

Emancipating Rural Women in Interwar Yugoslavia:
Analysis of Discourses on Rural Women in Two 1930s Women's
Periodicals

By

Isidora Grubački

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Supervisor: Professor Balázs Trencsényi
Second reader: Professor Francisca de Haan

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ideas and, to a limited extent, practices of emancipation of rural women in the interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia that preceded the radical empowerment of women that took place with the establishment with socialist Yugoslavia in 1946. The thesis is a comparative discourse analysis of the ways two different periodicals edited and published by women constructed the desirable roles of rural women in the 1930s. The periodicals in question are: *Seljanka: list za prosvećivanje žena na selu* (1933-1935) [Peasant Woman: Periodical for Enlightenment of Women in the Countryside], the only periodical in interwar Yugoslavia published specifically for rural women, and *Žena danas* (1936-1940) [Woman Today], a periodical that had a strong feminist, pacifist and antifascist stand with a hidden communist agenda. By constructing the desirable image of rural women in the public sphere, the discourses I analyze shaped the ideas of how and in which ways the changes in the lives of rural women in Yugoslavia should occur. As this thesis argues, these discourses of emancipation of rural women were influenced by different political and social ideologies of the period, usually perceived as conflicting, such as eugenics, nationalism and traditionalism, communism/socialism and feminism, and different approaches to Yugoslav nation-building, integral and federal. By looking at these two periodicals, I show how the approach of the educated, elite women towards ‘the rural woman question’ became more inclusive and more radical as World War II was approaching and as ‘the woman question’ got increasingly involved with socialist ideology.

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Introduction

In 2012, the exhibition *Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End* was opened in the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade. The exhibition was a major event as it gathered a group of curators, sociologists and historians to propose a concept, content and organization of a new permanent exhibition of the *Museum of Yugoslav History*.¹ The stated aim of the exhibition was to, “in a modern, attractive and objective way,” present “one of the most interesting and most controversial state-building experiments in the 20th century.”² Although the exhibition was a genuine attempt to overcome the nationalist narratives and ask questions about the history of the Yugoslav country, I found the depiction of Yugoslavia as a “controversial state-building experiment” less objective than it was claimed. I was particularly struck by the representation of women’s emancipation in Yugoslavia. This – indeed very marginal - segment reproduced the popular stereotypes about the history of women’s emancipation in the socialist period, saying that the women’s emancipation in Yugoslavia began only after World War II, as well as that even though after the war women got the right to vote and had more rights to work – nothing had really changed.³

¹ The authors of the exhibition were curator Ana Panić, sociologist Jovo Bakić and historians Srđan Cvetković, Ivana Dobrivojević, Hrvoje Klasić and Vladimir Petrović.

² “Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End,” accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.mij.rs/en/exhibitions/69/yugoslavia-from-the-beginning-to-the-end.html>.

³ The text goes as follows: “The process of women’s emancipation began only after the end of World War II. Women received the right to vote (in 1946) and became increasingly present on the job market. In spite of the proclaimed equality, the situation of women in the first post-war years was far from idyllic.” In the continuation of the text, however, the author chooses to focus in length on all the gender-relation issues that failed to be changed in socialist Yugoslavia, concluding that “up to the break-up of Yugoslavia, in the most cases women remained the lesser paid and lesser esteemed work force.” (*Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End*, ed. Ana Panić, transl. into English by Jelena Bajić (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslav History, 2014), 41.) Instead of focusing on the actual women’s struggles for political and other rights in the interwar period and after World War II, the author of the text chose to emphasize all the segments in which the socialist system failed, thus making the narrative less about women and their emancipation. Similarly, Donna Harsh concluded her chapter “Communism and Women” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* saying that “under communism, women did not achieve equality with men. They did not attain self-determination or social autonomy,” but right after saying that “still, communism dramatically changed women’s social position.” Should the order of these two sentences change, the implications of

The text in question visibly understated the empowerment of women that came to force after the establishment of the socialist Yugoslavia, not mentioning the fact that the 1946 constitution for the first time guaranteed full legal, economic and social gender equality for women, that both girls and boys had the obligation to go to elementary school, as well as that women finally gained the right to inherit and own property, to vote and to act politically.⁴ What is more, in the 1950s, the state guaranteed legal equality of marital and extramarital children, and the divorce and the right to abortion were liberalized.⁵ These were all radical changes that made a huge difference in the lives of many Yugoslav women.

Very importantly, changes that came to power in 1946 did not happen in a vacuum, but were preceded by decades of active involvement of women who, in many different ways, aimed at improving the legal and social conditions Yugoslav women lived in. While there were active women's organizations even before World War I, in interwar Yugoslavia, like never before (or after) there was a plurality of women's organizations that had different aims and ideologies, some considering themselves feminist and some rejecting this notion, that were also a part of a wider network of women's organizations internationally.⁶

the text, I believe, would be different. (Donna Harsh, "Communism and Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 501.)

⁴ Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. Veku* [Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert] (Beograd: Clio, 2013), 268. Up until 1946, Serbian Civil Law was in force in Serbia since 1844, in which married women had as much rights as feeble-minded people. See: Marija Draškić and Olga Popović-Obradović, "Pravni položaj žene prema srpskom građanskom zakoniku (1844-1946)," [Women's Legal Position According to the Serbian Civil Law Code (1844-1946)] in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. Veka 2* [Serbia in the 19th and 20th Century Modernizing Processes 2. Women's Position as the Measure of Modernization], ed. Latinka Perović (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1988), 11-25.

⁵ Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. veku*, 268.

⁶ Even before World War I, in 1914 in Serbia there were thirty-two organizations in *Srpski Ženski Savez* [Serbian Women's Alliance], which had already in 1911 became a part of the *International Council of Women* and *International Alliance of Women*. (Thomas A. Emmert, "Ženski pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999): 35, and Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women. The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 16.)

The two initial monographs about the interwar women's movements were Jovanka Kecman's *Žene Jugoslavije u radničkom pokretu i ženskim organizacijama 1918-1941* (1978) [Women of Yugoslavia in the Workers' Movement and Women's Organizations 1918-1941], who approached 'the woman question' in interwar Yugoslavia through the lens of the history of workers' movement, and Neda Božinović's *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* (1996) [The Woman Question in Serbia in 19th and 20th Century], in which Božinović offered a description of women's organizations in interwar Serbia systematically dividing the organizations into "proletarian" and "bourgeois."⁷ The fact that the history of interwar women's and feminist movement has been embedded into state-socialist narratives and largely shaped by concerns about the workers' movements might be one of the reasons this subject is often overlooked in the mainstream narratives about emancipation of women in Yugoslavia.

In the first volume of *Gender & History*, the pioneer in Yugoslav women's history, Lydia Sklevicky published an article challenging the socialist rejection of "bourgeois feminism," arguing that in interwar Yugoslavia "the claims of the very vocal and not so exclusive bourgeois feminist movement did not differ from the claims of the so-called 'proletarian women's movement' as much as one would expect."⁸ Thommas A. Emmert's text "Ženski Pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s" also pointed to the gap in scholarly research on the Serbian women's organizations in the interwar period, criticizing Jovanka Kecman for an analysis that largely ignored all the "bourgeois" organizations that, according to Kecman, only

⁷ Jovanka Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije u radničkom pokretu i ženskim organizacijama 1918-1941*. [Women of Yugoslavia in the Workers Movement and Women's Organizations 1918-1941] (Beograd: Narodna knjiga: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1978) and Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji* [The Woman Question in Serbia in 19th and 20th Century] (Beograd: Devedesetčetvrti, Žene u crnom, 1996). (All translations from Serbo-Croatian are mine, unless indicated differently.)

⁸ Lydia Sklevicky, "More Horses Than Women: On the Difficulties of Founding Women's History in Yugoslavia," *Gender & History*, Vol. 1. No. 1. (Spring 1989), 72.

partially encouraged women's liberation.⁹ He noted that only several of the organizations Kecman named "bourgeois" actually considered themselves feminist, and that the key feminist organization was *Društvo za prosvetivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava* [Society for the Enlightenment of Woman and Defense of Her Rights], established in 1919 and shortly afterward renamed into *Ženski pokret* [Women's Movement],¹⁰ the organization Sklevicky surely had in mind when saying that its program did not differ greatly than that of the 'proletarian women.' Emmert also warned that the accomplishments of various non-feminist interwar organizations¹¹ should not be underestimated, even though they might be limited in scope, as the mere effort of organizing women in the patriarchal society was in a way politicizing their activities.¹²

Entering the abovementioned discussion, this thesis aims to explore the ideas and, to a limited extent, practices of emancipation of women in the interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia that preceded the changes that came with the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia. Specifically, it engages with the question of emancipation of rural women, the major socio-economic group in Yugoslavia at the time.¹³ As Mary E. Reed has noted, most of the sources about rural population are limited to those written by women and men outside of this socio-economic group.¹⁴ Yet, in the interwar period, a heterogeneous group of elite, educated women who organized within various women's organizations and who published periodicals directed at a heterogeneous female audience was increasingly concerned about the difficulties Yugoslav rural women faced in everyday life. This thesis offers a comparative discourse analysis

⁹ Thomas A. Emmert, "Ženski pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s," 33-34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹¹ Those who rejected the term feminism.

¹² Thomas A. Emmert, "Ženski pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s," 34.

¹³ According to the 1931 census, 76,58% of Yugoslav population lived in rural areas. In: Momčilo Isić, "Privatnost na selu," [Privacy in the Countryside] in *Privatni život kod Srba u dvadesetom veku* [Everyday Life in Serbia in Twentieth Century], ed. Milan Ristović (Beograd: Clio, 2007): 379.

¹⁴ Mary E. Reed, "Peasant Women of Croatia in the Interwar Years," in *Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 98.

of two different periodicals edited by women that, by identifying the problems of rural women and offering solutions to the detected problems, constructed the desirable role of rural woman in interwar Yugoslavia, thus offering a model for a change in rural women's lives.

The periodicals in question are: *Seljanka: list za prosvetivnje žena na selu* (1933-1935) [Peasant Woman: Periodical for Enlightenment of Women in the Countryside], the only periodical in interwar Yugoslavia published specifically for rural women, and *Žena danas* (1936-1940) [Woman Today], a periodical that had a strong feminist, pacifist and antifascist stand with a hidden communist agenda. Understanding discourse in relation to power, I see it worthwhile to compare the discourses of *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* because I believe that by constructing the desirable image of rural women in the public sphere, they shaped the ideas of how and in which ways the changes in the lives of rural women in Yugoslavia should occur. As this thesis argues, the discourses of emancipation of rural women were influenced by different political and social ideologies of the period, conventionally perceived as conflicting, such as eugenics, nationalism and traditionalism, communism/socialism and feminism, as well as by different approaches to Yugoslav nation-building, integral and federal.

Additionally, as the objects of my analysis are two monthly periodicals published in Belgrade, but with an aspiration to be widely read in all parts of Yugoslavia, my research addresses the complexity of constructing a community of Yugoslav women within the conflicting nation-building projects. Moreover, although the focus is on the discourses of emancipation of rural women, the thesis aims to make a contribution to the discussion about the interwar women's movements. Finally, as Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi indicated in the introduction to *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and*

Feminisms,¹⁵ in the context of Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, nationalism and socialism are the two ideologies that “stand out in their involvement with ‘the woman question,’”¹⁶ also adding that women’s involvement in nationalism and socialism “not only allowed them to articulate certain demands [...], but also to challenge the limits of those ideologies or to criticize them from within.”¹⁷ This thesis follows the suggestion of *A Biographical Dictionary*’s editors, aiming to offer an “alternative feminist reading” of the histories of nationalism and socialism in the Yugoslav context.

I.1. The Sources

Before I proceed to explain why I have chosen to look at discourses of emancipation of rural women exactly in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, I will first point to some studies on which I rely and which in certain aspects I challenge in this thesis.

When it comes to the question of Yugoslav rural women, there really is a huge gap in historiography. In fact, the only monograph on this subject is Momčilo Isić’s book *Seljanka u Srbiji u prvoj polovini 20. veka* [Peasant Woman in Serbia in the First Half of the 20th Century] (2008), which presents the first wide-ranging research on the position of rural women in Serbia in the first part of the 20th century. Yet, even though Isić addresses some of the most important questions concerning the conditions rural women lived in, the book remains mainly descriptive and does not address any theoretical questions, including the category of gender.

¹⁵ Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe ; 19th and 20th centuries* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, “Introduction,” in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: 19th and 20th centuries*, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Another key text about rural women is Vera Stein Erlich's 1964 socio-anthropological study *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji* [Yugoslav Family in Transition].¹⁸ This book is a product of the major research Erlich had conducted in the late 1930s on the transformation in family life in more 300 Yugoslav villages. Her insights on extended families, patriarchal system in Yugoslavia and family transformation are especially valuable for understanding the changes happening within the rural population since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, and it is even more exciting that the research on Yugoslav families was initiated while Erlich was publishing her articles in *Žena danas*. So, curiously, while Erlich's book from the 1960s contributes to the framework of this thesis, Vera Erlich's writings in *Žena danas* are the thesis' object of study.

Moreover, as this thesis is an analysis of two interwar women's periodicals (that is, periodicals edited by women and published for women), it is important to mention that I follow the recent research on Serbian women's periodicals done by literary historians Stanislava Barać and Ana Kolarić. In her 2015 book *Feministička kontrapublic: Žanr ženskog portreta u srpskoj periodici 1920-1941* [Feminist Counterpublic. The Female Portrait Genre in Serbian Periodicals 1920-1941],¹⁹ Barać presents women's periodicals as central to what she calls the "feminist counterpublic" in interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia. As her research shows, there was an extraordinary amount of women's public engagement and conversations about women's position in Yugoslav public space between the two wars. In her study, Barać analyzed the portraits of women in interwar women's periodicals, including *Seljanka* and *Žena*

¹⁸ The first edition of this study was published in 1964 in Zagreb under the title *Porodica u transformaciji: studija u tri stotine jugoslovenskih sela* [Family in Transition: A Study in Three Hundred Yugoslav villages]. Then, it was published in United States in 1966 under the title *Yugoslav Family in Transition* (Princeton University Press, 1966) and again in Zagreb in 1971 under the title *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji* [Yugoslav Family in Transition].

¹⁹ Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrapublic: Žanr ženskog portreta u srpskoj periodici 1920-1941* [Feminist Counterpublic. The Female Portrait Genre in Serbian Periodicals 1920-1941] (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2015).

danas, thus conceptualizing a new female portraits genre within the field of literary history. Importantly, Barać has done a systematic research on interwar women's periodicals, including *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, so her insights will often be an important reference point for me.

Ana Kolarić's recent doctoral dissertation *Rod, književnost i modernost u periodici s početka 20. veka: 'Žena' (1911–1914) i 'The Freewoman' (1911–1912).* [Gender, Literature and Modernity in Periodicals from the Early Twentieth Century: *Žena/The Woman* (1911–1914) and *The Freewoman* (1911–1912)] (2015) contributes, among other things, to understanding the discourses of emancipation of Serbian women in Vojvodina before World War I.²⁰ Her analysis and interpretation help me make sense of the *longue durée* continuities and breaks in the discourses of emancipation of women in Serbia and Yugoslavia in the first half of the twentieth century.

I.1.1. *Seljanka*: list za prosvetivanje žena na selu (1933-1935) [Peasant Woman: Periodical for Enlightenment of Women in the Countryside]

As *Seljanka* was the first and the only periodical in the interwar Yugoslavia dedicated primarily to women in the countryside, it seems reasonable to choose it as a source for the analysis this thesis aims for.²¹ The periodical was published monthly, in Belgrade, between January 1933 and December 1935. It was financed entirely from the subscriptions of the readers, and the publishing was stopped due to the lack of money. The primary aim of the periodical was educational – it offered rural women knowledge that was, from the perspective of the editor Darinka Lacković, considered necessary for the domestic duties of all rural women.

²⁰ Ana Kolarić, *Rod, književnost i modernost u periodici s početka 20. veka: Žena (1911–1914) i The Freewoman (1911–1912)* [Gender, Literature and Modernity in Periodicals from the Early Twentieth Century: *Žena/The Woman* (1911–1914) and *The Freewoman* (1911–1912)]. PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2015.

²¹ Stanislava Barać puts *Seljanka* in three different periodical contexts: first, women's periodicals, secondly, press for or about rural population such as *Selo* (1919-1952), *Komunističko selo* (1920), *Mlado selo* (1926), *Omladinsko selo* (1933) and others, and, thirdly, the context of the educational press. As I will show in this paper, *Seljanka* had many similarities with the health periodicals from the period before World War I. (Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 281-282.)

Importantly, *Seljanka* was also an unofficial publication of the King's Fund Domestic School (Domaćička škola Kraljevog fonda). This was an informal eight-month school for rural women that took place in Sremski Karlovci near Novi Sad in the period between 1929 and, most probably, 1935, and it followed the tradition of the domestic schools for women organized in Serbia in the first half of the twentieth century.²² Whereas the organizer of these courses before the war was *Društvo za očuvanje narodnog zdravlja* (Society for the Preservation of People's Health), since 1922 the organization *Ženski pokret* is increasingly involved in these activities.²³

Darinka Lacković, the main “character” in this “story,” was a member of *Ženski pokret*, the organizer of the King's Fund Domestic School and the editor of *Seljanka*. It seems that her idea was to establish a periodical that would serve as a platform for communication between her and her former students, but also as educational material for all rural women to learn how to perform their domestic duties properly. Unfortunately, I have not managed to discover more information about Lacković, except that she had published an article in the periodical *Žena* [The Woman] before World War I (this will be discussed later). Hopefully, future archival research will shed more light on this interesting persona.

In the thesis, I link *Seljanka* with the eugenic discourses that, as I argue, largely shaped the desirable role of rural women constructed in this periodical. Secondly, as the King's Fund Domestic School was established in 1929, the same year King Aleksandar's royal dictatorship was initiated, I connect *Seljanka* with the idea of integral Yugoslavism as propagated by King Aleksandar. Thereby, this periodical is a worthy source for understanding the relationship between eugenics and nation-building projects in Yugoslavia, and, more importantly, the gender

²² Periodical *Zdravlje* [Health] contains a report of the first course organized for women in a village near Belgrade in 1905. The aim of this course was to teach rural women how to make good bread. See: “Društvo za čuvanje narodnog zdravlja: škole za devojčice” [Society for the Preservation of People's Health: Schools for Girls], *Zdravlje*, 1906/10, 309-313.

²³ Thomas A. Emmert, “Ženski pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s,” 46.

aspect of the way these two ideologies were entangled. Additionally, *Seljanka* is a valuable source that offers information about the King's Fund Domestic School, thus making it possible to get a less blurred picture of the informal education of rural women in Serbia and Yugoslavia in the first part of the twentieth century, as well as to analyze closely the educational material rural women were confronted with. Finally, the analysis of texts in *Seljanka* will reveal the information about the everyday life of women in the countryside and the elements of their labor.

I.1.2. *Žena danas* (1936-1940) [The Woman Today]

The introduction to the 1966 reprint of *Žena danas* associates this publication primarily with the work of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, illegal in Yugoslavia from 1921 to World War II.²⁴ In fact, *Žena danas* was a product of collaboration between the liberal women's organization *Ženski pokret* and young women from Communist Party of Yugoslavia who after 1935, as a part of the Popular Front strategy, "infiltrated" into a legal organization and established *Omladinska sekcija Ženskog pokreta* [Youth Section of Women's Movement]. As I show in this thesis, the periodical cannot be related only to the Communist Party, as it was also associated with Gabrielle Duchêne and the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism (WWCAWF) established in 1934. Furthermore, the periodical gathered a wide number of antifascist left-progressive feminists, the majority of whom – but not all - were members of the Communist Party. To make a meaningful list of women who contributed to the work of *Žena danas* would be a huge project in itself, as the lists in the historiography do not mention all women. The names of the members of the publishing office were listed in the introduction to the 1966 reprint of *Žena danas*, yet the names of the editors are a valuable, but only a starting point

²⁴ See: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, "Uvod," [Introduction] *Žena danas. Brojevi 1/1936 – 33/1944. Fototipsko izdanje* [The Woman Today. Issues 1/1936 – 33/1944. Facsimile edition] (Beograd: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, 1966), V-VIII. The existing historiography follows this narrative. See, for example: "Žena danas," *Žene Srbije u NOB* [Women of Serbia in the National Liberation Struggle], ed. Bosa Cvetić, (Beograd: Nolit, 1975), 69-81.

for researching this periodical and the women who worked on it.²⁵ While the existing narratives mention, for example, Mitra Mitrović²⁶ – the president of the Youth Section who after the war had many functions in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia – they are silent about the Slovenian communist feminist Angela Vode and Jewish left-progressive intellectual for Zagreb Vera Erlich Stein, who, as I show in this thesis, largely contributed to *Žena danas* as well.

Twenty-nine issues of this feminist, pacifist and antifascist women's periodical were published in the period between November 1936 and September 1940. The thirtieth issue was confiscated by the censors in November 1940, and during the war (which started in Yugoslavia in April 1941) three issues were published in 1943 by the antifascist women on the liberated territory. After the war, it was revived as the official periodical of the *Antifašistički Front Žena – AFŽ* [Women's Antifascist Front]. In my analysis, I will focus only on the 29 issues that were published between 1936 and 1940.

Until November 1940, the editors managed to escape the censorship and to continually (although not every month as planned) publish progressive articles concerning education and upbringing, motherhood, literature and art, but also the Spanish Civil War, international conferences of women's organizations, etc. In the first issue of *Žena danas*, the editors explain:

Our aim is to gather around [the periodical] the biggest possible number of women from all parts of our country, regardless of their religion, nationality and political beliefs, so that, in the periodical, they [the women] could all find their

²⁵ The editors were: Mitra Mitrović, Milica Šuvaković, Olga Alkalaj, dr Dušica Stefanović, Nataša Jeremić, Zora Šer, Ela Almuli, dr Irena Stefanović, Beška Bembasa, Olga Jojić, Bosa Cvetić, Fani Politeo-Vučković, Vojka Demajo, Ela Nenadović, Dragana Pavlović, Milka Žicina and Zojica Levi. Women who were killed during WWII were: Olga Alkalaj, Beška Bembasa, Nataša Jeremić, Olga Jojić, Fani Politeo-Vučković, dr Dušica Stefanović, Zora Šer and Milica Šuvaković. See: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, "Uvod," *Žena danas. Brojevi 1/1936 – 33/1944. Fototipsko izdanje*, VI.

²⁶ For more about Mitra Mitrović, see: Latinka Perović, "De Profundis (za Mitru Mitrović: 1912-2001)," [De Profundis (For Mitra Mitrović: 1912-2001)] in *Republika* 259 (April 16-30, 2001), accessed May 31, 2017, <http://www.yurope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/2001/259/index.html>; and: Stanislava Barać, "(Ne)pristajanje na zaborav: Mitra Mitrović, portret revolucionarke" [(Not) Accepting the Oblivion: Mitra Mitrović, Portrait of a Revolutionary], *Komuna Links*, accessed May 31, 2017, <http://komunalinks.com/home/2017/1/23/nepristajanje-na-zaborav-mitra-mitrovi-portret-revolucionarke>.

own self and through the periodical evolve united and connected by the common interests and aspirations. Mothers, housewives, workers, clerks and intellectuals, all of you who have been for centuries treated as less worthy and lower than man, we invite you to sincerely and devotedly cooperate with us on our common periodical, which should be the most loyal interpreter of our spirit and the real reflection of our common aspirations.²⁷

As *Žena danas* was a Belgrade-based publication and as over 70% of women in Yugoslavia were illiterate at the time, there were obvious limitations to reaching all women in the country. Yet, as I will show, the editors made a conscious effort to communicate with the widest possible number of Yugoslav women, to offer them new perspectives on issues related to work, politics, motherhood, and to mobilize even the illiterate rural women for a change in the lives of all Yugoslav women that would truly be revolutionary.

In the thesis, I will analyze the representations of rural women in the periodical, the purpose of which, I argue, was to draw attention to the difficult life of Yugoslav rural women and to offer new knowledge to the readers of the periodical about how peasant women live in different regions of the country, and, secondly, to suggest educated women what they could do in order to change the circumstances in which peasant women lives. They suggested an approach that was a conscious effort to overcome the elitism of the earlier approach of women's organizations, including *Ženski pokret*. Furthermore, I will analyze the reconfiguration of the feminist ideology in the Yugoslav context after 1935 that took place along with the change of the approach towards the Yugoslav national question of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Finally, by analyzing texts of Vera Stein Erlich and Angela Vode published in *Žena danas*, this thesis will put light to the importance of these two women for the antifascist circle of women that created *Žena danas*, thus challenging the official socialist interpretation of the events that led to the radical empowerment of women after WWII.

