

**POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF INTERWAR
FEMINISMS:
The Case of Yugoslavia**

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the changes and transformations that Yugoslav feminism experienced during the interwar period, a period marked by political instability, the Great Depression, a crisis of liberal democracy, and the rise of ultranationalism and fascism. The main objective is to examine how feminists in Yugoslavia organized themselves and how they conceptualized feminism during this time. The research is guided by two key questions. First, how did feminists in Yugoslavia organize themselves in the interwar period and how did the domestic and international political contexts shape their feminist activism and organizations? Secondly, what were the main ideas and concepts of Yugoslav feminist political thought in the interwar period?

In five chapters, this thesis puts the history of the central Yugoslav feminist organization, the Alliance of Women's Movements (*Alijansa ženskih pokreta, AŽP*), at the center of analysis, and examines the Yugoslavist orientation of the feminist protagonists, their participation in two international women's organizations, the Little Entente of Women and the *Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme*, their uses of the concept of feminism in the 1920s and in the 1930s, and the different feminist approaches to peasant women. Methodologically, the thesis conceptualizes two political generations of feminists—liberal and left feminist generations—and pays particular attention to the feminist political languages which individuals belonging to these two generations used.

The study finds that interwar feminisms in Yugoslavia were closely intertwined with both the domestic and international political contexts. Furthermore, feminists actively developed their movement and ideas in response to the volatile political climate of their time. They did so by building alliances across ethnic divides, across political divides, and in and through international organizations. Finally, the thesis finds that the 1930s were not a period of crisis or demise of feminisms, as the historical literature generally assumes, but rather a time

of significant continuity and change in terms of organizing, feminist agendas, and conceptual frameworks.

The dissertation makes contributions to three historiographical strands. Firstly, it challenges the prevailing binary division between “bourgeois feminism” and “proletarian women’s movements” in Yugoslav historiography on women's movements and feminisms during the interwar period. Secondly, it engages with the broader international historiography on interwar feminisms by questioning the dominant “wave” metaphor, and by arguing that the inclusion of communist feminists is necessary for the conceptualization of what some historians have called “the missing wave.” Lastly, it situates the story of interwar feminisms in Yugoslavia within the historiography of political history during that period, revealing the Yugoslavist orientation of feminisms in interwar Yugoslavia, which has been obscured by the post-Yugoslav perspective in the historiography.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	vii
List of Abbreviations	1
List of Illustrations	2
INTRODUCTION	3
Historiography.....	15
Interwar feminism in Yugoslav historiography and the “bourgeois feminism/proletarian women’s movement” binary.....	15
Feminisms: Terminologies and periodization in contemporary scholarship.....	22
The political history of interwar Yugoslavia with a focus on the national question	31
Methodology	37
Women’s intellectual history	37
The uses of “feminism” as analytical concepts	41
Sources	48
Chapter outline	49
1. Forging alliances in the new state: cooperations and Yugoslavism (1917–1934)	52
1.1. The beginnings of cooperation between Yugoslav feminists in Zofka Kveder’s journal <i>Ženski svijet/Jugoslavenska žena</i> (1917–1920).....	57
1.2. The rise of cooperation of the liberal feminist generation: from the National Council of Women to the Alliance of Women’s Movements (1919–1928).....	67
1.3. Different versions of Yugoslavism at the 1919 founding congress of the National Council of Women	78
1.4. “Let us be assured that work brings us closer”: Feminists and Yugoslavism in the time of political turmoil (1928–1934).....	87
Conclusions	97
2. The Yugoslav feminists and the Little Entente of Women: transformation of liberal feminism	101
2.1. The LEW in the 1920s: an ambiguous organization	104
2.2. Yugoslav feminists at the LEW congresses	110
2.3. A “purely feminist” organization for the Yugoslav feminists?.....	119
2.4. Restructuring of the LEW in the 1930s: from a feminist organization to the female version of the Little Entente	131
2.5. The LEW and the WILPF: towards an entangled history	135
Conclusions	146
3. Yugoslav left feminists and the Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme	149

3.1.	Convergences between the Alliance and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia before the Popular Front.....	153
3.2.	The Popular Front in Yugoslavia: The KPJ's leading role and the changes in the structure of the Alliance of Women's Movements	162
3.3.	The Comité Mondial des Femmes Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme and the Yugoslav Ženski pokret Youth sections.....	168
3.4.	Left feminist responses to fascism and war	182
	Conclusions	195
4.	<i>Feminizam and novi feminizam: conceptual transformations</i>	198
4.1.	What was “purely feminist” in 1920s Yugoslavia? The case of Alojzija Štebi.....	202
4.2.	Yugoslav <i>feminizam</i> and women's political participation	212
4.3.	The 1930s generation's framing of “new feminism”: the case of Mitra Mitrović..	219
4.4.	“New feminism” in the context of 1930s youth magazines: women's experiences, mass participation, and “new politics”	230
4.5.	Conceptual shifts in 1940: from the AŽP meeting in January to the KPJ Fifth Land Conference in October	239
	Conclusions	249
5.	Feminisms in the Yugoslav Countryside	253
5.1.	Conservative feminism and peasant women in Serbia: the case of Belgrade ŽP and Darinka Lacković	260
5.2.	Slovenian national liberal feminism and peasant women: The case of NCWY <i>Dravska</i> section and Minka Govekar.....	270
5.3.	Left feminist approaches to peasant women: between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Croatian Peasant Party.....	276
5.4.	Milka Žicina's contribution to left feminism	289
	Conclusions	299
	Conclusion	302
	Bibliography	310
	Archival sources.....	310
	Periodicals and newspapers.....	311
	Published and digitized primary sources.....	311
	Secondary sources	312

List of Abbreviations

AŽP – Alijansa ženskih pokreta (Alliance of Women's Movements)

CMF - Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme

HSS – Hrvatska seljačka stranka (Croatian Peasant Party)

IAW – International Alliance of Women (see also IWSA)

ICW – International Council of Women

IWSA – International Woman Suffrage Alliance (see also IAW)

Kingdom SHS – Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes

KPJ – Komunistička partija Jugoslavije (Communist Party of Yugoslavia)

LEW – Little Entente of Women

NCW – National Council of Women of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Narodni ženski savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca)

NCWY – National Council of Women of Yugoslavia (Jugoslovenski ženski savez)

SRPJ[k] – Socijalistička radička partija Jugoslavije (komunista) (Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia [Communist])

SŽD – Slovensko žensko društvo (Slovenian Women's Society)

UJŽ - Udruženje jugoslavenskih žena (Association of Yugoslav Women)

ZDŽD – Zveza delavskih žena in deklet (Association of Working Women and Girls)

ŽP – Ženski pokret

ŽP Youth Section – Omladinska sekcija Ženskog pokreta

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1

- 1.1. Zofka Kveder (1878-1926) (1920-1930). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-TAB2ZS2W from <http://www.dlib.si>. Page 58.
- 1.2. Alojzija Štebi (1883-1956) (1977). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-07U33DRO from <http://www.dlib.si>. Page 60.
- 1.3. *Ženski pokret*, cover page and the first page of the September-October issue of 1922, Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije, https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NBN:RS:SD_7220578B8A0C6650CF7E01E1359E86A7-1922-09-B009-10. Page 70.
- 1.4. *Ženski pokret*, cover page of the first issue of the new format of *Ženski pokret*, published in February 1927, Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije, https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NBN:RS:SD_7220578B8A0C6650CF7E01E1359E86A7-1927-02-B001. Page 74.

Chapter 2

- 2.1. The Little Entente of Women group photographed at the 1926 IAW meeting in Paris, sitting. Archiv Národního muzea, Prague, Fond PLAMÍNKOVÁ Františka. Page 111.
- 2.2. The Little Entente of Women group photographed at the 1926 IAW meeting in Paris, standing. Archiv Národního muzea, Prague, Fond PLAMÍNKOVÁ Františka. Page 112.
- 2.3. Milena Atanacković, a photograph from *International Women's News, Jus Suffragii* 29, no. 7 (April, 1935): 62. LSE Digital Library, The Women's Library Collection, <https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1wr030030300004>. Page 113.
- 2.4. Delfa Ivanić. *Žena i svet*, 9 (1925). Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije, https://digitalna.nb.rs/wb/NBS/casopisi/pretrazivi_po_datumu/zena_i_svet/1925/09/b009#page/0/mode/1up. Page 125.

Chapter 3

- 3.1. Angela Vode (1892-1985) (1939). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-D2E300AL from <http://www.dlib.si>. Page 159.
- 3.2. *Žena danas*, cover of the 14th issue from June, 1938. My photograph. Page 180.
- 3.3. *Ženski svijet*, cover of the 13th issue of November-December, 1940. My photograph. Page 181.
- 3.4. *Žena danas*, cover of the 25th issue from October, 1939. My photograph. Page 191.
- 3.5. *Žena danas*, cover of the 11-12th issue from March-April, 1938. My photograph. Page 191.

Chapter 5

- 5.1. The first ŽP domestic school, a photograph published in *Seljanka* 1, no. 1 (1933). My photograph. Page 262.
- 5.2. *Seljanka*, cover page of the 2nd issue, published in 1933. My photograph. Page 263.
- 5.3. Grabjec, Fran (191?). Minka Govekar (roj. 1874). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-G9OVLX7P from <http://www.dlib.si>. Page 272.
- 5.4. *Žena danas*, cover of the 13th issue from May, 1938. My photograph. Page 281.

INTRODUCTION

“You are all feminists, even though many of you are unconscious feminists,”¹ exclaimed one of the representatives from Zagreb at the founding congress of the National Council of Women of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (NCW) in Belgrade in 1919. On the same occasion, the Slovenian-born and (at the time) Zagreb-based writer and journalist Zofka Kveder, in a confession-like speech, declared: “From my young days, encouraged by books, I worked for feminism. I was a feminist even before knowing what that word means.”² More than a decade later, in 1933, the Prague-based Yugoslav feminist theorist and activist Julka Hlapec Djordjević criticized the Yugoslav, but also more broadly the European feminist movement, stating that “the feminist movement has everywhere and generally fallen into a sort of stagnation.”³ In 1936, young communist women began publishing a new feminist Popular Front journal, conceptualizing their program as “new feminism.”⁴ Giving a retrospective interpretation of the Yugoslav interwar feminist movement in which she had taken an active part, the Yugoslav Jewish intellectual and feminist activist Paulina Lebl Albala wrote in 1943: “For us the feminist struggle was a fight against reactionary streams, and it is no wonder that it gradually evolved and finally was transformed into action against Fascism and Nazism and positively in favor of equality, democracy and social justice.”⁵ Given all this, what was feminism in Yugoslavia in the interwar period? A vague, still undefined concept, an organization in crisis, a movement

¹ *Spomenica sa I kongresa žena Kraljevstva Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* [A Memorial Book from the 1st Congress of Women of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes] (Beograd: Nova štamparija Davidović, 1920), 92.

² *Ibid.*, 112.

³ J. Hlapec Djordjević, “Feministički pokret na raskršću” [The Feminist Movement at the Crossroads] *Jugoslovenska žena* 3, no. 31 (1933): 2.

⁴ “Novi feminizam” [New Feminism], *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 4. For this article from *Žena danas*, my quotes in English are from: “‘Novi Feminizam’ / The New Feminism (1936),” translated by Suzana Vuljević, in *Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women’s Rights*, ed. Zsófia Lóránd, Adela Hincu, Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz (CEU Press, forthcoming).

⁵ Paulina Lebl Albala, *Yugoslav women fight for freedom* (New York: Yugoslav Information Center, 1943), 9.

which transformed into an antifascist movement? Or was feminism all of this, and even much more?

By studying the history of feminisms in interwar Yugoslavia, where women's and feminist organizations flourished on an unprecedented level,⁶ this thesis seeks to explore the changes and transformations Yugoslav interwar feminisms underwent in a period often described as an "age of crisis."⁷ Europe between World War I and World War II was characterized by political instability, the Great Depression, a "crisis of liberal democracy,"⁸ and the rise of ultra-nationalism and fascism, and it was within and against this political context that the interwar feminists in Europe organized, campaigned, and developed their ideas about feminism. This dissertation is guided by two research questions. First, how did feminists in Yugoslavia organize themselves in the interwar period and how did the domestic and international political contexts shape their feminist activism and organizations? In other words, what was the role of the domestic and international political context in shaping Yugoslav feminisms? Secondly, what were the main ideas and concepts of Yugoslav feminists' political thought in the interwar period, how did they use the concept of feminism, and how did these ideas change in the period under research?

To answer these questions, I engage in an analysis of the main organizations and the political thought of the interwar feminists in Yugoslavia. In this endeavor, I start by focusing on the women active in the Alliance of Women's Movements (Alijansa ženskih poreta, AŽP), researching their use of the concept of feminism, and their individual and collective political trajectories. AŽP was an organization which became synonymous with the concept of feminism

⁶ The country was initially called Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes between 1918 and 1929, when it was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. For simplicity's sake, I will mainly refer to it as Yugoslavia, or in some cases Kingdom SHS.

⁷ T. Iván Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998); Agnes Cornell, *Democratic Stability in an Age of Crisis: Reassessing the Interwar Period* (Oxford: University Press, 2020).

⁸ See, for example, Marc Matera and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Global 1930s: The International Decade* (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

in interwar Yugoslavia, as much as, for instance, the National Woman's Party would in the interwar United States.⁹ It was formed in September 1923 in Ljubljana, by representatives of women's organizations from Ljubljana, Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo which self-identified as feminist organizations; indeed, initially, the Alijansa ženskih pokreta was named the Feminist Alliance (Feministička alijansa). The Feminist Alliance functioned in this form only briefly, and its greatest success was that it stimulated the establishment of many new Ženski pokret (Women's Movement, hereafter ŽP) organizations in the country. On September 16, 1926, the Feminist Alliance's board gathered all ŽP organizations in the country for a meeting in the small town of Bosanski Brod, at the border of Bosnia and Slavonia. On this occasion, the Feminist Alliance was restructured and renamed "Alliance of Women's Movements," which henceforth gathered only Ženski pokret organizations (hence the name change to the Alliance of Women's Movements, Ženskih pokreta). As such, the Alliance continued to function and grow in the following years and became synonymous with organized feminism in Yugoslavia. The organization's work, however, declined after the introduction of the royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia in 1929. It only regained its strength in the second half of the 1930s, when young communist women joined the organization in large numbers, significantly transforming the organization's character by opening it up to broader groups of (young) women and by foregrounding new ideas, as will be discussed in the dissertation in detail. The Alliance of Women's Movements or AŽP ceased to function in 1940.

While my interest goes beyond providing a history of the AŽP, I nevertheless find it to be a useful starting point in exploring an emerging network of feminists from Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade, who engaged in feminist struggle; promoted specific ideas about what feminism was or should be, thus building feminist political languages; and aimed to build a

⁹ Nancy Cott, *The grounding of modern feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

movement through which they would contribute toward reaching what they saw as necessary changes in the Yugoslav society. Historian Jovanka Kecman has so far provided the most encompassing history of AŽP in her 1978 study on women’s organizing in workers’ and women’s organizations in interwar Yugoslavia: however, in her approach, the organization is treated as a depersonalized entity and the changes in its organizational structure and its entanglements with other organizations have been insufficiently explored.¹⁰ Therefore, I will focus more on the individuals who built this feminist organization, and will carefully examine the dynamics of their collaboration. In this context, I pay a great deal of attention to individual women’s biographies, which I see as part of the ongoing feminist historians’ endeavor to “recover, explore, and understand the lives and experiences of those multitudes of women who have been ‘hidden from history.’”¹¹ Relying on the existing biographical work on many of the women I write about,¹² I see their individual biographies as important building blocks and context for their feminist political thought. At the same time, I consider the focus on individual women’s political thought as essential for expanding the existing biographies, because this element is often underresearched. Finally, an exploration of the political transformation that the AŽP underwent in the second half of the 1930s, when young communist women joined it en masse, will allow me to analyze the then transformation of feminism as a generational

¹⁰ 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). For a brief overview of women’s and feminist organizing in interwar Yugoslavia, see also: Ivana Pantelić, “Neki aspekti položaja žena u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji,” *Knjiženstvo* 1, no. 1 (2011).

¹¹ Barbara Caine, “Feminist biography and feminist history,” *Women’s History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 247–261, especially 250.

