (1957: 23). The whole necessity for the justification of the SŽDH’s existence was actually related to the idea that there were no specific women’s issues, only issues of the entire society and that the entire society had to help women workers and working families to solve the everyday problems, such as better nutrition, childcare or socializing domestic labour (Krajačić, 1957: 23). The SŽDH leaders kept inviting other organizations to join in finding solutions for social (not only women’s) problems that the SŽD was dealing with (Krajačić, 1957: 23), but these organizations often didn’t perform their tasks, but often in vain.

Bosa Cvetić, president of the Central committee of the SŽD of Yugoslavia (SŽDJ), in her essay “Društva žena nisu se odvojila od općedruštvenih zadataka” (“Women’s societies are not detached from general social activities”) explained debates that were going on in the period between the last Congress of the AFŽ in 1953 and the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH in 1957 and said that all the time the question was, “is our work useful or not” and “whether is it enough for women just to join to the SSRN, engage there to the full extent and try to find solutions for women’s problems from those positions” (1957: 56). She argued that a scenario in which a separate women’s organization would result in smaller participation of women within the SSRN and isolate them didn’t happen. Instead, “women didn’t leave other political and social organizations, they still work there” and the biggest success of the SŽD

²³ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, p.1

was that it managed to draw new women activists into the political and social sphere (1957: 56). She was actually arguing for a double strategy: for simultaneously organizing both in the regular SSRN's institutions and in separate women's organizations.

Anka Berus was explaining a similar thing, when she criticized the SŽD's activists who were complaining about comrades' behavior towards them (see below). According to Berus, sentences such as "comrades didn't give us, comrades promised us" were unacceptable since at least half of women present on that Plenary Session (1958) "worked in some of the people's committees" and there were "no one who, apart from being active in the SŽD, was not also active in some other form of social management".²⁴ That was why women were supposed to work on all issues within these institutions, and within communes. In other words they had to, according to Berus, work on enhancing women's position in the society, not to beg comrades for anything.²⁵

At the Plenary Session in 1960 other SŽD's leaders and rank-and file members expressed almost same opinions. Irena Bijelić, member of the GO of the SŽDH, concluded that women, apart being active in the SŽD and discussing problems within the women's organization, "should discuss these issues in all positions, which our society created for debates and adoptions of collective proposals and conclusions, therefore at union's meetings, working councils, institutions of League of Communists..." (1960: 27). Activist from lower committees also recognized this need. Jelica Radojčević from Koprivnica (a small city in the north of Croatia) said that it would be excellent if, as a result of conclusions of that Plenary Session, all institutions would help in solving different kind of problems. It would be especially good, Radojčević said, if it would be possible to mobilize "women who work in the municipal people's committees, the councils of the municipal people's committees, and in

²⁴ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.39

²⁵ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.30-33

management positions in other socio-political organizations” in solving all those issues (1960: 94). While emphasizing that the conclusions of the Plenary Sessions should be used as directions for solving problems within the communes, Milka Planinc explained that the Main Committee of the SŽDH invited “other [female] comrades to put these issues [the problems of working families and female workers and the problem of people’s living standard] on the agenda of all political organizations, first of all on the agenda of the SSRN” (1960: 127).

As is obvious from the quotes above, the SŽDH women at the Plenary Session in 1960 continued to advocate for a double strategy in women’s organizing. But as already mentioned in the first part of this chapter, just before this SŽDH’s 1960 Plenary Session, the Fifth Congress of the SSRNJ was held, during which women’s organizing was discussed further in accordance with a greater decentralization of the country and putting emphasis on solving every problem on the level of the commune.²⁶ Soka Krajačić emphasized that during 1960 discussions over the role of the SŽD, which started in 1953, continued²⁷ and that the SSRNJ suggested the dissolution of the SŽD.²⁸ This final decision was left to the next Congress of the SŽD, and Krajačić was clear in explaining the SŽDH’s leaders’ position. They obviously wanted to continue with the double strategy of organizing women, both in separate organizations and within the SSRN, because they saw the need for a separate women’s organization. According to Krajačić, the SŽDH leaders were clear in their position that “in our Republic there is no need for orders to dissolve districts’ committees of the SŽD, because this has to be decided in each and every committee in every district, according to practical needs”.²⁹