²⁷ "Uvodna reč" [Introductory Word], *Žena danas*, 1936/01, 3.

Additionally, the two periodicals offer their visions about, to put it simply, how to and to what extent rural women's position in society should in fact change. By looking at these two publications, I contrast a discourse that searches for emancipation of women within the framework of nationalist, traditionalist ideology, with a discourse shaped by feminist and socialist ideas in *Žena danas*. Very importantly, these two periodicals were not published at the exact same time. Published in the first half of the 1930s, *Seljanka*, as I will show, actually fits very nicely the intellectual matrix of the liberal feminism of the 1920s, and even the period of the before WWI. *Žena danas*, on the contrary, is an example of the radicalization of the feminist discourses in Serbia and the other parts of Yugoslavia that came with the Popular Front strategy and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's adoption of a federal solution to the Yugoslav nation-building problem. Hence, by looking at how the two discourses of emancipation of rural women – shaped by different ideologies – offered different ideas about what the desirable role of rural women should be, my intention is to show how the discourses of emancipation of rural women actually radicalized as 'the woman question' got increasingly involved with socialist ideology during the 1930s.

I.2. Methodology and Framework of Analysis

My understanding of discourse is primarily influenced by Foucault's interpretations of discourse as a category structured by power and production of knowledge.²⁸ Understanding discourse as "a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable," Foucault proposes a method of reconstructing the distribution of discursive elements by

²⁸ See: Michel Foucault, "On Power," in: *Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*, tr. Alan Sheridan and others, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 102-109.

looking for things that are said, but also those that are unsaid and concealed.²⁹ When looking at the discourses, it is important to look the various effects of the discourses, “according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated.”³⁰ My interest is to see how the everyday lives of rural women, their experiences and knowledge, have been, in Foucault’s words, “put into discourse.”³¹ I intend to explore what kind of knowledge about rural women was produced in the public sphere, relying on the idea that the knowledge that was created in the two periodicals to a large extent constituted social subjects and the relations between social individual and/or collective social subjects.³² In other words, I explore how the strategies of power are manifested at a very local, often overlooked level.

As I argue, the discourses of emancipation of women I analyze are shaped by various social and political ideologies, such as eugenics, socialism, feminism, traditionalism, antifascism, pacifism and different versions of Yugoslav nation building. For Michael Freeden, ideologies are “complex competitions over legitimizing alternative political vocabularies, competitions which are never definitively resolved on the conceptual and semantic level.”³³ I agree with Freeden’s explanations that ideologies “shape the access we gain to the political world.”³⁴ Understanding this means, in Freeden’s words, “recognizing the tendency of ideologies to generate comprehensive world views, in which even incremental changes may create chain reaction of semantic adjustments.”³⁵ Importantly, Freeden points to three things important for the study of ideology. First, political thinking always takes place within a context. Second, “ideologies are

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 92-102.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³² Norman Fairclough, “General Introduction,” to *Critical Discourse Analysis. The Critical Study of Language* (London, New York: Longman, 1995), 6.

³³ Michael Freeden, “Concepts, Ideology and Political Theory,” in Carsten Dutt ed., *Herausforderungen der Begriffsgeschichte* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003), 54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

devices that select specific political meanings of concepts from a pool of available meanings;” as the meanings of the concepts are contested, each ideology has to assign a certain meaning to a concept.³⁶ And third, ideologies do not assign meanings to the concepts in a vacuum, but only within a network of other concepts.³⁷ By looking at certain concepts, such as sisterhood, nation, education, or, above all, the concept and category of rural women, I actually look at the way the meaning of these concepts was shaped by competing ideologies in the 1930s Yugoslavia. When it comes to the relationship between discourse and ideology, I should specify that I see discourse as a communicative practice through which ideology is practiced,³⁸ or, as Freeden explains it, “ideology is one form of discourse but it is not entirely containable in the idea of discourse.”³⁹ When I look at discourse, I am interested in both the representation of reality and its construction, and I bear in mind the individual and collective agency of those who participated in creating the discourse, but I also take that the power of a discourse often exceeds the intended ideological agendas.

The concept of the public sphere is essential for my analysis, and I find Nancy Fraser’s 1990 article “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” a useful point of reference. In her article, Fraser pointed to the importance of Jurgen Habermas’s idea of the public sphere, as it is “an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” which allows distinction of the democratic associations from the state apparatuses and the market economy.⁴⁰ Yet, she also aimed to contribute to the reconfiguration of the term by challenging the four assumptions that she sees as central to what she calls a “bourgeois

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 57

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Michael Freeden, *Ideology, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 106.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁰ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990), 57.

masculinist” conception of the public sphere.⁴¹ First, she criticized the assumption that in reality it is possible for all the individuals to enter a discussion in the public sphere as if they were equals. As she argues, even when the inequalities of the participants are supposedly put aside, these inequalities still affect the ways the subordinated groups participate in the public sphere, including the fact that they are often simply not heard.⁴² Secondly, she reflected on the interaction among different publics, challenging the assumption that a single public sphere is more democratic than the multiplication of the competing publics. Her view is that a single public sphere does not leave space for the subordinated groups to address their own needs and strategies.⁴³ In this context, she proposed the term “subaltern counterpublics” to name the alternative publics formed by social groups historically excluded from the “bourgeois masculinist” public – women, workers, people of color, etc.⁴⁴ What she essentially proposes is an a more sensible approach towards what she calls “contestatory interaction of different publics” that would allow us to identify the mechanisms that keep some subordinate to the others.⁴⁵ Thirdly, she challenges the assumption that the discussion in the public sphere is limited only to the issues that are relevant for everyone, arguing that there are no a priori boundaries between the “public” and “private” interests, but that exactly through the public contestation it is decided what is and what is not a matter of public concern.⁴⁶ Finally, Fraser points to the problem of the distinction between the civil society and the state, arguing for a new, post-bourgeois conception of the public sphere that would allow us to see public sphere as more than “autonomous opinion formation removed from authoritative decision-making.”⁴⁷ When talking about public sphere and

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 63-65.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

(subaltern) feminist counterpublic in the thesis, I bear in mind Fraser's idea of the alternative publics formed by women. I also follow Stanislava Barać who, in the Yugoslav context, located the forming of the subaltern feminist counterpublic in the 1920s, as this was the time of the proliferation of the women's and feminist periodicals and women's activities related to various forms of gatherings, courses, international conferences, petitions for the universal suffrage rights and for peace.⁴⁸

Moreover, as I believe that a certain kind of change in the ways rural women live was generated through the discourses of emancipation of women, the concepts of modernity and gender fit my analysis very nicely. The notion of modernization relates primarily to the processes that took place mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the industrialization of production and the rapid urbanization. The key processes of modernization in the context relevant for this research are the creation of the multi-national state and the rapid transformation of the traditional family life in Yugoslavia that took place in the first half of the twentieth century (I discuss this in details in the first chapter). Amazed by the contradictory experiences of modernization, Marshall Berman described that the processes of modernization have caused a range of visions and ideas that give men and women the "power to change the world that is changing them, to make way through the maelstrom and make it their town," making them both subjects and objects of modernization. These visions and processes are part of what is called "modernism."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost: Žanr ženskog portreta u srpskoj periodici 1920-1941*, 59.

⁴⁹ Marshall Berman, "Introduction: Modernity – Yesterday, Today and Today," in *All that is Solid Melts to Air. The Experience of Modernity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988 [1982]), 88-89.

However, as Roger Griffin recapitulated, modernity has also been associated with catastrophe, fragmentation, incoherence and ambivalence,⁵⁰ and described as a liminal, transitional state of permanent crisis.⁵¹ Within this modernist context and often as a reaction to the social processes of modernization, different social and political ideologies took shape. To understand the discourse in *Seljanka*, I believe Griffin's framework of "palingenetic dynamic of modernism" is valuable, as the solution to the highly ambivalent experience of modernity and the alleged degeneration of society was sought not in transformation but in *renewal*. In other words, terrified by what they saw as physical and moral decay in society, the scientific "experts" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came with the idea that the states should introduce interventionist measures that would reduce the degenerative impact on the healthy population and, consequently, renew the nation.⁵² In this context, a "hybrid discourse" of scientific nationalism occurred, a discourse that, as Griffin nicely put it, "fuses science and myth, academic scholarship and populism, and the cult of knowledge and progress with "atavistic" assumptions about the existence of an ethnic essence attached to an organic nation."⁵³ Right next to ultra-nationalism, Griffin saw eugenics – basically the idea that race can be improved by scientific intervention into breeding and inheritance - as an important manifestation of scientific nationalism.⁵⁴ The analysis of the discourse in *Seljanka* will, hopefully, contribute to the understanding of the ways eugenics was adapted into the peasant context of interwar Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, for understanding the idea of change inherent to the discourse in *Žena danas*, Berman's chapter on Marx, Modernism and Modernization is informative. Interestingly,

⁵⁰ Roger Griffin, "Tunnel Visions and Mysterious Trees: Modernist Projects of National and Racial regeneration, 1880-1939," in Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling eds., *Blood and Homeland. Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 420.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 429.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 427.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 436-437.

Berman points to the affinities between Marx and the modernists that were, according to him, often overlooked.⁵⁵ As opposed to the previous example, of interest here is Berman's claim that what is inherent to Marx's both celebration and criticism of bourgeoisie, as Marx calls it, is the idea of transformation of catastrophes, transformation as opposed to solid stability. In Berman's words, "stability can only mean entropy, slow death, while our sense of progress and growth is our only way of knowing for sure that we are alive," and more, "Modern men and women must learn to yearn for change: not merely to be open to changes in their personal and social lives, but positively to demand them, actively seek them out and carry them through."⁵⁶ I see the discourse in *Žena danas* as highly compatible with this idea, since the implicit and/or explicit message of many of the texts mobilization for change. As the above quoted introductory text in *Žena danas* says, the aim of the editors is to create a community of women and mobilize the to make a certain change, the change, I would add, that concerns mainly women's rights, peace in the world and mobilization against fascism than it concerns, at this specific historical point, fight against "bourgeoisie."

Another concept, or category, essential for my research is, of course, gender. In my understanding of gender, I rely greatly on Jeanne Boydston's article "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," published in journal *Gender & History* in 2008,⁵⁷ which aims at rethinking some of the implications of using gender as a category of analysis as proposed in Joan W. Scott's 1986 essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."⁵⁸ I agree with Boydston when she points out to possible problems of using gender as a fixed and stable category of historical

⁵⁵ Marshal Berman, "All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: Marx, Modernism and Modernization," in *All that is Solid Melts to Air. The Experience of Modernity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988 [1982]), 88-89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁵⁷ Jeanne Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," *Gender & History*, Vol.20 No.3 (2008): 558-583.

⁵⁸ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, Vol.91, No.5 (Dec., 1986): 1053-1075.

analysis by emphasizing the inherent limitations of the processes of categorizations, these processes being “simplifying, consolidating and universalizing.”⁵⁹ Within this framework, as she explains, the irregularities that do not fit are most often simply ignored or suppressed.⁶⁰ She further explains that the dominant understanding of gender as a category of historical analysis is a contemporary Western category, closely linked to feminist movements in Europe and United States in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶¹ Very importantly, Boydston suggests *asking questions* about gender relations in different societies, reminding the reader that “there is no social experience solely constructed through the process of gender.”⁶² By asking questions about gender relations, rather than assuming that gender is the male element in all societies, a feminist historian can avoid making unnecessary generalizations that she would refute in other contexts. So, when analyzing the category of rural women in discourses of *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, I will use gender as a *question* of historical analysis and as much as possible try to understand how the desirable role of rural (often referred to as *neprosvećena* - uneducated) woman was constructed in relation to the constructs of (rural) men and educated women, and in relation to categories such as nationality, religion, region, class and age.

I also rely on certain concepts of postcolonial theory. Adrienne Rich’s idea of “the politics of location” is valuable especially for the third chapter, for when she says “I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create,”⁶³ it helps me realize the importance of understanding women I write about in their own not only historical, but also geographical

⁵⁹ Jeanne Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis,” 560.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 561.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 576.

⁶³ Adrienne Rich, “Notes Towards a Politics of Location,” in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1994), 212.

contexts. Moreover, she points to the women's body as a "location" as well, which means that when writing about women it is crucial to look at the politics of motherhood, abortion and forcible sterilization, or, as Rich says, to "begin with the material."⁶⁴ But then, also, look at the women's ideas not as abstractions "float[ing] along above the heads of ordinary people – women,"⁶⁵ but as something that also took place within a certain "location." In the context of Cold War and the United States' anticommunist discourse, Rich also warned that "words like *socialism, communism, democracy, collectivism* – are stripped of their historical roots."⁶⁶ For this exact reason, revisiting the different discourses of emancipation from the pre-WWII period, and re-placing them in their own contexts seems important today. Additionally, I find Chandra Mohanty's concept of "colonization" particularly helpful for analyzing the discourses of educated women about uneducated women. She uses "colonization" as a discursive notion, arguing that some of the feminist writings, as she nicely put it, "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world," thus producing a homogenized image of a "singular 'third-world woman' - an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse."⁶⁷ Having this in mind, I will question whether and to what extent the editors and writers of *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* "colonize" the diverse experiences of Yugoslav rural women.

Finally, as I called the discourses I analyze discourses of *emancipation*, I should clarify that I use this term to name the idea of *change* in the desirable role of rural women that each of the discourses propagates. I understand the term as relational to what was, within the discourses, considered as a desired mode of modernization. I hope to show, therefore, that the idea of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁶⁷ Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review*, no.30 (Autumn, 1988), 62-63.

emancipation was conditioned by different ideologies and the worldviews these ideologies generated, but also by the patriarchal relations that especially dominated the life in the countryside.

To recapitulate, my thesis analyzes the discourses that aimed to make a change in rural women's lives by constructing the desirable role of rural women in public sphere and by engaging in different kind of educational practices. These discourses, as I aim to show, are hybrid discourses influenced by social and political ideologies that might seem conflicting at the first glance, such as eugenics, traditionalism and integral Yugoslavism in the case of *Seljanka* and communism/socialism, feminism and pacifism in the case of *Žena danas*. By looking at these two discourses, I want to show how the discourses of emancipation of rural women radicalized and became more inclusive towards the rural women in the 1930s.

I.3. Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter aims to offer a context for understanding the discourses of emancipation of rural women. In the first part, my goal is to explore how 'the woman question' was before World War I in Serbia and in interwar Yugoslavia involved with two ideologies crucial for this context – nationalism and socialism. This part of the chapter is primarily based on the recent research of literary historians Ana Kolarić and Stanislava Barać. Following Rudolf Bićanić's and Vera Stein Erlich's accounts of the rural life and family in interwar Yugoslavia, in the second part of the first chapter I offer information about the transformation in the family life in Yugoslav villages and the impact it had on the everyday life of rural women. Then, I examine the representations and self-representations in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, looking at how these two publications detected the problems concerning the lives of rural women, and what solutions they offered.

As both periodicals I analyze had (among other functions) an educational function, the second chapter looks at contested conceptions of rural women's education in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*. In this context, I use the concept of education to talk about the ideas and practices that concern changing the position of rural women through learning and gaining knowledge previously unavailable to them. In this chapter I aim to answer the following questions: How did women editing *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* understand and practice the education of women? What influenced their understanding? How did the publications discuss the question of illiteracy and education of rural women? By looking at the publications of Laza Marković, a physician who was in charge for the health section in *Seljanka*, and comparing them to the program texts in *Seljanka*, I argue that education in *Seljanka* was strongly influenced by the contemporary eugenic discourses and the official public health education system established in the interwar period. In the second part, I look at *Žena danas*'s texts that concern rural women's education and that discuss the ways rural women should be approached. I specifically focus on the work of Vera Stein Erlich, arguing that the approach towards education in *Žena danas* was under the influence of the contemporary progressive ideas of the the school of individual psychology of Alfred Adler and the "new pedagogy" practiced in Weimar Republic.

The third chapter again has two parts, and it addresses the problems of saying "we" in the Yugoslav context, that is it addresses the difficulties of constructing an inclusive "sisterhood" in interwar Yugoslavia. *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, both published in Belgrade, aimed at a readership in whole Yugoslavia which was supposed to be active for a certain cause and to fight for change in women's lives. How did the women imagine the sisterhood in relation to the national identity? I argue in this chapter that these two conceptions of sisterhood were shaped by two opposed nation-building projects, integral and federal Yugoslavism respectively. Additionally, I explore

what the ideology of integral Yugoslavism meant, arguing that the Serbian nationalist narrative, even though in this context put second place to the biological discourses of national renewal, was still a strong element in the idea of integral Yugoslavism. In the case of *Žena danas*, I examine the relationship between communism/socialism, feminism and nationalism in the period after 1935, during the Popular Front.

Chapter 1 - Searching for the Context

In this chapter, I engage with the two contexts essential for understanding the discourses of rural women's emancipation in the interwar period. In the first subchapter I put light to the discourses of women's emancipation in Serbia before World War I and point to the diversification of the discourses of women's emancipation in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia in interwar period. As the focus is particularly on the ways 'the woman question' is involved with the nationalist and socialist ideologies before and after WWI, it offers crucial information for situating *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* in the wider context of feminism in Serbia and Yugoslavia. Yet, I must note that there is still a huge gap in knowledge about the history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia, so this is only a small part of the, until a more comprehensive study is written on this subject.

The second subchapter searches for the information about the rural context in interwar period, focusing on the transformations in the family life in Yugoslav villages that had been taking place since the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first part of this subchapter, I search for the information about changes in Yugoslav rural areas in the accounts of Rudolf Bićanić and Vera Stein Erlich. Then, I look at the representations and self-representations of rural women in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*. By focusing on both the said and unsaid in the sources, my analysis in the sources in this subchapter aims to reconstruct the bias of the sources, by

looking at which problems are said and/or unsaid concerning the labor and everyday life of rural women. Importantly, this subchapter also serves as a background story for the two following analytical chapters, which mainly focus on education and nation-building, respectively.

1.1. Feminism, Nationalism and Socialism: A short overview of women's organizations and discourses of emancipation in Serbia and Yugoslavia before and after WWI

The first discourses of women's emancipation among the Serbian elite can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, linked to the organization "United Serbian Youth," the first Serbian organization that accepted formal membership of women. The organization was established in 1866 in Novi Sad, and until its end in 1871 its core idea was that Serbian people could get closer to European civilization through education and culture, which would consequently lead to a rise of national consciousness and national liberation.⁶⁸ Within the nationalist ideology, women and men demanded education for women, because it would enable them to further educate their children.⁶⁹ Hence, the first discourses of women's emancipation in the Serbian context were conditioned by the dominant discourses of nation-building. According to Neda Božinović, the approach of different political groups – liberals, socialists and radicals – to the question of women's emancipation did not diversify much after the breakup of "United Serbian Youth,"

⁶⁸ Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u devetnaestom i dvadesetom veku*, 34-39. See also: Draga Dejanović, "To Serbian mothers," in *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States*, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and Vangelis Kechriotis, vol. III/1 of *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries* (Central European University Press: 2010), 119-124, accessed May 27, 2017, <http://books.openedition.org/ceup/1977>.

⁶⁹ According to Neda Božinović, the approach of different political groups – liberals, socialists and radicals – to the question of emancipation of women did not diversify much after the breakup of "United Serbian Youth," mainly because they all had similar understanding of the goals of women's emancipation and that there were no (or a very small number of) working-class women at the time. Yet, it would be interesting to think further about the entanglement of feminist, nationalist and socialist ideologies from the 1860s and the way this entanglement developed and changed over the years. See: Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje...*, 48.

mainly because they all had similar understanding of the goals of women's emancipation and that there were no (or a very small number of) working-class women at the time.⁷⁰

As Ana Kolarić has shown in her recent dissertation about gender, literature and modernity in periodicals *Žena* and *The Freewoman*, the discourses of women's emancipation in the Serbian context were still sought within the framework of national-liberation in the years before World War I. *Žena* (1911-1914) [The Woman] was edited by Milica Tomić,⁷¹ who worked and published together with her husband Jaša Tomić.⁷² *Žena* shows a strong continuity with the discourses of emancipation and women's education from the late nineteenth century, framed largely within the patriarchal idea of the role of the Serbian woman. In the 1910s context, Jaša Tomić saw the family – not individual – as the basis of society, and noted that a woman cannot exist outside of the circle of family and home, and Milica Tomić used the same family and nation agenda to argue for the importance of women's emancipation.⁷³

Regarding the periodical *Žena*, it is useful to note its construction of the women's role in relation to the Balkan wars (and WWI), when women were represented as mothers and wives who send their sons and husbands to war, but also as nurses who help the soldiers, which was emancipatory as this was the first public job that women were allowed to do, although it reified women's caring role.⁷⁴ Moreover, women across the country experienced working on their own

⁷⁰ Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje...*, 48. Yet, it would be interesting to think further about the entanglement of feminist, nationalist and socialist ideologies from the 1860s and the way this entanglement developed and changed over the years.

⁷¹ Milica Tomić (1859-1944) was a daughter of Serbian politician Svetozar Miletić, who took part in 1848 rebellions and was later the mayor of Novi Sad. She went to school in Novi Sad, Budapest and Vienna, but when her father was arrested, she took over part of her work and thus did not go to study medicine as it had been planned. Over the years, she was active in Novi Sad, editing the women's periodical *Žena*, established the first women's library *Posestrima*, and she collaborated with the Hungarian feminist and suffragist Rosika Schwimmer. For more about Milica Tomić, see: In Serbian: "Milica Tomić," *Knjiženstvo*, accessed May 26, 2017, <http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr/authors/milica-tomic>, and in English: "Tomić, Milica," *Women Writers*, accessed May 26, 2017, <http://neww.huylgens.knaw.nl/authors/show/4001>.

⁷² The leader of the Serbian Radical Party in Vojvodina (part of Austria-Hungary at the time).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 137-138

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 263

without men on a large scale during World War I. As one article from 1922 says, “women were left alone to protect the homeland, the children, and to await the enemy. [...] Within a year [...] the whole economy was in her hands.”⁷⁵ In this new context, new questions emerged, such as the women’s right for public work and the political rights of women, including the right to vote.

After World War I, the discourses of women’s emancipation diversified significantly. Women’s organizations advocating for women’s emancipation in the interwar period (and the press connected to these organizations) are usually labeled as liberal, socialist and conservative. I believe that the situation is far more complicated and is yet to be researched in detail. Apart from the deeply transformative experience of the war, one of the main reasons why the situation becomes more complex after the World War I is the establishment of the new country, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Kingdom of Yugoslavia. With this change of context, pre-war discourses of women’s emancipation also transform: firstly, they can no longer be centered on *Serbian* national-liberation narratives, and secondly, they are no longer *primarily* linked to the nation-building narratives. After the war, the focus is mainly on the women’s legal emancipation and the fight for suffrage. But what happened with the strong Serbian nation-building discourses in the interwar period? And, secondly, what was the political discourse of the central feminist organization in the interwar period, *Ženski pokret*?

With the new country there were new questions about the emancipation of women, and new women's organizations that sought for equality in different ways. Already in 1919, representatives from the whole Kingdom met in Belgrade and founded the *Narodni ženski savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* [National Women’s Alliance of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes]. Their first declared goals were: national unity, then equality of women and men before the law, equal pay

⁷⁵ Zorka Krasnar-Karadžić, “Ženski pokret kod nas i na strani,” in *Ženski pokret* 3, 1-2 (January-February 1922), 23-24, as quoted in: Thomas A. Emmert, “Ženski pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s,” 34-35.

for equal work, equal education opportunities, struggle against prostitution and alcohol. But, there were a lot of differences between the ways the representatives, especially Croatian and Serbian, understood national unity. The most famous remark probably is that of Croatian journalist Marija Jurić Zagorka, who argued not only that the Serbian women were in the majority at the meeting, but that they showed “an unshakable, traditional patriotism.”⁷⁶ Serbian women sought to be “the first among equals” because of their heroism and sacrifices during the national-liberation wars, and, what is more, Zagorka accused Serbian women of understanding Yugoslavism as a territorial, and not a national, unitary concept, which, consequently, left a lot of space for their Serbian patriotism and national sentiment.⁷⁷ It is indicative that Croatian and Slovenian women at the meeting wanted the Alliance to be called *Yugoslav*, while Serbian women insisted that the name encompassed all three “tribal” names.⁷⁸ As Melissa Bokovoy argued, Serbian women did not find it easy to renounce the earlier, nationalist discourse, and consequently it was difficult to establish a unitary organization.⁷⁹

As for the socialist discourses, the situation is very interesting and it challenges the strict divide between the socialist and “bourgeois feminist” discourses and organizations, as present in Neda Božinović’s and Jovanka Kecman’s accounts. The crucial publication for understanding the connections between the socialist and the liberal feminist discourses in the interwar period is the periodical *Ženski pokret* [The Women’s Movement], what Stanislava Barać calls the “central

⁷⁶ Zagorka, “Snimke iz Beograda,” *Jutarnji list*, 8 October 1919, 3, as quoted in: Melissa Bokovoy, “Kosovo Maiden(s): Serbian Women Commemorate the Wars of National Liberation, 1912-1918,” in N. M. Wingfield and M. Bucur, *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Ana Kolarić, *Rod, književnost i modernost u periodici s početka 20. veka*, 267.