¹² Among these are: 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); Alenka Šelih, ed., *Pozabljena polovica: portreti žensk 19. in 20. stoletja na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Tuma, SAZU, 2007); Selišnik, “Socialna feministka”; Veljko Stanić, “‘Parče velikog života’: Mitra Mitrović o tridesetim godinama 20. Veka” [‘A Piece of a Great Life’: Mitra Mitrović on the 1930s], in *Časopis Žena danas (1936–1940): Prosvećivanje za revoluciju*, ed. Stanislava Barać (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2022), 55–97.

change, along with shifts in the meaning of the concept of feminism and in the dominant feminist political thought.

There are two scales of research I focus on in this thesis: the national (i.e. Yugoslav) and the transnational. Regarding the national scale, this dissertation is the first attempt since Kecman's 1978 study to consider three Yugoslav intellectual and organizational centers—Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana—in one analytical framework, with a focus on the entanglements and the intellectual and organizational networks between these centers.¹³ I build on the body of rapidly increasing scholarship on women's movements and feminisms in interwar Yugoslavia,¹⁴ and feminist periodical studies,¹⁵ which has however largely been written from the perspective of the (post-)Yugoslav states. By considering the feminists active in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade with a focus on their cooperation, my aim is to move beyond

¹³ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*. Another analysis which takes into account the Yugoslav space in the analysis of women's authorship in interwar Yugoslavia is: Jelena Petrović, *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹⁴ Irena Selišnik, "Volilna pravica žensk kot demokratična novost: dejavniki, ki vplivajo na njeno uveljavitev na Slovenskem" [Women's suffrage as a democratic innovation: factors affecting its implementation in Slovenia] (PhD dissertation, University of Ljubljana, 2007); Ivana Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke. Društvena emancipacija partizanki u Srbiji 1945-1953* [Partisan Women as Citizens. Social Emancipation of Partisan Women in Serbia 1945-1953] (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju; Evoluta, 2011); Svetlana Stefanović, "Nation und Geschlecht. Frauen in Serbien von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg," (PhD diss., Universität Leipzig, 2013), <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:15-qucosa-203559>; Ana Stolić, *Sestre srpkinje* [Serbian Sisters] (Beograd: Evoluta, 2015); Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav partisans: a history of World War II resistance* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Ivan Simić, *Soviet Influences on Postwar Yugoslav Gender Policies* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Ana Rajković, *Dugi ženski marš. Položaj radnica i ženski aktivizam u Hrvatskoj između dvaju svjetskih ratova* [The Long Women's March. The position of female workers and women's activism in Croatia between the two world wars] (Zagreb: DAF, 2021); Fabio Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878-1941)* (Central European University Press, 2021); Minja Bujaković, "Reinvestigating communist women's activism in the interwar kingdom of Yugoslavia," MA Thesis, Central European University, Budapest-Vienna, 2021.

¹⁵ Svetlana Stefanović, "Žensko pitanje u beogradskoj štampi i periodici" [The Woman Question in Belgrade press and periodicals] (Master's thesis, University of Belgrade, 2000); Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije. Rodni stereotipi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji* [Dangerous illusions. Gender stereotypes in interwar Yugoslavia] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2014); 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); Ana Kolarić, *Rod, modernost i emancipacija* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2017); Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev, ed., *Ženski pokret (1920-1938): zbornik radova* [Women's Movement (1920-1938): Collection of Essays] (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021); Ana Kolarić, *Periodika u feminističkoj učionici. Časopis "Ženski pokret" (1920-1938) i studije književnosti* [Periodicals in a feminist classroom: the Journal *Ženski pokret* (1920-1938) and literary studies] (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2021); Stanislava Barać, ed., *Časopis Žena danas (1936-1940): Prosvećivanje za revoluciju* [Magazine "Woman Today" (1936-1940): Enlightenment for the Revolution] (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2022).

viewing the interwar period from the perspective of post-Yugoslav nation-states. While generally limiting the scope of the research to these three urban centers, in the last chapter I decenter my research by exploring different feminist approaches to peasant women. The second scale involves the broader transnational context in which Yugoslav feminists were active, which I approach by exploring their feminism through a comparative lens with other (mostly European) contexts and by analyzing their involvement with international women's organizations. The latter refers to the regional transnational feminist organization the Little Entente of Women, founded at the 1923 International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) congress in Rome, and the Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme (Women's World Committee against War and Fascism, CMF), founded in 1934 in Paris.

In terms of methodology, I see this thesis as a part of the recent scholarship consciously aiming to overcome the general lack of focus on women's and feminist history in intellectual history. In 2007, historian Hilda L. Smith pointed to what she called the paradigmatic separation between women intellectuals and intellectual history and argued that intellectual historians had failed to include any discussion on gender or women.¹⁶ Since then, there has been only a gradual rise of interest in women's intellectual history, and more specifically women's international, social, economic and political thought. Although women's and gender history has not been overly present in intellectual history, overviews of political thought usually do have one chapter about feminism and/or women's political thought.¹⁷ Regarding the intellectual history of feminism, particularly relevant is Lucy Delap's book on "avant-garde feminism" in early-twentieth-century Britain and the US, in which the author explores the

¹⁶ Hilda L. Smith, "Women Intellectuals and Intellectual History: Their Paradigmatic Separation," *Women's History Review* 16, No. 3 (July 2007): 353–368; Hilda L. Smith, "Women's History as Intellectual History: A Perspective on the Journal of Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 26–32.

¹⁷ Susan James, "Feminisms," *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 493–516; Lucy Delap, "The 'woman question' and the origins of feminism," *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 319–348.

coining of the term feminism in the transatlantic 1910s context and the intellectual discussions surrounding it.¹⁸ More recently, the number of articles and edited volumes focusing on women's economic, social, international, and political thought has been increasing.¹⁹ In the case of East Central Europe, the most important is Zsófia Lóránd's 2018 study on the intellectual history of feminism in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁰ Building on these works, this thesis aims to contribute to the efforts of integrating women's intellectual history into the political and intellectual histories of these regions.

Regarding the analytical concepts I will use in my analysis—besides the concept of feminism, which I will discuss in detail in the methodology section—another key term is that of political generation. This concept has seen a rise in recent historiography,²¹ and I find it markedly suitable for discussing the transformation of feminism from the 1920s to the 1930s. In my analysis, I draw upon Karl Mannheim's conceptualization of generations. He defined generations through the phenomenon of "common location" in time and space, explaining that this common location is shaped by social change rather than biological factors. According to Mannheim, a generation emerges as a result of being exposed to a "specific range of potential experience," which arises from the social and intellectual signs of destabilization.²² Thus, for

¹⁸ Delap, *The feminist avant-garde*.

¹⁹ For example, Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, *Women's International Thought. A New History* (2021, Cambridge University Press); Sarah Dunstan and Patricia Owens, "Claudia Jones, International Thinker," *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 2 (2022): 551–574.

²⁰ Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge*. See the methodology section for further elaboration.

²¹ See, for example: Anna Artwińska and Agnieszka Mrozik, eds., *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2020); Maria Todorova, *The Lost World of Socialists at Europe's Margins: Imagining Utopia, 1870s-1920s* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Stefan Gužvica, "Sickle Without a Hammer: Revolution and Nation Building in the Balkans, 1900s–1930s" (PhD dissertation, Regensburg, Regensburg, 2022); Marco Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy. A History of Italian Antifascism in Interwar Europe* (Verso books, forthcoming in 2024), I'm extremely grateful to Marco Bresciani for sharing his manuscript with me. The book was originally published in Italian, as: Marco Bresciani, *Quale antifascismo? Storia di Giustizia e Libertà* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2017). For the use of the concept of generation for writing the history of radical feminism in the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, see: Nancy Whittier, *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 1-25.

²² Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Routledge, 1952), 276-320, 303. For a good discussion about Mannheim's use of political generation, see also: Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos, "From Political to Social Generations: A

Mannheim, the subjectivity of historical actors in interpreting their key experience is crucial for the formation of political generations. Within this framework, Mannheim introduced the notion of “generation units,” denoting different groups within the same generation who hold a similar (ideological) worldview and interpret social changes in similar ways. Finally, he differentiated between generation units’ conscious and unconscious activities. Namely, whereas the generation unit can have only “an intuitive awareness of its existence as a group but failing to realize the group's character as a generation unit,” groups can, on the other hand, “consciously experience and emphasize their character as generation units.” He illustrated the latter with an example of a contemporary German youth movement.²³

Following Mannheim, I speak of two feminist generations in Yugoslavia: the generation of “liberal feminists” which was predominant in the 1920s, and the “left feminist” generation, which became a dominant force in the 1930s feminist landscape.²⁴ Starting from this, I will furthermore consider different “generation units” within these two broadly conceived feminist generations, which I will analyze through their differing feminist political thought.²⁵ The concept of political generation is particularly valuable in understanding the feminist transformation that occurred in the 1930s. This perspective could also prompt a reconsideration of the prevalent metaphor of “feminist waves,” as historian Chiara Bonfiglioli has suggested.²⁶

Moreover, I agree with Anna Artwińska and Agnieszka Mrozik’s claim that the concept of generation can be useful for exploring the history of communisms and feminisms from a

Critical Reappraisal of Mannheim’s Classical Approach,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 17, no. 2 (2014): 165-183, especially 166.

²³ Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 309.

²⁴ I wrote about the left feminists as a generation in Isidora Grubački, “Communism, Left Feminism and Generations in the 1930s: The Case of Yugoslavia,” in *Gender, Generations and Communism in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, eds. Anna Artwińska and Agnieszka Mrozik (London: Routledge, 2020), 55–57.

²⁵ For the discussion on feminism as a political language, see the methodology section.

²⁶ Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Communisms, Generations, and Waves. The Cases of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Cuba,” in *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2020), 66-81, especially 73. I discuss the feminist waves metaphor more in the historiography section.

transnational perspective.²⁷ While my focus is mainly on the case of Yugoslavia, I contend that the generational shift was a phenomenon which extended beyond feminist circles, and beyond the borders of Yugoslavia. According to historian James Barrett's research of the Popular Front in the USA, generation shifts played an important role in shaping the new social and political movements as well.²⁸ Historian Siân Reynolds further highlighted the importance of generation when analyzing antifascist women in France in the 1930s.²⁹ It is worth noting, moreover, that this was also a generation which in many cases thought about themselves exactly in generational terms; such was the case with the left feminist and communist generation in Yugoslavia, of which I will write through the case of one of the leaders of the young communist women who joined the Alliance of Women's Movements' in 1935, Mitra Mitrović (1912-2001). A fantastic illustration for this kind of self-conceptualization, which also puts emphasis on the importance of the role of politics in their lives, is that of Austrian-born feminist historian Gerda Lerner (1920-2013), who in her autobiography published in 2002 wrote:

Do you remember—on March 11, 1938 [the day of the *Anschluss*] I collapsed totally and could do nothing but cry, but then I did not cry for another year. This is the difference between earlier generations and ours: for us politics is life, for our lives depend on the form taken by our society.³⁰

When discussing these two political generations of feminists, I will mention their differing horizons of expectations, using Reinhart Koselleck's notion. According to Koselleck, expectation is a historical concept that does not refer to an immediate historical reality (such as signing an agreement), but is an epistemological category which he pairs with the category of experience ("spaces of experience").³¹ Experience and expectation are seen as two categories

²⁷ Anna Artwińska and Agnieszka Mrozik, "Introduction," in *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2020), 9–28, especially 22.

²⁸ James R. Barrett, "Rethinking the Popular Front," *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 4 (2009): 531–532.

²⁹ Siân Reynolds, "The lost generation of French feminists? Anti-fascist women in the 1930s," *Women's Studies International Forum* 23, no. 6 (2000): 679–688.

³⁰ Gerda Lerner, *Fireweed: A Political Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 163.

³¹ Koselleck, *Futures past*, 257.

that embody past and future in the present: the experience encompasses the past, whereas expectations are the “future made present,” encompassing hopes and fears, wishes and desires, and other elements which all constitute an expectation.³² Drawing a connection between Mannheim and Koselleck, Michael Pickering highlights Mannheim's exploration in the 1930s of two distinct “horizons of expectations”: one resting on the experience of social stability, and, secondly, a horizon of expectation of those “caught up in an unstable social order” and living in times of intense change. In the times of insecurity, anxiety, and anger, then, more limited horizons of expectations are exchanged for a wider range of expectations, and previously existing but marginalized possibilities are brought to light.³³

I advance three main arguments in the thesis. First, Yugoslav interwar feminisms were intrinsically linked with both the domestic and the international political context. My analysis will show that the Yugoslav feminist movement emerged and developed in a period of the establishment of the post-war Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918) great political instability (1918–1929), the royal dictatorship (1929–1934), and the rise of an anti-regime and antifascist leftist movement (1930s), as well as the Great Depression, and the rise of ultra-nationalism and fascism. However, it would not suffice to say that Yugoslav interwar feminisms were shaped by these developments. Rather, and this is the second main argument, the interwar feminists of both political generations built their movement against this volatile context, and reacted and responded to it by forging cooperations: across ethnic divides, between Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian women; across political divides, between conservative, liberal, and communist women; and through international women's organizations.

The third argument posits that in Yugoslavia, the interwar period—and more specifically the 1930s—were not years of the “crisis” or “demise” of feminism, as historians

³² Ibid., 258–259.

³³ Michael Pickering, “Experience as horizon. Koselleck, expectation and historical time,” *Cultural studies* 18, no. 2-3 (2004): 271–289, particularly 279-280.

have argued.³⁴ As I argue, the transformation of feminism that occurred in the 1930s encompassed significant continuity and change. This transformation becomes apparent when examining the continuities and changes between what I refer to as the liberal feminist generation, most active in the 1920s, and the subsequent emergence of the left feminist generation in the 1930s.

Only after careful consideration of continuities can changes be properly assessed. The first continuity was organizational. Namely, the AŽP remained the main feminist organization for both generations of feminists. The liberal generation of feminists built this organization during the 1920s, and the left feminist generation revived it in the second half of the 1930s. The organization functioned until January 1940, when both the initiators and long-term leaders of the Alliance led by the Ljubljana-born Alojzija Štebi (1883-1956) *and* the young communist women led by Mitra Mitrović left the organization. The second continuity between 1920s and 1930s was in the feminist agenda, which encompassed, but was not limited to, demands for women's rights to vote and to paid employment, equal pay for equal work and equal professional opportunities, legal equality, against the double morality, and more generally social justice, peace, and democracy. What is more, as the pioneering women's historian Lydia Sklevicky had noted already in 1984, the continuity in terms of the agenda can be also noticed if we take a look at the agenda of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia regarding women, as presented in 1940 by one of the leading post-war communists Vida Tomšič (1913-1998). Third, there was also significant continuity in the use the concept of "feminism," which women with diverse political orientations used in both periods, up until 1940 when Yugoslav communist women distanced themselves from the term, a topic I will extensively explore in chapter 4.

³⁴ See the historiography section.

Regarding the changes, I contend that these should be understood in the realm of the two generations' politics. When it comes to organizing, what changed were the dominant political alliances. Whereas in the 1920s the Alliance of Women's Movements was an organization which served as a platform for conservative feminists, national liberal feminists, and civic feminists. Communist feminists were a minority, yet, as chapter 3 will demonstrate, they also on some occasions took part in the feminist movement in the 1920s. With the change of the context, the rise of fascism and ultra-nationalism in the 1930s brought together civic feminists, communist feminists, and in some cases also national liberal feminists, whereas in this period the cooperation with conservative feminists proved to be less possible due to their support of ethnic-nationalism and in some cases also fascism. When it comes to the difference regarding the agenda, what changed substantially was the horizon of expectations of how this agenda might be reached. Namely, the liberal feminist generation put all hopes in the democratization in the new state, and trusted that, with women gaining suffrage rights (which did not happen in Yugoslavia before 1945), conditions will be created for the feminist agenda to be reached. On the other hand, the horizon of expectation of the left feminist generation, which grew up in the politically unstable 1920s, was that the agenda could be reached only in a radically transformed society. Finally, there was a significant change in the meaning and the understanding of the term "feminism" by the two generations. The liberal feminist generation in the 1920s associated "feminism" with the state and with social reforms; theirs was a reformist, yet still quite radical version of feminism which aimed at improving the state so that it could deliver justice and equality to all members of society. The 1930s saw the rise of what was called "new feminism," which aimed to reconceptualize feminism in two ways: first, antifascism became the core of 1930s feminism; and, secondly, Yugoslav left feminists saw their program as possible only in a radically transformed society. Consequently, they advocated

for a far-reaching social and political transformation, which essentially equated to a revolutionary transformation.