²⁶ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.185

²⁷ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.184

²⁸ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.194

²⁹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.5., GO SŽDH, December 6-7, 1960, p.194

3.3. *Polemics over the main goal of the organization*

Here, I will first analyse discussions that took place during the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH's and First Plenary Session held on January 1958 about the importance of the "political work" among women, in order to see how the SŽDH's leaders and members saw their own work and what was important for them to emphasize about that work. Thus, I will try to give answers to several questions: Which terms were the SŽDH women using in describing their goals and activities? What can we conclude from the fact that the SŽDH women were discussing very thoroughly their own position and that they were searching for a new solution of women's organizing in the new system of self-management socialism and decentralization of Yugoslavia? What does the insistence on labelling the SŽDH's work as "political" - even though, in the division of labour between the SSRN's commissions and the SŽDH, "political work" was supposed to be the SSRN commissions' activity - by the SŽDH leaders, tell us about how they saw themselves, and how did they evaluate the organization's activities and goals?

The president of the Main Committee of SŽDH, Soka Krajačić, reminded her *drugarice* of the conclusion of the last AFŽ Congress that the political work among women should be performed in the framework of the SSRN. She claimed that the idea behind this decision was to prevent an isolation of women in separate organization and to move the "political work" among women to the SSRN "where overall political activity is going on", while at the same time to encourage the forming of different women's associations in order to solve specific women's problems of each district (1957: 19).

Krajačić several times emphasized that the main goal of the SŽDH's activities was to enable women's participation in the political and social life of Croatia. For example, while evaluating the activities of the Main Committee of the SŽDH, she insisted that it "was approaching all issues with the idea of providing assistance to the women workers, which

aimed to enable women's higher participation in the political and social spheres" (1957: 30). What is visible from Soka Krajačić's remarks is the struggle of the SŽDH's leadership to position itself in the new system and to figure out what was the SŽDH's status within it. Even though officially the SŽDH was not supposed to conduct "political work" among women for the above mentioned reasons, I think it was really important for Soka Krajačić to explain that the SŽDH's activities still could be labeled as political activities. This is the most evident when she criticized the SŽDH's work on providing household courses for women and at the same time defended the organization (1957: 32-33). As I explained above, apart from providing facilities and services for the working family, the SŽDH was also teaching women how to better deal with all domestic labour through household courses for women. Krajačić said that this could be seen as one of the reasons for the backlash in understanding women's position in society – as a mother and housewife (1957: 32-33). She said that because of the household courses, "it seems that our only goal is to teach women how to cook, to tidy apartments and to take care of children", but she insisted that the SŽDH was conducting this activity also "in order to make it possible for women to participate more in the political and social life" (1957: 33). At the end of her essay, Krajačić again explained that everything they did was "in order to help women in overcoming obstacles for their greater participation in the political and social life" (1957: 34).

Mika Špiljak, a (male) member of the Presidency of the Main Committee of SSRNH, who was participating in the discussion during the Founding Assembly, explicitly claimed in his essay "Aktivnost društva žena je društveno-politička aktivnost" ("The activities of the women's societies are socio-political activities") that the SŽDH was conducting "political activities" (1957: 63). I found his essay extremely important because of his remarks on the meaning of the socio-political work in the new moment for the Yugoslav state. Even though the Resolution on forming the SŽD in 1953 stated that political work among women should

be removed to SSRN's special committees for work among women, Špiljak asked in his introduction "Where do these ideas about the SŽD not conducting political activities come from?" (1957: 63). He argued that in the new circumstances the SŽD's activities were for sure socio-political activities and he blamed some political actors for not being able to see socio-political character of the SŽD's work, saying that they failed to see how political work meant something else than it meant during the war (1957: 63). Špiljak tried to explain that the political work during WW2, such as the "fight against chetniks, ustashas or the fight for independence" was not relevant or important anymore and that "there [were] completely different problems in our society at the moment" (1957: 63).