⁷⁹ Also, Melissa Bokovoy adds: “Commemorations in both Serbia and Croatia after the war privileged certain kinds of experience and excluded others. Not only did commemorative activities tend toward privileging one national group over another, but commemoration of the wars of national liberation privileged male experience over female experience. Despite the visibility of women during the Balkan Wars and World War I, as combatants, non-combatants, refugees, and victims, women’s experiences became either secondary considerations or largely ignored in the commemorative practices and traditions which emerged in Yugoslavia during the interwar period.” Melissa Bokovoy, “Kosovo Maiden(s): Serbian Women Commemorate the Wars of National Liberation, 1912-1918,” 167.

institution of the feminist counterpublic in interwar Yugoslavia.”⁸⁰ It was the official publication of the society *Ženski pokret*, established first in 1919 in Belgrade and then in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and other. In 1924, all the regional sections of this organization were united into the *Alijansa ženskih pokreta* [The Alliance of the Woman’s Movements], and from that moment the periodical *Ženski pokret* is an official organ of this alliance, aiming to gather women from all the regional sections of *Ženski pokret* and to follow their work.⁸¹ As the editors’ approach was “intellectual elitism,”⁸² the reading audience consisted mainly of the educated middle-class feminists from the urban centers of the state. In the beginning of the 1920s, the women from *Ženski pokret* demanded radical changes, as they aimed for the female suffrage rights and the protection of women’s rights. Yet, even though the change they demanded was radical – it was not revolutionary, as it did not ask for the destruction of the social order.⁸³ Barać notes that the periodical was a “melting pot of feminist and communist ideology,”⁸⁴ although in the period of the royal dictatorship (1929-1934), the editors seem to have given up some of their demands and focused more on the discourse of motherhood, although the feminist ideology was to a large extent still preserved.⁸⁵

Barać’s examples give us a clue that the feminist and socialist ideologies among the educated middle-class women in Yugoslavia were not entirely conflicting. Already in 1920, *Ženski pokret* publishes Alexandra Kollontai’s text about prostitution, whereas in 1922 and 1923 there are several texts about Rosa Luxemburg that even send calls for revolution hidden within the form of literary criticism, not interesting to censors.⁸⁶ Very interestingly, there are also texts

⁸⁰ Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrapunkcija*, 132.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 149-152.

that criticize the limits of women's emancipation within the Soviet "communist experiment," so in 1927 Julka Hlapec Đorđević says that the problem is that women in Soviet Russia, even though they have their own work, still do all the housework and the work around the children without the help of their husbands. She concludes that, when it comes to 'the woman question,' there is "a fiasco in USSR".⁸⁷ From 1933, *Ženski pokret* had a strong pacifist stance and it often warned to the danger of the German national-socialism.⁸⁸ Although there is not yet sufficient research about how members of the *Ženski pokret* conceptualized feminism or women's emancipation in the 1920s, Ajlojzija Štebi's 1930 article appears to be one of the key articles for understanding how women (at least the non-socialist women) conceptualized the difference between what she called "socialist and bourgeois women's movement." Ajlojzija Štebi's view is that, even though there used to be a sharp conflict between these two groups in the international women's movement, "the socialist women's movement had a huge influence on the bourgeois women's movement." She adds that although the both "factions" exist in Yugoslavia, they are not very strong so the two groups can work together for a common cause as "there are not yet really profound and sharp differences" between them.⁸⁹ These examples show that the differences between the "bourgeois" and the "socialist" discourses were not as distinct as one might think. This is an important context for understanding the collaboration of the feminist organization *Ženski pokret* and the younger women from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia that established the Youth Section of *Ženski pokret* in 1935 and published *Žena danas*.

Finally, it is important to note here that *Ženski pokret* did not publish many articles about rural women. However, women from the organization *Ženski pokret* had organized domestic

⁸⁷ Julka Hlapec Đorđević, "Žene i deca u Sovjetskoj Rusiji," *Ženski pokret*, 1927/12, 4, as quoted in Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 153.

⁸⁸ Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 133.

⁸⁹ Ajlojzija Štebi, "Jedna paralela," 1930/7-8, 2, as quoted in Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 134.

schools for rural women from 1922 to 1929. In 1929, Darinka Lacković started organizing the King's Fund Domestic School. Darinka Lacković was a part of the 1920s feminist circles as well, she was a contributor to the periodical *Ženski pokret* and, as I don't have exact information about her, I can only assume that she also participated in the organizations of the school in the earlier period. This, unfortunately, is a gap in this research, and my analysis of *Seljanka* is done without knowing the details of how the feminists in the 1920s related to the conflicting nation-building projects in Yugoslavia.

My intention in this part of the subchapter was to put light to the discourses of women's emancipation in Serbia before World War I, and to, by looking at the continuities and discontinuities in interwar period, point to two complexities when it comes to the 'woman question' in the context of Yugoslavia. The first mainly concerns the contested conceptions of "Yugoslavia" between Serbian women and Croatian and Slovenian women right after WWI, and the strong Serbian nationalist narratives that did not disappear in interwar Yugoslavia. The second complexity is connected to the alleged distinction between the "bourgeois" and "socialist" discourses of women's emancipation, which I aimed to challenge by showing how, even though there were differences, these differences were considered as minor in the given historical context.

1.2. The Rural Context: Reconstructing the Problems and the Solutions of the Everyday Life of Rural Women

1.2.1. Transformations in the Family Life in Yugoslav Rural Areas

The discourses of emancipation of rural women in the interwar period were part of the larger context of the contemporary feminist discourses in Yugoslavia discussed in the previous subchapter. However, discourses of rural women's emancipation were also responses to the processes of modernization and of transformation of the traditional patriarchal way of life that had been taking place in the Balkans since the end of the nineteenth century. In the rural context, the major consequence of the modernization processes was the dissolution of *zadruga* - the traditional form of huge patriarchal family, in which different generations would live and work in a collectively owned household. It was a hierarchical patriarchal community in which each individual had a place and a task. Importantly, it was a self-sufficient unit of production, in which the members worked together and shared the products of their labor.⁹⁰

In his 1936 book *Kako živi narod: život u pasivnim krajevima* [How the People Lives: Life in the Passive Regions], Rudolf Bićanić, young economist and a member of the Croatian Peasant Party, offered a study about the way the rural population lived in the poorest regions in Yugoslavia, allowing us to better understand the context in which the transformation of the traditional life was taking place.⁹¹ The detail that probably reflects the peasants' troubles the

⁹⁰ For more about South-Slav *zadruga*, see: Maria N. Todorova, "The problem of the South Slav *zadruga*" and "Conclusion" in: Maria N. Todorova, *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 127-166; and: Elinor Murray Despalatovic, Preface to *How the People Live: Life in the Passive Regions* by Rudolf Bićanić, Joel M. Halpern and Elinor Murray Despotović, transl. by Stephen Clissold (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1981 [1936]), accessed May 30, 2017, http://scholarworks.umass.edu/anthro_res_rpt21/1.

⁹¹ In 1935 Bićanić set out on a journey around the villages of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Dalmatia as to get familiar with the way the people – narod – actually lived. According to R.J.Crampton, this research was a part of the Croatian Peasant Party and Peasant Economic Union's (Gospodarska Sloga) endeavour to "improve the material and cultural standard of the peasant's life," by setting up of co-operatives. R.J. Crampton, review of the *How the People*

most is that, according to Bićanić, they felt the year 1935 had been worse even than 1917 - the year remembered for disastrous hunger during World War I.⁹² All day and every day, peasants were occupied with the struggle for survival and the effort to satisfy their primary needs.⁹³ The reason for the difficult life Bićanić saw in the economic crisis and the rapid “penetration of capitalism into the village.”⁹⁴ As Bićanić noticed perhaps with a touch of romanticism:

In the days when the peasant neither bought nor sold, there were no crises like the one gripping the world today. The peasant consumed what he produced: he drank his milk and his wine, ate his own poultry and mutton. Today the market snatches it all away for next to nothing in return.⁹⁵

In the interwar period, the rural population had been increasingly burdened with taxes and debts, they had to sell the food they had produced cheaply while eating only corn porridge for each meal, whereas their methods of farming remained undeveloped. To illustrate his point about the undeveloped character of these areas entirely, Bićanić highlights that only one fourth of the Croats have beds in their homes – usually one room in the house would serve as a bedroom and all members of the household would sleep there together.⁹⁶

While Bićanić was concerned about how people lived in the rural areas, social anthropologist Vera Stein Erlich was more interested in how women lived in different regions, as well as how their situation changed with the transformation of the old family way of life. In 1937, she had started her seminal research about the transformations in Yugoslav family life, which took shape in a study *Yugoslav Family in Transition* published in 1964.⁹⁷ In this research, Erlich was interested primarily in the consequences of the dissolution of the traditional

Live: Life in the Passive Regions by Rudolf Bićanić, Joel M. Halpern and Elinor Murray Despotović, in *The Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 31. No. 2. (1983), 180.

⁹² Rudolf Bićanić, *How the People Live: Life in the Passive Regions*, 29.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112-114.

⁹⁷ Vera Stein Erlich, *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji* (Zagreb: Liber, 1971)

patriarchal family life. What kind of difficulties did this change bring for the members of the families? According to Erlich, there were both “light and dark” sides of these changes. The main problem was that the nuclear families that would divide from a *zadruga* would do it with the intention to work independently, but without predicting all the risks of independence, the hard work within the household, as well as the problems of dependence on the market economy.⁹⁸ As Erlich informs us, the labor became more difficult, as there were no other household members as a replacement for the hard work, so even the children had to start working at an early age.⁹⁹ Along with that, the position of women within the family changed as well, and the change was ambivalent. Whereas in traditional *zadrugas* women had been in charge of the female jobs, such as making clothes and food, at this point they started doing the heavy farm work as well.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, women were in a less secure position, as they were not protected by the community any more from, for example, domestic violence. But, at the same time, they were, as Erlich put it, “starting to move more freely” and to form their lives more actively.¹⁰¹

I see the discourses of emancipation of rural women in these two sources as different responses to the already ongoing changes in the lives of rural women. In the continuation of this subchapter, I will look at the representations and self-representations of rural women in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, with the intention to explore if and to what extent the *problems* detected concerning rural women in the two sources differ, as well as what the *solutions* the editors potentially offer to the problems are. I will examine the content of the articles, particularly focusing on the issue of women’s labor and the way the women’s labor was conceptualized in the sources. However, I will also aim to reveal the silences, or, as Ann Stoler has written in a

⁹⁸ Vera Stein Erlich, *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji*, 391.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 393-394.

different context, my objective is to look at “what was ‘unwritten’ because ‘everyone knew it’, what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and what was unwritten because it could not be said.”¹⁰² In the case of *Seljanka*, I examine the program introductory texts along with the remarkable correspondence between the former students and the editor published in the section “Our Mail” in each issue. In the case of *Žena danas*, I look at the representations of rural women, which put light to what was *unsaid* in to a large extent idealistic representations of life in the countryside in *Seljanka*, but also point to the message(s) this periodical communicate about the rural women to its readers.

1.2.2. *Seljanka*: Housewife, Wife, Mother – and Agricultural Worker

Here comes “Seljanka!” There are periodicals for almost every profession. Specialized newspapers exist for teachers, priests, professors, engineers, attorneys, merchants, craftsmen, women in towns and peasant men. Peasant women, who can hardly read and who know so little, now finally get their own periodical, because they need to hear and learn many things as well.¹⁰³

Hence begins the introductory text of *Seljanka*, written by the editor Darinka Lacković. From the first sentence, it is evident that the category “seljanka” [peasant woman] is perceived, above all, as a profession. The aim of the texts published in this periodical was “to give lessons on: science¹⁰⁴ about cooking, health, agricultural domestic work – cooking, food preservation and handwork.”¹⁰⁵ The periodical, therefore, was basically to serve as a manual or a handbook and to educate rural women, thus providing them with knowledge necessary for the performance of their domestic work. The category of rural women was primarily defined through the labor they

¹⁰² A. Stoler. “Prologue in Two Parts,” in: *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2009), 3

¹⁰³ “Uvod” [Introduction], *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Originally, the author uses the word *nauka*, which in Serbian means *science*, but it can also mean *knowledge* in general. I chose to translate it as *science* in order to emphasize the stand of the author that all the “domestic duties” of rural women should be taken as seriously as, for example, science about health.

¹⁰⁵ “Uvod,” *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 2.

are supposed to perform in their households, but how was the rural women's role in the household constructed, and what did it imply?

“Naturally,” every woman works as a housewife, wife and a mother,¹⁰⁶ and I will look at what *Seljanka* prescribes to each of these functions. The housework of women consisted primarily of the maintenance of family health and household hygiene. The aim of the health institutions from the beginning of 20th century onwards was to improve extremely poor living conditions in the countryside, and the advices are very similar to the public health discourses both before and after World War I.¹⁰⁷ The articles in *Seljanka* offer very basic information about health and hygiene, for example how to boil soap,¹⁰⁸ how to cook healthy food and how to rightly preserve it for winter.¹⁰⁹ The letters and the program texts also indicate that the women who had been previously educated in the school should further inform their family and other women in the village of these important issues. However, since changing lifestyles was not easy, women often wrote about difficulties they encountered in their homes. Responding to Ivanka Kuzmanović's letter, Darinka Lacković writes:

I trust you when you say that you are struggling with your family to accept your advice, I laughed when I read your letter in which you describe how your mother was angry with you when you opened the window when they were asleep, so that the fresh air comes in, what did she say? Why do we have fire, then, to heat the outside? Mr. doctor will be very pleased when he hears that you managed to introduce a spittoon in your home, your family must admit that it is much nicer to spit in a spittoon then wherever in the house.¹¹⁰

The changes women mostly write about include opening the windows, spitting in one place instead of all over the house, and eating from separate plates. Ivanka Kuzmanović writes:

¹⁰⁶ D., “Seljanka kao saradnik u poljoprivredi” [Peasant Woman as a Coworker in Agriculture], *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 5

¹⁰⁷ This will be analyzed in length in the second chapter.

¹⁰⁸ “Kuvanje sapuna” [Cooking Soap], *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 13.

¹⁰⁹ “Naš kuvar” [Our Cookbook], *Seljanka* 1933/02, 13.

¹¹⁰ Darinka Lacković to Ivanka Kuzmanović, *Seljanka*, 1933/02: 15.

You should know how beautifully I tidied the house, everybody listens to me, I made sweet cherry compote and jam, and they also like my cooked dishes. Only one thing they don't want to listen, to eat from their own plate, I eat from my own plate and they tell me we are not sick so you can eat with us. I explained to them why it is not good to eat from the common pot.¹¹¹

Interestingly, she adds that thanks to her teachers, she does not have to “live like cattle” any more.¹¹²

Looking at these letters, it appears that the difference between the “old” and the “new” way of life indeed was huge. The school seems to have made quite an impact on the everyday life of – at least some - rural families. Even though a number of women complained that it was hard to make changes, many wrote about their success in changing not only their home, but also the wider community. Darinka Glogovac informed her teacher that everybody is satisfied with her knowledge: “Every evening I give lectures, the older ones listen to me more or less, but the younger ones have already learned almost all about hygiene.”¹¹³ Also, Marina Cvijić-Kerović from Bosnia wrote: “Every evening they ask me to instruct them and they even come from other houses, so I practically lecture a class, so they start laughing how I speak so seriously and they are amazed how I have managed to learn so much in eight months.”¹¹⁴ These examples illustrate the successful impact this school and probably other similar schools had on the everyday life in rural areas across country. Even though the number of women was not so large, the impact seems to have been on a much wider scale.

While the most explicit goal of the school was to improve rural women's knowledge in performing their housework, the ideology of the school did not go against the common opinion that every woman's role is to get married and give birth to a lot of children. The program of the

¹¹¹ Ivanka Kuzmanović to Darinka Lacković, 1933/09, 15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Darinka Glogovac to Darinka Lacković, *Seljanka*, 1934/01: 16.

¹¹⁴ Marina Cvijić-Kerović to Darinka Lacković, *Seljanka*, 1933/05: 14.

school obviously encompassed the advice of the right way to get married. Because of this specific education, the women who had gone to Domestic School were highly appreciated in the village. Ljubica Grković from Hercegovina writes:

Now even our peasants say the school is good, and they appreciate our knowledge, even though before they had thought that a girl that leaves home is good for nothing. Now, Miss, I have a lot of suitors, I can say I am proposed by peasants as well as by office bearers, but I will not decide without your knowledge because I look at you as my guardian.¹¹⁵

Notably, this letter shows that Darinka Lacković had a profound influence on the girls. “I am glad you got married, especially that you married into a peasant house,” she would write.¹¹⁶ In the letters, Darinka Lacković was often referred to as “the mother,” and she would even interfere into the relation between the real mother and the daughter.¹¹⁷ A girl, therefore, should listen to their parents, get married and then perform her duties as she had learnt in the school. In one of the letters Vukosava Boglić, apparently Lacković’s associate from Knin, describes how five former students from the villages around Knin visited her for a couple of days and mentions how she helped one of the girls: “Stana was at my place for three days, I talked to her a lot and I explicated her the role in the house.”¹¹⁸ This implies that the “role in the house” was something taken for granted.

Finally, the text “Mother” published in the second issue of *Seljanka* offers a description of what being a mother implies. The text makes a clear differentiation between mothers and fathers; while mother is the one who primarily educates her children, father is only “a guest in

¹¹⁵ Ljubica Grković to Darinka Lacković, *Seljanka*, 1933/03: 16-17.

¹¹⁶ Darinka Lacković to Darinka Čosić, *Seljanka*, 1933/04: 15-16.

¹¹⁷ In the letter to Slavica Krajačić from Karlovac, she writes: “I see from your letter that you are struggling with the marriage, I am sure they do not let you marry who you want, listen to your mother, dear child, she is your best friend. Write to me lengthily, so I will see who is right.” Darinka Lacković to Slavica Krajačić, *Seljanka*, 1933/03: 15.

¹¹⁸ Vukosava Boglić to Darinka Lacković, *Seljanka*, 1934/01: 14-15.

the house,” always busy and unable to actually take care of the children.¹¹⁹ Additionally, mothers are also in charge of preserving national customs and, through telling folk tales to their children, developing the national sentiment.¹²⁰ In this context, a clear division between “female” and “male” work is made, while not a word was mentioned about the work men do. The implication seems to be that it should not be questioned how men are “busy” and that all the work in the house and connected to children is, naturally, women’s work and women’s *only*. When it comes to motherhood, the aim was to raise children that are patriots and that gladly make sacrifices for their homeland.¹²¹

One of the crucial things concerning motherhood is knowledge about pregnancy, birth and baby care. As I have explained, the discourse of *Seljanka* implied that every woman should get married and that it was better to marry into a peasant house. Of course, the fact that marriage implied having children was unsaid because that was very well known. In a letter to Ivanka Đorđević-Andelković, Lacković writes:

For you peasant women, especially there, where there are no doctors and midwives, it is necessary to know how you will manage. And you were all so shy about it and some even got angry that you were told something about it. All of you are future mothers and housewives and that knowledge is the most important for you, because in villages a young woman might die only because she is not informed, and because she takes the birth-giving for granted.¹²²

Thus, knowledge about giving birth was not yet articulated among rural women, or if it was, it could not be said because it was considered shameful. Certainly, the absence of knowledge about crucial issues related to childbirth was one of the causes of the highest mortality rates of newborn children in whole Europe. Through the school and the periodical, Darinka Lacković and her

¹¹⁹ Đ. Karajovanović, “Majka” [Mother], *Seljanka*, 1933/02, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Darinka Lacković to Ivanka Đorđević-Andelković, 1934/02.

associates aimed to make a change which, although limited by a traditionalist and patriarchal worldview, still introduced profound changes into the lives of rural women.

So, according to *Seljanka*, the role of the peasant woman as a housewife, wife and a mother was basically to cook, to keep the house clean and healthy in a way instructed by the periodical, to give birth to children and to raise them in patriotic manners. However, *Seljanka* added a new component to the rural women's "natural" labor: every peasant woman was to become her husband's coworker in the agricultural production of the household. This, it appears, reflects the already ongoing changes in the lives of rural women, which put women in a difficult position as, next to their "natural" labor, now they had to do the heavy agricultural labor as well. In *Seljanka*, there is an attempt to come to terms with this problem by explaining that agricultural labor consists of the male and female part. Specifically, women's part consisted of: poultry raising, dairy production and growing vegetables and flowers. In this sense, women's labor gained an economic element as well, so it seems that the idea was to "liberate" women from the hard work in the field by making the "women's" part of the work economically sustainable. The writer of the periodical assumed that all the material needed in the household, such as material for clothes and food, should be covered by the income the housewife makes.¹²³ The following chapter will engage with these ideas in detail.

Lastly, *Seljanka* offered one more interesting novelty to the everyday life of rural women. Namely, with the establishment of this periodical, some rural women got the opportunity to become a part of a "public forum," or, using Fraser's term, "subaltern counterpublic" created through the mail section in which the letters were published. From the pragmatic, "business" perspective, this public correspondence seems to have functioned as an encouragement for the

¹²³ On the contrary, the larger income (presumably from the work of men) should be used for improvement of the household in general, for example to mend the buildings, buy healthier cattle, buy more land, etc. D., "Seljanka kao saradnik u poljoprivredi," *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 6.

women to pay yearly subscription to the periodical and to contribute to the work of the school through recommending new students. The fact that the former students were supposed to participate in recruiting new students meant that they had their share of responsibilities regarding the whole organization. It was expected from them to write letters continuously and make effort to find new participants. If a woman would not write for a certain period of time, the editor would address her via a short letter in the periodical, asking her if anything is wrong. In this way, the correspondence was maintained, and the women remained a part of a larger network of women. The limits of this “subaltern counterpublic” formed of rural women will be discussed in the third chapter.

1.2.3. The Representations of Rural Women in *Žena danas*

Periodical *Žena danas* dealt with the similar problems as *Seljanka*, although it brought different views and different solutions to the problems. In the text “*Peasant Woman* – Franja Vučinović,”¹²⁴ the editors of *Žena danas* positively evaluated F. Vučinović’s book *Seljačka žena* [Peasant Woman], saying that the book’s author “is right to be critical of those who always write nicely about the countryside.” Furthermore, they added that “learning about the circumstances rural women live in should serve as a kind of help in the process of approaching them, which is why the booklet *Seljačka žena* is so welcome, because in the image of Croatian peasant woman we recognize those women from closer areas such as Belgrade, Morava, Southern Serbia or Sandžak.”¹²⁵ At least two things are important here. First, the editors of *Žena danas* were interested to learn about the actual experiences of women from different parts of the country, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Secondly, the editors of *Žena danas* seem to be in debate with those discourses that idealize the countryside, such as the one in *Seljanka*. It is

¹²⁴ “*Seljačka žena* – Franja Vučinović” [‘Peasant Woman’ - Franja Vučinović], *Žena danas*, 1937/7, 17.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

not surprising in this context that *Žena danas* offers information that is *not* talked about in *Seljanka*, or simply that it approaches the same issues differently.

While *Seljanka* idealized the “profession” of peasant women, the text “The Life of a Bosnian Peasant Woman” raised the problem of women being “sold” and “bought” in order to perform cheap labor in the households they had been “married-into”. In Bosnian rural areas, for example, it is common to marry fifteen-year-old boys just before they leave for the army, so that the new wife can replace him in the household. Namely, it is cheaper to get a girl that would work all day with no right to complain, than to pay for a wage earner that usually works only one kind of job and demands time to rest.¹²⁶ A young wife becomes a slave for the whole household; “If the household has more members, the young woman becomes the servant of the whole *zadruga*, she has to do all the hardest jobs nobody else wants to.”¹²⁷

All the texts about rural women in *Žena danas* emphasize the incredible amount of work women in the countryside face every day and all year long without a break, comparing women explicitly to slaves. What does rural women’s labor consist of? In autumn, when men have more free time, women have to work around the cattle, to preserve food and to sew clothes for the whole household.¹²⁸ During winter, when men stay in the warm house and when all the streams are covered with thick ice, “a peasant woman breaks the ice, takes the water, and in the coldest possible weather she rinses the laundry.”¹²⁹ When the summer comes, a peasant woman does not have a vacation like some other people:

She gets up at three in the morning, prepares the meal for work in the fields, makes cornbread, feeds the chickens, cleans the house, and when the sun comes

¹²⁶ “Život Bosanske seljanke” [The Life of a Bosnian Rural Woman], *Žena danas*, 1938/11-12, 20.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

out she leaves for the fields. Often she must take lunch to the fields, [...], because men never carry pots... As soon as she gets to the fields, she starts digging.¹³⁰

After an hour rest in the sun, even though the river might be nearby, she has no time to go swimming, as more work awaits them at home; while men have a rest and wait for dinner, she prepares dinner and does numerous other chores for the house.¹³¹ In other words, women's work never ends.