The remainder of this introduction is structured as follows. First there is a historiography section, which is divided into three parts, and discusses the Yugoslav historiography of interwar feminism; international scholarship regarding the terminology and periodization of feminisms; and scholarship on the political history of Yugoslavia. The subsequent section about methodology outlines my methodological focus on women's intellectual history and feminist political thought, and further examines the ways I use feminism as an analytical concept in the thesis. Finally, I discuss the sources on which this dissertation is based, and offer an outline of the dissertation.

Historiography

Interwar feminism in Yugoslav historiography and the “bourgeois feminism/proletarian women's movement” binary

The first issue I will discuss concerning the Yugoslav historiography concerns the binary between “bourgeois feminism” and “proletarian women's movement,” or, put differently, the communism/feminism binary. As is well known, the term bourgeois feminism was used, among others, by the German social democrat and later communist Clara Zetkin, and the Russian revolutionary, diplomat, and theorist Alexandra Kollontai. Rejecting cooperation with the women whom they called bourgeois feminists, Zetkin and Kollontai advocated for a separate organizing of socialist women in the framework of the broader social democratic workers' movement. As Marilyn J. Boxer demonstrated, the legacy of this derogatory term was far-reaching, having made it also to the academic discourse of the second half of the twentieth century, when historians persisted in an uncritical use of the bourgeois feminism. Although

Boxer does not define feminism clearly in her article either, she is right in her claim that bourgeois feminism has often been contested and vaguely defined, and that the distinction between socialist and bourgeois depended on various factors, including ideology, political strategies, personal rivalries, the relationship among the political parties in various national contexts, and so forth.³⁵ In both these aspects, the historiography of women's movements and feminisms in interwar Yugoslavia is no exception.

The key study for the history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia is historian Jovanka Kecman's 1978 monograph, which explored women's activism in the workers' movement and in women's organizations between 1918 and 1941. Although this study was written in a positivistic and largely descriptive style, it was the first large-scale research on women's activism in interwar Yugoslavia and remains unsurpassed in its scope and richness of information. In her study, Kecman encompassed both interwar decades, women's activism in the workers' movement and in autonomous women's organizations and covered the whole country (as opposed to the more recent studies focusing on post-Yugoslav states). Kecman's methodological approach largely rested on the binary between the bourgeois feminist movement on the one hand, and the proletarian, communist, or workers' movement on the other, thus setting a clear boundary between the two, and framing the discussion for generations to come. Based on the fact that Kecman made a distinction between bourgeois feminists and the proletarian women's movement, there seems to be a historiographical consensus in the region that Kecman's work is, to put it simply, "ideological." Historian Thomas A. Emmert, for instance, argued in 1999 that "this categorization inhibited scholars like Kecman from

³⁵ Marilyn J. Boxer, "Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept 'Bourgeois Feminism,'" *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 131–158.

seeing the true nature, philosophy, and contributions of some nonsocialist women's organizations."³⁶

However, despite insisting on this bourgeois feminism/proletarian women's movement binary, Kecman did not exclude the bourgeois women's organizations on interwar Yugoslavia from her research. On the contrary, she offered pioneering and broad research on women's organizations in interwar Yugoslavia, and her work became a key reference point for contemporary historians of the women's movement and feminism in interwar Yugoslavia. Taking a closer look at her interpretative framework, we see that in the opening sentence Kecman promised to study women in the Yugoslav workers' movement. Yet, already in the second sentence she explained that "women were not disempowered only as workers, but also as women," which, in Kecman's words, "justifies separate research" on women as well as an inclusion of the bourgeois women's organizations.³⁷ I see the way Kecman explained her interest in women's history and the focus on "bourgeois" women's organizations as an interesting example of negotiation with a still patriarchal academic community and the generally accepted bourgeois/proletarian binary in the 1970s.³⁸ Rather than a tension in reconciling "feminism" with "communism," I recognize in Kecman's approach the tension in the a priori division between the two in a socialist context.

Other historians, including Čedomir Popov in his 1961 article on the formation of the Antifascist Women's Front, and Danilo Kecić in his 1989 discussion of the creation of the Ženski pokret Youth sections in Vojvodina in the second half of the 1930s, reinforced the

³⁶ 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: Penn State University Press, 1999), 24.

³⁷ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 1.

³⁸ The lack of interest among historians to focus on women's history was, of course, not specific to Yugoslav historiography. For an example of how the New Left resisted focusing on women's history, see: Boxer, "Bourgeois feminism," 147. An exception is historian Danilo Kecić, who researched the participation of women in what he called a "workers and revolutionary-democratic movement" in Vojvodina. Danilo Kecić, *Revolucionarni tokovi* (Novi Sad, 1989), 53–93.

binary more than Kecman. Popov wrote that in 1939 a division existed between the “massive progressive wing of the women’s movement” and, on the other hand, the “right wing bourgeois and reactionary, narrow nationalist wing, whose most prominent representatives were members of chauvinist feminist organizations”; concerning the latter, he referred to the women’s nationalist organizations Kolo srpskih sestara (Circle of Serbian Sisters) and Društvo Katarina Zrinjska (Association Katarina Zrinjska).³⁹ Kecić, moreover, referred to the Yugoslav National Council of Women as a “feminist organization.”⁴⁰ These works lack precision as they did not define what they meant by feminism, and as they labeled women’s nationalist organizations and the NCW feminist, even though women activists in the interwar period did not call this organization feminist at the time, as the analysis in this thesis will show.

On the other hand, some Yugoslav historians have implicitly challenged the binary. In an important 1972 article, historian Ljubinka Ćirić Bogetić discussed in a nuanced and historically-specific way the cooperation and conflicts between what she called the “liberal-bourgeois” and “communist” women in the late 1930s,⁴¹ whereas Erna Muser in 1967 published a contribution dealing with the socialist and communist women’s connections with the feminists in Slovenia.⁴² Secondly, in the introduction to the 1979 phototype edition of the Zagreb Popular Front magazine *Ženski svijet* (Women’s World, 1939–1941), Jelena Jančić Starc—who had herself been active in the 1930s left feminist movement in Zagreb and an

³⁹ Čedomir Popov, “Formiranje AFŽ-a 1942. Rezultat stava KPJ prema ženskom pitanju i posledica politike Narodnog fronta” [Forming of the AFŽ in 1942. The result of the KPJ’s attitude towards the woman question and the consequence of the politics of Popular Front], *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu* 6 (1961): 1–55, particularly 25, <https://digitalna.ff.uns.ac.rs/sadrzaj/1961/0374-0730> (Accessed December 13, 2022).

⁴⁰ Kecić, *Revolucionarni tokovi*, 70.

⁴¹ Ljubinka Ćirić Bogetić, “Odluke Pete zemaljske konferencije KPJ o radu među ženama i njihova realizacija u periodu 1940-1941” [The decisions of the Fifth land conference of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on the work among women and their realization in the period 1940-1941] in *Peta zemaljska konferencija komunističke partije Jugoslavije: zbornik radova* [The Fifth land conference of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia: Collection of Essays], eds. Zlatko Čepo and Ivan Jelić (Zagreb: Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, Školska knjiga, 1972), 75–97.

⁴² Erna Muser, “Socialisti in komunisti ter boj Slovenk za enakopravnost” [Socialists and Communists and the Struggle of Slovenian Women for Equality], *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 1-2 (1967): 191–211.

editor of this magazine—emphasized the shared program between the feminists and the communist students, and underscored that the feminists in Zagreb were antifascist and “far from clericalism,” despite the fact that they dissociated themselves from communism.⁴³ Finally, in her 1996 study on “the woman question” in Serbia, Neda Božinović (1917 – 2001)—who was active in the left feminist movement before WWII and in the Antifascist Women’s Front after the war, and then again in active in the feminist antiwar movement in the 1990s—mentioned the previously overlooked fact that the communist women who edited the interwar Popular Front journal *Žena danas* (Woman Today, 1936–1940) in Belgrade conceptualized their program, through which they connected the feminist and the anti-fascist movement, as “new feminism.”⁴⁴ Interestingly, all these researchers were born between 1912 and 1920, and (except for Ćirić Bogetić, of whom I found no more than her years of birth and death) were active in the communist women’s movement before WWII and in the partisan movement during WWII, so their *generational* view that recognized cooperation between communist and liberal women will be indicative for the argument in this work.

Building on the research of Ćirić Bogetić and Starc Jančić, in her two-part article from the mid-1980s the pioneering Yugoslav women’s historian Lydia Sklevicky made three important points. To begin with, she argued that scholarship had until then insufficiently focused on the cooperation between the feminists and the communists. Secondly, Sklevicky warned against the uncritical homogenization of non-communist women’s organizations, and particularly disagreed with historian Čedomir Popov’s aforementioned differentiation.⁴⁵ Lastly, Sklevicky noted that scholarship, mainly Kecman’s, had insisted on the bourgeois

⁴³ Jelena Starc Jančić, “Ženski svijet” [Women’s World], in *Ženski svijet* (Zagreb: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost i ulogu žene u društvenom razvoju RK SSRNH i Izdavački savjet časopisa *Žena*), 19.

⁴⁴ Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* [The “Woman Question” in Serbia in the 19th and 20th Century] (Beograd: Devedesetčetvrti, Žene u crnom 1996), 124.

⁴⁵ Lydia Sklevicky, “Karakteristike organiziranog djelovanja žena u Jugoslaviji u razdoblju do drugog svjetskog rata (II)” [Characteristics of women’s organized activities in Yugoslavia in the period before WWII], *Polja* 30, no. 309 (1984): 454–456, particularly 455.

women's organizations' support of the regime.⁴⁶ Disagreeing with this, Sklevicky rightly contrasted Kecman's work to that of Starc Jančić and Ćirić Bogetić, who highlighted the antifascist and pacifist orientation of the bourgeois women's movement. Sklevicky accentuated the largely overlapping, even shared, agenda of the feminist and communist women in the 1930s, and argued that all future research on this topic must take the heterogeneity of both the socialist and nonsocialist women's movements into account, as well as the complexities of the relationship between these movements in different periods.⁴⁷

Throughout the period of socialist Yugoslavia, historians have offered different and more or less nuanced approaches to the history of women's and feminist organizing in interwar Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, since the late 1990s historians have continued to uncritically reproduce the old bourgeois/proletarian binary, often without a careful examination of the primary sources. Two examples are Jelena Batinić's otherwise excellent 2015 study on women partisans in Yugoslavia during WWII, in which the reflections on the (dis)continuity of the WWII women's liberation with the interwar feminist history are comparatively weaker than her research on the participation of women in the partisan movement,⁴⁸ and Jelena Petrović's 2018 discussion of interwar feminisms in the first two chapters of her book on women's authorship in interwar Yugoslavia.⁴⁹ Importantly, both mentioned overviews of the interwar feminist movement are based predominantly on secondary literature (mainly Kecman and Emmert), and thus offer overly generalized and insufficiently substantiated evaluations of interwar feminisms.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Lydia Sklevicky, "Karakteristike organiziranog djelovanja žena u Jugoslaviji u razdoblju do drugog svjetskog rata (I)," *Polja* 30, no. 308 (1984): 415–417.

⁴⁸ Batinić's interwar feminist story is mainly based on two essays of Thomas Emmert and Vlasta Jalušić, the latter one also based mainly on secondary sources. See Emmert, "Ženski pokret", and Vlasta Jalušić, "Women in interwar Slovenia," 51–66, in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet.

⁴⁹ Petrović, *Women's Authorship*.

Two examples from Petrović's study can further clarify this. Concerning generalizations, the first is a quote from Vida Tomšič, who as a delegate at the Fifth Land Conference of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1940 denounced “feminism” as “right wing opportunist help to the bourgeois (in original: *građanski*) women’s movement in spreading the illusions that some reforms can allegedly solve the woman question in the context of a class society.”⁵⁰ Petrović applies this 1940 quote retrospectively to the whole interwar period, thus simplifying the image of the women’s movement in Yugoslavia in this period.⁵¹ The second example concerns the feminist and communist Popular Front journal *Žena danas*. Although Petrović discusses the programmatic text of “new feminism” in the first issue of this journal, she does not mention the journal’s communist dimension, which Kecman, Božinović, and others had already documented,⁵² and in this way contributes to obscuring Yugoslav communist women’s attempt to reconceptualize feminism in the second half of the 1930s.

To transcend the bourgeois/proletarian division, I embark on two key tasks. The first revolves around understanding the meaning of the concept of “feminism” before WWII. I revisit the primary sources, aiming to enrich our comprehension of the nuanced uses of the term “feminism” in interwar Yugoslavia. Despite the frequent contrast drawn between feminism and communism, Yugoslav feminist historians have not extensively explored what feminism meant and how it was conceptualized and reconceptualized in the interwar period in Yugoslavia. For instance, the meaning of the term “feminist” in the name of the Feminist Alliance has remained unexamined, and little attention has been given to the intriguing case of young communist women forwarding the idea of “new feminism.” Furthermore, while the

⁵⁰ Marija Šoljan Bakarić, *Žene Hrvatske u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* [Women of Croatia in the National Liberation Struggle] (Zagreb: Glavni odbor Saveza ženskih društava Hrvatske, 1955), 2-8; See Petrović, *Women’s Authorship*, 37, 71.

⁵¹ Historian Ivan Simić uncritically repeated this quote in his study on Soviet influences on postwar Yugoslav gender policies. Simić, *Soviet Influences*, 26.

⁵² Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 124; Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 318–348.

regional feminist transnational organization, Little Entente of Women, has been described as "feminist," there is a lack of context provided for this characterization.⁵³

My second approach to transcending the aforementioned binary division involves exploring the level and dynamics of collaboration among feminists with diverse political orientations in interwar Yugoslavia. In doing so, my research contributes to challenging the historiographical norm that liberal and socialist women were incapable of cooperating across political lines, as historian Laura Beers has discussed already. In her work on the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Beers foregrounded importance of looking at the collaboration of liberal and socialist women, not only during the Popular Front period but also earlier. She has moreover highlighted the necessity of distinguishing between socialists and members of the Communist Party.⁵⁴ Building upon these insights, the thesis sheds light on how different feminists cooperated in the Yugoslav feminist movement during the 1920s and 1930s, and furthermore unveils the plurality of political stances held by the feminists who forged this movement in Yugoslavia.

Feminisms: Terminologies and periodization in contemporary scholarship

To comprehend the history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia, it is essential to consider the broader scholarship on interwar feminisms. This section focuses on the ways historians have used analytical categories in researching feminism, and how these relate to our understanding of the periodization of feminism. As I see it, the case of Yugoslav feminisms, and its

⁵³ See: Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, Marijana Kardum, "Mala ženska antanta (1923–1929): mali savez s velikim ambicijama" [Little Entente with a great ambition: The Little Entente of Women], *Historijski zbornik* 72, br. 1 (2019): 111–138.

⁵⁴ Laura Beers, "Bridging the Ideological Divide: Liberal and Socialist Collaboration in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1919–1945," *Journal of Women's History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 112 and 114. For a similar claim, see Celia Donert, "Women's Rights and Global Socialism: Gendering Socialist Internationalism during the Cold War," *International Review of Social History* 67, no. 30 (April 2022): 13.

transformation from the 1920s to the 1930s, can contribute to our understanding of the histories of interwar feminisms, and, more specifically, to rethinking of the so-called first and second feminist waves.

The prevalent idea of the feminist waves (and I will particularly focus on the first and second wave here) is a largely Western-centered one. In brief, this chronology identifies the “first wave” of feminism as a movement which advocated for women’s civil and political rights (primarily education and suffrage), roughly from the mid-19th century to WWI, and the “second wave” of feminism, as a movement that began in the mid-1960s and built on the ideas of the first wave feminists, but focused on more areas of women’s experience, such as politics, work, the family, and sexuality.⁵⁵ Scholars have widely demonstrated that the interwar period has been a time of diverse women’s activism, particularly on the international level,⁵⁶ and historians have continued to emphasize the importance for a rethinking of the waves metaphor, arguing that the metaphor carries with itself a range of methodological and interpretative dilemmas, the most important being that it “entrenches the perception of a ‘singular’ feminism,” and, moreover, that it predominantly highlights the periods of the rise of middle-class white women’s feminism in some Western countries.⁵⁷ For these reasons, historians have increasingly embarked on implicitly or explicitly challenging the waves metaphor by offering alternative conceptualizations of feminisms and, consequently, alternative periodizations, which can result in conceptualizations of what historian Dorothy Sue Cobble has called “the missing wave[s]”.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See, for example, the definition in Encyclopedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/event/womens-movement>.

⁵⁶ See, for example: Carol Miller, “‘Geneva - the Key to Equality’: Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations,” *Women’s History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 219–45; Rupp, *Worlds of Women*; Susan Zimmermann, “Equality of Women’s Economic Status? A Major Bone of Contention in the International Gender Politics Emerging During the Interwar Period,” *International History Review* 41, no. 1 (2019): 200–227.