Maybe the best comparison between what was seen as important during WW2 and what was seen as urgent in the 1950s and 1960s in Yugoslavia was made several years later, at the Plenary Session of the SŽDH in 1960. SŽDH member Nada Sremec strived to explain what the main task of all women should be. In her words, all of them should "learn, learn, learn" because "just as during the war one had to fight", today's task is to study in every field: from ideological education, to general, professional and political education" (1960: 104).

Bosa Cvetić, president of the Central committee of the SŽD of Yugoslavia (SŽDJ), claimed that "it seems from the outside that we narrowed the scope of our work" (1957: 55), and "that we are preoccupied with irrelevant problems" (1957: 56) compared to the political work of the AFŽ, but actually the SŽD's work was "widespread and diverse" (1957: 55). Similar to Mika Špiljak's remarks about the different nature of the political work, Cvetić argued that "in these conditions, if an organization doesn't have political program, it doesn't have to mean that it is apolitical", because in the overall work of the SŽD "there was no activity that wouldn't be in line with the general struggle for building our socialist society" (1957: 59). In other words, everything that the SŽDH was doing was in order to build socialism.

The notes for a book of essays from the SŽDH Founding Assembly's clearly stated that the overall conclusion on the role of the SŽDH was that its goal was women's participation in political life. It was stated in the document that "the first Assembly of the SŽDH produced rich material and gave orientation for further work with women in solving a series of questions and problems in order to help them in their efforts to enter all sectors of the social life and in their struggle for full political and social affirmation".³⁰

During the Plenary Session of the SŽDH on January 27-28, 1958, several leaders referred to this issue as well. Anka Berus, while advocating for the cooperation of the SŽDH with other social factors and while claiming that all women's specific problems could and had to be solved within the commune, she emphasized that this approach would "contribute to enormous women's political enlightenment and their participation in social activities".³¹ When she spoke about kindergartens, Irena Bijelić emphasized that one of the purposes of opening kindergartens was to "enable parents to enter political and social life".³² While analyzing the overall work of the SŽD, Marija Šoljan, member of the GO of the SŽDH, said that they "couldn't be satisfied, but also they couldn't be unsatisfied" because there were improvements in women's political participation and women had been elected to the district and local committees of the SSRN in higher numbers in 1953 than in the elections in 1950.³³ It is clear that she thought that the SŽD's work helped women to enter the political life and that the SŽD should continue to take care of women's political participation. At the same Plenary Session, it was several times emphasized that the session was held intentionally just before the elections for the People's Assembly and the Parliament of the NRH. Šoljan concluded that it was necessary to organize meetings with women on the ground to enhance

³⁰ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, February, 1957

³¹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.43

³² HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, morning, p.14

³³ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 2.day, p.33

their participation in elections, because “experience from last elections showed that very good results were achieved in places where separate meetings with women were held”.³⁴

Šoljan also stressed another issue, which can be illustrative for the position of the SŽDH leaders on the women’s question in Yugoslavia. Apart from the next elections, the second most important topic at the Plenary Session in 1958 was the preparation for the next International Women’s Day on March 8. When women from lower SŽDH’s committees gave reports on the preparations in their committees, Šoljan warned them about the content of the celebration. She said that “in recent years March 8 started to have characteristics of Mother’s Day”, which she highly disapproved of.³⁵ Šoljan emphasized that the GO of the SŽDH already “gave guidelines that March 8 should be celebrated differently, that it should be a socio-political manifestation for all women, not only for mothers”, because “women achieved so many results in our socialist community” and March 8 should be celebrated accordingly.³⁶