The descriptions of women's labor in *Žena danas* are far from saying that more responsibility in the household could mean more independence for a woman. In the text "Development of Rural Women's Labor," Pavle Mijović identified the problem concerning the increasingly difficult rural women's daily work. According to Mijović, in ancient time women's labor consisted mainly of child-rearing and child-caring. However, with the dissolution of the tribal organizations in Montenegro and the development of agriculture, women's work quantitatively and qualitatively changed.¹³² This indicates to the difference between the way *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* responded to the changes that were happening with the dissolution of the old way of life which burdened women with additional work. While in *Seljanka* the increase in the amount of work of rural women was used to pronounce women as equal to their husbands – coworkers in agriculture, equal in difference -, in *Žena danas* the change is negatively evaluated exactly because, rather than improving the position of peasant women or making them independent of their husbands, it simply increased the amount of women's work and made her life more difficult.

This further opens the important question of the division of labor. Whereas the texts in *Seljanka* are silent about what the work of men actually implied, *Žena danas* openly talked about

¹³⁰ O.V. – učiteljica, "Kako žena na selu provodi leto" [How a Peasant Woman Spends Her Summer], 1938/16, 29.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Pavle Mijović, "Razvitak rada seoskih žena" [Development of Rural Women's Labor], *Žena danas*, 1939/19, 09.

the privileged position of men. On Sundays, they say, men get into their white Sunday suits and leave for communal gatherings, whereas women stay home to feed the cattle, clean up the barn, prepare meals.¹³³ While women work, men leave to a local *kafana* [guesthouse, inn], come back to lunch and then go back to *kafana*, since they “have some work there.”¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the editors of *Žena danas* are careful to say that only women work hard: “Still, it would be wrong to think that men’s position is much better than women’s. It is, but only in the way that he has complete freedom, while a woman is subjected to him.”¹³⁵ This points to the idea that both peasant women and peasant men were exploited, but the emphasis was still on the fact that women’s position and women’s labor was far more difficult than labor and position of their husbands, for the reasons mentioned above. Finally, while men have their “days off” and the rights to go out and socialize, women work without a break:

And when she almost falls down from all the work, then the husband comes back from a festivity or a village drinking bout. She must serve him, take his dirty shoes off, and for the smallest mistake his heavy, manly fist could be burdened on her weak shoulders. Men who do not beat their wives in villages are rare.¹³⁶

Women’s labor briefly stops only during her other *labor* – childbirth. The problem, according to *Žena danas* is that rural women would very often deliver a baby alone in the field. After that, the practice was to go alone to the stream to wash herself only one day after the delivery and, with no more delay, continue the work because it is shameful for the woman to rest after the childbirth. Furthermore, the article “What Needs To Be Done To Decrease Maternal Mortality” brings criticism against the “rooted and false assurance, that reigns mostly among men,” that Yugoslav women have a “superhuman resistance,” and that they are “heroic” because

¹³³ “Život Bosanske seljanke”, *Žena danas*, 1938/11-12, 20

¹³⁴ O.V. – učiteljica, “Kako žena na selu provodi leto,” 1938/16, 29

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

they usually give birth in the field.¹³⁷ The article argues that there is no exact information about how many women die during the childbirth, and that because of ignorance and hard life Yugoslav women workers and peasant women aged twenty-five looks like forty.¹³⁸ Concerning the problems of childbirth, the proposed solution is the following:

The most important factor is the state, the only effective solution. To appoint enough county doctors, especially in the stagnant areas, to make sure not to leave even one county without a doctor and a midwife. To open labor departments in existing hospitals, to open new maternity hospitals, especially in rural areas, and to strive to have a systematic plan for rural maternity hospitals.¹³⁹

This citation illustrates the general attitude of the editorial board of *Žena danas*, conditioned, of course, by the communist political ideology.

There is one more issue *Seljanka* is completely silent about. It appears that abortion was not written (or talked) about in the school or the periodical because it could *not* be said. There are several mentions of the abortion issue in *Žena danas*. The most striking example is Sofija Mijović's story "Conversations" in which a poor, but healthy peasant woman Luca, married to a drunk and pregnant for eleventh time, explains to her neighbors that she cannot abort, because a women that does something like that is damned in the "other life." Yet, what happens instead of abortion shocks the reader profoundly. Instead of ceasing the pregnancy, Luca puts her newborn babies unprotected in the cold and "prays to the God to take the child." After two days, the child would die, and she would say: "What can you do, God's will!" The same thing, then, happens to Luca's sixteen year old daughter. The narrator, however, depicts these women with empathy:

This Luca is a rarely kind human being, but the prejudice not to leave her husband, the wish to educate her female child, threw her deeply. But, in the eye of her neighbor, Luca is a good person. She is not lazy, nor corrupt, but too honest. Naivety made Luca go so

¹³⁷ "Šta treba uraditi da se smanji smrtnost porodilja" [What Needs To Be Done To Decrease Maternal Mortality], *Žena danas*, 1937/03, 14.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

far as to call for God, to take her babies, because a baby in her cottage is so huge that she could not bear to look around her so many hungry children.¹⁴⁰

The problem, again, is not the individual human being, but poverty and prejudice that rule in the society, thus disabling young, uneducated women to make a change. This text functions as an explanation for those who are not informed of the problems rural women cope with, but also as an incentive for women to think differently and to fight against prejudice and for education. From this perspective, the discourse in *Seljanka* seems ignorant of the problems that many rural women have to face with, such as being married to a drunkard and extreme poverty no women's economizing. Therefore, *Žena danas* articulates a problem with a lot of empathy and care for individual human being, but also with an insinuation how to solve it on a structural level.

1.2.4. Conclusions

The dissolution of the traditional huge patriarchal family in the Balkans – *zadruga* - started taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the traditional patriarchal way of life began to disappear. This tendency continued rapidly in interwar period, and it influenced the everyday life in rural areas greatly. With the rapid transformations of the family life and the economic crisis of 1929, life for the rural population became increasingly difficult. Life became difficult especially for women, as they, along with their traditional share of work, at this point started doing the heavy work as well. In this context, discourses in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* detect the problems in rural women's lives and offer solutions in their own way. While there are some problems that are indicated in both periodicals, such as the incredible lack of hygiene and high level of child mortality, the offered solutions are quite different. On the one hand, the editor of *Seljanka* makes a selection of women she wants to work with and educate, hoping that they would further educate other women and men in the villages. The discourse in

¹⁴⁰ Sofija Mijović, "Razgovori" [Conversations], *Žena danas*, 1937/07, 21-22.

this periodical proposes a change in rural women's lives that concerns mainly educating women in a way that would be useful for the wider community. However, it does not challenge the traditional role of women as mothers and humble wives, subjected to men even when they are the coworkers in the house. On the other hand, influenced by the communist ideology, *Žena danas* points to the fact that women are often sold as labor force and explains how a peasant woman is subjected to her husband within the family. The emphasis is on rural women's position within the family (or within a *zadruga*) that correlates with the position of a slave.

While the discourse in *Seljanka* emphasized the direct, but limited, education of rural women and put pressure on the women to make changes on their own, the discourse in *Žena danas* implied a systematic approach that would help not just those privileged to be allowed to go to school, but also those who would never have such an opportunity. The following chapter looks more closely at the ideas and practices of education in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*.

Chapter 2 - Rural Women's Education in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*

Education is certainly one of the most important aspects of the history of women's emancipation. Historians have already pointed to the poor state of educational system in interwar Yugoslavia, with a particular emphasis on the problem of women's education. In Serbia, for example, even though the elementary education of female children had been obligatory since 1882, less than 20% of school children in the following decades were female.¹⁴¹ In 1929, a law stating that elementary education was compulsory for all children was (once again) put into force, but the number of girls in schools increased only for a brief period.¹⁴² The rural population

¹⁴¹ Momčilo Isić, *Seljanka u Srbiji u prvoj polovini XX veka* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2008), 49.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 50

steadily refused to send in female children to school, and obviously much more than laws was needed to change this tendency in education.

Along with the (doubtful) efforts of the Yugoslav country to improve the formal education and encourage the predominantly rural population to allow its children, both male and female, to attend school, there were parallel efforts to make a change through informal education. Both *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* responded to the patriarchal trends of refusing to send children especially female children, to school. This chapter looks more closely into the, as I will show, contested conceptions of rural women's education. To be precise, I use the concept of education here for ideas and practices that concern changing the position of rural women through learning and gaining knowledge previously unavailable to them. Therefore, the questions I want to answer in this chapter are: How did women editing *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* understand and practice the education of women? What influenced their understanding? How did the publications discuss the question of illiteracy and education of rural women?

I argue that the ideas and practices of education in *Seljanka* were strongly influenced by the contemporary eugenic discourses and the official public health education system established in the interwar period, while the texts about education and pedagogy in *Žena danas*, especially those of Vera Stein Erlich, indicate an important influence of the ideas of the school of individual psychology of Alfred Adler and the “new pedagogy” practiced in Weimar Republic.

2.1. *Seljanka*: Informal Education of Rural Women in Interwar Yugoslavia

I see *Seljanka* as a valuable source for exploring in more detail the informal education of rural women in interwar Yugoslavia. Its health section might be the key to understanding the periodical. In the context of the Yugoslav post-war demographic catastrophes, a shift from the

curative to preventive medicine took place¹⁴³ and education of peasants became one of the crucial elements in what was considered the preservation of the nation. Laza Marković, a physician from Novi Sad, was in charge of the health section of the periodical and most probably he was also the physician who had given lectures to the girls in the domestic school organized by Darinka Lacković. Interestingly, Marković was also the author of many publications about public health between 1904 and 1935. His ideas were part of the wider public health discourses specific for Southeastern Europe in the interwar period, which aimed at the creation of eugenically healthy nation and society in the newly formed state and were based on the assumption that health, hygiene and eugenics “are complexly linked to political processes and state policies.”¹⁴⁴ Looking at his earlier work makes it possible to better understand the connections between the eugenic and public health discourses and the desirable role of rural women that was constructed through these discourses and practices.

In this subchapter, I first look at different publications Laza Marković wrote in the period both before and after World War I in order to identify his main ideas. Then, I trace the influence of his ideas on the educational practice discussed in *Seljanka*. By exploring the connection between women’s education and public health discourses, I aim to show that Darinka Lacković’s domestic school and the discourse in *Seljanka* were under the strong influence of the contemporary eugenic discourses and interwar Yugoslav public health policy. Furthermore, I aim to show that although the discourse in *Seljanka* puts rural women in the conservative position of mothers, wives and housewives, it also seeks for emancipation of women within the framework of scientific nationalism.

¹⁴³ Vladimir Petrović, “Overview,” in *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900-1945* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 474.

¹⁴⁴ Promitzer, Christian, Trubeta, Sevasti and Turda, Marius, “Framing issues of health, hygiene and eugenics in Southeastern Europe,” in *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 1-3.

2.1.1. Laza Marković and Eugenics in Vojvodina between 1904 and 1935

Laza Marković (1876-1935)¹⁴⁵ was born to a merchant family in Tomaševac, Banat (southern Austria-Hungary at the time). He graduated from the Serbian Orthodox Grammar School in Novi Sad (Újvidék) in 1894 and subsequently pursued medical education in Budapest as a stipendist of Endowment of Sava Tekelija (Thököly Száva). Before opening his own physician's clinic in 1903 in Novi Sad, he had practiced medicine for several years in Budapest and Germany. Laza Marković was a part of the intellectual circle very close to the Serbian cultural institution *Matica srpska* and the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad, which means that he was as a part of the educated Serbian elite in Austria-Hungary. In the first decade of 20th century, Marković wrote plays that were performed in the Serbian National Theatre. He was an active physician in the wars; during the Balkan Wars (1911-1912) Marković went to Serbia and worked together with dr Milan Jovanović Batut, and during World War I he was active in Novi Sad. After the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, Marković occupied a series of positions in state health institutions in the Banat, Bačka and Baranja region (Dunavska banovina [Danube region] after 1929).¹⁴⁶

According to one of the rare accounts about his life, Laza Marković was the most popular physician in Novi Sad.¹⁴⁷ After he had returned to Novi Sad and opened his private clinic,

¹⁴⁵ In this paragraph, I rely on the only two biographies of Laza Marković: Risto Jeremić, *Prilozi za biografski rečnik Srba lekara Vojvođana 1756-1940* [Contributions to the Biographical Dictionary of Doctors from Vojvodina 1756-1940], (Novi Sad, 1951), 82-83; A biography written by dr Karmen Maskarel, the granddaughter of Laza Marković. Accessed April 20, 2017. <http://blog.b92.net/text/25344/Dr-Laza-Markovic/>.

¹⁴⁶ Some of the positions he occupied are: the president of the District Committee of Anti-Tuberculosis League (Oblasni odbor Antituberkulozne Lige), the president of the Union for the Protection of Children (Unija za zaštitu dece), the president of the Anti-alcoholic Movement (Trezenjački pokret), the director of the Health Section of Ministry of Health for Banat, Bačka and Baranja (resorno ministarstvo Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca postavilo za šefa Zdravstvenog odseka za Banat, Bačku i Baranju, 1919-1924), the director of Inspectorate of Ministry of Public Health (Inspektorat Ministarstva narodnog zdravlja, 1924-1929), the chief of Department of Social policy and public health of Danube Region (načelnik odeljenja za socijalnu politiku i narodno zdravlje banske uprave Dunavske banovine, after 1929).

¹⁴⁷ Risto Jeremić, *Prilozi za biografski rečnik Srba lekara Vojvođana 1756-1940* (Novi Sad: Medicinski pregled, 1952), 82-83.

Marković wrote a number of plays and monologues that were performed first in the Serbian National Theatre and then increasingly in the countryside. The function of these plays was to educate peasants by warning them about key problems concerning health, hygiene and eugenics. Some of the recurring topics were alcoholism, venereal diseases, popular misbeliefs, and the importance of health in marriage – the motives typical for health discourses of the time. Having all this in mind, it is obvious that Laza Marković was an important public figure both before and after World War I and that he participated in shaping the public (and popular) discourses about health and hygiene in the Serbian and later the Yugoslav context. A closer look at his work reveals more about his ideas about public health, as well as the ways these ideas influenced the construction of the desirable role of women.

It seems that Laza Marković's plays from the 1900s were written specifically for the Serbian elite theatre audience while his later monologues and dialogues were more intended for the peasant audience. His first play, *Pod novim slemenom* [Under the New Roof], (1905) gained success in the Serbian Novi Sad elite circles.¹⁴⁸ A contemporary critic compared it to the best peasant plays written at the time.¹⁴⁹ The central theme of this play is in essence the greed for money and luxury. The main character is a woman, Djula, whose greed causes the material and moral decline of herself and her husband. The beginning of the play finds Djula married into a happy, rich and successful family house – *zadruga*. However, she does not respect the rules of the traditional communal living, does not want to work like everyone else, instead she complains that she is the only one working all the time. She persuades her husband to ask for his share from his father so that they can leave and live under their own roof, be independent of his parents and

¹⁴⁸ Laza Marković, *Pod novim slemenom* [Under the New Roof] (Novi Sad: 1904).

¹⁴⁹ The writer of the critique highlights that the value of this play lies first in the quality of its structure, secondly, in the fact that it represents the life of the actual peasants and not the village life through the village elite such as priests, and, finally, that it reflects real life, not just some abstract ideas. "See: L. Mrgud, *Pod Novim Slemenom*," [L. Mrgud, *Under the New Roof*] *Letopis Matice srpske*, [year 75], 237=3 (1906), 113-115.

be in charge of their own money. The proud father divides the house, renounces his son and the couple leaves. However, due to his incapability to be “the man” of the house and her constant need of the new dresses (which, importantly, she does not make herself but buys on the market), they get into large debts and their house gets taken away. At that point, Djula accepts to go with a rich neighbor who had always been in love with her. Finally, the angry and disappointed husband takes a knife and kills his wife and himself.

Several important elements should be highlighted here. First, the author sees the *zadruga* as an ideal prototype of the peasant family structure, a commune where everybody lives and works collectively. The dissolution of the *zadruga* inevitably leads to a tragedy. Secondly, there is a conflict between two generations; the father represents the older generation, he is referred to as “the old Miletićevac,”¹⁵⁰ while the son is a representative of the younger generation and obviously lacks capability, determination and patriarchal sentiments to preserve the good old way of life and to resist the new, anti-traditionalist, capitalist trends. Thirdly, the character who actually causes the whole problem is a *woman* who does not want to work in the collective *or* work for herself but simply spends money by buying things. The dress is a paradigmatic example here because, as a part of a traditional community, her job would be to produce the necessary clothes for herself and for the family, and not to spend money and enter into capitalist relations by buying unnecessary clothes someone else had produced. Finally, very importantly, Djula is the daughter of an *alcoholic*, which obviously explains her destructive nature. It goes without saying that she had *inherited* the bad character from her father.

In more general terms, the discourse of this play reflects the contemporary concerns of the dissolution of the traditional patriarchal family life in the form of *zadrugas*. The play stands for a certain kind of rejection of capitalism and individual property. Furthermore, an important

¹⁵⁰ This implies that he participated in the 1848 rebellions under the leadership of the politician Svetozar Miletić.

element is what Maria Todorova calls “myth making,” meaning here the representation of the *zadruga* as inherently a Slavic family institution in the line with the „Slavic spirit of peacefulness and democratic cooperation“ as contrasted with “individualism, egoism and aggressiveness.”¹⁵¹ The causes of the dissolution of the healthy, old family life are greedy individualism and alcoholism, which I identify as consequences of the modernization processes and the introduction of the market economy to the villages discussed in the first chapter, and harmful inheritance and a badly arranged marriage between an undetermined man and a daughter of an alcoholic, which are the concepts of the eugenic ideas of the time. Already in Laza Marković’s early plays, thus, the traditionalist ideology is merged with the modern, scientific discourse of eugenics.

In the following years, Laza Marković further elaborated his ideas in numerous publications about public health and eugenics, mostly in the form of short one-act plays and peasant dialogues that were performed in villages in front of peasants. In *Ženidba i udadba ili Kako će narod doći do dobrog podmlatka* [Marrying Sons and Daughters or How Will the Nation Get Fine Youth] (1920) the motives of alcoholism, badly arranged marriage and ideas about health and eugenics are nicely put into a dialogue between a doctor and a peasant. This booklet illustrates not only Laza Marković’s understanding of eugenics, but also the form and the content of the education peasants in Yugoslavia were subjected to in the first part of the twentieth century. In *Ženidba i udadba*, the author refers to World War I as the huge trauma for the whole nation, as the losses among the people in these areas were highest in Europe. Laza Marković’s interpretation centers on the fact that not only were “the best, the most capable sons, who were supposed to leave numerous children” killed during the war, but many others who had

¹⁵¹ Maria N. Todorova, “Conclusion” in *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 153-154.

survived were infected by various venereal diseases, so the nation was significantly weakened.¹⁵²

Where did Marković see a solution? The Romans and Greeks, adds Marković, were the most enlightened nations in the world, and yet wild and uncultured, but healthy and fertile people conquered them; the guilt of the Romans and Greeks was in turning away from nature and its laws.¹⁵³ This argument indicates a shift from the emphasis of the cultural legacy of the nation to the biological discourses seen as crucial for a healthy nation and a successful state. The shift from cultural to health education is also visible in Laza Marković's work, having in mind that his earlier plays had been written specifically for the theatre, while later on he focused more on the popularization of health and hygiene among the peasants.¹⁵⁴ This shift from the cultural to the biological discourses will be further discussed in the third chapter.

After the introductory remarks of the author, a conversation between the peasant and the doctor begins, in which the doctor explains – in a way understandable to the peasant – the important elements in the process of marriage. The way the doctor talks to the peasant is amusing for the contemporary reader, because the problems of marriage are explained through comparisons to crops and cattle. At first, the doctor praises the watermelon he had bought from the peasant a day earlier. The peasant explains the watermelon is so large, red and sweet because the seed of the watermelon was good as well – it was, the peasant boasts, the seed of the largest and sweetest previous year's watermelon. In order to have a good crop, one needs to have the

¹⁵² Laza Marković, *Ženidba i udadba ili Kako će narod doći do dobrog podmlatka* (Novi Sad: 1922), 3.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

¹⁵⁴ Yet, even though the discourses of national liberation seem to not have been *primary* any more, the continuation of the dominant Serbian national liberation discourse from the period before World War I appears unchanged in the new context. . A good illustration for this claim might be the fact that although Marković writes about the new country, he still emphasizes that he talks of the *Serbian* nation, saying that it is important for every *Serbian* house to have healthy and strong youth, so that the *Serbian* people could keep their homes and fields and even make them bigger through the economic and educational struggle that every nation has with its neighboring nations" (Laza Marković, *Ženidba i udadba*, 54). Also indicative is a monologue written for the opening of the Red Cross in Novi Sad, in which Pavle Orlović, who had been killed in the Kosovo Battle in 1389, explains to the peasants why they are lucky to have Red Cross, unlike him and his friends who had died in the battle with no chance to be cured (Laza Marković, "Duh Pavla Orlovića"[Pavle Orlović's Ghost] in *Mati: Komad u jednom činu*, [Mother. A Peace in One Act], Novi Sad: 1928).

best seed. Further on, the doctor asks the peasant how come his horse is so beautiful. Not unexpectedly, the peasant describes how he had bred together the finest mare and the finest horse. Step by step, the doctor leads the peasant to the actual topic of the conversation – marriage. The peasant is wrong to think that for a good marriage the dowry of the bride is more important than her health. By careful mathematic calculation, the doctor and the peasant come to the conclusion that the illness of the bride costs more than the money she can bring to the house. The damage is twofold: in money and in offspring.¹⁵⁵

Finally, the doctor explains the principle of natural selection through the example of piglets, since it is commonly known that only the stronger piglets survive while the weaker ones are not strong enough to struggle for food. In the animal world, the stronger species kill the weaker ones so that they could remain alive.¹⁵⁶ This resonates with the idea that only the most capable people and nations are supposed to live and to conquer the others. Consequently, the role of the state is to educate the people how to preserve their health in order to lead a more capable, productive life within the traditionally given family and national frameworks. The solution to problems such as alcoholism, venereal diseases, syphilis - but also bad sight, inclination toward quarreling, rabbit mouth, bad teeth and many others – is first of all careful of arrangement of marriages which would prevent the unfit to have descendants. In case this is not enough, Marković also proposes forbidding certain people to marry and have children, but also sterilization of all the misfit, including tramps and lazy people. However, Marković's attitude towards sterilization seems ambiguous. Even though he often mentioned sterilization, he always

¹⁵⁵ Laza Marković, *Ženidba i udadba*, 7-21

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-29

emphasized that in practice it is more important to strive for the *positive* eugenics by promoting the marriage between those who are considered healthy enough to reproduce.¹⁵⁷

So far, I have pointed to Laza Marković's main ideas, illustrating a subtle shift from the peasant plays he had written for theatre in 1900s to the short dialogues he wrote for peasants in the 1910s and 1920s. I have focused on those publications that concern life in the countryside. With the establishment of the new country and *Državna škola za narodno prosvjećivanje* [Public School for Popular Education], his ideas become part of the official Yugoslav policy.¹⁵⁸ As the next part of this subchapter will show, the education of rural women in Lacković's school was based on the ideas identified in Marković's publications.

2.1.2. Informal Education and Eugenics: Constructing a Desirable Role of Rural Women

Marković's theoretical assumptions concerning eugenics are based on the idea that the preservation of the nation and "the race" is a prerequisite of the existence of the state.¹⁵⁹ In order to "preserve the race," the extremely bad health conditions in villages across the country had to be changed and, in line with the ideas of eugenics, the inheritance of the bad characteristics had to be stopped. In order to do this, the education of rural women needed to improve as well. As Mary E. Reed nicely put it, "peasant women held the key to needed health reforms in the villages," because it was they who cleaned the house and cared about children.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, she added that in the interwar period, peasant women were "trapped in the disintegration of the

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-40.