⁵⁷ Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010): 77, 82.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 86. See also: Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-10; See also: Bonfiglioli, “Communisms,

How does the conceptualization of feminism as an analytical term influence the periodization? To begin with, some studies on interwar feminism have paid particular attention to the way the concept of feminism was used in historical context. Probably the best example of such an approach is that of Nancy Cott, who in her 1987 monograph *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* gave an account of American feminism in the 1910s and 1920s. Proposing these decades as crucial for the birth of modern feminism—or, as she wrote it in singular, “Feminism”—Cott suggested that these two decades represented a rupture with the earlier period of the women’s movement. As she argued, the “change of vocabulary” and the introduction of the “new language of Feminism” in this period signified the emergence of a modern agenda, simultaneously laying the groundwork of “the fault lines of modern feminism.”⁵⁹ Focusing primarily on the movement which itself used the feminist label, Cott argued against historiographical claims of the demise of feminism in the 1920s, and suggested that the difficulty, in this period, was in finding “language, organization, and goals adequate to the paradoxical situation of modern women, diverse individuals and subgroups who ‘can’t avoid being women whatever they do,’ who inhabit the same worlds as men, not in the same way.”⁶⁰ Rather than demise, she relied on the concept of crisis, and proposed that “rather than strictly marking 1920 as the end of an era, we should recognize the surrounding decades as a period of crisis and transition.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, her conclusions imply that feminist claims in the USA became vague by the early 1930s.

In contrast to Cott, historian Karen Offen a year later opted for a more precise definition of feminism as an analytical term. Offen famously wrote about two distinct modes of

Generations, and Waves,” 67; Nancy A. Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Barbara Molony and Jennifer Nelson, eds, *Women’s Activism and ‘Second Wave’ Feminism: Transnational Histories* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Celia Donert, “Women’s Rights in Cold War Europe: Disentangling Feminist Histories,” *Past & Present* 218, no. suppl 8 (January 1, 2013): 178-179.

⁵⁹ Cott, *Modern feminism*, 3-4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

argumentation used historically by women to argue for women's emancipation from male control, which she called individualist and relational feminism. Whereas individualist feminist arguments posited the individual, irrespective of sex or gender, as the basic unit, relational feminism advocated for a gender-based but egalitarian vision centered around non-hierarchical male-female partnerships.⁶² As Offen argued, despite the fact that European feminism was for a long time dominated by the latter line of argumentation, much of the discussion *about* feminism has been based on the model of an individualistic tradition of argumentation.⁶³ Her argument has significantly influenced the scholarship in East Central Europe, as recently historians of women's movements in for example Serbia and Bulgaria have used Offen's definition of "relational feminism."⁶⁴ Moreover, differently than Cott, Offen argued for a broader, yet still specific, definition of feminism. According to her, feminism should be viewed as both a social movement and "a rapidly developing major critical ideology," an ideology which "incorporates a broad spectrum of ideas and possesses an international scope," and was both dependent on and in tension with male-centered political discourses.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, she remained attentive to the way the concept was used in historical context, thereby maintaining a clear distinction between feminism as an analytical and as a historical term. This approach allowed her to undertake the journey of writing a comparative history of European feminisms, spanning from the early 18th century to the 1950s.⁶⁶

Both Cott's and Offen's approaches have their advantages and limitations, particularly regarding periodization. While Cott's focus on the change of the "language of feminism" is relevant, her conclusions focus on incoherences of early 20th-century American feminist

⁶² Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 119–157, specifically 135–136.

⁶³ Offen, "Defining Feminism," 137.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Kolarić, *Rod, modernost i emancipacija*; Stolić, *Sestre Srпкиnje*;

⁶⁵ Offen, "Defining Feminism," 151–152.

⁶⁶ Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

thought and suggest a universalizing and unifying understanding of “modern Feminism”; accordingly, they can only be applied to the Yugoslav case study in a limited way. Moreover, by ending her interpretation in the early 1930s and making a direct continuation with the 1960s, Cott rested her interpretation on the assumption that, broadly put, the developments in the 1930s were the beginning of the end of interwar feminism. Cott’s study did not deal with the transformation feminism had undergone in the interwar period, implying that there was little feminism in these three in-between decades, thus contributing to the idea of the 1930s to 1960s as “doldrums.”⁶⁷ Similarly, the historian of French feminisms Christine Bard used the concept of crisis to describe what happened with feminism in the 1930s.⁶⁸ Although she pinpointed the rupture to the year 1940, Bard argued that the “crisis of feminism” had already emerged in the 1930s. She offered some of the possible causes of the “crisis of feminism,” including the ideological obstacles which kept young women from feminist action in the context of the re-politicization of French society in the second half of the 1930s, the shift to antifascism, and the outdatedness of the kind of feminism identified with suffragism; some of these will be addressed and evaluated in this thesis.⁶⁹ Offen’s definition of feminism—to which I will come back later in the methodology section—significantly extended the geographical and time frame of the research of feminism, including some Eastern European case studies and the history of feminism in the 19th century, her analysis still ended in the 1950s and did not speak much of what and how happened after.

Other historians have sought to embrace a broader view of feminisms, encompassing both communist and socialist women's contributions, and have thus contributed explicitly or

⁶⁷ According to Dorothy Sue Cobble, the idea that these years were the years of “doldrum” was foregrounded by Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor in their 1987 book *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s*. In her 2004 book, Cobble argued against this stance. See: Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, especially 1-10, and note 27 on page 235.

⁶⁸ Christine Bard, “La crise du féminisme en France dans les années trente,” *Les cahiers du CEDREF*, 4–5 (1995), 13–27.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

implicitly towards the rethinking of the “waves” metaphors. One of these approaches has been to view communist women’s activism as a part of the history of feminism, often expressed by using the term “left feminism.” Historians have offered varied definitions of “left feminism,” using the term to refer to the women who usually—though not always—rejected identification with the feminist label and were in direct or indirect connection with communist parties. In 1991, historian Ellen C. Dubois proposed this term to describe a perspective “which fuses a recognition of the systematic oppression of women with an appreciation of other structures of power,” as well as an “understanding that the attainment of genuine equality for women—all women—requires a radical challenge to [American] society, the mobilization of masses of people, and fundamental social change.”⁷⁰ Building on Dubois, Francisca de Haan has used the term to refer to the WIDF, and specified that her aim was to point to the fact that not all women in the WIDF identified as communist, nor were all of them members of the Communist Party, and, secondly, that women’s rights were integral to the WIDF program.⁷¹

These approaches have faced criticism due to claims that feminism and communism inherently contradict each other; critics contended that researching them together is unwarranted, primarily because communist women's organizations did not prioritize individual autonomy for women and because their agency was allegedly constrained by the dominance of Party directives.⁷² More recently, Zsófia Lóránd has argued for retaining the clear analytical division between what she called feminism and socialist women’s emancipation politics,

⁷⁰ Ellen C. Dubois, “Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism,” *Gender and History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 84.

⁷¹ Francisca de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organisations: The Case of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF),” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 4 (September 2010), 547–573. For similar uses of the terms, see also: Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for freedom: black women, American communism, and the making of black left feminism* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2011), 5, who uses the term “black left feminism;” and Michelle Chase, “‘Hands Off Korea!’: Women’s Internationalist Solidarity and Peace Activism in Early Cold War Cuba,” *Journal of Women’s History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 66, who used the term “left feminism” to denote the “visions of women’s liberation that foregrounded social rights and state intervention while often rejecting the label feminist.”

⁷² Nanette Funk, “A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women’s organizations, women’s agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–360.

nevertheless highlighting the importance of researching the latter.⁷³ Historian Celia Donert has persuasively argued that it is necessary to include the social history of East European socialist regimes when researching the history of women's international rights after WWII.⁷⁴ On the other hand, De Haan maintains that the omission of what she calls "left feminist inter/transnational women's organizations" from the historiography of feminism, particularly during the Cold War era, stemmed from the assumption that these organizations—particularly the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and its affiliates—were "deeply politicized," "communist," and "not feminist." This assumption, however, overlooks the fact that, as de Haan emphasizes following Offen's insights, all women's organizations, whether communist and non-communist, were shaped by and involved in different political contexts and projects—that is, also the so-called politically neutral ones.⁷⁵

Thinking along similar lines, and analyzing feminisms in their own political contexts, Dorothy Sue Cobble and Katherine M. Marino recently significantly expanded our knowledge of the ways different women have challenged the mainstream feminists in the US (those Nancy Cott focused on). Cobble has pointed to alternative feminist politics in the US by researching trade unions and what she called "full rights feminism" and "labor feminism."⁷⁶ Katherine Marino demonstrated in her ground-breaking study that Latin American feminists challenged the US feminism that focused on women's civil and political rights without considering social and economic rights and anti-imperialist politics. These feminists used the term *feminismo práctico*, arguing that it signified not only a support for women's political and civil rights, but

⁷³ Zsófia Lóránd, "International Solidarity as the Cornerstone of the Hungarian Post-War Socialist Women's Rights Agenda in the Magazine *Asszonyok*," *International Review of Social History* 67, no. 30 (April 2022): 103–29.

⁷⁴ Donert, "Women's Rights in Cold War Europe," 181.

⁷⁵ De Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 550; see also: Francisca de Haan, ed., "Ten Years After. Communism and Feminism Revisited," *Aspasia* 10 (2016): 102–168; Karen Offen, "The History of Feminism is Political History," *Perspectives on History* (May 1, 2011), <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-2011/the-history-of-feminism-is-political-history>.

⁷⁶ Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *For the Many: American Feminists and the Global Fight for Democratic Equality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021).

also a radical transformation which encompassed also social justice and social and political rights of all suffering under US imperialism.⁷⁷ In the case of “black left feminism” in the US, as Erik McDuffie showed, the women who did not identify with the feminist label challenged equalitarian feminism that did not consider the problem of racism, but they also challenged “the CPUSA’s masculinist articulations of what it termed the ‘Negro Question’ and the agendas and sexist practices of Communist and non-Communist black male leaders.”⁷⁸

The implications of these new studies are multifold. Besides advocating for the mentioned inclusion of those who sometimes rejected the term and connected equal rights issues with other problems (such as those related to class, race, and empire), broadening the way we use “feminism” as an analytical term can help us deepen our understanding of the ways women around the world have challenged dominant feminist ideas and movements. Moreover, these recent approaches have been useful in rethinking the feminist waves metaphor. The research on “left feminism” has mainly focused on the period after 1945, whereas Cobble and Marino have in their recent studies predominantly dealt with the transformation that this thesis also focuses on, which is from the 1920s to the 1930s. Cobble and Marino’s approaches have foregrounded an alternative ideology, implying that a “missing feminist wave,” which began to rise in the early 1930s, can help us rethink the aforementioned years of “doldrums.” Overall, then, this scholarship challenges the waves metaphor and opens up space for novel approaches to the histories of feminisms.

This study situates the Yugoslav case study in the framework outlined by this broader scholarship, underscoring the significant contribution the Yugoslav case can make to the conceptualization of this “missing wave,” which I suggest emerged already in the 1930s, and

⁷⁷ Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 1–2.

⁷⁸ McDuffie, *Sojourning*; see also: Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx. The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.

not after 1945, as historians usually suggest.⁷⁹ The specific focus of my research lies in examining the transformation of feminisms in Yugoslavia, where the self-identified feminist movement emerged in the 1920s, that is, only after the first wave, according to the prevailing narrative, had already “ended,” and where the left feminist generation played a pivotal role in what I analyze as the political transformation of interwar feminisms.

Conducting research on Yugoslav feminisms necessitates situating them within their political and historiographical context, which will additionally contribute to challenging the dominant narrative, which has—as the examples have shown—predominantly remained Western- and US-centered. Therefore, I bring together historiographies of feminism and communism, i.e., left feminisms; Western and Yugoslav historiographies; and sources of liberal and left feminist activism in the interwar period, thus making the following two claims. First, focusing solely on those women and movements that identified with the term “feminism” is not sufficient for writing comprehensive histories of feminisms, although it can be a valuable starting point; as my analysis will show, the predominant meaning of “feminism” in 1920s Yugoslavia was closer to Cobble’s “full rights feminism” than to Cott’s interpretation, or in other words closer to the alternative than to the mainstream meaning in the US in the same period. Secondly, the distancing of communist women from the term “feminism” should not be taken for granted without proper contextualization, and the historiography can benefit significantly from including communist women’s activism in the history of feminism(s).

⁷⁹ Bonfiglioli, “Communisms, Generations, and Waves;” Eloisa Betti, “Generations of Italian Communist Women and the Making of a Women’s Rights Agenda in the Cold War (1945–68). Historiography, Memory, and New Archival Evidence,” in *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2020), 82-101.

The political history of interwar Yugoslavia with a focus on the national question

Besides the bourgeois/proletarian division, another important historiographical issue regarding the history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia which historians are yet to reassess is the so-called national question. Since the 1990s and 2000s historians in the post-Yugoslav states began individually and collectively working towards writing women's history in different post-Yugoslav countries.⁸⁰ However, their research was to a large extent shaped by the post-Yugoslav realities, without sufficient reference to the broader Yugoslav framework or critical reassessment of the relationship between feminism and nationalism. Although there are some exceptions,⁸¹ studies have researched women's movements and feminisms before 1918 in Croatian, Slovenian, and Serbian contexts without sufficiently exploring their political and nationalist aims. This includes the previously under-researched women's nationalist organizations, such as Beogradsko žensko društvo (Belgrade Women's Society, established in 1975) in Serbia, or charitable women's societies in Croatia before WWI.⁸²

Taking a different approach in this thesis by taking the larger Yugoslav context and the shared space of the Yugoslav feminists as my analytical framework. I do so in order to evaluate to what extent feminism in interwar Yugoslavia was itself "Yugoslav," in two meanings. First, to what extent did the feminists from Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrade, and other places in Yugoslavia cooperate? Secondly, to what extent did the feminists in Yugoslavia support the Yugoslavist nation-building project, and did their relationship towards Yugoslavism change

⁸⁰ See, for example: Latinka Perović, ed., *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka, vol. 2. Položaj žene kao merilo modernizacije* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1998); Nataša Budna Kodrič, Aleksandra Serše, eds., *Splošno žensko društvo 1901-1945. Od dobrih deklet do feministk* [General Women's Society 1901-1945: From Good Girls to Feminists] (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2003); Andrea Feldman, ed. *Žene u Hrvatskoj. Ženska i kulturna povijest* (Zagreb: Institut Vlado Gotovac, Ženska infoteka, 2004).

⁸¹ Stefanović, "Nation und Geschlecht"; Kolarić, *Rod, modernost, emancipacija*.

⁸² See, for example: Jasmina V. Milanović, *Žensko društvo (1875-1942)* [Women's Society] (Beograd: Službeni Glasnik, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2020); Lucija Benyovski, "Dobrotvorna gospojinska društva u Hrvatskoj od osnivanja do Prvog svjetskog rata" [Charitable ladies' societies in Croatia from their founding to WWI] *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 30, no. 1 (1998): 73–93.

over time? Recent historiography on the (political) history of Yugoslavia is essential to answer these questions, as it is in the political context of interwar Yugoslavia that the feminists developed their organizations and ideology.

Yet, before turning to historiography, it is useful to outline a broad overview of the political developments in interwar Yugoslavia. Formed on December 1, 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was a conjuncture of former parts of Austria-Hungary,⁸³ the previously independent Kingdom of Serbia and Kingdom of Montenegro, as well as territories Serbia had acquired from the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan wars (1911–1914). After the Kingdom SHS had been established, this variety remained. The seven historic entities which formed the new country were unevenly developed and had different political, economic, legal, and infrastructural systems. According to the 1921 census, the Kingdom SHS had slightly over 12 million inhabitants, of which more than 70% lived in rural areas with high illiteracy rates: women’s literacy rate was 61.2% in 1921.⁸⁴ The country was formed as a centralized, constitutional, and parliamentary monarchy under the throne of the Serbian dynasty of Karadjordjević, as part of the “post-war liberal-constitutional order.”⁸⁵ When the decisions were made to establish Kingdom SHS in November 1918, it was agreed that the Constitution would later decide whether the country would be a monarchy or a republic, a centralized or a decentralized state. The proposals for the political structure of the new country diverged, ranging from a centralized monarchy to a federalized three-member regency.⁸⁶ The two biggest parties, the populist People’s Radical Party (Narodna radikalna stranka, NRS) and the

⁸³ Slovenia and Dalmatia in Austria; Croatia and Slavonia, and Vojvodina in Hungary; Bosnia and Herzegovina jointly governed by Austria and Hungary.