In contrast to the Founding Assembly and the First Plenary Session, at the Second Plenary Session 1960, which focused on the new Five-Year Plan and on manufacture, “political work” was barely mentioned. Irena Bijelić explained that she did not mention women’s political participation in her essay “not because they [the SŽDH] consider it an irrelevant question, but because this question is directly related to the first one [women’s participation in manufacture]” (1960: 23). She argued that “women’s greater participation in skilled jobs and the presence in manufacture” would lead to “women’s greater participation in authority and management bodies” (1960: 23).

³⁴ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 2.day, p.35

³⁵ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 2.day, p.35

³⁶ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 2.day, p.35

3.4. Which problems were the SŽDH women facing in their practical work?

Here, I will present problems the SŽDH women were facing in their work. What were the biggest problems women were dealing with? What can we conclude from these problems and the SŽDH's reaction towards them about the society they lived in and about what kind of activism was possible and suitable at the time? How can we evaluate the SŽDH engagement in dealing with the patriarchal society?

The consequence of these debates and of a looser structure of the organization, compared to the AFŽ's, was a temporary paralysis in the women's activities in some districts. An indicative example is one from the above mentioned *Hrvatsko zagorje*, where during the forming of the District committee of the SŽDH women emphasized that "there are no strict directives or rules for our work, because every district or region has its own specific issues". They evaluated these changes as being helpful because "strict directives could maybe prevent work on the ground". On the other hand, they referred to the period of three years after the dissolution of the AFŽ and before forming this committee of the SŽDH in their district and said that "we have to be careful not to transform this liberty in organizing and acting into a complete neglecting of the work among women, which happened in the region before".³⁷

The problem of the "political work" among women was not solely a problem on the level of the SŽDH's leadership discussions. Problems related to this "political work" were the biggest problems that the SŽDH's members were facing on the ground. It is evident from several essays from the SŽDH Founding Assembly in 1957 that the 'comrades' from the SSRNH's Commissions for work among women weren't doing their job, that is, they often neglected their tasks on raising women's political consciousness and providing political education for women.

³⁷ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.2.1., GO SŽDH, October 1, 1956

Maybe the most direct critique towards the SSRN came from Soka Krajačić when she asked “why there are not more women in leadership positions within the SSRN” (1957: 32), although women were very active in all social organizations. She argued that one of the reasons must be that “the SSRN doesn’t take care of political work among women; neither does it keep track of women’s participation in the social life” (1957: 32). Moreover, she briefly repeated that the decision of the Fourth Plenary Session of the SSRNJ (and also of the Fourth Congress of the AFŽJ) was that the political work with women had to be conducted within the SSRN, but then she stated that “SSRN’s organizations don’t know much about women’s activities” or about the “problems that women are dealing with” and how this really “makes it difficult to work on enlightenment and an intensive raising of women’s political consciousness” (1957: 32). Krajačić concluded that there was a backlash in understanding women’s position in the Yugoslav society and that the lack or the non-existence of political work among women was one of the reasons for that backlash (1957: 32).

Other leaders also criticized the SSRN for not fulfilling its duties and suggested to the SŽD to perform those duties. Anka Berus, for example, said that the SŽDH should put pressure on the SSRN and maybe conduct activities that should be performed by the SSRN. She emphasized that women’s societies “should ask the SSRN to solve some special issues if the SSRN doesn’t take it in its own hands” because “in politics, everybody can knock on everybody’s door and has right to ask questions and raise issues that one thinks have to be solved” (1957: 50).

The SŽDH not only had a problem with the political work among women not being conducted by those responsible for it. In addition, organizations that were supposed to work with them on solving the problems of female workers and working families didn’t do their jobs either. For example, while explaining that the role of the SŽDH Main Committee was to help working families by opening kindergartens together with other responsible organizations,

Soka Krajačić was worried about the condition of the kindergartens and their future because the SŽDH “found omissions and irresponsibility even among those social factors that are legally obliged to take care of kindergartens” (1957: 26).