¹⁵⁸ It is important to note that Laza Marković was only one of the actors important for the popular health education and eugenics theories. While Marković was obviously in charge of the region around Novi Sad, the most active promoters of the preventive medicine in Belgrade were Milan Jovanović Batut and Uroš Krulj. For the limited scope of this thesis, I am focusing here solely on Marković, for two reasons: first, I find his publications as precious for understanding *Seljanka*, and, second, even though he was such an important figure in Novi Sad, it seems that he is almost completely unknown at the moment.

¹⁵⁹ Laza Marković, *Zadaci narodne uprave za unapređenje rasne higijene i evgenike* [Objectives of the People's Bureau for Advancement of Racial Hygiene and Eugenics] (Novi Sad, 19??), 5.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Reed, "Peasant Women in Croatia in the Interwar Years," in Sharon L. Wolchik and, Alfred G. Meyer, eds., *Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 100.

extended family structure, an agrarian depression, and the transition to a cash economy.”¹⁶¹ The informal schools for rural women, such as the one organized by Darinka Lacković, through their discourse and practice constructed a desirable role of rural women with the ambiguous aim to at the same time *preserve* the traditional way of life in rural areas (more specifically, to preserve the extended family structure and to avoid transition to cash economy as much as possible) *and* in a very specific manner to *modernize* and improve the living conditions in the countryside. I understand this modernization within Griffin’s framework, as a renewal of the healthiest national elements conducted by the scientific experts, thus as a form of scientific nationalism.¹⁶²

The education of rural women in informal schools offered knowledge that was considered necessary for improving the household health conditions and lowering the extremely high mortality rates of newborn children (hygiene, childbirth and childcare, reading and writing, cooking) as well as preserving the self-sufficient character of the household as much as possible (growing food, embroidery and making clothes). However, the program of the school appears to have encompassed much more. In terms of eugenics, it was in line with Marković’s proposition that the state measures should focus on *quantitative*, rather than qualitative race hygiene, with the crucial help of the *social hygiene* program, “the goal of which is to preserve life of individuals and the society to the final limits, overlooking their qualities, especially the qualities of their inherited values and abilities.”¹⁶³ Yet, he adds that *qualitative* and *positive* eugenics is important as well, and that it is crucial to encourage healthy people to reproduce.¹⁶⁴ Within this context, the

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Roger Griffin, “Tunnel Visions and Mysterious Trees: Modernist Projects of National and Racial regeneration, 1880-1939,” 436-437.

¹⁶³ According to Marković, in order to have a eugenically healthy nation, each family was supposed to have at least three to four children. Laza Marković, *Zadaci narodne uprave za unapređenje rasne higijene i evgenike*, 20.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

education in informal schools also implied a certain model how to marry rationally and wisely in order to prevent the inheritance of bad characteristics.

From the reports and letters in *Seljanka* it is evident that Lacković went around Yugoslavia herself searching for women from “good village houses” that would be allowed to go to this school.¹⁶⁵ At a later point, Lacković indicated more specifically that the future student needs to be a peasant woman older than fifteen who still wears and makes national clothes, and that she has to be “necessarily from a good house, so that she could be allowed to apply her new knowledge upon return.”¹⁶⁶ I mentioned in the previous chapter that girls would not marry without having in mind the advice they had received in school, and that their role as mothers was taken for granted. The question is then, what kind of family were they advised to marry into? In the text “Large and happy families,” Darinka Lacković wonders: “Will the happy times ever come back, when the daughter-in-law would not ask her husband to leave the *zadruga*, but she would enjoy the house full of youngsters, and she would love her parents in law as her own?”¹⁶⁷ The ideal prototype family is, obviously, still an extended peasant, patriarchal family, with the traditional male and female roles and a strict division of labor. In the school, girls were therefore most likely taught to respect the peasant house they marry into and to have many children. Their labor consisted of producing and cooking food, cleaning the house properly and making all the necessary clothes for themselves and the family, thus minimizing the capitalist connections with world. If we have in mind that this was the time of the economic crisis and that peasants were, as Bićanić informed us in his *How the People Live*, practically starving, it seems that the responsibility for the self-sustainability of the household – related, of course, to the self-

¹⁶⁵ Darinka Lacković, “Izbor novih učenica i obilaženje svršenih učenica Domaćičke škole Kraljevog fonda” [Selection of New Students and Visitation of the Graduated Students of the King’s Fund School], *Seljanka*, 1934/06: 8.

¹⁶⁶ Darinka Lacković to Stanojka M. Jovanović, *Seljanka* 1935/12, 14.

¹⁶⁷ Darinka Lacković, “Velike i sretne porodice” [Large and Happy Families], *Seljanka*, 1935/03:6.

sustainability of the nation - was put on women. To recapitulate - in the beginning of the century, Laza Marković wrote plays for the elite Novi Sad audience warning on the consequences of the dissolution of *zadruga*. In the early 1930s, *Seljanka* responded to the crisis still holding to the traditional way of life, as it is the only way towards the renewal of the nation.

Yet, despite the fact that this discourse is essentially traditionalist, anti-capitalist, anti-individualistic and patriarchal, the peasant family still needed to go through a limited modernization in order to be healthy and stable. I would point here to particular, even though slight, changes in the gender relations. First, even though the relationship between men and women still remains defined within the traditional patriarchal framework, within this framework rural women were (finally!) given the opportunity and the incentive to pursue some kind of education and to learn how to read and write, which is in any case the first step to any kind of emancipation. Secondly, for the first time, rural women got in touch with the basic knowledge about childbirth and childcare. The discourse about sexual knowledge was obviously shaped to serve the purpose of the state. Nevertheless, it still made women conscious about what was awaiting them.

Thirdly, in the previous chapter I wrote that, along with the “natural” labor of women (“occupation” of the mother, wife and a housewife), education in the domestic school aimed to transform women into the equal coworkers in the household. According to the discourse in *Seljanka*, women’s labor gains an economic element, as she becomes in charge of raising the poultry, making dairy products and growing vegetables. Lacković saw this new, rational division of labor as good, as “only this kind of the division of labor in the household leads to progress,” thus leading to the transformation of rural women from “slaves” to “coworkers.”¹⁶⁸ If, according to Lacković, all the income the housewife makes should cover all the material needed for the

¹⁶⁸ *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 6

household, the implication was that a peasant woman should have their own budget. Here I see a rational, progressive element put in the traditionalist framework.

Furthermore, as Laza Marković articulated it, each individual, whether male or female, became subjected to a higher cause of the preservation of the “race” and the creation of the “new ethics,” different from the previously accepted social or Christian ethics. This also meant that the “educational work must be performed *intensively* with both male and female youth of *all* social classes.”¹⁶⁹ Not only was this a radical proposition in terms of arguing for intensive education of all human beings, regardless of the gender or class, but it also led to a change in the understanding of the public and private sphere. Marković argued that the state, the church and the society should start overlooking marriages carefully.¹⁷⁰ Thus, he argued that the state should interfere into the private sphere of the Yugoslav citizens. This, it seems, was a version of the “new motherhood” ideas in Germany and Britain in the beginning of the twentieth century that argued for a “combination of enlightened reproductive decision making and careful nurture” which would produce healthy offspring.¹⁷¹ Adapted to the Yugoslav, patriarchal context, “new motherhood” was embedded into the nationalist ideology and the arguments for the well-being of a woman were merged with eugenic arguments that connected the well-being of a mother and a well-being of the nation.

To understand this phenomenon better, in her text about feminism and eugenics in Germany and Britain, Ann Taylor Allen reminds us that in 1900s Germany, politically progressive feminists were sympathetic towards some of the elements of the eugenics movement, as the public overlooking of the reproduction would mean decrease of the husbands’ rights to

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷⁰ Laza Marković, *Zadaci narodne uprave za unapređenje rasne higijene i evgenike*, 27

¹⁷¹ Ann Taylor Allen, “Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain, 1900-1940: A Comparative Perspective,” in *German Studies Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Oct., 2000), 481.

control the households and reproduction.¹⁷² In the case of Yugoslavia, the concern for ‘the woman question’ was in a dialogue with the concerns of eugenicists, and it seems to have increased women’s autonomy. Not only that, but this approach also left space for challenging the double standards that the society had for men and women. A brilliant example is Marković’s play performed in 1924 in Novi Sad, in which a woman, accused of cheating on her husband and having someone else’s child, explains in front of the court that she is innocent and that she had conceived a child through artificial insemination with a help of a doctor. The man is wrong to have had sexual relations before marriage, since it disabled him to have children, and the woman says in her defense: “My wish is not to justify myself, but I just want to emphasize, that the society has double standards for men and women.”¹⁷³ Again, it is confirmed that the role of a woman is to be a mother, but the questioning of the double standards concerning men and women is definitely a novelty. Not only did Marković openly raise the question of the double standards when it came to the sexual activity of men and women, but he did so through the voice of a woman.¹⁷⁴

To recapitulate, my aim in this subchapter was to make a connection between the domestic schools organized by Darinka Lacković in the early 1930s with the eugenic and public health discourses as presented in the leading Novi Sad physician Laza Marković’s publications. The eugenic discourse of Laza Marković was largely shaped by the concern for the

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Laza Marković, *Mati: Komad u jednom činu od Laze Markovića* (Novi Sad: 1928), 40.

¹⁷⁴ In fact, Marković had several stories like that. One of them, printed even in *Seljanka*, was originally published in the 1923 as a part of a collection of two monologues and one short play which presents the “hell” of the household in which the husband is an alcoholic. This story is written in the form of a confession of a woman who had killed her husband - an alcoholic, a gambler and a womanizer - in the moment of a great humiliation. In the monologue, the focus is not on the moral of the story, but on the opportunity of the woman to express herself. Laza Marković, *U paklu: dva monologa i slika u jednom činu* [In Hell: Two Monologues and A One-Act Scene] (Novi Sad: 1923).

transformations of the traditional, patriarchal way of life that was taking place along with the dissolution of the *zadrugas*. After the demographic catastrophes of World War I, the education of the peasants was seen as crucial for the preservation of the eugenically healthy nation in the newly formed state. By looking at the discourse of *Seljanka* along with the work of Laza Marković, I could identify how ‘the woman question’ was involved with the nationalist ideology based on the biological discourses. There are many progressive elements in *Seljanka*. First and foremost, the emphasis is put on women’s education. Then, women are for the first time talked to about childbirth and childcare, which was crucial as it made them conscious about what was awaiting them. Third, women’s labor in the house gained an economic element and, with their own budget, women were supposed to take care of the household. Fourth, women’s right for well-being was sought through the argument that a well-being of a mother means well-being of the nation. These were all attempts to seek for the women’s rights and equality within the ambiguous eugenic discourse that aimed for both preservation of the old forms of family life and the renewal of the nation through scientific modernization.

Yet, the question remains whether a form of women’s emancipation actually took place. The context in which Darinka Lacković and Laza Marković worked was rural and extremely patriarchal, and even the state could not force peasants to send their daughters to school. The fact that Darinka Lacković intended to transform rural women from “slaves” to “coworkers” indicates that she was aware of the terrible position of Yugoslav rural women, and that her intention was to help improving their way of life. Both Laza Marković and Darinka Lacković spent many years working in the field of peasants’ education, and even though they framed their arguments for the education of peasants within the framework of the national strength and progress, they argued for education for all. Yet, I agree with Stanislava Barać who calls this a

“false emancipatory discourse,”¹⁷⁵ as it only increased the amount of women’s labor. Additionally, this discourse put huge pressure on women to act in a certain new way in their communities, without offering them any other possibility than to marry into a peasant family, work endlessly and have as many healthy children as they can, for the sake of the nation. This discourse aimed to give women more autonomy through education, sexual education, independent work within the household and, very importantly, the right for well-being as a mother, but the discourse also emphasized and strengthened the “natural” roles of women and the gendered division of labor.

2.2. The Discussion about Education and Pegagogy in *Žena danas*

Žena danas will offer you the best entertainment and instruction with its prose; it will help you develop your personality through its principled articles; it will get you familiarized with the work of women in the last three years here and in other places; it will offer help to mothers via its pedagogical advice; to young women, it would offer a possibility to find a solution for the many difficulties life puts in front of them today; finally, it would familiarize you with the life of women from all parts of the country.¹⁷⁶

This is the text of one of the advertisements for *Žena danas*. The editors, as we see, were very conscious about the educational function of their publication, given that they wanted to help women develop their worldviews, educate their children and know about what feminist activists were doing in the world. When it came to ‘the rural woman question’, the editors did not pretend to be communicating with rural women directly, as they were of course aware of the high illiteracy rate and the difficult circumstances in which rural women lived. In the first chapter, I

¹⁷⁵ Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 286.

¹⁷⁶ “Svaka žena treba da nabavi komplet *Žene danas*” [Every Woman Should Get All Issues of *Žena danas*], *Žena danas*, 1939/24, 28.

showed how the representations of rural women in *Žena danas* continually pointed to the never-ending work of rural women, as well as their subordinated position in the patriarchal family.

My aim in this subchapter is to understand the ideas and practices of education of rural women. I will look at the texts in *Žena danas* that concern women's activism and the ideas about the practical work that needs to be done in order to change the difficult circumstances rural women live in. I believe that the function of these texts was to serve as a model of how to approach rural women and their problems. When evaluating Franjo Vučinović's book *Seljačka žena*,¹⁷⁷ for example, the editors particularly pointed to the fact that the book can "serve as a kind of help in the process of approaching them."¹⁷⁸ I argue that the way educated women imagined educating peasant women was influenced by contemporary pedagogy. I will specifically focus on Vera Stein Erlich, who, as I intend to show, was influenced by "new pedagogy" practiced in Weimar Republic and by the individual psychology of Alfred Adler.

2.2.1. Educating rural women: Nikica Blagojević, Angela Vode and Vera Stein Erlich

Countryside nurse Nikica Blagojević frequently wrote about her experiences of working with and talking to rural women. In the text "Our Peasant Woman," she explained that the best way one can approach rural women is to "go to the river or near the place they work, and they [the peasant women] will come on their own and ask questions."¹⁷⁹ According to Nikica Blagojević, rural women are "hungry of knowledge." The main goal of approaching them, as she explicitly stated, was to invite them to organize: "Tell them then about women's miseries. You have to know well their needs, their lives and language. Invite them to organize. They will all be

¹⁷⁷ See page 41.

¹⁷⁸ "Seljačka žena – Franja Vučinović" [*Peasant Woman* - Franja Vučinović], *Žena danas*, 1937/7, 17.

¹⁷⁹ Nikica Blagojević, "Naša seljačka žena" [Our Peasant Woman], *Žena danas* 1937/5-6: 13.

with you...”¹⁸⁰ This text points to two things. First, it sends a message to the reader that rural women should be invited to organize and, secondly, it implies this would be possible if rural women would hear about the miseries of other women. This is only one of the articles in *Žena danas* that attempted to present the ways educated women could approach rural women and talk to them, which I discuss in this subchapter. In another article, with the aim of opposing the opinion of a “reactionary” writer who thinks that women’s destinies are in the hands of men, the editors state that „to us, on the contrary, it is clear that women’s destinies are in their own hands and that they will, in the community with progressive men, build themselves a nicer and a worthier future.”¹⁸¹ Therefore, it is clear that all women must be in charge of changes in their own lives, which implies that women from urban areas cannot fight for the rights of rural women *instead of* the rural women. It is also evident, however, that educated women considered themselves responsible for approaching rural women and explaining them why it was important to organize in any way. The invitation to rural women to organize, then, was a call to join a community of women who want to fight for their own rights and for change. While Nikica Blagojević’s texts and representations are mainly based on her personal experience of working in the countryside as a nurse, similar texts written by Angela Vode, Slovenian feminist and communist, and Vera Stein Erlich, a Jewish leftist intellectual from Zagreb, additionally contain theoretical layer worth taking closer look at. Both articles I will focus on here are published in the eight issue of *Žena danas*.

Angela Vode (1892-1985) was a Slovenian activist, feminist, teacher, member of the antifascist movement and one of the founders of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. In the interwar period, she was also a member of many Slovenian women’s and feminist organizations,

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

including *Žensko gibanje* [Women's Movement], and she participated in the activities of the international women's organizations such as Little Entente of Women, International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship and International Council of Women. In 1939, she was expelled from the Communist Party because she refused to accept Stalin's Non-aggression pact with Hitler. She was imprisoned in 1944 by German fascists as a political prisoner, and after the war by the Communist Party as she had criticized the governmental and educational system in the newly formed country. In the 1980s her work was rediscovered and published in three volumes in Slovenian. Vode published several articles in *Žena danas*, and I will analyze her articles in the thesis, in this and in the following chapter.¹⁸²

Angela Vode's text is a report about communication between Slovenian (female) students and rural women. Students organized a camp in a Slovenian rural area, with the aim to try to bring closer the students and the peasants and to overcome the gap between women in rural and urban areas. According to Vode, the students went near a village, constructed tents, and went to the village to work and talk to people. Vode reported how students described this activity:

“We came closer to the people and the children. In the beginning, they were distrustful – what did we want from them? They have become apathetic from the sufferings, but somehow we managed to break the ice. On Sundays, when people have the most free time, we gave lectures.”¹⁸³

The students learned that the peasants want “progress,” but “those in charge of that do not think about the people's needs.”¹⁸⁴ While the camp was just a minor attempt, one of the students concluded that they have at least “gained some knowledge, [...], to find out how and what should be done,” adding finally that “not politics – those people need bread and a little, at least a little

¹⁸² For more about Angela Vode, see: Karmen Klavžar “VODE, Angela (1892–1985),” in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 604-607.

¹⁸³ Angela Vode, “Kako slovenačka studentkinja pokušava da se približi seljačkoj ženi” [How Slovenian Students Try to Approach Peasant Women], *Žena danas*, 1937/06, 9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

bit of rest...”¹⁸⁵ This sudden conclusion that the peasants don’t need politics but bread and rest indicates a possible preconception that what peasant men and peasant women needed to gain was political education in order to organize. If this preconception had existed before the students’ visit, it was, as it appears, challenged during the actual conversations with the peasants. What could have been a simplified call for political education (and agitation) of peasants was thus replaced by a more complex understanding that educated women and students have to actually talk to the peasants first in order to understand what they *really* need and what kind of help the peasants themselves would find useful.

The relationship between educated students and peasant women in this way becomes based on exchange of knowledge: educated women are to learn from peasant women about their experiences and needs, so that they could be able to appropriately share the knowledge they had been privileged enough to gain. As Vode explains, what stands behind these students’ activist practices is assuredness that “every person that had an opportunity to gain higher education must be aware that their education cannot stay the dead capital, but that they are obliged to offer as much as possible of their wealth to the others.” Therefore, the exchange of knowledge and creation of new knowledge about how different groups of women live is crucial for creation of a wide community of Yugoslav women.

Vera Erlich Stein’s text “How Women Live in Different Regions” further theorizes the mentioned ideas by asking the following questions:

“How do women live, how do mothers live, how do young girls live in villages and in towns? How does their youth pass, do they participate actively in important decisions or are they simply passive objects, led by blind incidence or the older members of the family?”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Vera Štajn Erlih, “Kako žene žive u raznim krajevima” [How Women Live in Different Regions], *Žena danas*, 1937/08, 4.

Following this set of questions, Erlich sets out to explain how it is often assumed that rural women in all parts of the country live under the same circumstances, while in reality it is crucial to understand the differences. One of the examples concerns violence against women; as she notes, it is often rumored that husbands beat their wives. However, Erlich argues that while in Zagorje in Croatia men openly beat their wives in front of their neighbors who never interfere to save the woman, in Montenegro to beat one's wife in public would be a huge disgrace. This shows that every phenomenon has a context behind it, therefore a system of knowledge should be created in which every phenomenon would be explained as a symptom of human relations.¹⁸⁷ Vera Stein Erlich's criticism is very analogous to historian Jeanne Boydston's arguments, who maintains that gender relations should be always explored and not assumed to be known.

Moreover, Vera Erlich Stein states that this kind of research is „educational work, work on changing the old and unrighteous relations,“ adding that „objective scientific work changes life because it leads people to awareness about the unrighteousness that exist and that can be changed.“¹⁸⁸ I have argued elsewhere that Erlich understood scientific and theoretical work as an activist practice.¹⁸⁹ In order to understand the relationship between her scientific work and the activism inherent to it, it is useful to have in mind her own education and intellectual influences, as well as her work. Vera Stein Erlich (1897-1980) was a psychologist, sociologist, anthropologist, educator, feminist and Jewish progressive intellectual.¹⁹⁰ As Feldman nicely put it in probably the most detailed biography of Erlich so far, Vera Erlich Stein “provides a telling example of the ways in which an extraordinary individual tried to come to terms with a

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Vera Štajn Erlih, “Kako žene žive u raznim krajevima,” *Žena danas*, 1937/08, 4.

¹⁸⁹ Isidora Grubački, “Angažman Vere Štajn Erlih u časopisu *Žena danas* (1936-1940)” [Vera Stein Erlich's Engagement in Magazine *Žena Danas*/Woman Today (1936-1940)] in: Collection of Articles: The Magazine “Woman Today”. Forthcoming, to be published in 2017 by the Institute of Literature and Arts, Belgrade.

¹⁹⁰ Feldman, Andrea, “Vera Erlich Stein: Odyssey of a Croatian Jewish Intellectual,” in Judith Szapor, Andrea Peto, Maura Hametz, and Marina Calloni, eds, *Jewish intellectual women in Central Europe, 1860-2000: twelve biographical essays* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 327-348.

patriarchal society in the otherwise fragmented political culture of interwar Yugoslavia.”¹⁹¹ Interested in art and psychology, Erlich was educated in Zagreb, Berlin and Vienna, where she attended Alfred Adler’s lectures on individual psychology and graduated from university in 1924.¹⁹² Vera Erlich and her husband, Beno Stein, held a leftist intellectual salon in the 1930s, which even Josip Broz Tito would visit occasionally. Although more information about Erlich’s education is not available in the so-far written biographies, intellectual influences on her work could be reconstructed from her own publications in the early 1930s. In 1933 and 1934 she published three books as a part of the “new pedagogy” edition of *Minerva* publishing house in Zagreb. The topic of these books was theory and practice of new schools and new pedagogy Erlich came into touch with during her stay in Germany and Vienna. The names of the books in question are: *Kolektivni rad u savremenoj školi* (1933) [Collective Work in Contemporary School], *Individualna psihologija u školskoj praksi* (1934) [Individual Psychology in School Practice] and *Metoda Montessori u školi* (1934) [Montessori Method in School].

Vera Erlich Stein dedicated these books to all the teachers, youth and parents dissatisfied with the current state of school education and who would like to contribute to the transformation of the educational system.¹⁹³ In her evaluation of the methods, she put emphasis on the degree of its relevance for the community. In the third book, Erlich problematizes the Montessori Method, asking whether the goals of this method are progressive, given that it is an essentially individualist method and that it assumes that all children in all positions are equal.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, she saw the values in the collective method as practiced in school in Berlin between 1918 and 1933 and the school practice of Viennese individual psychologists exactly in the ways

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁹³ Vera Erlich Stein, *Kolektivni rad u savremenoj školi* [Collective Work in Contemporary School] (Zagreb: Minerva, 1933), 4-5.

¹⁹⁴ Vera Erlich Stein, *Metoda Montessori* [Montessori Method] (Zagreb: Minerva, 1934), 4.

it emphasized the importance of education for community. In the collective method, Erlich particularly valued the fact that children collectively chose the topics of general and contemporary importance, then studying it in details. In this way, the curriculum was not based on some abstract ideas but on knowledge necessary for everyday life.

As for the method of individual psychology, Erlich emphasized that it was based on the idea of social determination, which, as she explained, means that concrete social circumstances influence the ways every individual is formed. However, as the society influences the formation of every individual, so does the individual change the society, thus the relationship between the individual and society is interdependent.¹⁹⁵ Clearly, Alfred Adler's¹⁹⁶ individual psychology theory and practice was a significant influence on the Vera Stein Erlich's ideas. What Alfred Adler was essentially interested in was the relationship between the individual and community. In the interwar period, his ideas were largely influenced by the experiences of the war. In the text "Individual Psychological Education" from 1920, for example, he concluded that although the therapy by the methods of individual psychology could be successful in individual cases, to make society better one needs much more than that. Therefore, he started applying his methods

¹⁹⁵ Vera Erlich Stein, *Kolektivni rad u savremenju školi*, [Collective Work in Contemporary School] (Zagreb: Minerva, 1933), 15.