⁸⁴ Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988, vol. 1* [History of Yugoslavia 1918-1988] (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 311; Marie-Janine Calic, *History of Yugoslavia* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2018 [2014]), 72; Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 56–60; Robert J. Evans, “The Successor States,” in Robert Gerwarth, ed., *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 210–236.

⁸⁵ Evans, “The Successor States,” 210; Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 74.

⁸⁶ Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 28–32.

Yugoslav Democratic Party (Jugoslovenska Demokratska stranka, JDS), agreed about the centralized character of the state, whereas the opposition, among them the republican Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ, illegal from 1920), was against the centralized character of the new state with the center in Belgrade.⁸⁷ The country's first Constitution, adopted in June 1921, confirmed the strong centralized character of the monarchy.

Three national groups were considered as constitutive of the new country: Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; according to the prevailing ideology of *national unity*, they constituted the Yugoslav nation, as expressed in the name of the new country: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.⁸⁸ Apart from the three titular nations, there were also Muslim communities in interwar Yugoslavia, which could be found among Slavs, Albanians, Turks, and Roma. It is important to note that the successive national governments did not consider Montenegrins and Macedonians as constitutive nations but as Serbs. Finally, the new Yugoslav state also had Hungarian, German, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, and other minorities.⁸⁹

There is a historiographical consensus that the political situation in the country was rather unstable in the 1920s.⁹⁰ This is so because in the 1920s there were only three general elections (in 1923, 1925, and 1927), but as many as twenty-four governments (and thirty-nine by 1941!).⁹¹ The (Serbian) Radical Party participated in twenty-one governments in the 1920s, and the Democratic Party took part in nine out of twelve governments before 1924, before it split up in March of that year (when Svetozar Pribićević left the JDS and formed the Nezavisna

⁸⁷ Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 80–81.

⁸⁸ I discuss different versions of Yugoslavism in chapter 1.

⁸⁹ Christian Axboe Nielsen. *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 37–40. There was, of course, opposition to these claims, and so the Montenegrin Party (Crnogorska stranka) was formed in 1923 and in the 1920s demanded Montenegrin autonomy within a federalist state, whereas many Slavs who self-identified as Macedonians organized within the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO). Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 40.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 80–84.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

Demokratska Stranka, Independent Democratic Party, NDS).⁹² The intra-party conflicts increased in 1927, after the leaders of the Croatian Peasant Party and the Independent Democratic Party, Stjepan Radić and Svetozar Pribićević respectively, formed the Peasant-Democratic coalition, the first serious threat to the Radicals' regime. This culminated in the events of June 20, 1928, when the Serbian Radical Party member Puniša Račić shot five members of the Croatian Peasant Party, including the latter party's president Stjepan Radić, who died from his wounds on August 8, 1928.⁹³ On January 6, 1929, King Aleksandar proclaimed what historians call the royal dictatorship, and assumed total power by dissolving the parliament and banning all political parties. He also changed the country's name to Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and introduced nine new administrative units, called *banovinas*. The dictatorship would last until 1934, when Croatian and Macedonian extremists assassinated King Aleksandar in Marseille. Following the King's assassination, a new regime headed by Milan Stojadinović (May 1935–August 1939) was established, which the historian Marie-Janine Calic called "semiauthoritarian," as it "adapted symbolic practices, political rituals, and semantics from Italian fascism and German National Socialism" without, however, completely adopting their ideologies and methods of rule.⁹⁴ As a reaction first to the regime, then to the rise of fascism and ultra-nationalism in Europe and in Yugoslavia, a strong antifascist, communist-led movement emerged in the 1930s. In August 1939, the state's character changed again, when an agreement between the new prime minister Dragiša Cvetković and the new leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček, recognized the new Banovina of Croatia as a semi-autonomous entity. In April 1941, the German-led Axis powers occupied and

⁹² Pieter Troch, "Yugoslavism between the World Wars: Indecisive Nation Building," *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 2 (2010): 229–231. JDS was formed out of several pre-WWI parties, including the Croat-Serb Coalition and the Slovenian Liberals from Austria-Hungary, and the Independent Radical Party from Serbia.

⁹³ Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Višestruki Razlozi Atentata Na Vođu HSS-a Stjepana Radića 1928. Godine" [Multiple Reasons for the Assassination of HSS Leader Stjepan Radić in 1928], *Cris : Časopis Povijesnog Društva Križevci* 20, no. 1 (2018): 5–15; Alex N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia. Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), 48–51.

⁹⁴ Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 109.

partitioned Yugoslavia, and the state would be re-established in November 1945 as the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

Because of the multinational character of the country and the conflicting nation-building projects in interwar Yugoslavia, and, sixty years later, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the national question has been a key theme in the historiography about interwar Yugoslavia. One of the key works about the early history of the Yugoslav state is Ivo Banac's 1984 *The national question in Yugoslavia: origins, history, politics*, which discusses the years of Yugoslav state formation. Banac's seminal book is useful for a better understanding of the national question in Yugoslavia, which he explored through a focus on the political parties. According to Banac, Croats and Serbs had strongly formed national identities already before WWI, which he saw as the main reason for the instability of the interwar Yugoslav state.⁹⁵

In 2007, historian Dejan Djokić published *Elusive Compromise*, in which he challenged Banac's approach and maintained that historians should not reduce the interwar political developments in Yugoslavia to conflicts between Croats and Serbs. As he showed, there were many attempts to achieve an agreement about the form of the state. Moreover, Djokić highlighted the importance of the intra-party struggles and the debates about whether Yugoslavia should be a monarchy or republic, and a centralized or a federal state, suggesting that Serbian and Croatian nationalisms changed over time.⁹⁶ Building on Djokić's work, and focusing on the idea of Yugoslavism, historian Pieter Troch in a 2010 article has further challenged a view such as Banac's that "conceives of national identities as clearly bounded and singular concepts." Examining the way ruling political elites in interwar Yugoslavia defined the Yugoslav national idea, Troch argued that the interwar period should be approached "not as an epilogue in the crystallization process of [Serbian, Croatian, and other] national identities

⁹⁵ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁹⁶ Djokić, *Elusive compromise*, 1–2, 5–6.

but as a period during which important variations came about in conceptions about and relations between national identities.”⁹⁷ Approaching national identities not as fixed entities but as “public projects,” Troch moreover argued that the ways ruling elites formulated and adopted “Yugoslavism” had an effect on how the Yugoslav idea was perceived, and effectively led to the discrediting of the Yugoslav national idea in the 1930s.⁹⁸

These and other studies will provide the context for my research of interwar feminisms in Yugoslavia, allowing me to interpret Yugoslav feminist history through a perspective which considers the changing dynamics between different nation-building projects, and particularly the differences between versions of Yugoslavism and their mutual dynamics during the interwar years. While most of the work on the political history of interwar Yugoslavia approaches the national question through political parties, this study will offer a different perspective, focusing on the way feminists contributed to Yugoslav nation-building. To a certain extent, the research will also enhance our knowledge of women’s participation in political parties, particularly the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS). Finally, as aforementioned studies rarely focused on women, and never on feminists, it is my aim to highlight the ways feminists in Yugoslavia contributed and reacted to politics in interwar Yugoslavia.

⁹⁷ Troch, “Yugoslavism,” 228.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 228–229. See also: Andrew Wachtel, *Making a nation, breaking a nation: literature and cultural politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Dejan Djokic, ed., *Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003); Jovo Bakić, *Ideologije jugoslovenstva između srpskog i hrvatskog nacionalizma: 1914-1941* [Ideologies of Yugoslavism between Serbian and Croatian Nationalism: 1914-1941] (Zrenjanin: Gradska narodna biblioteka "Žarko Zrenjanin", 2004); Pieter Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia: Education, Yugoslavism and the Balkans before World War II* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015); Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*.

Methodology

Women's intellectual history

Concerning methodology, I will explore the history of feminism by focusing on Yugoslav women's political thought and feminist political languages. The initial inspiration for researching interwar feminisms as intellectual history stems from Zsófia Lóránd's 2018 work on the intellectual history of feminism in 1970s and 1980s Yugoslavia.⁹⁹ In her book, Lóránd provided a pioneering view on what she called "new feminism" in Yugoslavia. While making clear that her analysis does not claim that there was nothing "between the 1960s and the first moments of feminism in the nineteenth century," Lóránd's main interest was in the ways the feminist disappointments with the 1960s movements "mobilized feminist thought and feminist activism."¹⁰⁰ Her work shed light on how Marxist and Western feminist thought intersected in the Yugoslav context, significantly contributing to our understanding of the intellectual influences and exchanges within the only self-described feminist movement in the state-socialist countries. Thinking about Lóránd's contribution and my sources from the interwar period, it became apparent that, unlike in the 1970s and 1980s when there was a relatively clearly delineated idea and discussion among the Yugoslav feminists of what feminism meant and was for them, the conversation during the interwar period was much more diverse and extensively engaged with different strands of political thought prevalent at that time. Recognizing the value of Lóránd's methodological approaches, my decision was to use the tools mostly developed by historians of the so-called "Cambridge School" of intellectual history for the interwar period, interpreting interwar feminisms in *their own* political contexts.

⁹⁹ Lóránd, *Feminist Challenge*. I initially read it as a dissertation, defended in 2015, one year before I began my MA studies.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

The term Cambridge School of intellectual history refers to the work of a group of historians who from the 1960s and 1970s sought to rejuvenate the study of political thought. They placed a strong emphasis on understanding the linguistic context in which ideas develop and on the rhetorical strategies thinkers employed to convey their arguments. Their work stood in opposition to the prevailing approaches of their time, which examined ideas in an ahistorical manner, took the autonomy of text “as the sole necessary key to its own meaning,” and perpetuated a “mythology of coherence” that disregarded thinkers’ contradictions.¹⁰¹ One of the pioneers of the Cambridge School of intellectual history, Quentin Skinner, emphasized the importance of the intended meaning of historical actors in intellectual history writing, which he conceptualized through the notion of a speech act. For him, the central question in studying any text is “what its author, in writing at the time he did, intended to convey to the audience he intended to address.”¹⁰² Another key historian associated with the Cambridge School, John Pocock, emphasized the significance of studying what he called political languages, as it is through language that political thought was articulated.¹⁰³ I agree with historian Ian Hampsher-Monk that the combined approaches of Skinner and Pocock offer a valuable framework for studying the character of political language and its changes over time, as well as the synchronicity of individual speech acts carried out in in different moments.¹⁰⁴ My aim, thus, is to achieve an “informed interpretation” of texts, focusing on the authorial intentions and ideas.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3; 18.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰³ J. G. A. Pocock, “The concept of a language and the métier d'historien: some considerations on practice”, in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 19–38.

¹⁰⁴ Iain Hampsher-Monk, “Speech Acts, Languages or Conceptual History?” in *History of concepts: comparative perspectives*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, (Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 37–50, particularly 46.

¹⁰⁵ Donald Kelley, *The descent of ideas: the history of intellectual history* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 311.

The insights of the “Cambridge School” of intellectual history are also relevant for my examination of the concept of feminism as used by historical actors. Seeing language as crucial for understanding the beliefs and practices of political agents, in the book *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, James Farr, Terence Ball, and Skinner highlighted that political and conceptual change are two intertwined processes.¹⁰⁶ According to Farr, conceptual change brings with it a reconstitution of the political world: “As beliefs, actions, and practices face crises of the most profound sort, older concepts expire and others are born.”¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, he warned that concepts are not subjects, and kept the focus on the actors who are using certain concepts for specific political purposes.¹⁰⁸ In this context, Quentin Skinner's proposition becomes particularly relevant, as he suggested that every concept is invariably accompanied by a specific vocabulary that enables consistent discussion. Thus, he highlighted the association of certain political vocabularies with particular concepts.¹⁰⁹ Relying on these insights, in my analysis of how historical actors used the concept of feminism, I am interested in unpacking the meanings, the most dominant uses and contestations, and the changes of meaning of the concept of feminism in Yugoslavia in the interwar period, primarily—but not exclusively—in feminist journals. As the concept of feminism was fairly new in this period, my interest is in understanding the intertwining of the political and conceptual change. Consequently, in order to gain deeper insights into the transformations in the usage of the concept of feminism, my research will focus on identifying the political vocabularies utilized in connection with the

¹⁰⁶ Terence Ball, James Farr, Russel L. Hanson, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, Russel L. Hanson, 1–5; James Farr, “Understanding conceptual change,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 24–49, particularly 31; Quentin Skinner, “Language and political change,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 6–23.

¹⁰⁷ Farr, “Understanding conceptual change,” 30.

¹⁰⁸ According to Farr, “Conceptual change is one imaginative consequence of political actors criticizing and attempting to resolve the contradictions which they discover or generate in the complex web of their beliefs, actions, and practices as they try to understand and change the world around them.” Farr, “Understanding conceptual change,” 25.

¹⁰⁹ Quentin Skinner, “Language and political change,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 6.

concepts of *feminizam* (feminism) and *novi feminizam* (new feminism) in Yugoslavia in the 1920s and 1930s, respectively.

The approaches of the “Cambridge school” of intellectual history were also foundational for the intellectual history approaches developed by historians focusing on East Central Europe,¹¹⁰ developed further in the seminal 2016 and 2018 volumes *History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* (henceforth HMPT).¹¹¹ In the introduction to the HMPT volume, the authors focus on an interplay of intended meaning, the socio-institutional setting of the discourses, and political languages, thus combining conceptual-contextualist approaches of Skinner, Pocock, Michael Freeden, and Koselleck.¹¹² The volumes offer a comprehensive comparative overview of political thought in East Central Europe. Whereas the HMPT will be the key reference point for the history of political thought, its discussion about feminism is only partially useful for this thesis, thus certain reformulations are needed (as I explain in the next section).

Finally, for an exploration of feminist political thought, it is particularly important to consider recent theoretical and empirical studies on gender and intellectual history. According to historian Rachel Foxley, “the interpretation of ideas and texts from the past in gendered terms may bring up different issues from those raised by other interpretations of texts from the past.”¹¹³ She further advocated for incorporating “less articulate sources” in the study of intellectual history, urging a recontextualization of already researched sources alongside a

¹¹⁰ Balázs Trencsényi, “Conceptual History and Political Languages: On the Central-European Adaptation of the Contextualist-Conceptualist Methodologies of Intellectual History,” *Prague Perspectives. Studies in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Petr Roubal and Václav Veber (Prague: Klementinum, 2004), 142-166.

¹¹¹ Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baar, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopeček, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume I, Negotiating Modernity in the ‘Long Nineteenth Century’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčić, Maria Falina, Monika Baar and Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe, Volume II, Negotiating Modernity in the ‘Short Twentieth Century’ and Beyond. Part I: 1918-1968* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹¹² Trencsényi et. al, *History I*, 5-6.

¹¹³ Rachel Foxley, “Gender and Intellectual History,” in *Palgrave Advances in Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 189–190.

deeper contextualization of new sources. Overall, Foxley emphasized the importance of including women in the intellectual canon, particularly those who “have not been part of the ‘canon’ but who corresponded with or wrote works in response to men who [were],” despite their voices being less heard at the time, and even if their thoughts often did not encompass practice.¹¹⁴ Building on Foxley’s work, Katherina Rietzler and Patrician Owens highlight the question of what constitutes “thought,” defining it not merely as dense theoretical treatises, but rather as tightly linked to positionality, policy formulation, practice, and activism.¹¹⁵

Another key term in intellectual history is context. In alignment with Skinner’s perspective, context should be regarded as the “ultimate framework” that can help to establish the plausible conventional meanings that someone within a particular societal context could have intended to convey.¹¹⁶ Historian Donald Kelley’s observation adds depth to this notion. He emphasizes that placing texts within their context is not something “merely to be appropriated at second hand from available historiographical conventions,” but rather gleaned from other textual sources that operate within the same semantic horizons.¹¹⁷ In establishing the context in this thesis, I focus on a wide array of different feminist sources which I read against each other. Moreover, I heavily rely on the HPMT, which I consider the key element of the interpretation of feminist political languages in interwar period, as it offers a fruitful base for discussing feminist thought within a broader context of political thought in the region.¹¹⁸

The uses of “feminism” as analytical concept

As the discussion on terminologies and periodization of feminism in the historiographical section made clear, the way the concept of feminism was used by historical actors—which

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 189–209.

¹¹⁵ Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, *Women's International Thought. A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5.

¹¹⁶ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 49.

¹¹⁷ Kelley, *The descent of ideas*, 311.