Krajačić’s and Berus’s critique could be seen in light of feminist historian and activist Neda Božinović’s critique of the transfer of political work among women to the SSRN, almost 40 years after. She interpreted the dissolution of the AFŽ as the result of a patriarchal backlash (1996: 170), which I discussed in the chapter on the AFŽ. But, as I also already mentioned, Božinović points out that the redistribution of responsibilities between the SSRN and the SŽD caused serious problems on the ground, since the SSRN simply didn’t take its duties seriously (1996: 263). From archival documents that I analyzed above, the same conclusion can be drawn.

Maybe the most illustrative examples of what kind of problems women from the SŽD were facing and how they struggled with them are those of SŽDH’s member Nevja Zakinja from Pula (a town in Istria), given during the Plenary Session in January 1958. She thought that the biggest achievement of the SŽD in her district was that problems which bothered women were now finally discussed during the meetings of the District committees of the SSRN. But she was also complaining about the comrades’ reaction towards the SŽD members’ demands: they often said there was no money for solving a certain issue in order to help women from the community.³⁸ That is why women from the SŽD were very “resolute” and tried to fight for what they wanted. She gave the example of crèches in Istria and said that the comrades wanted to close some crèches because of a lack of money, but women from the SŽD visited the comrades and explained them that the SŽD wouldn’t let this happen.³⁹

³⁸ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.1-2

³⁹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.5

Nevia Zakinja explained that she was saying this “to show how often and easily comrades and authorities made decisions on closing facilities for childcare”. The SŽD’s activists managed to prevent the authorities from doing that, but the communication between the SŽD and the people’s committees was in general poor. Zakinja said that the SŽD women called presidents of working councils or managers of enterprises for a meeting to include them in solving women’s workers problems, but they didn’t have success in this undertaking. Most of the time, she said, women had to go and try to convince comrades from Union’s councils or the local SSRN’s committees of taking them seriously. In the end of her speech Zakinja concluded that “the biggest problem is that we have to go there and struggle to persuade them that we are talking about real problems”.⁴⁰

Similar problems were pointed out by other women at the SŽDH’s Plenary Session in 1958. Jelka Marković from the SŽD in Virovitica (a city in the north of Croatia) explained how women were struggling while organizing the SŽD in their district. Women gave their best to organize women’s societies according to the specific problems in their community, but “the comrades tricked them [the SŽD women]” by saying that women can “rely on the SSRN, which will bear the costs [of organizing]”.⁴¹ In but in the end the SSRN was not helpful at all and everything that women got from their comrades was only “one corner of the table, where already three comrades were working”.⁴²

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided basic facts about the SŽDH, presented discussions which were going on within the SŽDH in the 1950s around the complex issue of women’s organizing in Yugoslavia, explained what was the main dispute over the SŽDH’s goals,

⁴⁰ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.6

⁴¹ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.21

⁴² HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.21

provided an example of the SŽDH's approach to women's position in society and summarized problems the SŽDH women were facing in their work.

I analyzed archival material from the Founding Assembly of the SŽDH's, held on February 27-18, 1957, the First Plenary Session held on January 27-28, 1958, and the Second Plenary Session held on December 6-7, 1960. I approached these documents from a bottom-up perspective, striving to show the SŽDH women's agency. I tried to demonstrate how these women saw themselves, what was important for them and which language they used to describe their activities and position in the Yugoslav communist society. The SŽDH leaders discussed the position of their organization within the new circumstances of self-management socialism and decentralization in Yugoslavia in the 1950s. It was important for them to explain why the AFŽ had to be dissolved and to emphasize how, in the new context, the entire society had to work on solving the problems of women's position in the community. Although, the SŽDH's leaders and rank-and-file members agreed with the dissolution of the AFŽ, they justified the existence of a somewhat separate women's organization, because they regarded this as the only way to solve specific women's issues in particular districts, cities or villages. Apart from justifying the existence of the SŽDH, some leaders strongly advocated for a form of double organizing: to fight for women's liberation *both* in a separate organization *and* within the SSRN. It seems that the SŽDH women really believed this was the right approach to women's liberation.