¹⁹⁶ (This footnote is based on the following article: Michael P. Maniacci, "An Introduction to Alfred Adler" in Jon Carlson and Michael P. Maniacci, eds., *Alfred Adler Revisited* (Routledge: New York, 2011), 1-10). Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was a psychiatrist, physician, author, professor and scientist from Vienna. Adler worked at the same time as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, but has developed his theory in opposition to Freud's and Jung's theories, disagreeing with Freud, among other things, that repression was a consequence of living in a community and that women were inferior to men. Adler claimed that "only *poorly adjusted* individuals had to repress their drives," that "people who were raised well and with love and compassion" could achieve to be adjusted members of a community and that the reason why women might have more difficulties in adjusting than men is "because of the *social situation* in which they found themselves," being "treated like second-class citizens and told from an early age that men were more powerful" (*Ibid.*, 3). Being rejected by the scientific and academic community (both medical and psychiatrist), Adler decided to turn to people themselves and started teaching and helping people directly. According to Maniacci, Adler's work was not research driven, meaning that his goal was not to prove a theory, but to help people: "He wanted individuals to compensate for their weaknesses and unfortunate circumstances of life. He wanted to make life fair and better for all." (*Ibid.*, 9).

to the wider society, arguing for education throughout people's whole life.¹⁹⁷ According to a text about Adler's individual psychological education, "in taking on the challenge of improving the world through applying and developing his psychology in education and community, Adler was taking on entrenched establishments. In addition to the schools, he was confronting other professions to become involved with the challenge of improving child development and education."¹⁹⁸ In a nutshell, Adler's idea was that human society can only change and progress possible through education that is not only aimed at the individual human being, but prepares individuals and groups for communal life.

2.2.2. Exchanging knowledge: Education for Community and Women's Rights

If after this brief digression about Vera Erlich's and Alfred Adler's main ideas we come back to the texts in *Žena danas*, we might notice that what connects all these different texts are ideas of education, knowledge, community and progress. What was, then, the ideal of education of women? According to the abovementioned articles, rural women were hungry of knowledge and educated women should approach them and offer them knowledge. Yet, the idea was not to approach rural women with an already prepared (political) program, but with questions, openness and readiness to learn about them and from them in order to understand what kind of knowledge they might need. Only through a mutual exchange of knowledge can a real community of women be created. For this reason, I see the representations of rural women in *Žena danas* as a part of the learning process about how rural women live across Yugoslavia. As in the views of Alfred Adler, activists and writers in *Žena danas* believe that "society can only progress within the

¹⁹⁷ Guy J. Manaster, „Individual Psychological Education,“ in Jon Carlson and Michael P. Maniaci, eds., *Alfred Adler Revisited* (Routledge: New York, 2011), 129.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

context of social collaboration, which includes working toward similar goals,”¹⁹⁹ so they also explain how educated women may enter into communication and collaboration with rural women, thus creating a wider community. Hence, rural women’s education and the creation of a community of women were clearly influenced by Alfred Adler’s ideas of individual psychology and his theory of children’s formation and education.

In fact, the ideas of children’s education in *Žena danas* were quite similar to the ideas of education of rural women, and in these texts feminist, socialist and even antifascist elements can be (even more easily) discovered. For example, one of the often discussed issues in *Žena danas* was biological inheritance. In the call to mothers to write to the editors about the problems they have in bringing up their children, the editors argue against inheritance theories, detecting that the reason for a “bad nature” of their children cannot be inheritance, but it is most usually pedagogy of the parents that tends to reach for the means such as strict discipline and punishments.²⁰⁰ Theories of inheritance are not, however, dismissed completely; yet, in order to develop the inherited characteristics, a child must have “sufficient nutrition, enough sun, clean air, work and leisure,” etc, which is conditioned by the family’s wealth. Thus, children are often not unproductive in schools because of their inherited characteristics, but because of bad economic circumstances.²⁰¹ Furthermore, in an excerpt from Angela Vode’s book *Pol i sudbina* [Sex and Destiny], Vode argues that the old educational ideals that make a strict distinction between boys and girls are the cause of the failure of children’s education for the contemporary world. Just like Vera Erlich in all of her works on pedagogy, Angela Vode detects one of the causes of inequality between men and women in early education, and, as we might conclude,

¹⁹⁹ Bret A. Moore, “The Progress of Mankind,” in Jon Carlson and Michael P. Maniaci, eds., *Alfred Adler Revisited* (Routledge: New York, 2011), 35.

²⁰⁰ Uredništvo *Žene danas*, “Jedna majka nam se obratila” [A Mother Wrote To Us], *Žena danas*, 1938/10, 14.

²⁰¹ Dr Mita Đurić, “Ekonomsko stanje i uspeh u školi” [Economic Standard and Success in School], *Žena danas*, 1937/7, 22.

promotes co-education of girls and boys.²⁰² The main “enemy” of this (new) approach is the sentence told by many fathers, quoted by Vode: “I would rather see three daughters dying suddenly, than accept that my son has fallen.”²⁰³ Finally, as Vera Erlich’s “new pedagogy” books were antifascist warning about the dangers of what is perceived as fascist education, so does *Žena danas* warn about the militarist education in Germany, in a text in which a mother tells how her son is taught in school to support the war for a pure “Arian race.”²⁰⁴

All this, I believe, is very important for understanding the way the editors and writers of *Žena danas* imagined approaching rural women, aware that the knowledge personal development was conditioned by the extremely poor and patriarchal circumstances in which they had been brought up.²⁰⁵ Yet, even though this was the aspiration, in practice it was not always possible to follow the advice. A special issue edited by women from Bosnia (of which I will write more in the following chapter), is a telling example of the ways educated women in Bosnia tried to approach rural women. Even though rural women needed, as the editors highlight, bread, work, light rooms, warm food and clothes, what the editors can offer them is knowledge, knowledge to overcome the “life unworthy of a human being.”²⁰⁶ In the article “If children can do it, so can we,” Vukica Grbić describes the time when she invited peasant women to a meeting and proposed them to create an organization called *Društvo domaćica* [Society of Housewives].” As the text is written in a dialogue between the author and the peasant women, it illustrates the way

²⁰² Angela Vode, “Da li današnje vaspitanje odgovara svojim zadacima?” [Does Today’s Education Correspond With Its Goals?], *Žena danas*, 1938/9, 15.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ “Hansov rođendan” [Hans’s Birthday], *Žena danas*, 1936/01, 18.

²⁰⁵ “Still our peasant woman gives birth in the fields, in the barn, still by her and her children’s side in sickness sit old women [and not the doctors], still hundreds and hundreds of women and children die because of the lack of knowledge, superstition and bad economic and hygienic circumstances [...]” (“Reč Redakcije” [The Editors’ Word] *Žena danas*, 1939/24, 3. Grupa žena koje su pripremile Bosansko-Hercegovački broj, “Iskustva žena koje su opremile Bosansko-Hercegovački broj” [The Experience of Women Who Edited the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Issue], *Žena danas*, 1939/24, 28.)

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

she approached women, implicitly teaching the reader how to proceed (“Dear sisters, I am glad that I can see us women at a gathering. I invited you to meet and to talk, because you too have the right to leave the house for a bit.”) What she proposed does not seem revolutionary at all – the idea is to create a society and organize meetings where women could attend lectures and learn how to, like in domestic schools, take care of the house better and read. Yet, inviting rural women to gather and talking to them about rights already in the second sentence was revolutionary at the time, especially if we have in mind the conception of education in *Seljanka*, where women were familiarized primarily with their duties, but not actually with their rights. Even though this society resembles domestic school, it seems that the society was a form of “innocent” gathering that was to serve for more radical goals, which in the given context was talking to rural women that they have rights.

In *Seljanka*, the idea of education was quite hierarchical, when the rural women would simply “receive” already prepared set of knowledge from the teachers. In the case of *Žena danas*, it seems that there was more space for dialogue and for the exchange of knowledge between educated and uneducated women. Not only were urban, educated women to learn about how rural women live in different parts of the country, but rural women were to learn about *other* activities of educated women, such as women’s struggle for their political rights. “Tell them about the miseries of women,” Nikica Blagojević suggested. This also included the knowledge about women’s fight for suffrage. The 1939 October issue, along with a condemnation of the war that had started on September 1, brings a “A Call for the Right to Vote,”²⁰⁷ in which all women were invited to sign a petition for suffrage. The call was addressed to rural women as well, and it ended with a message that literate women should read the call to illiterate women. The idea was that even illiterate women should have the right to vote. 1940 January issue brings reports of the

²⁰⁷ “Apel za pravo glasa” [Appeal for the Right to Vote], *Žena danas*, 1939/25, 3.

biggest women's organized campaign for suffrage. The reports explain that this public activity was not successful, but although the main goal was not achieved, Marija Velimirović saw a triumph in a way this activity gathered a large number of women, including rural women, and not only those who had already been for the cause earlier.²⁰⁸ The same issue also brought a handwritten letter signed by "peasant women from Lika" (Croatia), who explain how they went around the villages in Lika and explained to the women why they should sign the petition for women's suffrage. As the letter explains, other rural women from Lika got familiar with the suffrage issue for the first time and started discussing it, which is a big step.²⁰⁹ There were also reports on rural women getting in conflict with their husbands because they had signed the petition, and similar reports of the women teachers who, as it appears, were the main actors of this widespread suffrage activity.²¹⁰ Interestingly, when rural women would hear from the teachers that in some other countries women *could* actually vote, they would stop being suspicious of the proposal and would agree to sign the petition ("Here, give me, I want to sign as well. Why haven't we asked for this right before?")²¹¹ If these reports are accurate, it actually proves that many rural women indeed were "hungry" of knowledge, and that they would be happy to enter into dialogue with educated women that would approach them. Even more importantly, it shows that in 1939, during the biggest public activity of Yugoslav women who demanded suffrage, rural women got familiar with the idea that, even if they are illiterate, they should have the right to vote.

²⁰⁸ Marija Velimirović, "Rezultati jedne borbe" [The Results of a Struggle], *Žena danas*, 1940/26, 3-4.

²⁰⁹ "Pismo seljanki iz Like" [A Letter from Lika Rural Women], *Žena danas*, 1940/26, 6.

²¹⁰ "Naša akcija kroz selo i grad" [Our Campaign In Villages and in Towns], *Žena danas*, 1940/26, 10-12.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

This subchapter explored the ideas and practices of education in *Žena danas*, focusing mostly on articles of Angela Vode and Vera Stein Erlich. Vera Erlich Stein's work and Alfred Adler's individual psychology were useful for understanding the broader theoretical framework that influenced the formation of ideas of women who participated in the creation of this periodical. Through the periodical, the editors and the contributors pointed to the importance of learning about rural women and consistently aimed to show how and for what reasons educated women could approach rural women. Education of rural women was based on the idea that an exchange of knowledge needed to happen between urban, educated women and rural, uneducated women. Not only was important for educated women to learn about how other women live in different parts of the country, but for the rural women it was important to learn about how other women suffer, how they organize to fight for their rights and how, in many countries of the world, women have a right to vote. Additionally, the examples of the education of children showed that the ideas of education in *Žena danas* also had feminist, socialist and antifascist elements, which correlated with the ideas of women's emancipation.

Over the years, it seems, many left-progressive women had been trying to approach rural women, as they felt obliged to help them somehow. Women could only progress if they worked for the mutual goal, thus it was important to talk to rural women, make them conscious about their political rights, and mobilize them to organize among themselves. As Angela Vode's text showed, this was often hard, as rural women often lived in very difficult circumstances and needed to first satisfy their primary needs. As the years past, it seems though, the situation was changing, and in 1939 there is an example of rural women from Lika who take part in to that point the biggest women's petition for suffrage. Rural women would sign the petition, but they would also go and talk to other rural women and explain them what the petition was about. The

reports of the activity of women for the suffrage rights show that rural women *did* actually respond to the new information when it was well explained to them. Thus, the conclusion is that the education and also political mobilization of rural women was indeed hard, but that huge steps were made in these years leading to World War II.

2.3. Conclusions

In the context of transformation of family life in rural areas and disappearing of the old, patriarchal way of life in *zadrugas* and in the context of increasing amount of women's labor, when women had to start doing hard agricultural labor along their husbands, both conceptions of education analyzed in this chapter aimed at changing and modernizing rural women's lives in a certain way. These ideas and practices of education constructed the desirable role of rural women, thus projecting the goals and the limits of the emancipation of rural women. The ideas of education in *Seljanka* were shaped by eugenic and public health ideas that originated from the period before World War I, but became a part of the official state discourse in the 1920s. The domestic schools were a part of the urban elite's efforts to educate the rural population. The change in rural women's lives was sought within a strict framework of a traditional and extended peasant family and the nation that was supposed to, through the improvement of rural women's lives, get stronger through renewal. 'The woman question' in *Seljanka* was involved with a hybrid discourse of "scientific nationalism." The aim was to, paradoxically, at the same time preserve the traditional way of life (*zadruga*) and to improve the women's position. It seems that the desirable image of rural woman was an enlightened, literate woman with more autonomy within the traditional family, who took care of the family and the household and even had her own budget which helped her rationalize the household economy. Yet, her role within the nation

remains, above all, reproductive, and the education was based on the strict division of labor, which further reified the constructed difference between women and men.

Žena danas shows that the long tradition of the efforts to educate rural women was continued, but that the approach significantly changes. Influenced by the contemporary pedagogy, such as Alfred Adler's individual psychology and so called "new pedagogy" methods practiced in Berlin and Vienna, women connected to *Žena danas* with the lead of Vera Erlich Stein and Angela Vode attempted to overcome the hierarchical relationship of educated / uneducated by promoting the idea of the exchange of knowledge between the two groups. As they claimed, rural women were hungry of knowledge; yet, they should not be approached with the already prepared political program, but (also) with questions, readiness to listen and to explain in a way understandable to them. Whereas *Seljanka* was based on the separate education of men and women, *Žena danas* promoted coeducation of girls and boys, as it saw one of the causes of inequality of women and men in the ways they are traditionally educated. The ideal of education also sought for a balance between an individual and collective, with the implicit view that the progress is possible only through the education of the individuals for the community. So, 'the woman question' was in the case of *Žena danas* embedded into the concern for the social, but it was, very importantly, still concerned about women and their rights. Whereas *Seljanka* is based on the narrative of renewal and preservation, *Žena danas* yearns for transformation and for a radical change in Yugoslav rural women's lives. The biggest to that point suffrage campaign showed that many rural women, although illiterate and uneducated, would join the cause for women's rights, only if they would get familiarized with the contemporary happenings.

Through these ideas and practices of education, shaped, respectively, by eugenics and contemporary pedagogy, there was an attempt to create a community of women. The following

chapter analyzes different conceptions of sisterhood, constructed through *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*.

Chapter 3 – Constructing “Sisterhood” in *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*: Yugoslav nation-building and International Networks

In one of her key texts “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” (1984), Adrienne Rich draws attention to the problem of saying “we” without contextualization and making general claims about “all women,” adding that it is necessary to always specify “where, when, and under what conditions have women and been acted on, as women.”²¹² Moreover, she problematizes the idea that the experience of some women can be relevant for the liberation of all women, especially the female proletariat – “uneducated, ill nourished, unorganized and largely from the Third World.”²¹³ *Seljanka* and *Žena danas*, both published in Belgrade, aimed at a readership in whole Yugoslavia. Both aimed at creating an “imagined community”²¹⁴ of sisters – which I will name *sisterhood* – that was supposed to be active together for a certain cause and fight for change in women’s lives. The aim was, of course, to include rural women into this sisterhood created primarily by educated women. But, then, if (Serbian) women from Belgrade were creating a community that was to include rural women from all parts of the country, how did they come to terms with saying “we”? Did they make claims about “all Yugoslav women”? How did they imagine this sisterhood in relation to the national identity? I argue in this chapter that these two conceptions of sisterhood were shaped by two opposed nation-building projects, integral and federal Yugoslavism respectively.

²¹² Adrienne Rich, “Notes Towards a Politics of Location,” in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*, 114.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

²¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, “Introduction,” *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 1-7.

By looking at the way the sisterhood was constructed in *Seljanka* along the lines of integral Yugoslavism, I intend to show that the Serbian nationalist narrative, even though put second place to the biological discourses of national renewal, was still a strong element in the idea of integral Yugoslavism. In the first subchapter, I also explore the (dis)continuities in the discourses of emancipation of rural women in *Seljanka* with the discourse in a pre-WWI periodical *Žena*, exploring Darinka Lacković's motivation for only partial politization of rural women. In the second part of the chapter, by exploring the connections between nationalism, feminism and communism in Yugoslavia during the Popular Front, I intend to show that the federal approach to the Yugoslav national problem took shape along with the attempt for reconceptualization of feminist ideology and a more inclusive approach towards the rural women.

The questions I will try to answer at least partially in this chapter are the following: What was the (implicit) nation-building agenda in the two periodicals? What were the elements of two different approaches? How was, in relation to the national question, an imagined community of women constructed, and how were rural women included in this sisterhood? What was the relation of these discourses with the discourses of emancipation of women and national-liberation narratives dominant in the period before World War I (specifically in Serbia)? What were the other political discourses these two periodicals were competing with? Were Yugoslav (rural) women seen as a part of a wider, international community of women?

3.1. *Seljanka* and the Construction of Yugoslav Peasant Sisterhood

The approach to Yugoslavism in *Seljanka*, I argue, is shaped by the ideology of integral Yugoslavism of King Aleksandar, which basically means that Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian national identities were “erased” in the name of *narodno jedinstvo* [national unity]. Yet, as I will

show, this actually did not suppress a strong Serbian cultural character propagated in *Seljanka*.²¹⁵ Moreover, the sisterhood Darinka Lacković tried to create was a hierarchical network of teachers, doctors and humanitarian women on the one side, and peasant women – the students who one-sidedly received the knowledge the teachers considered important – on the other. While in the previous chapters I have mainly discussed the program of the school and its connection to eugenic ideas, here I will explore the hidden curriculum²¹⁶ of the King Fund's Domestic School. As educational theorists Michael W. Apple and Nancy R. King indicated, “the relationship between ideology and school knowledge is especially important for our understanding of the larger social collectivity of which we are all a part,” as it enables us to understand how the stratification and inequality are produced and/or perpetuated.²¹⁷ Thus, in *Seljanka*, I look at the hidden curriculum in terms of nation-building and the ambivalent politization of women that takes place through the school.

On January 6, 1929, King Aleksandar Karadjordjević proclaimed a royal dictatorship by suspending the constitution of the Kingdom, prohibiting all the parties and societies with tribal or confessional characteristics and by dissolving the parliament. In light of increasing national tensions in the country, the King emphasized that it was his “sacred duty to preserve the unity of the nation and State by all means.”²¹⁸ In October the same year, the name of the country was

²¹⁵ Andrew Wachtel suggests that there were three possible models of cultural unification. First, the romantic model, when the existing (read: Serbian) culture would be chosen as a standard one; secondly, a multicultural model that would combine elements of the “tribal” cultures; and, thirdly, the supranational model, not based on the “tribal” cultures. *Seljanka* would fit into the first model. See: Andrew Wachtel, “Creating a Synthetic Yugoslav Culture,” in *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 81.

²¹⁶ For the term “hidden curriculum” see, for example, Michael W. Apple and Nancy R. King, “What Do Schools Teach?,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 4, *Curriculum Theorizing since 1947: Rhetoric or Progress?* (1977), 341-358.

²¹⁷ Michael W. Apple and Nancy R. King, “What Do Schools Teach?,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 4, *Curriculum Theorizing since 1947: Rhetoric or Progress?* (1977), 356.

²¹⁸ 'Royal proclamation abrogating the Constitution and dissolving the Parliament of the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom', Belgrade, 6 January 1929, *Yugoslavia Through Documents: From its Creation to its Dissolution*

changed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the country was divided into new administrative unities named after rivers in order to avoid the national connotations (although the majority of the population in six out of nine of these territorial units, *banovine*, was Serbian).²¹⁹ The final goal was merging the state and the nation, and creating an integral Yugoslav national identity.

While the country remained “as centralized as it had been throughout the 1920s,” the main change was that the ideology of integral Yugoslavism was supposed to suppress the sub-identities within the Yugoslav nation thus “transforming” Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into Yugoslavs.²²⁰ This was a result of what Djokić called the “volatile twenties,”²²¹ when there were, to put it simply, competing nation-building projects within the newly-formed country. The most obvious conflict was between the Croatian nation-building project led by Croatian Peasant Party’s leader Stjepan Radić and the “Great Serbian” nation-building project led by Nikola Pašić’s People’s Radical Party.²²² After 1929, various organizations were established with the goal of creating/strengthening the ideology of integral Yugoslavism, and organizations and newspapers increasingly took the prefix *Yugoslav*.²²³ As I showed in the first chapter on the example of the unification of *Narodni ženski savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, competing nation-building discourses were present among the women’s organizations as well. Unfortunately, a more comprehensive research regarding the Yugoslav women’s organizations and their connection to conflicting nation-building projects has not yet been done. In this chapter, my hope

(compiled by Snezana Trifunovska), Dordrecht, 1994, 190-91. As quoted in: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 68-69.

²¹⁹ Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. veku*, 145.

²²⁰ Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, 73- 74.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²²² For more about this, see: Ivo Banac, “The Radicals,” and “The Hard Opposition” in *The national question in Yugoslavia : origins, history, politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992 [1984]), 153-169 and 226-260.

²²³ Branko Petranović, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija: 1914-1941*, vol. 1 of Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije: 1918-1988*. (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 183.

is to point to some of the main concerns in when it comes to the complexities of constructing a “sisterhood” in interwar Yugoslavia.

According to historian Marie Žanin-Čalić, the national unity under the royal dictatorship was being constructed on the basis of conservative values and patriarchal culture, or, in other words, the idea was to *preserve* what was already there, and not to change it through revolutionary social transformation.²²⁴ The example of *Seljanka* strengthens this argument, as the King’s Fund Domestic School appeared 1929 in the context of the dictatorship, organized by Darinka Lacković.²²⁵ I find it reasonable to link *Seljanka* to the integral Yugoslav nation-building ideology as the school was established in 1929 and funded by the King’s Fund which was, according to Lacković.²²⁶ Although in *Seljanka* there are no explicit claims about the idea of nationhood, I think that it is possible to read the implicit ideas of the Yugoslav national identity from the way this sisterhood of rural women was constructed through and in the periodical. What kind of sisterhood was constructed, and what were the connections between this peasant sisterhood and the idea of nation?

To understand the hidden curriculum of the school, it is first important to know how the students of the school were chosen. This unusual eight-month school was in a small Vojvodina town Sremska Kamenica, it was not easy for Darinka Lacković to persuade the parents of women from different parts of Yugoslavia to let their daughters leave the house and go that far for a long period of time. According to Lacković’s own accounts, she would go across the whole country searching for women from different regions. In fact, she made a conscious effort to have an equal

²²⁴ Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. veku*, 145.

²²⁵ “Domaćička škola Kraljeva Fonda u Kamenici” [King’s Fund Domestic School in Kamenica], *Seljanka*, 1933/04, 4. According to a text in *Seljanka*, *Ženski pokret* organized the first domestic course for women in 1922. (“Domaćinski tečajevi po selima” [Domestic Courses in the Countryside], *Seljanka*, 1933/01, 7.

²²⁶ King’s Fund was established, according to Lacković, by the King in 1922 to help the “progress of the villages and the nation.” (“Domaćička škola Kraljeva Fonda u Kamenici,” *Seljanka*, 1933/04, 4.)

number of groups from different parts of the country, which is evident from a letter Lacković wrote to a colleague from Banja Luka, asking her to find one Orthodox and one Muslim girl, while she would find the Catholic girl in another place.²²⁷ Going away from home, the girls from the whole country would spend four months with each other and meet Lacković and other women and men working in the school. By remaining in communication with their teacher after the school and helping Lacković find new students, the girls would stay a part of this community of women.

The result was that the activities of rural women were, in this way, politicized. Probably for the first time, rural women were gathered around a common interest identified in the King's Fund Domestic School which was presented to them as a symbol of progress of rural women, villages, and, consequently, the whole nation. Thomas A. Emmert raised a question about the effort of organizing women in Yugoslav patriarchal society, emphasizing that there were many women's organizations in the interwar period that did not consider themselves feminist, but that their activities were still politicized.²²⁸ Even though the discourse in *Seljanka* aimed at emancipating rural women and politicizing their activities, there is still a question *to what extent* and *how* this approach to emancipation of women in interwar Yugoslavia was at the same time strengthening the limits of their emancipation. What I mean here is the fact that their network was embedded into the framework of a patriarchal society. Unlike other women's periodicals, *Seljanka* did not offer any information about the other women's activities in Yugoslavia and in the world – it never mentioned the struggle for women's political rights, suffrage, and at that time even the women's increasing involvement in the struggle against fascism. In fact, rural women were not to become familiar even with the activities of *Ženski pokret*, unless it was the

²²⁷ Darinka Lacković, A letter to Stanojka M. Jovanović, *Seljanka*, 1935/12, 14.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34

domestic school for rural women organized in the previous years. The question remains why rural women were excluded from the feminist subaltern countpublic. One of the answers is that rural women could not become a part of the feminist subaltern countpublic, because ‘the rural woman question’ was embedded into the narrative of national renewal through the regeneration of the old patriarchal way of life. One could argue that this was the only way to frame ‘the rural woman question’ in this specific context. Yet, framing ‘the rural woman question’ strictly within the limits of the nationalist narrative of biological renewal led to a paradoxical situation that the nationalist narrative that would enable the discourse of emancipation would at the same time draw the limits of this emancipation.