¹¹⁸ See note 109.

exhibited significant geographical and temporal variations—is an important part of the history of feminism. Due to the lack of studies on the use of the concept of "feminism" in Yugoslavia and East Central Europe, therefore, I find it beneficial to delve into the sources and unpack the meanings of the term "feminism" in interwar Yugoslavia, in the way elaborated earlier. At the same time, the historiographical usage of the term should be distinguished from feminism as an analytical term. This helps me understand feminism as “a term in transition, indicating no accepted and clearly bounded set of ideas or political agenda,” as Lucy Delap has usefully put it.¹¹⁹ However, as a second step, it becomes essential to consider the analytical tools that can aid my analysis, thus in this section, I will specify the uses of “feminism” as analytical concepts.

In analyzing interwar feminisms, I will combine different approaches, perhaps getting the closest to that of Karen Offen, who—as discussed in the historiography section—saw feminism as both a social movement and an ideology incorporating a spectrum of ideas, remaining attentive to the way the concept was used in the historical context. Rather than discussing the feminist movement, I will discuss the political alliances and changes of these alliances from the 1920s to the 1930s. I will refer to these as two feminist generations, suggesting that this generational framework is useful for understanding the transformation of feminism which happened not just in Yugoslavia but on a broader transnational, and even global, level in the 1930s. In the case of the two generations, their differing horizons of expectations brought forward differing feminist politics as well. Secondly, whereas speaking of the liberal feminist and left feminist generations is useful for discussing the feminist transformation in broader terms, it is by no means sufficient to encompass the plurality of

¹¹⁹ Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde. Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), particularly 3, and 11. See also: Lóránd, *Feminist Challenge*, 27.

political orientations that existed. In the remainder of the section, I will explain further these analytical terms, and give examples which will make the terms more concrete.

When referring to liberal feminists, I denote the generation of feminists whose political formation mainly took place in the period before WWI, and who became politically active mostly in the 1900s and 1910s. Exploring their pre-WWI activism is beyond the scope of this thesis, and the focus will be on their post-WWI activism, as it was in the early post-WWI years that they began to organize to demand women's equal political, legal, and social rights in the newly formed state of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It was this state whose founding these women supported, and from which they had high expectations. For the liberal feminists in the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav state created after WWI was the main framework within which they functioned: neither the state framework, its liberal constitutional system, nor the post-WWI international state-order were to be challenged. At the same time, the new nation-state, and more specifically its laws regarding women's rights, were the main object of their criticism. They criticized the state from a feminist perspective, asking for social, political, and legal reforms to improve the position of women and of other groups in society through parliamentary, rather than revolutionary, means. In this regard, the feminists belonged to the tradition of liberalism in East Central Europe where liberal thought "attached enormous importance to state institutions," and saw the locus of sovereignty in the state, advocating for state intervention.¹²⁰

In the case of the 1930s left feminist generation, their formative political experiences happened in the 1920s, in the Yugoslav case the time of dysfunctional parliament and constant talk of the parliamentary and political "crisis." Furthermore, this generation became politically active in the early 1930s, in the context of the rise of the first anti-regime, and then antifascist

¹²⁰ Trencsényi et. al, *History I*, 400.

and Popular Front youth protests. I consider the term interwar left feminism useful to denote that those belonging to this group were not all members of the Communist Party; nor were all Communist Party members (women included) interested in or writing about women's rights issues.¹²¹ The term is close to some terms used in local scholarship. In 1970 Mladen Iveković, for example, used the term “left intelligentsia” and noted that the “left intelligentsia, as a sociological-political category, was never entirely homogeneous, and cannot be entirely identified with the communist intelligentsia” because the left intelligentsia included “some leftist circles of intellectuals and cultural workers which were not tied to the CP in party-political ways.” Furthermore, he noted that the left intelligentsia included highly educated intellectuals as well as former workers who began writing and publishing.¹²² Thus, even though many of the women active in the interwar left feminist movement were connected to the Communist Party, in using this term my aim is to shift the primary focus from the Party to the women who formed the movement from below and the type of feminism they advocated for. While their proximity to the Party differed, the women who gathered around left feminism had similar ideas about the need to change the position of women in society, and emphasized the “revolutionary” orientation of the movement, which connected the issue of genuine equality for all women with the “radical challenge to society, the mobilization of masses of people, and fundamental social change.”¹²³

The Yugoslav case provides a particularly valuable example for identifying this generational shift, which can be seen in the changes the organization Alliance of Women's Movements underwent from its prehistory and emergence in 1923, to its transformation in the mid-1930s, when the young communist women joined en masse. However, the generational

¹²¹ While some were the Party members, others were—as Minja Bujaković has suggested in her MA thesis on the participation of women in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the interwar period—sympathizers or fellow travellers. Bujaković, “Reinvestigating communist women's activism.”

¹²² Mladen Iveković, *Hrvatska lijeva inteligencija 1918-1945, Volume 1* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1970), 6.

¹²³ Dubois, “Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism.”

framework is also useful to discuss the feminist transformation that took place internationally at the time. It is for this reason that I explore the Yugoslav women's participation in the Little Entente of Women and the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism.

Secondly, in order to be able to discuss the ideological plurality within each generation, I find it useful to discuss distinct feminist political languages in interwar Yugoslavia. Rather than claiming that there was one feminist political language in interwar Yugoslavia, I emphasize the plurality of feminisms, and suggest that in most cases the feminist political languages in interwar period overlapped with other, more dominant political languages. As mentioned earlier, I found the HMPT's framework essential for my analysis, yet with certain alterations. Namely, the HMPT authors only briefly referred to feminism, in the first volume under the sub-chapter "The 'Women's Question and Feminism,'" and in the second volume occasionally through the text. The authors first note that it would not be useful to subsume different opinions about women's position in society "under a feminist umbrella", and further refer to "a self-consciously feminist ideological position" in ECE and a "the definition of feminism as an international movement and a coherent political and intellectual agenda," in this context mentioning three women's international organizations of the time, the ICW, the IWSA, and the WILPF.¹²⁴ However, one of the claim of this thesis is that it is not sufficiently precise to rely only on the way women used or did not use the term feminism, nor can the involvement with the three aforementioned organizations be sufficient for the division between feminism and non-feminism. Thus, I consider "the many faces of feminism,"¹²⁵ or, in other words, different feminist political languages available in the interwar period. It is for this endeavor that I consider the HMPT essential, as feminist political languages to a large extent overlapped with other political languages discussed in these volumes, namely communism,

¹²⁴ Trencsényi et al., *History I*, 593-594. See also Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 81-84, 123.

¹²⁵ See HMPT, "The many faces of leftism," Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 105-141.

social democracy, civic radicalism, national liberalism, conservatism, and agrarian populism will be useful for my examination. I will give several examples of some of the most dominant feminist political languages.

An example of “conservative feminism” is the political thought of Serbian activist Delfa Ivanić (1881-1972) and Romanian politician Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1876-1944), who propagated women’s emancipation within a nationalist framework, and saw the nation in ethnic-nationalist terms and asked for the improvement of women’s position in society without changing the existing class hierarchies.

When it comes to “civic feminism,” this is the political language used by those women who identified with the feminist label the most. As I will show, this political stream propagated a specific idea of feminism, which sought equality between the sexes *and* social justice. In the Yugoslav case, the proponents of this political language also embraced the Yugoslavist idea, therefore Yugoslavism is also an important aspect of their political thought. The political language of the leaders of the feminist movement, such as Alojzija Štebi, Milena Atanacković, or Zorka Kasnar Karadžić to a large extent overlaps with this political language. It is moreover a political language close to that of “civic radicalism,” which the authors of the *HMPT* describe as the position of those who “sympathized with the broadly conceived socialist left but tended to be wary of the party discipline and were often critical of what they saw as reductionist materialism.”¹²⁶ Among the representatives of this stream, *HMPT* places the Czechoslovak president Tomáš Masaryk, an important influence for East Central European feminists; the Serbian literary scholar and politician Jovan Skerlić (1877–1914), also a professor of Zorka Kasnar Karadžić; and the Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar (1876–1918), also a close friend of Alojzija Štebi.¹²⁷ Given that all three mentioned male political thinkers were quite vocal on

¹²⁶ Trencsényi et al., *History I*, 431.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 431-445.

what at the time was called “the woman question,” it is not surprising that there was so much overlap between these two political languages.¹²⁸

The most important political language of the left feminist generation is that of “communist feminism.” This is a political language which existed in the 1920s as well. As I will show, there were communist women in the 1920s Yugoslavia who embraced feminist goals, in some cases cooperating with the dominant groups in the liberal feminist generation, and in some cases even leading the feminist organizations (this was the case of the Slovenian communist feminist Angela Vode). According to Mannheim, “it occurs very frequently that the nucleus of attitudes particular to a new generation is first evolved and practiced by older people who are isolated in their own generation.” Mannheim calls these individuals “forerunners,” and I find this useful to refer to the communist feminists active in the 1920s. Communist feminism, however, was the predominant political language of the left feminist generation that emerged in the 1930s in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Zagreb, and more broadly across Yugoslavia.

Finally, there was also another feminist political language, for whose name I will borrow historian Susan Zimmermann’s term “legal equality feminism.” According to Zimmermann, legal equality feminists “posited legal gender equality as the singular most important goal.”¹²⁹ In the Yugoslav case, I will show that this stream instated that feminism should not be connected to any kind of politics.

¹²⁸ Masaryk was famously an important figure for the feminist thinkers in East Central Europe, whereas Jovan Skerlić was among the first intellectuals to use the word “feminism” in Serbian language. Ana Stolić, “Feminizam,” *Srbi 1903-1914. Istorija ideja* [Serbs 1903-1914. The history of ideas], ed. Miloš Ković (Beograd: Clio, 2015), 301.

¹²⁹ Zimmermann, “Equality of Women’s Economic Status?”, 205.

Sources

To uncover the complex picture of political history of feminism the interwar period, I use a large array of sources, from periodicals and, to a lesser extent, archival sources, to ego-documents and various other published sources.

The main feminist organization at the time was the Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP). Unfortunately, the location of its archival fond is unknown. Whereas some secondary literature from the 1970s and 1980s mentions an extensive fond,¹³⁰ currently there is only one box titled “Ženski pokret” in the State Archives of Serbia, with only a small number of documents preserved. Nevertheless, I have explored other fonds in the archives in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade, such as the fonds of the Progressive Student Movement and the King's Court of the Archives of Yugoslavia, or the personal fonds of Slovenian feminists Minka Govekar or Alojzija Štebi at the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia. Important was also the Fond of Erna Muser held at the Manuscript Collection of the National and University Library Ljubljana, where I found several important letters of Angela Vode. I also visited the archives in the Czech Republic and France, where I found useful sources which helped me build my interpretation; this includes the Popular Front magazines preserved at the fond of Bernadette Cattaneo at the Humathèque Condorcet in Aubervilliers, and the box of documents of the Little Entente of Women, a part of the fond Ženská národní rada held at the National Archives of the Czech Republic.

The main sources for my research, however, are women's periodicals and various other publications (a complete list is offered at the end of the thesis). Apart from exploring the individual publications authored by interwar feminists—which in the Yugoslav case are not numerous—I have developed my research around organizations, the organizations' official

¹³⁰ Ćirić Bogetić, “Odluke Pete zemaljske konferencije”; Kecić, *Revolucionarni tokovi*. The fond “Alijansa ženskih pokreta” used to be first in the AIIRP, and then in ACK SKJ.

periodicals. Most important of these are the Alliance of Women's Movements official periodical *Ženski pokret* (Women's Movement, 1920-1938), as well as *Žena danas* (Woman Today, 1936-1940) and *Ženski svijet* (Women's World, 1939-1941), the two Popular Front left feminist journals published in Belgrade and Zagreb, respectively. The organizations' periodicals were central to feminist discussions and to women's contribution to the public sphere and, as Lucy Delap, Maria DiCenzo, and Leila Ryan have noted, "can also be seen as constituting a form of contentious collective action."¹³¹ Following Lucy Delap's insight that media of certain social movements are often key to collective identity formation,¹³² exploring feminist discussions in the public sphere is useful for examining how different feminist networks framed and reframed their concerns in interwar Yugoslavia.¹³³ In many ways, my research builds on the existing rich research of feminist periodical studies in Serbia.¹³⁴ However, I am not interested in the periodicals per se, but I use them as sources for organizational histories; the way the concept of feminism was used; individual women's political thought; and the key intellectual discussions the feminists had in certain periodicals.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1 explores the emergence and development of the first nationwide self-identified feminist alliance in interwar Yugoslavia, Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP), from the perspective of the political history of interwar Yugoslavia. The chapter argues that Yugoslavism was one of the key cohesive factors in the emergence and development of

¹³¹ Lucy Delap, Maria DiCenzo, and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 56.

¹³² Delap, et al., *Feminist Media History*, 159.

¹³³ On the issue of "framing" and articulating problems and grievances, see: Delap, et al., *Feminist Media History*, 45–50.

¹³⁴ See note 15. See also: Miroslava Malešević, "'Ženski pokret' – feminističko glasilo između dva svetska rata" [Ženski pokret – the Feminist Paper between the Two World Wars] In: *Žensko: etnografski aspekti društvenog položaja žene u Srbiji* [Female: ethnographic aspects of the social position of women in Serbia], 9–39. Beograd: Srpski genealoški centar, 2007.

interwar feminisms, and that cooperation between women from Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade was an essential characteristic of interwar feminisms in Yugoslavia.

Chapter 2 further examines liberal feminism through the case of Yugoslav women's participation in the work of the Little Entente of Women (LEW), established in 1923. While demonstrating that the LEW was the most important transnational organization in which Yugoslav feminists were active in the 1920s, the chapter argues that the LEW could be used for the propagation of both feminist and nationalist aims and argues that the Yugoslav women mainly used it for the propagation of feminism.

Chapter 3 examines the history of the AŽP in the second half of the 1930s, in the context of the transnational organization Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme, established in 1934 as a precursor of the official Popular Front policy. This chapter argues that the cooperation between women from the Alliance and communist women had a longer history, but that this collaboration blossomed after 1935. Moreover, by focusing on the work of the Ženski pokret Youth sections, the chapter argues that the Yugoslav women contributed actively to the work of the CMF, and that the Yugoslav women's participation in the CMF, despite the fact that Yugoslav women did not form a separate CMF section, enhances our understanding of the CMF itself and the ways the organization influenced women transnationally.

Chapter 4 explores the uses, meanings, and reconceptualization of the concept of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia, and argues that the transformation of the feminist movement, but also the use of the concept of feminism in the second half of the 1930s, had an important generational dimension. It argues, moreover, that there were significant continuities between the dominant conceptualizations of feminisms in the 1920s and the 1930s.

Finally, chapter 5 explores how the predominantly urban-centered feminisms (those located in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade) translated in the broader Yugoslav peasant context, and what were the most important issues Yugoslav urban feminists raised regarding peasant

women. This chapter argues that the Yugoslav feminists were more concerned with the position of peasant women in Yugoslav society than the historiography has suggested so far, and that two aspects were crucial for two distinct feminist approaches to peasant women: the conceptualization of women's work and the category of the nation.

The dissertation's conclusion reiterates its main findings, highlights what the thesis contributes to different bodies of scholarly literature, and indicates further research desiderata.

1. Forging alliances in the new state: cooperations and Yugoslavism (1917–1934)

In the thesis introduction, I discussed the Feminist Alliance, established in 1923 and renamed in 1926 the Alliance of Women's Movements (henceforth the Alliance or AŽP). This chapter examines the history of this organization from its prehistory in the late 1910s—specifically, from the first issue of the Zagreb-based journal *Ženski svijet* (Women's World, 1917–1920)—in September 1917, until the second half of the 1930s.¹³⁵ Besides the Alliance, in this and other chapters there will be mention of a second national women's organization, the Narodni ženski savez Srba Hrvata i Slovenaca (National Council of Women of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, NCW), renamed the Jugoslovenski ženski savez (National Council of Women of Yugoslavia, NCWY) in 1929.¹³⁶ Founded in 1919, the NCW was the first nationwide union of a significant number of women's organizations across the country, and it was affiliated with the International Council of Women (ICW).¹³⁷ The Alliance was initially founded in 1923 as an alternative to the Council, and the division between the two is similar to that of the two biggest international women's organizations of the time, ICW and IWSA, in terms of their support for suffrage (the IWSA was established in 1904 by some women from the ICW who declared suffrage as their main goal),¹³⁸ and in terms of using the label feminism, which was the case

¹³⁵ The history of the organization in the second half of the 1930s and the cooperation between the Alliance and communist women will be examined separately in chapter 3.