The SŽDH's leaders were trying to position themselves and to figure it out what was their role in the new circumstances in Yugoslavia. They often emphasized that, although this was supposed to be the SSRN's task, the SŽDH's work could be labelled as "political work". It was extremely important for the SŽDH women to prove that they were not just explaining women how to do housework, but that all the SŽDH's activities were performed in order to enhance women's position in the political and social sphere. It was obvious from the problems

that the SŽDH women were facing on the ground that they didn't receive much help from other institutions, as they were supposed to. Often, the biggest obstacle in their work was exactly the disparaging behaviour from comrades from the SSRN. Therefore, I would agree with the historian Chiara Bonfiglioli's opinion that the AFŽ's leaders (which later became the SŽD's leaders) decided to dissolve the AFŽ in order to try to find a solution for achieving women's equality within the self-management institutions, where all political activities were going on (2012: 216). But, what is obvious from the documents that I analyzed, this idea was not implemented well enough, primarily because of the lack of cooperation from the SSRN. Nevertheless, I believe that the SŽDH's work shouldn't be judged as not meaningful, as several historians who evaluated the end of the AFŽ as the end of meaningful work on enhancing women's position in Yugoslavia did, just because in the SŽDH women had problems with the implementation of the new structure. As I demonstrated in the last part of the chapter, those women on the ground were fighting for what they considered as important, and the leaders (such as Soka Krajačić) were openly and publicly criticizing the SSRN for not fulfilling its duties.

As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, the mainstream paradigm in the scholarly literature about the official women's organizations in state socialist countries still disparages them as "Party tools". By contrast, my analysis of archival documents of the SŽDH showed that the SŽDH women had their own voices and opinions; that they strived to enhance women's position in society in a way they found the most suitable for the context they lived in; and that they discussed at large the SŽDH's position in the circumstances of self-management and tried to find solutions for the problems they were facing on the ground. Therefore, I argue that the SŽDH can't be labelled as "Party tool" and that the SŽDH women's work should not be erased from the historiography on the Yugoslav women's movement.

Conclusion

“Comrades, we are proceeding with our meeting. [...] It has been exactly 15 years since the first Antifascist Women's Front conference was held in Bosanski Petrovac on December 6-7, 1942. [...] This year we are celebrating the 15th anniversary of that great and important date”.⁴³ These were the words of SŽDH Main Committee Marija Šoljan at the SŽDH Plenary Session in 1958. The SŽDH women celebrated the establishment of the women's antifascist organization, and it is evident that they were proud of everything the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ) had done for women in Yugoslavia. After analyzing archival documents, I believe the SŽDH women considered the SŽDH as a successor of the AFŽ, which continued the AFŽ's efforts, but in a different way. The SŽDH women saw themselves as part of continuum, but while historians have written about the AFŽ, *their* contributions were erased from women's history in Yugoslavia. This continuum is not visible in scholarly works on Yugoslav women's history. Historical overviews usually start with the AFŽ and continue with the feminist movement in the 1970s, suggesting that after the dissolution of the AFŽ in 1953 there was nothing noteworthy for women's history until the 1970s. The AFŽ's successor organizations remained almost completely unresearched.