To understand this paradox better, it might be important to bear in mind that Darinka Lacković’s views were formed in the context of the period before WWI, when women found the ways of articulating their demands through nationalist narratives. In fact, Darinka Lacković published an article in the pre-WWI periodical *Žena* as well, arguing there for the women’s political equality. She explained that “a modern woman has long ago stopped being her husband’s maidservant,” inviting women to “...liberate women! Give them freedom, let them come out of their four narrow walls! Educate them differently.”²²⁹ This might be a way to understand Lacković’s motivations for working with rural women, as she wanted to liberate them by offering them different education. Importantly, the emancipation in *Seljanka* was sought in negotiation with the girls’ families, as it was the only possible way to communicate with the women at all. So, in order to do that, Lacković’s choice of strategy was to emphasize women’s difference from men and to form a “sisterhood” that was based on the rural women’s role of a mother, wife and a housewife. In *Worlds of Women. The Making of an International Women’s*

²²⁹ Darinka Lacković, “Cilj i zadatak ženskog pokreta” [The Objective and Goal of the Women’s Movement], *Žena*, 1912/09, 541.

Movement, Leila J. Rupp talked in a similar way about the difficulties of forging the “international bonds of womanhood,” saying that there were many versions of ideology of difference that could bring women together – it could be violence against women, it could be women’s common experience of subordination, or it could be women’s roles of mothers.²³⁰ In the case of *Seljanka*, the “sisterhood” was constructed on the basis of the shared identity of rural women and as mothers of the Yugoslav nation.

In *Seljanka*, we can see that the discourse of emancipation of rural women and the discourse of nation-building converged in a similar way as in the pre-war discourse illustrated on the example of the periodical *Žena*. Both discourses aim for the improvement of the lives of women through education, but strictly in the limits of the family and home. Milica Tomić and Darinka Lacković had the same argument: education of women is crucial as they are the first teachers of their children. Yet, there are two important differences. First, in the pre-WWI context, women who were involved in the struggle for women’s rights were members of the educated class of women who requested education for themselves using the discourse of national-liberation. Twenty years after that, Darinka Lacković enters into a hierarchical teacher-student relationship, offering knowledge considered important for rural women, but also keeping silent about things such as women’s suffrage. There is another discontinuity with the discourse in *Žena* I suggest, even though the need to educate girls in the two cases of *Žena* and *Seljanka* was justified by the needs of the nation. Before the war, the emphasis was on the Serbian cultural national-liberation narratives, whereas in the interwar period these narratives became secondary to the eugenic discourses of health and hygiene. Thus women’s role within the nation remained reproductive (in both biological and cultural terms) and the division of labor remained as strong as ever. But, the focus shifted from the Serbian national-liberation narratives which served to

²³⁰ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 101.

intensify the romantic national sentiments of the people thus preparing them for wars for liberation, to the scientific discourse about health that aimed at securing and strengthening the already liberated nation.

But what, then, happened with the strong cultural national-liberation discourses from before WWI? I argue that this was a part of *Seljanka*'s hidden curriculum, through which this diverse group of women was to be integrated. Their "sisterhood" was primarily based on their rural backgrounds, with the presumption that they all had similar problems for which the school offers appropriate solutions. However, while they were assumed to share the identity of peasant women, which was in fact constructed through the school and the periodical, the religious, cultural, linguistic or political diversity of Yugoslavia *Seljanka* hardly mentioned, or even ignored. For instance, the periodical was printed entirely in the Serbian Cyrillic alphabet, which was an obvious problem, given that *Seljanka* was supposed to be read in all parts of the country. In a letter to representatives of the Zagreb association *Jugoslovenski ženski savez* [Yugoslav Female Association], Lacković wrote that she understood that the readers from Croatia would prefer to have *Seljanka* printed in the Latin alphabet, but that this was impossible at the given moment. Former students from Split had the same problem. Concerning language, the letter written by Đurđa Nikolić from Tavor-Skoplje is particularly interesting, when she writes: "I am, thank God, well and healthy. I can tell you, dear Miss, that when I visit other houses and talk about what I have learnt in school, they marvel at how I speak and they ask me if I am Serbian or Macedonian, and they tell me well done, how nice you speak."²³¹ This shows not only that speaking Serbian was encouraged, but that there was an aspiration to categorize Macedonians as Serbians. This is in line with Andrew Wachtel's claim that Macedonians were expected to

²³¹ Đurđa Nikolić to Darinka Lacković, *Seljanka* 1934/08, 15-16

assimilate into the nation-building process as South Serbians, and not as a distinct national group.²³²

Along with similar lines, the fact that there were various religious traditions in Yugoslavia was mentioned only once, when two women of different religions (one is Serbian Orthodox Christian and the other, even though it is not explicated, probably Catholic Christian since the letter is addressed to a Slavonian village in Croatia) visited each other during the religious feasts. In this letter, Lacković says how nice it is that one girl visited the other one for religious celebration, even though her religion is different. However, while other religions are not mentioned at all, the letters about Serbian Orthodox family saint celebrations (slava) are quite frequent. According to the letters, the school taught women how to make ritual bread (slavski kolač) for the celebration of slava, even though it was specifically a Serbian tradition that must have been unimportant to women with other religious backgrounds. Moreover, on the first page of the 1933 January issue of *Seljanka*, Darinka Lacković wished all the readers Marry Christmas, which the Serbian church celebrated on January 7th. Finally, even though literary excerpts in *Seljanka* are rare, it is hard to overlook that the first issue of *Seljanka* brought a folk song about Serbian saint, St. Sava, as well as the text of the Serbian Orthodox Lord's Prayer "Oče naš." At the same time, *Seljanka* was completely silent about Muslims. In the context of the period before World War I, Ana Kolarić showed in her analysis of *Žena* that the Balkan wars were seen as a part of the centuries long struggle against Turks.²³³ The myth of the Kosovo battle became (or remained?) one of the key elements of Serbian nation-building narrative. Consequently, Serbian national-liberation narratives were defined as opposed to the

²³² Andrew Wachtel, "Creating a Synthetic Yugoslav Culture," in *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 72.

²³³ Ana Kolarić, *Gender, Literature and Modernity...*, 256.

Turkish/Ottoman tradition and strongly excluded Muslim communities.²³⁴ According to Wachtel, the Ottoman threat that existed before the World War I vanished in the interwar period, so the Serbs and Croats claimed that Yugoslav Muslims were Serbian or Croatian descendants, hence a part of the Serbian or Croatian nationality.²³⁵ How this, as Leila J. Rupp calls it, “pervasive Christian spirit” affected Muslim women in Bosnia and other parts of Yugoslavia, is another important story to tell.²³⁶ What I can notice at this point is that in *Seljanka* – there are no letters signed by names that could be easily associated with Muslim women.

All this relates to the question of what Wachtel calls the “Serbianization of Yugoslavia”. While in theory the initial idea of unification did not imply this principle of the prevailing Serbian element dominating in the Yugoslav context, in the practice the latter seems to be the case. As Darinka Lacković was associated with *Ženski pokret*, in the future research it is important to find out if and to what extent the nationalist element in *Seljanka* was similar or different to the nationalist element in *Ženski pokret*, and if Darinka Lacković’s implicit (unintended?) nation-building project was a norm or an exception in the world of *Ženski pokret*. As we know for now, the agenda of *Ženski pokret* was, in a way, pro-Yugoslav, as the goal was the collaboration of all the regional *Ženski pokret* organizations. But, as I showed here, in the 1920s and the early 1930s context, pro-Yugoslav could actually very easily mean conservative and pro-Serbian.

Nonetheless, there were competing nation-building processes in Yugoslavia, the most important one being associated with the Croatian Peasant Party. Mary E. Reed wrote about the Croatian Peasant Party’s activities the Croatian villages in the interwar period, led by Mara

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 263

²³⁵ Andrew Wachtel, “Creating a Synthetic Yugoslav Culture,” in *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 72.

²³⁶ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 55.

Matošec, who often traveled to villages to organize plays or give lectures.²³⁷ According to Mary E. Reed's text, the activities organized by the Croatian Peasant Party did not differ much from the activities organized by Darinka Lacković. They, too, organized domestic courses for women, put emphasis on the production of clothing and the traditional way of village life, organized literacy campaigns and propagated health reforms.²³⁸ Another similarity between *Seljanka* and the Croatian Peasant Party's discourse was that, even though women were equal with men, women's place primarily was in the home.²³⁹ This shows that, while these two approaches to emancipation of women to a large extent overlapped, the main difference was the national element; integral Yugoslavism was to a large extent, in fact, Serbian, whereas the Croatian Peasant Party's approach was based on Croatian nationalism.

A nice parallel can be made here with how transnational women's organizations functioned in the interwar period, thus perhaps suggesting that the approach of *Seljanka* was not that unusual or unexpected. As Leila Rupp notices, while the three major transnational women's organizations (the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) in theory accepted women of all races, nations, religion, etc., in practice these organizations were mostly formed by elite, Christian, older women of European origin.²⁴⁰ The unacknowledged assumptions about the "superiority and natural leadership of Euro-American societies" was one of the causes of the, in the end, pretty

²³⁷ Mary E. Reed, 104

²³⁸ 105-106

²³⁹ 107

²⁴⁰ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 51.

much homogeneous organizations that set boundaries for inclusive participation, even if these boundaries were unintended.²⁴¹

In the case of *Seljanka*, I analyzed the implicit nation-building elements in a discourse I connect to King Aleksandar's ideology of integral Yugoslavism, thus aiming to point to difficulties in saying the Yugoslav "we" in this period. The sisterhood in *Seljanka* was constructed on the basis of the assumed peasant and Yugoslav identity of women included in the project, which was part of the, perhaps even unintended, "hidden curriculum" of *Seljanka* and the King's Fund Domestic School. Strikingly, Lacković would invest great effort to find women from all parts of Yugoslavia whose fathers were willing to let them spend eight months in a school in Vojvodina. Yet, while being primarily concerned about the scientific knowledge necessary for rural women across Yugoslavia, *Seljanka* "colonized" the experiences of non-Serbian women by implicitly propagating the Serbian national model through the Yugoslav nation-building discourse, thus marginalizing non-Serbian women in this community. Looking at the pre-WWI discourse in *Žena*, it seems plausible that the strong elements of the Serbian identity was a consequence of Darinka Lacković's historical and geographical "location," that is, the fact that both her feminism and her nationalism were formed in the period when Serbian national-liberation discourses dominated the public sphere. Thus, although there was a shift from romantic to scientific nationalism, the romantic elements were still preserved, together with the gendered division of labor and women's reproductive role within the family and the nation.

All this contributes to two Wachtel's remarks. First, he sees the failure of the first Yugoslav state was in its "inability to create a consensus regarding the twin concepts of the Yugoslav nation and its culture."²⁴² And, second, he suggests that after WWI the "Serbian politics remained the

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁴² Andrew Wachtel, "Creating a Synthetic Yugoslav Culture," 68.

province of the older generation.”²⁴³ How a younger generation of women struggled with these problems in the period after 1935 will be the topic of the following subchapter.

3.2. Layers of Sisterhood in *Žena danas*

In this subchapter, I look at how “sisterhood” was constructed in *Žena danas*, arguing that the way the editors and contributors came to terms with saying the Yugoslav “we” and overcoming the earlier nationalist biases was by accepting the federalist approach to the Yugoslav national question. As I will show in this subchapter, to understand the nation-building element in this “sisterhood,” it is important to have in mind the Yugoslav Communist Party’s shift in the approach towards the national question, which I will explain shortly. Along with that, however, there was young communist women’s attempt to reconceptualize the feminist ideology, and to, by forming *Ženski pokret*’s Youth Section, overcome the elitism of *Ženski pokret* and create a community of women that would be truly inclusive. Thus, I identify four layers of “sisterhood” in *Žena danas*, and they concern: the international networks *Žena danas* was involved with, as it was connected to the Communist Party and the Women’s World Committee against War and Fascism; the collaboration of young antifascist women who formed *Ženski pokret*’s Youth Section with an older generation of women from *Ženski pokret*; the national question; the editors’ conscious effort to overcome the elitism of *Ženski pokret* and include a wide number of Yugoslav women.

To understand the *Žena danas* editors’ relation to the national question, it is initially important to bear in mind that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Communist International’s approach towards the Yugoslav national question went through several phases in the interwar period. Up until at least 1934, the communists had difficulties to decide what kind of

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76.

strategy towards the national question to advance - a nice way to put is that “the KPJ programmatically tested all the viewpoints that are at all possible about Yugoslavia and about the national question in Yugoslavia.”²⁴⁴ At first, the national question was largely ignored, and the communists mostly supported Yugoslav unitarism. Then, between 1925 and 1934 the Comintern was essentially in favor of exploitation of the national question for the cause of destroying the “Versailles cordon” in the Balkans.²⁴⁵ Namely, after 1918, the Comintern perceived the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as “a hegemonic expansion carried out by the political and military elites of Serbia,” and a product of the “unjust 1919 Versailles peace conference.”²⁴⁶ A change towards the national question in Yugoslavia came with the introduction of the Popular Front strategy in 1935. At the 1935 plenum in Split, the Party concluded that “a solution to the national question within a Yugoslav context needed to recognize multinationalism and the right of different groups to self-determination.”²⁴⁷ From that point, the answers to the national tensions were sought within the federal model of Yugoslav country.²⁴⁸ The Communist Party of Yugoslavia from then on supported the establishment of national parliaments not only in Croatia and Slovenia, but also in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Vojvodina.²⁴⁹

Žena danas was published in this Popular Front context. The available historiography, and by this I mean primarily Jovanka Kecman’s and Neda Božinović’s monographs, as well as the section about *Žena danas* in the 1975 publication *Žene Srbije u NOB* [Women of Serbia in National-Liberation Struggle], I believe fails to paint a nuanced picture of the happenings during

²⁴⁴ Jozo Ivičević, “Odrednice unitarističkog nacionalnog programa I I II kongresa KPJ,” *Hrvatski znanstveni zbornik*, vol. 1 (1971), no. I, 135, as quoted in: Ivo Banac, *The national question in Yugoslavia : origins, history, politics*, 332.

²⁴⁵ Branko Petranović, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija: 1914-1941*, 216.

²⁴⁶ Aleksa Djilas, “The Yugoslavism and the Separatism of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia,” in *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953*, 55-56.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴⁸ Hilde Haug, “Towards Yugoslav Federal Unity under Comintern Influence,” in *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia* (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2012), 37.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

the Popular Front by making a strict division between the “socialist” and the “bourgeois” women’s movements. Their narratives were basically tainted by the fact that the Popular Front in Yugoslavia was ultimately not entirely a success story. It was challenged all along by many difficulties throughout the period, including the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact on August 23, 1939 to which the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was not sure how to react.²⁵⁰ At the fifth Land Conference in October 1940 in Zagreb, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia abandoned the Popular Front.²⁵¹ The collaboration of *Ženski pokret* and the Youth Section went through difficulties as well. In January 1940, the members of the Youth Section accused *Ženski pokret*’s leaders of depoliticizing the movement at a time when depoliticization meant giving up the key demands of the program, and therefore they left the organization. From that point, the communist women distanced themselves from, how they started calling them again, the “feminists.” In november 1940 the censors confiscated *Žena danas*’s thirtieth issue, but the three following issues of *Žena danas* were published during the war, under the leadership of Mitra Mitrović (the editor from the beginning) and Olga-Kovačić Kreačić.²⁵² After the war, *Žena danas* became the organ of the *Antifašistički Front Žena* [The Antifascist Women’s Front], the official women’s organization in the newly formed, socialist Yugoslavia.

The 1975 publication *Žene Srbije u NOB* emphasized the influence of the Communist Party on *Žena danas*’s establishment. In this publication that aimed to offer an official narrative about women in the national-liberation struggle, the main subject of the segment about *Žena*

²⁵⁰ Apart from the Non-aggression Pact issue, there was a disagreement between the main KPJ line and the strategy of the KPH – Komunistička partija Hrvatske [Croatian Communist Party]; whereas Tito and the KPJ thought the KPH was acting to independently, the leaders of the KPH, formed in 1938, felt that they needed to address the particular circumstances in Croatia. There was also a conflict with the leftist intellectual circles in Zagreb led by the well-know writer Miroslav Krleža, who was a supporter of communism but also openly criticized Stalinism. See: Hilde Haug, “Towards Yugoslav Federal Unity under Comintern Influence,” in *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia* (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2012), 51-55.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁵² Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, “Uvod,” *Žena danas. Brojevi 1/1936 – 33/1944. Fototipsko izdanje*. (Beograd: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, 1966), V-VIII.

danas was the Party which “entrusted the establishment of the periodical to the young communists from the Youth Section of *Ženski pokret*.”²⁵³ Certainly, *Žena danas* had much to do with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and it is a fact that, as a part of the Popular Front strategy, young communist women were instructed to “infiltrate” into the existing women’s organizations and legalize their activities (as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had been outlawed since 1921). Yet, I suggest that, if we look at *Žena danas* from a perspective of *Ženski pokret* and the Yugoslav feminist organizations, and not only the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, we might get a different picture that, instead of the Party, puts women and their own activities at the front of our interest. As I have mentioned earlier, the introduction into the 1966 reprinted version of *Žena danas*,²⁵⁴ as well as existing historiography, does not talk about the understanding of *feminism* and the approach to the national question in this period, it does not mention women such as Vera Stein Erlich, who contributed hugely to *Žena danas* but was not a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, or Angela Vode, who was expelled from the party in 1939 when she disagreed with the Stalin-Hitler Non-aggression pact. It also does not put emphasis to *Žena danas*’s connection with the Women’s World Congress against War and Fascism, which I will elaborate in the following paragraph. All this is crucial for understanding the “sisterhood” constructed in *Žena danas*.

Opening the first page of the first *Žena danas* issue, the reader notices that the introductory text for *Žena danas* was signed by the name of Gabrielle Duchêne. Gabrielle Duchêne was a French feminist and pacifist who in August 1934 at the Women’s World Congress against War and Fascism in Paris initiated the establishment of the Women’s World

²⁵³ Bosa Cvetić, ed., *Žene Srbije u Nob* (Beograd: Nolit, 1975), 69.

²⁵⁴ See: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, “Uvod,” *Žena danas. Brojevi 1/1936 – 33/1944. Fototipsko izdanje*. (Beograd: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Jugoslavije, 1966), V-VIII.

Committee against War and Fascism (WWCAWF).²⁵⁵ Duchêne was also one of the founders of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1915, as well as the president of the French section of this international women's organization.²⁵⁶ In the recent article "The Strained Courtship between Antifascism and Feminism," Mercedes Yusta challenged the opinion that this women's organization was simply directed by the Communist International and that it had no program of its own.²⁵⁷ Not all antifascist women were, as Yusta showed, members of the Communist Party. Actually, she argues that the organization was a "cultural melting pot" of different, as she named them, "political sensibilities."²⁵⁸ Ultimately, she maintains that women's antifascist mobilization resulted in creating a discourse that was an intersection of the antifascist, pacifist and feminist matrixes.²⁵⁹

So, although *Žena danas*'s editors were the members of the Communist Party, it certainly owed much to the WWCAWF as well. In the introductory text to *Žena danas*, Gabrielle Duchêne basically invited Yugoslav women to join the cause for peace and freedom.²⁶⁰ Over the years, *Žena danas* published reports about the work of Women's World Committee against War and Fascism. Also, the periodical visually resembled the French periodical *Les Femmes dans l'action mondiale*, published in Paris by the French Committee against War and Fascism from 1934 to 1939. Even the content was sometimes "transferred" to the Yugoslav edition, such as the text

²⁵⁵ See: Francisca de Haan, The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991. Accessed May 28, 2017, http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/help/view/the_womens_international_democratic_federation_widf_history_main_agenda_and_contributions_19451991.

²⁵⁶ Yugoslavia became a member of the WILPF in 1934. See: Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 18.

²⁵⁷ Mercedes Yusta, "The Strained Courtship between Antifascism and Feminism: From the Women's World Committee (1934) to the Women's International Democratic Federation (1945)," in *Rethinking Antifascism. History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 169.

²⁵⁸ Mercedes Yusta, "The Strained Courtship between Antifascism and Feminism...", 170.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁶⁰ Gabriela Dišen, "Novo polje rada za žene" [New Field of Women's Work], *Žena danas*, 1936/01, 2.

about the celebration of four years of the Women's World Committee in 1938.²⁶¹ Following Yusta's argument mentioned in the end of the previous paragraph, I suggest that *Žena danas* was a product of a wide coalition of Yugoslav (and international) antifascist (communist and left-liberal) feminists who, as WWCAWF, created a distinctive discourse focusing on peace, the fight against fascism and the women's political, social and even national rights. The basis of this wide coalition was the collaboration of young communists who formed the *Ženski pokret's* Youth Section and women from *Ženski pokret* who had already at least a decade of feminist activism behind them.

Already in the first issue of *Žena danas*, there was an attempt to reconceptualize the notion of feminism, by presenting the "new feminism:"

Recently a strong movement can be noticed among women. It can be said that women massively enter into the already established feminist organizations, and continue creating new ones. While for decades women's organizations were the object of ridicule and tasteless jokes, today they represent a significant factor in public life. Although the program has not changed so much, feminism itself has gone through great changes. The changes were influenced by the external circumstances, and the program has gained a special, deeper meaning. Pre-WWI feminism, based on the assertion that it was neutral and that it would not choose sides, now [...] had to take a stand.²⁶²

The element that came to the first place at this point was the need to take a stand against fascism. *Žena danas* did not dismiss the work of earlier feminist organizations, understanding their work as important for women. Yet, it did challenge the "neutrality" of those organizations, including, as it appears, *Ženski pokret* as well. Eventually, in the early 1940, the neutrality of *Ženski pokret* was the main reason of the "final" conflict between these two groups of women.

In the introduction to *A Biographical Dictionary*, Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi raise question about the category of socialist or communist

²⁶¹ "Četvorogodišnjica Svetskog komiteta žena" [Four-Years Anniversary of the Women's World Committee], *Žena danas*, 1938/16, 20.

²⁶² "Novi feminizam" [New Feminism], *Žena danas*, 1936/01, 4.

feminists. As they explain, “arguments against ‘communist feminists’ have pointed to the fact that first socialists and later communists have denounced and attacked the women’s movement as ‘bourgeois,’ and made explicit their aversion to ‘feminism.’”²⁶³ Yet, many examples in *A Biographical Dictionary* suggest that there were many women who could identify as both, and one of them is Angela Vode. The example of Angela Vode’s text “Feminism in Slovenia” is particularly interesting for the discussion whether the term “communist feminism” is *contradiction in terminis*,²⁶⁴ adding to it the question of nationalism as well. In this text, Vode gave an overview of the feminist movements in Slovenia, discussing all the Slovenian women’s societies (in fact, Vode was member of almost all of them!). According to Karmen Klavžar, who wrote a biography of Angela Vode in *A Biographical Dictionary*, Vode was a member of *Splošno slovensko žensko društvo* [General Slovene Women’s Society], *Društvo učiteljic* [Association of Women Teachers], the president of *Zveza delavskih žena* [Union of Working Women], *Ženski pokret* [The Woman’s Movement] – between 1927 and 1937 she was the president and the secretary of this organization -, and others. Meanwhile, she was also one of the founders of the Communist party in 1920, and remained a member until the 1939 Stalin-Hitler Non-Aggression pact, which she did not support and for which she was expelled from the party.²⁶⁵ There are two points Vode made in the text in *Žena danas*. The first point is that *Ženski pokret* did not manage to gather a wider community of women, and it is important because it reflects the attempt of the editors of *Žena danas* to, through establishing the Youth Section of *Ženski pokret*, make the Yugoslav feminist movement less elitist. Secondly, Vode makes a point that the women from *Savez radničkih žena*, even though they believed that the woman question

²⁶³ Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, “Introduction,” in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: 19th and 20th centuries*, 8.

²⁶⁴ See also: Mihaela Miroiu, “Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism,” in *Aspasia* Vol. 1 (2007), 197-201 and Natalia Novikova, “Communism as a Vision and a Practice,” in *Aspasia* Vol. 1 (2007), 202-206.

²⁶⁵ Karmen Klavžar “VODE, Angela (1892–1985),” 604-607.

could only be solved through the class struggle, felt that an organization that represented only women's interests was indeed necessary.²⁶⁶ This, in fact, shows that the views of Angela Vode were both socialist/communist (class struggle) and feminist (women's political rights), and that she insisted on the importance of separate women's organizations and even was part of those women's organizations the socialists traditionally considered as "bourgeois." Finally, she did write about women's movements in Slovenia, thus sharing knowledge about the activities among this national group and connecting it, though *Žena danas*, with the Yugoslav woman question.