¹³⁶ Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, "Yugoslav Women's Movement and 'The Happiness to the World'", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 31, no. 4 (2020): 722–744.

¹³⁷ Overall, the historiography on the NCW is still limited, and its work with the state and its contribution to the development of the welfare state and (women's) social work are yet to be properly researched. See Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 163–178, 266–281; Ograjšek Gorenjak, "Yugoslav Women's Movement"; Irena Selišnik, "Alojzija Štebi, socialna feministka in ena prvih političark v Sloveniji" [Alojzija Štebi, social feminist and one of first politicians in Slovenia] in *Ženske na robovih politike* [Women on the Edge of Politics], ed. Milica Antić Gaber (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2011), 41–59; Isidora Grubački and Irena Selišnik, "The National Women's Alliance in Interwar Yugoslavia. Between the Feminist Reform and Institutional Social Politics", *Women's History Review* 32, no. 2 (2023): 242–260.

¹³⁸ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women. The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 23.

for the IWSA and for the AŽP, but not the case with the ICW and the NCW.¹³⁹ In Yugoslavia, however, from the mid-1920s the division between the Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP) and the NCW blurred, so I will occasionally, when useful, refer to the latter organization as well.

There are two aspects I focus on in this chapter. First, I explore the extent of cooperation between self-identified feminists from different parts of Yugoslavia, which historians have not sufficiently explored yet. This collaboration is implicitly present, for example, in Jovanka Kecman's account: however, when she wrote her study in the 1970s, it was not considered necessary to explicitly highlight the collaboration between women from Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana.¹⁴⁰ In the post-Yugoslav period, conversely, historians often emphasized the conflicts between women, especially between those in Belgrade and Zagreb.¹⁴¹ Secondly, the chapter contextualizes the history of the AŽP within the political developments in Yugoslavia and explores the national ideology of Yugoslav feminists. It was in the highly politicized and unstable context of the establishment of the new country in 1918, the 1921 constitution which did not provide for women's suffrage, the shooting in parliament in 1928, and the royal dictatorship of January 6, 1929, that the Yugoslav feminists built their movement. While the importance of these events is not new and has already been discussed in historiography, my intention is to demonstrate more clearly the Yugoslav feminists' reaction to these events.

For both these aspects—the cooperation of women across the ethnic divide, and the national ideology of Yugoslav feminists— I consider it crucial to investigate the extent to which the feminists who formed the Alliance of Women's Movements adhered to the concept of Yugoslavism. In my view exploring the relationship between Yugoslavisms and feminisms

¹³⁹ Ibid., 131–135.

¹⁴⁰ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Andrea Feldman, “Proričući gladnu godinu: Žene i ideologija jugoslavenstva (1918-1938)” [Foretelling a Hungry Year: Women and the ideology of Yugoslavism], in *Žene u Hrvatskoj*, ed. Andrea Feldman (Zagreb: Institut „Vlado Gotovac“, Ženska infoteka, 2004), 235–246.

is crucial for overcoming certain simplifications in historical writing.¹⁴² Yugoslavism, or the idea of Yugoslav nationhood, was an idea reaching back to the first half of the nineteenth century. From its beginning, it competed against other national identities, predominantly the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian.¹⁴³ In the early twentieth century, the idea of Yugoslav nationhood gained in importance, and the concept of “national unity” (*narodno jedinstvo*) became one of the key terms for this idea of cultural—and increasingly, also political—unity.¹⁴⁴

In treating this issue, I follow the approaches of historians who, firstly, are careful not to see the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian national identities as fixed before 1918, which would easily lead to discrediting the Yugoslavist nation-building project; and, secondly, who consider the plurality of Yugoslavisms.¹⁴⁵ The two most dominant versions of Yugoslavism were propagated by the ruling elites. These were “unitarist” Yugoslavism and “compromised” or “centralist” Yugoslavism. “Unitarist” Yugoslavism was mainly propagated by the Democratic Party, which saw the Yugoslav nation as singular and indivisible, arguing that the “tribal” differences would shortly disappear.¹⁴⁶ The second was the Yugoslavism of the ruling People’s Radical Party, whose pre-WWI national ideology rested on the idea of unification of all Serbs (the idea of Greater Serbia), yet in the new state they reformulated their ideology into

¹⁴² An example is the introduction to a recent special journal issue of *Women's History Review*; in the article I co-wrote with Irena Selišnik, we explicitly call for a focus on the NCW in Yugoslavia which would go beyond the national question, yet in the introduction to the journal issue, the editors emphasized that “Isidora Grubački and Irena Selišnik note that in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, the national council was called the National Women’s Alliance (NWA – Narodni ženski savez/Narodna ženska zveza), thus proclaiming a national identity that hardly existed.” Ann Taylor Allen and Anne Cova, “Introduction: transnational women’s activism,” *Women’s History Review* 32, no. 2 (2023): 168.

¹⁴³ Wachtel, *Making a nation*.

¹⁴⁴ Connie Robinson, “Yugoslavism in the Early Twentieth Century: The Politics of the Yugoslav Committee,” in *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia. Key issues and controversies*, ed. James Ker-Lindsay and Dejan Djokić (New York: Routledge, 2010), 10–26.

¹⁴⁵ I will combine the typology from: Ondřej Vojtěchovský, Boris Moskovič, Jan Pelikán, “Yugoslavism throughout the twentieth century: developments and tendencies,” in *Czechoslovakism*, ed. Adam Hudek, Michal Kopeček, Jan Mervart (New York: Routledge, 2022): 433–461; Troch, “Yugoslavism;” Jovo Bakić, “Nova Evropa: Između prečanskog integralnog i hrvatskog minimalnog Jugoslovenstva,” in *Nova Evropa*, ed. Marko Nedić and Vesna Matović (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2010), 107–121; Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 71–72.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

that of a “three-named Yugoslav nation” consisting of three “tribes,” Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, with a still-visible Greater Serbian element.¹⁴⁷ According to Troch, the Radicals’ Serb-centered, or as he calls it “compromised Yugoslavism,” prevailed in the 1920s. The People’s Radical Party and the Democratic Party ruled the new state in the early 1920s and they together represent two predominant visions of Yugoslavism that existed in the new state.¹⁴⁸ The third iteration of Yugoslavism was that of the opposition, the Croatian People’s Peasant Party led by Stjepan Radić, who imagined the new state as a republic and a federative union, and stood in opposition to the regime until 1925.¹⁴⁹ Finally, the fourth iteration is “cultural Yugoslavism,” which stood for national state unity, but generally criticized the postwar political establishment.¹⁵⁰

Because the idea of Yugoslav nationhood meant different things to different political and cultural actors, and because women from different parts of Yugoslavia participated in forging alliances across the potential Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian divides, different conceptions of Yugoslavism existed among interwar Yugoslav feminists as well.¹⁵¹ In this chapter, I will explore the Yugoslav feminist movement through these four versions of Yugoslavism and contribute to their understanding—especially the fourth category—with the case of the feminists. It is important to add that with the 1929 dictatorship, King Aleksandar introduced a new version of “integral Yugoslavism” which aimed to ban all “tribal” divisions among Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, aspiring towards the creation of Yugoslav national

¹⁴⁷ Troch, “Yugoslavism,” 230-231; Vojtěchovský et al., “Yugoslavism,” 447; Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 11.

¹⁴⁸ In the early 1920s they both advocated for centralism and did not hesitate to use violence to support this position. In the mid-1920s, however, the Habsburg Yugoslavs became increasingly disappointed with the Serbian political establishment in Belgrade, and slowly moved towards an anti-centralist position. See: Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 438; Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Jovo Bakić, “Nova Evropa: Između prečanskog integralnog i hrvatskog minimalnog Jugoslovenstva” [The New Europe: Between Integral Yugoslavism of the Serbs Outside of Serbia and Croatian Minimalist Yugoslavism], in *Nova Evropa* [New Europe], ed. Marko Nedić and Vesna Matović (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2010), 107–121; Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 71–72.

¹⁵¹

unity.¹⁵² As Troch argued, the way the ruling elites implemented Yugoslavism in the 1920s, but especially during the dictatorship, discredited the idea of Yugoslav national unity.¹⁵³ After the dictatorship, Stojadinović's regime promoted "real Yugoslavism," which remained dedicated to the Yugoslav national ideology, although it was more flexible in this regard than King Aleksandar's regime.¹⁵⁴

The chapter proposes two arguments. Firstly, I argue that the cooperation among women from different parts of Yugoslavia—particularly Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Zagreb—was more extensive than the historiography has thus far acknowledged, and that this cooperation was central to the development of the Alliance of Women's Movements, the organization which gathered all feminists in the country. Secondly, the history of the AŽP and, in particular, the cooperation among feminists from various parts of the country cannot be understood without its contextualization within the broader political history of the state and Yugoslav nation-building, more specifically the Alliance's pro-Yugoslavist orientation. I see the women who founded the AŽP as a part of the aforementioned fourth category of "cultural Yugoslavism," which stood for national unity while simultaneously criticizing the postwar political establishment. While basing their cooperation on this conceptualization of national unity, however, the primary concern of the Yugoslav feminists was not national ideology, but the position of women in the newly formed Yugoslav state.

The chapter is divided into four sections. Section one focuses on the emergence of self-identified feminism in the framework of Zofka Kveder's journal *Ženski svijet*, renamed *Jugoslavenska žena* (Yugoslav Woman, 1918–1920). The second section examines the subsequent establishment of cooperation among Yugoslav feminists, initially in the NCW and later in the AŽP. Together, these two sections will demonstrate that there was consistent

¹⁵² Troch, "Yugoslavism," 232–236; Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*.

¹⁵³ Troch, "Yugoslavism," 229.

¹⁵⁴ Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 109.

cooperation between Yugoslav feminists from 1917 onward. Sections three and four examine the impact of the political context on the Yugoslav feminists' activism. Section three examines four different views on "Yugoslavism" among the women who participated in the formation of the NCW in 1919, and the fourth section proceeds to discuss the work of the AŽP after 1926, examining the impact of the 1928 shootings in the National Parliament and the 1929 royal dictatorship.

1.1.The beginnings of cooperation between Yugoslav feminists in Zofka Kveder's journal *Ženski svijet/Jugoslavenska žena* (1917–1920)

The founder of *Ženski svijet* in October 1917, and subsequently its editor, was the prominent writer, publicist, and activist, Zofka Kveder (1878–1926). With her extensive work experience and the wide network of women she had built up over the years, in 1917 Kveder successfully "recruited" a large number of women and men to contribute to her new journal. Since the late nineteenth century, Kveder had been active in literary and activist circles in Ljubljana, Trieste, and Austria-Hungary more broadly.¹⁵⁵ Thanks to her writing, she was one of the most popular feminists in Ljubljana in the early 1900s. In her women-centered literary works, Kveder discussed violence against women, pre-arranged and forced middle-class marriages, illegitimate motherhood, abortion, suicide, prostitution, early death at childhood, and even infanticide. She wrote many short stories, along with two novels, *Njeno življenje* (Her Life, 1914), and *Hanka* (1917). In the analysis of Kveder's letters by literary scholar Katja Mihurko Poniž, it is shown that she was an independent woman, who often went out on her own, spending time with people, smoking and drinking coffee.

¹⁵⁵ The information about Zofka Kveder here is based on: De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 282–285; Šelih et al., *Pozabljena polovica*, 154–157; Katja Mihurko Poniž, "Zofka Kveder – Slavic Cultural and Feminist Icon of the Early 20th Century," in *Defiant Trajectories: Mapping out Slavic Women Writers Routes*, ed. Maša Grdešić, et al. (Ljubljana: Cultural Tourist Association Women Writers Route: International Foundation - Forum of Slavic Cultures, 2021), 73–84.



1.1. Zofka Kveder (1878-1926) (1920-1930). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-TAB2ZS2W from <http://www.dlib.si>.

Kveder began her working life as a copier in a legal firm in Ljubljana, and lived and worked relatively briefly in Trieste, Bern, and Munich, before moving to Prague for six years (1900–1906) to be close to her fiancé Vladimir Jelovšek, a student of medicine and a poet. Yet she was not married and did not live with him when she gave birth to their first daughter in 1901; they married only in 1903. Everywhere she lived, she wrote and published short stories, or worked as an editor. She moved to Zagreb in 1911, where she became the editor of *Frauenzeitung*, a supplement of the Zagreb daily newspaper *Agramer Tagblatt*. Because of her husband's extramarital affairs, she attempted suicide in 1912, but then remarried in 1913 to the Croatian journalist and later politician Juraj Demetrović. In the summer of 1914, she visited

Serbia as a journalist and met Serbian women activists, thus enlarging her already wide network of friends and acquaintances across the cities of Austria-Hungary and beyond. She edited *Ženski svijet/Jugoslavenska žena* between 1917 and 1920.¹⁵⁶ The publication of the journal ended in 1920, possibly because her health deteriorated in 1919, after her eldest daughter died. After her second husband Demetrović asked for a divorce, she sadly died by suicide in November 1926.¹⁵⁷

Kveder's journal would become the first meeting point for many future Yugoslav feminists, hence a partial overview of participants is useful for the Feminist Alliance's prehistory. Among the contributors from Ljubljana was Minka Govekar (1874–1950, see chapter 5), a member of one of the Alliance's co-founding organizations, Splošno žensko društvo (General Slovenian Women's Society, henceforth SŽD). This was the central Slovene women's organization active since 1901, back then in the framework of Austria (Cisleithania, i.e., the western part of Austria-Hungary). Among other things, SŽD had over the years organized demonstrations for equal pay, and demanded social support for children born out of wedlock (the first time such a demand was made in the Yugoslav context), organized lectures on women's suffrage in international comparative perspective, and on various issues related to children and youth, but also workers' rights and the terrible living conditions of the working class; it also organized sewing courses for women.¹⁵⁸ Exceptionally for a Slavic women's organization in Austria-Hungary, SŽD was a member of the Austrian National Council of Women (Bund Österreichischer Frauenvereine, BÖF, est. 1902), and through it also of the International Council of Women.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ For a good text about the journal, see: Žarka Svirčev, "Jugoslavenska žena – forum moderne spisateljice" [Yugoslav Woman – The Forum of Modern Woman Writer], *Knjiženstvo* 5 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.18485/knjiz.2015.1.22> (Accessed May 20, 2023).

¹⁵⁷ Mihurko Poniž, "Zofka Kveder."

¹⁵⁸ Kodrić and Serše, *Splošno žensko društvo*, 74-96 Marta Verginella, *Slovenka: prvi ženski časopis (1897-1902)* [Slovene Woman: the First Women's Magazine] (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2017).

¹⁵⁹ Kodrić and Serše, *Splošno žensko društvo*; Grubački and Selišnik, "National Women's Alliance," 245.



1.2. Alojzija Štebi (1883-1956) (1977). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-07U33DRO from <http://www.dlib.si>

Another contributor from Ljubljana was Alojzija Štebi (1883–1956, see chapter 4).¹⁶⁰ At the time of her contribution to Kveder's journal, Alojzija Štebi was a member of Jugoslavenska socialdemokratska stranka (JSDS, Yugoslav Social Democratic Party). Štebi left the JSDS in 1919, and joined the aforementioned SŽD in 1922,¹⁶¹ which had by then

¹⁶⁰ Šelih et al., *Pozabljena polovica*, 193–196.

¹⁶¹ In the meantime, she established her own organization in 1921, Socialnogospodarsko in kulturno žensko društvo (Social-economic and cultural women's society), which she then merged with the SŽD in 1922. Selišnik, "Volilna pravica žensk."

consolidated as an organization with women's political rights as its primary goal, including equal suffrage rights for men and women.¹⁶² However, Štebi's cooperation with the SŽD was brief, as in 1924 she and her close associates left this organization.¹⁶³ It was during her activity in the SŽD that Štebi initiated the formation of the Feminist Alliance, as will be further discussed in 1.2.

Among the contributors to *Ženski svijet* from Belgrade were women who, inspired by Kveder, would in 1919 participate in organizing *Ženski pokret*, the first self-proclaimed feminist organization in Belgrade. The contributors included the Jewish-Yugoslav intellectual Paulina (Lebl) Albala (1891–1967) and her colleague Zora (Zorka) Kasnar(-Karadžić) (years of birth and death unknown), who belonged to the first two generations of women to finish the First Female Gymnasium in Belgrade, and afterwards both studied literature at the University of Belgrade.¹⁶⁴ With them also was Ruža Stojanović (date of birth unknown–1920), an ardent campaigner against alcoholism, who emphasized violence against women due to alcohol abuse, and inequality in marriage. Stojanović tragically took her own life in 1920, after she got pregnant out of wedlock with a man who refused to marry her.¹⁶⁵ Other contributors included Katarina Bogdanović (1885–1969), a teacher and public intellectual who moved to Kragujevac in her later years, where she worked as director of a girls' high school;¹⁶⁶ the philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981), who in 1924 became the first female professor at the

¹⁶² Kodrić and Serše, *Splošno žensko društvo*, 84.