In a broader sense, this thesis could be seen as part of emerging scholarly work on rethinking the complex relations between feminism and socialism. I examined the case of one of the AFŽ's successor organizations in order to understand better what was happening in a forgotten period of Yugoslav women's history. I looked at the *Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske* (Union of Women's Societies of Croatia, SŽDH), the organization that existed from 1953 to 1961 in the People's Republic of Croatia. First, I wanted to explore what the SŽDH women did, in order to be able to rethink second-wave feminist historians' perception of the

⁴³ HR-HDA-KDAŽH 1234-2, 2.4.4., GO SŽDH, January 27-28, 1958, 1.day, afternoon, p.23

AFŽ's dissolution in 1953 as the end of meaningful work on women's issues. Second, I wanted to find out whether historians' negative evaluation of the SŽDH as "Party tool" - which is the general scholarly narrative about official women's organization in state socialist countries - was justified in this case.

I first provided basic facts about Yugoslavia in Chapter 1 in order to locate the organization that I research in the specific context of self-management socialism and decentralization of Yugoslavia in the 1950s. In Chapter 2 I dealt with the complex history and historiography of the AFŽ. I explained the AFŽ's goals, activities and the changes in its organizational structures, as well as historians' evaluation of all of this. Above all, I focused on the historians' interpretation of the AFŽ's dissolution, according to which, the dissolution of the autonomous and unique organization was detrimental for meaningful work on women's position in society. Following the historian Chiara Bonfiglioli, I decided not to apply the second-wave feminist "autonomy principle" when evaluating the activities of the SŽDH, in order to be able to examine what the SŽDH women did and interpret their work in a new way.

In Chapter 3 I looked at archival documents of the SŽDH without second-wave feminist lenses and I approached the material from a bottom-up perspective, which goes against hegemonic narrative on communist women's organizations being simply obedient "Party tools". I presented the SŽDH's goals, activities and discussions that were going on within the organization. Above all, I wanted to find out how the SŽDH women perceived themselves, how they negotiated their position within the Yugoslav society, which words *they* used in describing the SŽDH's activities and goals, and how they fought against the patriarchal structures they encountered. I showed that the SŽDH leaders discussed their position and sought for the best way of organizing women in the new circumstances of self-management in Yugoslavia. I demonstrated that it was important for the SŽDH women to emphasize that they were fighting for enhancing women's position in the social and public

sphere and to keep their position as a somewhat separate organization, but *at the same time* to include the entire society in solving specific women's issues, what I referred to as their double strategy. In the end, I showed that SŽDH's leaders and rank-and-file members were not afraid to criticize the *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda* (Socialist Alliance of the Working People, SSRN) openly and in public. I believe that I managed to prove that the SŽDH was not simply a "Party tool" and that the SŽDH women had a well-thought-out strategy and ideas on how to enhance women's position in community.

While analyzing documents and doing my research I encountered two problems. First, I dealt with the extremely difficult, challenging and sometimes ambiguous language of the SŽDH women, often loaded with meanings specific for the context in which it emerged, which made it difficult to analyze and then translate into clear English. Second, because of the lack of scholarly work on this topic, and because of the lack of documents in the archive, I couldn't answer all the questions I would have like to address, for example, why and how the SŽDH was abolished.

I believe my research can serve as a starting point for further study on the extremely complex and almost completely unexplored field of women's organizations in Yugoslavia after the AFŽ. This thesis deals with the SŽDH, the organization on the republic level, but it would be excellent if further researchers could use this research while studying the SŽD on the federal level. Moreover, this research can be a helpful starting point for researching the SŽD's successor organization, the *Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena* (Conference for the Social Activity of Women, KDAŽ), which has been equally erased from Yugoslav women's history. I think this is important in order not to deprive future generations of knowledge on the extraordinary rich and empowering women's movement in Yugoslavia. Or in historian Lydia Sklevicky's words:

“Whether the need for approaching this kind of history which is able to integrate many dimensions and voices, among them women's perspective, will be met in the near future is hard to predict. But, it would be worth a try, since it is notorious fact that women in Yugoslav society make up the slightly bigger half of population, and since they have always significantly outnumbered the horses”.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Sklevicky, 1989b: 73

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