The way *Žena danas* presented the tradition of women's movements in Yugoslavia shows that reconceptualization of *feminism* went along with the change in the approach to the *national* question, which reflects the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's shift towards the national question as well. In a 1938 issue, Smilja Ivanović interviewed Milica Tomić, the editor of *Žena*, in which Milica briefly - and obviously not very willingly - talked about the difficulties she had had to graduate from high school and to be working publicly as a woman.²⁶⁷ While Milica Tomić refused to talk of her work - fearing that her opinions and worldviews "would come into collision" with the contemporary women's cause and the new worldviews - the author of the article expresses a great deal of respect towards this woman, in addition by putting the interview on the second page of the issue. Thus, the early feminist activity within the Serbian national-liberation struggle was seen as a precursor of the contemporary women's struggle.

Of course, this was in line with the new approach of Communist Party of Yugoslavia towards the Yugoslav national question. As I already mentioned, from then on, the Communist Party supported the establishment of the national parliaments in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Vojvodina. Obviously – and very interestingly – this also affected

²⁶⁶ Angela Vode, "Feminizam u Slovenačkoj" [Feminism in Slovenia], *Žena danas*, 1937/5-6, 2.

²⁶⁷ Smilja Ivanović, "Susret sa Milicom Jaše Tomića" [A Meeting with Milica Jaše Tomića], *Žena danas*, 1938/11-12, 3.

the representations of rural women in *Žena danas*. The editors of *Žena danas* recognized the diversity of the social contexts in which Yugoslav rural women lived and aimed to explore whether and how rural women were oppressed in different parts of Yugoslavia. In this light, it is thought-provoking that most of the texts that show “how women live in different parts of the country” focus on women in Vojvodina, Montenegro and Macedonia and, most frequently, on Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁶⁸ It is even more striking that these texts seem to represent these regions as, in a way, “backward,” meaning that typically they portray rural women and/or women who had not yet *organized* within a movement. This opens the question of elitism of the women publishing in *Žena danas*. In her study, Stanislava Barać argued that the conception that aimed at discussing how women live in different parts of the country “expresses an anti-elitist stand of the editors, in which a hierarchy between the center and the periphery is erased.”²⁶⁹ The “Muslim woman question” in *Žena danas* seems a good example to reflect on whether and to what extent the editors succeeded in erasing the hierarchy between them and the women from different areas, which then helps us better understand what kind of “sisterhood” they were constructing.

The way Muslim women were portrayed in *Žena danas* appears ambivalent. At least in the first issues of *Žena danas*, the Muslim women’s situation is perceived as backward. The model for the modernizing processes in the region of Bosnia is found in Atatürk’s Turkey, as Bosnia was at the time, in Vera Erlich’s words, much “more oriental” than Turkey.²⁷⁰ A text about Istanbul in the beginning of the first issue of the periodical describes Istanbul as a place

²⁶⁸ For example: M. Dj., “Žena u Crnoj Gori” [A Woman in Montenegro], *Žena danas*, 1937/07, 8; “Život Bosanske seljanke” [Life of a Bosnian Peasant Woman], *Žena danas*, 1938/11-12, 20; Marija Strnac, “Žena Vojvodjanskog sela ponovo nosi odeću koja je sama izatkala i kuva u zemljanim loncima” [Women from Vojvodina Villages Again Make Their Own Clothes and Cook in Clay Jars] *Žena danas*, 1938/16, 27.

²⁶⁹ Stanislava Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost...*, 209-210.

²⁷⁰ Vera Erlich, *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji*, 426.

where everyone could “breathe a sigh of relief” again, especially women who were liberated after centuries of prejudice and “religious fanaticism.” In Istanbul, the text recounts, women are dressed in European fashion, they sit at the same table with their husbands, and they talk freely with each other.²⁷¹ The photographs of a literacy course and a portrait of a woman judge accompanying the text send an implicit message to the reader that after the struggle against illiteracy, women will have a possibility to be judges – just like women in Istanbul. This text is followed by the article “The Muslim Woman in Bosnia Today,” explaining that female children are often deprived of education, as in this patriarchal society a woman’s work is in the house, and that they often have to marry at an early age, thirteen to fifteen. But then, the end of the text sends the following message: a change is indeed possible: the times are changing, and the emancipatory potential in the lives of Muslim woman is seen in education and work.²⁷²

The fact that Muslim women were given special attention might indicate that there was a general opinion within this progressive circle of women and men that Muslim women needed some kind of special help. Vera Erlich Stein’s introduction to her key book *Jugoslovenska porodica u transformaciji* gives a clue to the general prejudiced concerns about Muslim women, but also to the existence of the voices that warned against this attitude that put Muslim women at a lower position in the hierarchy of women. In the introduction to her book, Vera Erlich explained how her major research on Yugoslav families in rural areas had been initiated:

It started in 1937, when some students from Bosnia suggested me to write articles for the progressive periodicals about the position of Muslim women. They were embittered that their sisters were narrow-minded and “trapped” and that often times they had to marry against their own will, so they asked me to start a struggle for their emancipation. They

²⁷¹ “Bahrija Nuri Hadžić o Istanbulu” [Bahrija Nuri Hadžić about Istanbul], *Žena danas*, 1936/01, 5.

²⁷² “Današnja muslimanka u Bosni” [The Muslim Woman in Bosnia Today], *Žena danas* 1936/01, 8.

did not succeed in convincing me to take part in the struggle against burca and hijab, but I gladly accepted to do a research on Muslim family life.²⁷³

I understand this as Vera Stein Erlic's awareness of the inability to judge other women's way of life, or to talk instead of them. Instead of "struggling against burca and hijab," Vera Erlich thought, as I have shown in the previous chapter, that a systematic research about how women live in different parts of the country could actually help those women more, as those who wanted to help would then have actual knowledge about what kind of help could be appreciated. Yet, it is important to note that this was not Vera Erlich's individual attitude *only*. In the text "Research on Families" - published in May 1937, at the time the research on families was just starting, - Erlich described *Žena danas* as a platform for the exchange of observations about families, for which both the editors and Erlich would be, as she said, "truly grateful."²⁷⁴

My final example about the "Muslim woman question" concerns the twenty-fourth issue of *Žena danas*, a special issue for August-September 1938, particularly interesting because it was edited by women from Bosnia. In 1938, *Žena danas's* editors had asked women from Bosnia connected to the Communist Party and *Ženski pokret* to form a group of women that would prepare a special issue about the problems and lives of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁷⁵

This issue was, according to the editors, a way of connecting women from different parts of the

²⁷³ Gradually, the research spread to the other parts of the country, as the teachers from the whole country wanted to contribute to the research on the family relations in rural areas, with a special focus on the women's position in the families, and the phenomena of selling and buying women, etc. More than 300 teachers from rural Yugoslav areas participated in the research of Vera Erlich, completing a survey that Erlich had sent them about the family life in the areas in which they work. While the research was taking place, the danger from the occupation was increasing. In April 1941, Germans occupied Croatia, and Vera Erlich - carrying her research papers with her - escapes first to Dalmatia, and then to Vis and south Italy. The research, she recounts, remained safe with her. Vera Erlich Stein, "Umjesto predgovora," *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji*, 13-17.

²⁷⁴ Vera Erlich Stein, *Istraživanje u porodici*, 1937/04-05, 8.

²⁷⁵ In a chapter published in the 1977 book *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi: 1941-1945 godine: sjećanje učesnika*, Dana Begić even describes that during the celebrations of the 8th of March, women from the communist circles even spent time reading and analyzing the articles from *Žena danas*. (Dana Begić, "Osvrt na napredni pokret žena u Bosni i Hercegovini između dva rata" [An Overview of the Progressive Women's Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Interwar Period], in *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi - sjećanje učesnika* [Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the National Liberation Struggle - Memories of the Participants] (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), 27-29.)

country and including them into the newly forming “sisterhood.” The Belgrade editors reminded the readers of the twenty-fourth issue that *Žena danas* had always aimed to be a periodical of all the women and to give voice women from all parts of our country.²⁷⁶ In the end of the twenty-fourth issue, the editors from Bosnia share their experiences with the readers, explaining that it was the first time they organized to edit an issue and that the experience was (in my interpretation) empowering.²⁷⁷ At the same time, they are inviting women from Montenegro, Macedonia and Vojvodina to do the same which, of course, was a call for an exchange of knowledge and experiences. Also, I see it as a call for a continued building of the Yugoslav sisterhood that could be based only on understanding on each other’s perspectives. Finally, I read it as a call to organize and do something to change the situation in women’s lives around Yugoslavia.

As I searched for different aspects of sisterhood in *Žena danas*, I focused on four main aspects. The first layer of this sisterhood is the international. *Žena danas* was indeed connected to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but it was also connected to Gabrielle Duchêne and the international organization she had initiated in 1934, the Women’s World Committee against War and Fascism. Women who had created the antifascist circle in Yugoslavia during the Popular Front were part of the international sisterhood of women that took a decisive stand for women’s rights, for peace and against fascism, starting from 1934.²⁷⁸ The establishment of the *Ženski pokret*’s Youth Section was, of course, a part of the strategy of the Communist Party during the

²⁷⁶ “Reč Redakcije” [The Editors’ Word] *Žena danas*, 1939/24, 3.

²⁷⁷ Grupa žena koje su pripremile Bosansko-Hercegovački broj, “Iskustva žena koje su opremile Bosansko-Hercegovački broj” [The Experience of Women Who Edited the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Issue], *Žena danas*, 1939/24, 28.

²⁷⁸ For the events after the war and the creation of Women’s International Democratic Federation, a successor organization of Women’s World Committee against War and Fascism see: Francisca de Haan, *The Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991*.

Popular Front, when the members of the illegal party would “infiltrate” within the established, legal organizations and consequently be able to work publicly. Yet, their collaboration seems to have been more than just a party strategy, as *Žena danas* promotes the tradition of the feminist movements both before and after WWI. As I have shown in this subchapter, there was also an attempt to reconceptualize feminism by constructing anti-fascism as a crucial element, followed primarily by women’s political rights, such as the right to vote. So, *Žena danas* also indicates the layer of sisterhood, although a fragile sisterhood, of a younger generation of communist feminists and older liberal feminists who had been a part of *Ženski pokret* since the early 1920s. Their collaboration ended in January 1940, when the Youth Section accused the leaders of *Ženski pokret* of stepping back from the mobilization of the widest possible number of women to fight for their rights at the time when it was the most important. “To support the depolitization of *Ženski pokret* today,” they claimed, “means to be against its own program,” adding that “passivity today means leaving women to wander without orientation in the whirlpool of events.”²⁷⁹

The third layer of the sisterhood in *Žena danas* concerns the national question, which was reconceptualized along with the notion of feminism, as the Communist Party came up with the federal Yugoslav solution. Thus, as a response to the national tensions throughout the 1920s, as well as the failed integral Yugoslav model of King Aleksandar, the national question was used in a way that allowed *Žena danas* to deal with the regional and national differences in a non-nationalistic way. Importantly, *Žena danas* set out to preserve the memory of many women who had contributed to the feminist cause, including those who were active within the movement for the Serbian national-liberation, such as Milica Tomić. The fourth layer of sisterhood concerns

²⁷⁹ “Izjava Omladinske sekcije *Ženskog pokreta*” [The Statement of *Ženski pokret*’s Youth Section], *Žena danas*, 1940/26, 17.

the fact that the editors came to terms with saying “we” by considering the specific “location” of women within the country, especially in the case of rural women. Regional and historical differences were actively valued. To an extent, however, the texts about Muslim women were patronizing, as the educated women here, to use Mohanty’s term, “colonized” Muslim women’s experience and aimed to impose a specific model of emancipation, which was based on education, work and women organizing for their rights. At the same time, Vera Erlich was warning that entering the struggle against burca and hijab might not be the best idea. Therefore, the editors in *Žena danas* made a conscious effort to overcome the elitism of *Ženski pokret* and to be understood by the widest possible number of women, as well as to base the periodical on an exchange of knowledge about women’s lives.

3.3. Conclusions

This chapter examined the different ways women who edited periodicals in Belgrade attempted to create a sisterhood that would include, in the case of *Seljanka*, many Yugoslav peasant women and, in the case of *Žena danas*, all Yugoslav women, including peasant women. It examined how women came to terms with the national problem in Yugoslavia and the specific cultural and national “location” of various women across the country. As I looked at the discourses of women located in interwar Serbia, I explored whether and how the strong Serbian national-liberation discourses from the period before WWI influenced the way the sisterhood of women was constructed through the periodicals, which also affected the way the Yugoslav national identity was conceptualized.

As the introduction to the *Biographical Dictionary* suggests, in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the answer to ‘the woman question’ was in most cases sought within the

two wider questions – the ‘national question’ and the ‘social question.’²⁸⁰ *Seljanka* fits its arguments of rural women’s emancipation within the national question, largely shaped the Serbian national-liberation narratives from before WWI. Although the discourse in *Seljanka* aimed to promote the integral Yugoslav identity, there were many Serbian cultural elements within this discourse, such as the alphabet, language, Orthodox religion, etc. I suggest that one of the reasons for this is the fact that Darinka Lacković’s view on the woman question was shaped in the period before WWI, but also the fact that in the interwar period there was a shift from the cultural discourses of national-liberation to the biological (scientific) discourses of national renewal. Thus, Darinka Lacković’s effort to improve the living conditions of Yugoslav women was extraordinary, but it largely ignored the differences of rural women from various Yugoslav regions and thus “colonized” the experience of rural women that was not compatible with the Serbian idea of what Yugoslav identity means. The younger generation of women working on *Žena danas* challenged the “Serbianization of Yugoslavia.” Following the new, post-1935 the Communist Party of Yugoslavia’s approach towards the national question, women who edited and contributed to *Žena danas* took a different approach towards the national question. They were careful to address the differences in the lives of women in Yugoslavia according to their “locations,” by painting the regional portraits of Yugoslav women. Along with the shift towards the national question, they aimed to reconceptualize feminism, keeping the memory of the feminist struggle along with the national-liberation struggle before WWI, accepting *Ženski pokret*’s feminist goals such as political rights of women, but also adding a strong pacifist and antifascist element to it.

²⁸⁰ Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, “Introduction,” 6.

Whereas the sisterhood *Seljanka* constructed was not a sisterhood of equals, but a hierarchical community of women active in various women's organizations and rural women who were not familiarized with women's liberation struggles in Yugoslavia and in the world, the sisterhood of *Žena danas* was imagined to be one that would connect women from international organizations, such as Gabrielle Duchêne, to the illiterate rural women across Yugoslavia to whom, ideally, Duchêne's text would be read. *Žena danas* shows a conscious effort to overcome the elitism of other women's organizations, such as *Ženski pokret*, while the constant calls to women from around Yugoslavia to write about their experiences and how they lived shows a strong will to build a community that would be based on dialogue and on an exchange of knowledge.

Conclusion

With the rapid dissolution of the traditional, patriarchal way of life, rural women found themselves in an increasingly difficult position or, as Griffin put it in a slightly different context, "a liminal, transitional state of permanent crisis."²⁸¹ Although it is hard to make firm claims about rural women's life and labor in *zadrugas*, different sources suggest that with the dissolution of the extended families, the structure of rural women's labor changed as well, as in a household based on individual family it was not easy to find a replacement for work that needs to be done. Often, even, women had to engage with the hard agricultural labor along with their "traditional" female jobs in the house. Furthermore, during World War I, women worked as nurses, which was one of the first public jobs they were allowed to do in Serbia. Many women were left alone in their homes, which significantly changed the labor relations because, as was

²⁸¹ Roger Griffin, "Tunnel Visions and Mysterious Trees: Modernist Projects of National and Racial regeneration, 1880-1939," 429.

quoted earlier, “within a year [...] the whole economy was in her [women’s] hands.”²⁸² Within this context of shaken stability, I identified two discourses that took shape as a response to the ongoing changes – one that sought to preserve the old way of life and the other that pursued a transformation of the way rural women lived together with a transformation of the social relations. Interestingly, within both discourses there was a strong concern for ‘the woman question,’ and there was a genuine attempt to improve the situation of rural women. The two discourses called for modernization and progress, yet very differently conceptualized.

The discourse in *Seljanka* is a ‘hybrid discourse’ in which ‘the woman question’ was involved with the nationalist ideology of the renewal of the nation and the regeneration of the traditional, patriarchal way of life through modern, eugenic measures. Within this framework, a traditional role of rural women as a mother, wife and a housewife could not be challenged. Yet, changes were negotiated within the traditional limits of women’s role. *Seljanka* aimed for a transformation of rural women from “slaves” in the house to “coworkers” who are equal in the household. As mothers, rural women for the first time got in touch with knowledge about childbirth and childcare, essential for their well-being, and in the sphere of marriage they were advised how to marry smartly, which was a reflection of eugenic ideas of a healthy marriage. In the domain of housework, a strict division of labor was constructed and women’s labor gained an economic element, thus giving women more autonomy within the household. Yet, although there were many progressive elements in this discourse, it still put a huge pressure on women and reified and strengthened their productive and nurturing role. Finally, although rural women were a part of a subaltern counterpublic created through *Seljanka*, it seems that they had no access to

²⁸² Zorka Krasnar-Karadžić, “Ženski pokret kod nas i na strani,” in *Ženski pokret* 3, 1-2 (January-February 1922), 23-24, as quoted in: Thomas A. Emmert, “Ženski pokret: The Feminist Movement in Serbia in the 1920s,” 34-35.

the feminist counterpublic as they were not familiarized with the public activities of women across Yugoslavia and the world.

Žena danas constructed a more radical desirable role of rural women. Certainly, *Žena danas* shared many concerns with *Seljanka*, such as the concern about illiteracy and difficult position of rural women, but its approach was based on an attempt to overcome the elitism of the earlier activists. The editors continually pointed to the importance of learning about rural women and consistently aimed to show how and for which reasons educated women could approach rural women. Whereas the relationship between educated women and rural women in *Seljanka* remained strictly hierarchical, and while the experience of rural women was homogenized, *Žena danas* put emphasis on the exchange of knowledge between urban, educated and rural, uneducated women. For educated women, it was important to learn about rural women's experiences across the country, and they had even a moral responsibility to share their knowledge with those who were not as lucky as them to have had formal education. On the other hand, it was important for rural women to learn about the struggles of feminists in Yugoslavia and in the world. As the war was approaching, rural women were increasingly familiarized with, but also included in, the political struggles of women in Yugoslavia. In 1939, rural women from Lika even organized themselves to help with the petition in the biggest (and the last) suffrage campaign in this country. This indicates that, in the years leading to World War II, huge steps were made in the sphere of political mobilization of all women in Yugoslavia, including rural women.

Furthermore, apart from exploring the models of change in rural women's lives, this thesis also aimed to understand how *Seljanka* and *Žena danas* fit into the larger matrix of feminist tradition in Serbia and Yugoslavia, although a comprehensive history of feminism in

interwar Yugoslavia is yet to be written. In her text “Communism as a Vision and a Practice,” Natalia Novikova reminded us that, as feminism (as an ideology, intellectual tradition or organized movement) is “closely linked to a particular cultural, ideological, and political setting,” studying feminism means “examining both a variety of historical contexts, traditions, norms and political possibilities for the development of women’s activism, and also different strategies to attain feminist ideals.”²⁸³ Therefore, by looking at how the ‘rural woman question’ was involved with the nationalist and socialist ideologies in the interwar period, my idea was to look at the *longue durée* continuities and interruptions in the discourses of women’s emancipation and to shed light to the way the relationship of feminism with these two ideologies changed.

The analysis of *Seljanka* indicated a strong connection with the liberal-nation building project from the period before World War I. Although with the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes the pre-war discourses of women’s emancipation somewhat transformed, they were still closely linked to the concept of the nation. In the new context, the focus was no longer *primarily* on the cultural nation-building discourse, but it shifted to the biological discourses of national renewal. Interestingly, whereas within the elite women’s circles the dominant questions at this period were women’s legal emancipation and suffrage, rural women were, in line with the eugenics idea, seen as the main agents for the renewal of the nation. Thus, there was continuity in the feminists’ involvement with nationalism and eugenics from the period of before World War I to, at least, the beginning of the 1930s. In this context, it was difficult to create a truly inclusive “sisterhood” of Yugoslav women, as the competing nation-building projects could not be negotiated easily.

²⁸³ Natalia Novikova, “Communism as a Vision and a Practice,” 202.

At the same time, throughout the 1920s, liberal feminist discourse was in constant negotiation with the socialist ideology as well. As some women from *Ženski pokret* claimed, there were no major differences between the “bourgeois” and the “socialist” women’s movements in Yugoslavia at the time. Although the relationship between these two women’s movements throughout the 1920s and 1930s (also) awaits further research, I aimed to show that the negotiation between these two “sides” between 1935 and 1940 is the key for understanding how the feminist discourse (and practices) radicalized as World War II was approaching. In Yugoslavia, in the period of Popular Front, the notion of feminism was reconceptualized, with the concept of peace becoming the dominant element of the feminist ideology. Women who worked together on *Žena danas* created a discourse (and a platform) that was an intersection of feminist, antifascist and pacifist ideologies. Along with the changed approach towards feminism, there was a shift to the understanding of nationalism as well. As in 1935 the Communist Party changed their relationship towards the national question and started seeking the solution for the national tensions in the idea of federal Yugoslavism, saying the Yugoslav “we” and constructing a “sisterhood” of Yugoslav women became, as before World War I, not only possible but also progressive. Of course, one must not forget that the new approach to the Yugoslav nationalist question was a response to the rise of the fascist and the far-right ideology. As the far-right nationalist became a dangerous threat, the communists aimed at reconceptualization of the national question in a way that was not nationalistic but open to nationalist and regional differences.

I also raised a question of the absence of the women’s side of the Yugoslav Popular Front story in the existing historiography. The reason for that might be the fact that, as it seems for now, the older generation of liberal feminists decided to depoliticize the organization as the

danger of war was approaching, which women from the Youth Section saw as a betrayal to their common antifascist cause and left *Ženski pokret* in January 1940. After the split with *Ženski pokret*, the communist women started distancing themselves from “the feminists,” as they called them from that point. World War II in Yugoslavia started in April 1941, and many women who worked on *Žena danas* ended up killed in the war exactly for being involved with this publication and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Yet, this thesis showed that *Žena danas* cannot be associated solely with the Communist Party, as it was also a part of the network of antifascist women initiated in 1934 by the French socialist feminist Gabrielle Duchêne and the newly formed Women’s World Committee against War and Fascism. *Žena danas* was indeed a platform that gathered a wide number of antifascist – liberal and communist – Yugoslav women, who took part in what I see as a progressive feminist movement crucial for understanding 1930s feminism in interwar Yugoslavia. In this period, remarkable women such as Vera Stein Erlich and Angela Vode, not mentioned in the socialist narratives, contributed significantly to the feminist intellectual matrix of the interwar period.

Understanding interwar feminist ideology and ideas and practices of different women and women’s organizations, means understanding better the intellectual and political environment in the years that led to the radical empowerment of women and the establishment of the socialist Yugoslavia. However, the involvement of ‘the woman question’ with the nationalist ideology and eugenics in the atmosphere of the general politicization in the 1930s could also lead to the involvement of women with the radical nationalist discourses. This, I must note, is the “dark side” of the story missing from my narrative. Involvement of ‘the woman question’ with the nationalist question, as well as, perhaps, the distancing of the communist women from “the feminists,” could also give a clue to the question why women in socialist Yugoslavia did not

achieve equality with men. What makes the Yugoslav interwar feminist story even more interesting is that Yugoslavia was the only socialist country that had a conscious feminist movement in the 1970s, which was followed by, again, a strong pacifist feminist grass-roots movement that emerged opposing the 1990s wars.²⁸⁴ In Yugoslavia, it seems that the feminist discourses have always been in negotiation, or in a strong opposition to, nationalist and socialist ideologies. While this is true for other countries of the region as well,²⁸⁵ I believe that the continuity of women's organizing and feminist discourses in Yugoslavia makes Yugoslavia a particularly interesting study case for understanding the connections between feminist, socialist and nationalist ideologies in Southeastern Europe.

²⁸⁴ See: Zsofia, Lorand. *Learning a Feminist Language: The Intellectual History of Feminism in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s*. PhD diss., Central European University, 2014.

²⁸⁵ See, for example: Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, "Women's and Gender History," in *The Routledge History of East Central Europe Since 1700*, ed. Irina Livezeanu, Árpád von Klimó (New York: Routledge, 2017), 278-322, especially 306-307.

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