¹⁶³ According to Irena Selišnik's research, a group of women followed Štebi in different organizations. This circle included the communist and feminist activist, teacher, and publicist Angela Vode (1892–1985, see chapter 3); teacher, social worker, publicist and one of the editors (1923–1936) of the abovementioned Slovenian central women's journal *Ženski svet* (1923–1941), Pavla Hočevar (1889–1972), daughter of a peasant and a domestic servant; Tončka Čeč (1806–1943), one of the first Slovenian women communists and labor activists, born in a mining family in Trbovlje; Anica Lokar Gustinčič (1897–1976), a KPJ sympathizer who, with her husband Dragutin Gustinčič, left for the Soviet Union in 1931; and Mara Rus Lemež (1891–1928), a teacher whose husband was the communist Milan Lemež. See Selišnik, "Socialna feministka," 50–51; Selišnik, "Volilna pravica žensk."

¹⁶⁴ Paulina Lebl Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo*, 80.

¹⁶⁵ Barać, *Feministička kontrapunktnost*, 141–149.

¹⁶⁶ Zorana Simić, "Katarina Bogdanović i Mileva Milojević kao urednice i saradnice jugoslovenskog feminističkog časopisa *Ženski pokret* (1920–1938)" [Katarina Bogdanović and Mileva Milojević as Editors and Collaborators of the Yugoslav Feminist Magazine Women's Movement (1920–1938)], in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, 69–84.

University of Belgrade;¹⁶⁷ Leposava Petković (1875–1952), a high school teacher and one of the first Serbian women to graduate university in Serbia (see chapter 2). Kveder's journal was one of the catalysts for the founding of the Belgrade ŽP. According to Paulina Lebl Albala's memoirs, she and Kasnar were inspired to establish a feminist organization when Kveder invited them to write articles for her journal. They both felt great excitement, were particularly touched by the "combative feminist aspect" of this journal, and took it as their "noblesse oblige" to attempt to gather a group of educated women to "form a movement which will encompass broad masses of women."¹⁶⁸

Zofka Kveder's journal was published in Zagreb, where the Ljubljana-born Kveder had resided for a decade, yet there were not too many local contributors from Zagreb. Here, Kveder was active in a new organization called Udruženje jugoslavenskih žena (UJŽ, Association of Yugoslav Women), founded in 1918. It was one of a number of women's organizations established in Croatia-Slavonia in the late war years, and founded most probably in the context of the so-called "national councils": pro-Yugoslav groups of publicly active women and men who played an active role in proclaiming Croatia-Slavonia, the region of Dalmatia, and the city of Fiume/Rijeka independent from Austria-Hungary in October 1918.¹⁶⁹ Among the scarce traces of these organizations' practices is information about the large demonstration for women's suffrage which UJŽ held in 1919 in Zagreb.¹⁷⁰ One of the main UJŽ activists was the journalist and writer Adela Milčinović (1878–1968), who between 1923 and 1925 was active in the Feminist Alliance, the Yugoslav nationalist mass gymnastics organization Sokol

¹⁶⁷ De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 41–43. Katarina Lončarević, "Časopis Ženski pokret o Kseniji Atanasijević" [The Magazine Women's Movement on Ksenija Atanasijević], in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, 323–338.

¹⁶⁸ Paulina Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo* [It Was Like This Back in the Day] (Beograd: A. Lebl, 2005), 244.

¹⁶⁹ Francesca Rolandi, "Women's organizing in a contested borderland: the case of pro-Yugoslav associations in Sušak and Fiume in the interwar period", in *Ženski pokret 1920-1938*, 51–66.

¹⁷⁰ "Skupština žena u Zagrebu za pravo glasa" [Women's Assembly for Suffrage Right in Zagreb], *Jugoslavenska žena* 3 (1919): 118–119.

(Falcon), and the NCW.¹⁷¹ Also among the women active in the Croatian pro-Yugoslav women's movement at the time was the well-known writer and journalist Marija Jurić Zagorka (1873–1957).¹⁷² Milčinović and Zagorka's participation in the women's movement in the early postwar period, oriented towards the political and social rights of women, largely overlapped. They were, however, only relatively briefly active in the feminist movement in Zagreb; Milčinović permanently moved to the United States in 1925 (see chapter 2), whereas Zagorka opted out of the Yugoslav women's and feminist movement because she was unsatisfied with the treatment of the Yugoslav question among the women at the 1919 founding congress of the NCW (see section 1.2).

What was the political program of Zofka Kveder's journal? Founded in the last year of WWI in Zagreb, at the time still a part of the Habsburg Empire, *Ženski svijet* had a clear anti-Habsburg and pro-Yugoslav political agenda, and its politics must be read in the context of the dissolution of the Habsburg empire and the establishment of the new Yugoslav state. As I will discuss in more detail later (1.3), I consider Kveder a proponent of "unitarist Yugoslavism," which was propagated by Habsburg liberal politicians and intellectuals, and which conceptualized Yugoslav national unity as singular and indivisible. In 1917, Kveder offered support through her journal for Slovenian women's participation in the so-called "declaration movement," a large scale initiative to collect signatures for the unification of South Slavs inside a separate entity within the Habsburg Empire. The petition was submitted to the Austrian *Reichsrat* by the *Reichsrat's* Yugoslav Club in May 1917.¹⁷³ Kveder celebrated women's

¹⁷¹ De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 340–343.

¹⁷² Ibid., 195–199.

¹⁷³ The women who led the petition signing were Slovenian liberal Franja Tavčar and Cilka Krek, affiliated with the Catholic People's Party. Vlasta Stavbar, "Vloga žensk v deklaracijskem gibanju. Splošno žensko društvo 1901–1945", in *Splošno žensko društvo 1901–1945. Od dobrih deklet do feministk* [General Women's Society 1901–1945: From Good Girls to Feminists], ed. Nataša Budna Kodrič and Aleksandra Serše (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2003), 504–514; Mark Cornwall, "The Great War and the Yugoslav Grassroots. Popular mobilization in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914–1918," in *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia. Key Issues and Controversies*, ed. Dejan Djokić and James Ker-Lindsay (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 27–45,

contributions to the new state, and called for a “just peace” and the unification of Yugoslav people.¹⁷⁴ After the new state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, had been proclaimed officially on December 1, 1918, Zofka Kveder changed the name of the journal from the neutral *Ženski svijet* to *Jugoslavenska žena* (Yugoslav Woman) announcing: “We are free!” Thus, she made the journal’s pro-Yugoslav dimension explicit. Kveder connected the “woman question” with Yugoslavism by saying that the “Yugoslav women’s awakening” was the only positive thing to come out of the war, emphasizing that “our women have matured during these four war years from caring housewives, gentle mothers, good wives, devoted daughters, into conscious citizens, into valuable, hardworking units of its nation.”¹⁷⁵

Furthermore, the demands in the journal were all connected to a specific, post-WWI trust in democratization, which would include women’s equal suffrage rights; in the words of historian Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, there was a widespread “spirit of optimism” among women who “expected that the democratization of society must indisputably also include women’s suffrage rights,” and a conviction that all women’s issues would be solved in the new state.¹⁷⁶ Many women believed that women’s suffrage rights would be easily transferred from the “West,”¹⁷⁷ which in their context meant the countries in which women had gained suffrage rights. The “geographies” relevant for the journal’s contributors included contexts as different as (revolutionary) Russia, the United States, and Hungary. Likewise, England was perceived positively for the struggle for women’s right to vote, yet at the same time negatively for the suffragettes’ militant approach. To differentiate themselves from the British suffragettes, Zagorka said Croatian women were not like those in Britain who “damaged national arts,

particularly 27; Zofka Kveder, “Jugoslavenske žene i narodna politika” [Yugoslav Women and National Politics], *Ženski svijet* 1 (1918): 1–2.

¹⁷⁴ Kveder, “Jugoslavenske žene i narodna politika”

¹⁷⁵ Zofka Kveder, “Narodna organizacija i žene” [National Organization and Women], *Ženski svijet* 7 (1918): 273–274.

¹⁷⁶ Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije*, 91–112. Zora Kansar (Beograd), “Žensko pitanje u Srbiji [The woman question in Serbia], *Ženski svijet* 2 (1918): 91.

¹⁷⁷ Zora Kansar (Beograd), “Žensko pitanje u Srbiji [The Woman Question in Serbia], *Ženski svijet* 2 (1918): 91.

national buildings.”¹⁷⁸ This was a widely held belief at the time; another example is Serbian nationalist feminist Vladislava Beba Polit Desančić’s 1913 text *O feminizmu* [On Feminism], in which she referred sympathetically to the IWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt, and opposed the British “suffragettes-militants” who, in her understanding, “burn[ed] down houses.”¹⁷⁹ According to Ana Kolarić, the Serbian nationalist feminist Milica Tomić’s journal *Žena* (Woman) reported that at the 1913 IWSA congress in Budapest, the IWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt said that she did not want to evaluate either positively or negatively the actions of the English suffragettes, but a Serbian woman, Vukica M. Aleksijević, wrote another text in this journal in which she condemned these actions.¹⁸⁰ Another important reference was Finland, which was praised for granting women full suffrage rights in 1906 and for the improved position of mothers and children born out of wedlock.¹⁸¹

Besides suffrage, the women in Zofka Kveder’s journal advocated for women’s broader political participation. The Slovene feminist Minka Govekar asserted that “in the new, autonomous entity of Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes, women will be equal,” because “at a time when democracy is a global concept [*geslo*], women cannot remain a disdained sex.”¹⁸² A contributor from Serbia similarly discussed the “age of democracy” in which women would gain recognition through their work and contribution to society.¹⁸³ In the words of a feminist from Split, excluding women from discussions about the elections was “misunderstanding the

¹⁷⁸ Zagorka, “Hrvatska izborna reforma i žene” [Croatian Suffrage Reform and Women], *Ženski svijet* 4 (1917): 145.

¹⁷⁹ Vladislava Beba Polit Desančić (Novi Sad, 1886–Timișoara, 1949) was a Doctor of Philosophy, specializing in Slavonic studies, a writer, and translator, the niece of one of the pioneers of women’s activism, Savka Subotić, and the daughter of politician Mihailo Polit Desančić. See: Polit, Vladislava-Boba, “On feminism. The 7th international world’s congress of women in Budapest (O feminizmu. VII. međunarodni svetski kongres ženskinja u Budimpešti)”, *Ženski svet*, vol. XXVIII, no. 7 and 8, July and August 1913, 155–58. In: *Women and Social Movements in Modern Empires (WASMME): Habsburg Empire, 1820-1918 and Habsburg Empire, 1820-1918*.

¹⁸⁰ Kolarić, *Rod, modernost i emancipacija*, 113.

¹⁸¹ Jelka Perić (Šibenik), “Žene i politika” [Women and Politics], *Ženski svijet* 2 (1918): 50.

¹⁸² Minka Govekarjeva, “Slovenke o vojnem času” [Slovenian Women about War Times] *Ženski svijet* 1 (1917), 24.

¹⁸³ Darinka Stojanović, “O srpskim ženama” [About Serbian women], *Ženski svijet* 1 (1917): 32.

essence of democracy,” which she defined as “a free path to all the hardworking [people] [*vrijedan*], regardless of their class or sex.”¹⁸⁴ The emerging idea of feminism was, thus, in the early postwar period closely linked to national independence, a liberal understanding of democracy, and the much-desired idea of “democratization” in the new country, where South Slavs would be “free” and “independent” and where women would have equal social and political rights.

Overall, Kveder’s journal had a strong feminist dimension, which was developed within the Yugoslavist idea. The concept of feminism (*feminizam*) was at this point only sporadically used in *Ženski svijet* and *Jugoslavenska žena*, yet the demands for women’s rights were consistent with what in the following years would become widely considered a feminist agenda. Kveder’s opening text, “Što hoćemo?” [What do we want?] first spoke about the Yugoslav women’s contribution to the war, called for peace for all peoples and individuals, and then discussed and listed specific women’s demands: “equal professional opportunities and equal pay, equal social and political rights for women, and rights related to motherhood, including motherhood outside of marriage.”¹⁸⁵

Zofka Kveder’s journal, then, functioned since the autumn of 1917 as a forum that facilitated closer cooperation between (future) Yugoslav self-identified feminists. The journal had a pro-Yugoslavist orientation, and it was a platform for women from different parts of the future country (and beyond)¹⁸⁶ who advocated for women’s suffrage, and who demanded women’s political and social rights. After this initial coming together through the journal, how did the Yugoslav women’s cooperation develop further?

¹⁸⁴ Nevenka de Grisogono, “Žena prema politici i rodoljublju” [Woman’s Relationship with Politics and Patriotism], *Jugoslavenska žena* 5-6 (1918): 197.

¹⁸⁵ Zofka Kveder, “Što hoćemo?” [What do We Want?], *Ženski svijet* 1-2 (1917): 1–5.

¹⁸⁶ There were, for instance, some women writing from Trieste, which after WWI became a part of Italy.

1.2. The rise of cooperation of the liberal feminist generation: from the National Council of Women to the Alliance of Women's Movements (1919–1928)

Following the initial contact through Zofka Kveder's journal, Yugoslav feminists met in person at the first major meeting of the women from the new country, on September 21 to 23, 1919 in Belgrade, at which the NCW was founded. Outlining the organizational development from the NCW to the Feminist Alliance to the Alliance of Women's Movements, the section will highlight the extent of cooperation among women from Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade in the development of these organizations in the 1920s.

The NCW was a national umbrella organization which connected women's charitable, philanthropic, professional, and feminist organizations from around the Kingdom SHS. It united about 200 women's associations in the early 1920s,¹⁸⁷ and around 400 in the late 1930s.¹⁸⁸ Among them were the above-mentioned *Ženski pokret* from Belgrade, *UJŽ* from Zagreb, and *Splošno žensko društvo* from Ljubljana, who in 1923 would co-found the Feminist Alliance. In addition, many other women's organizations joined the NCW. First, there were Serbian charitable and patriotic organizations which, according to Ograjšek Gorenjak, belonged to an "older, more conservative, and nationalist current" of women,¹⁸⁹ and were before WWI active in the National Council of Women of Serbia (*Srpski narodni ženski savez*), the Serbian national umbrella women's organization affiliated with the ICW and the IWSA.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Z.K., "Izveštaj sa skupštine jugoslovenskih žena" [Report from the Assembly of Yugoslav Women], *Ženski pokret* 4–5 (1920): 20.

¹⁸⁸ Leposava Petković, "Reč predsednice Jugoslovenskog ženskog saveza" [Word of the President of the National Council of Women of Yugoslavia], *Glasnik jugoslovenskog ženskog saveza* 1 (1936): 1–2.

¹⁸⁹ Ograjšek Gorenjak, "Yugoslav Women's Movement," 728. These included: *Kolo srpskih sestara* (Circle of Serbian Sisters) and *Beogradsko žensko društvo* (Belgrade Women's Society, est. 1875), which had sections around the whole country; somewhat differently, *Materinsko udruženje* (Mother's association, est. 1904), which organized care for all abandoned children. Stolić, *Sestre srpkinje*, 152–163; Jasmina Milanović, "Materinsko udruženje – humani i socijalni aspekti delovanja 1904-1941" [Mothers' Association – charitable and social aspects of activism 1904-1941], *Istorija 20. veka* 36, no. 2 (2018): 37–54; Stefanović, "Nation und Geschlecht."

¹⁹⁰ Stolić, *Sestre srpkinje*, 163–176. In the 1910s, the Serbian NCW discussed and criticized issues such as the legal inequality of women and particularly the inheritance law according to which women could get only the dowry, the unequal position of women in the civil service, and women's suffrage rights. Furthermore, it developed a program which framed women's emancipation within the context of the national interest, motherhood, and the missionary role of women's organizations with regard to the education of women.

As historian Ana Stolić has argued, the kind of feminism the NCWS pursued was mainly “national feminism,” similar to other women’s movements in Europe, which put more emphasis on the national emancipation of the Serbian people than on the rights of women in the country.¹⁹¹ Another type of women’s organizations which joined the NCW in 1919 were Charitable Serbian Women’s Cooperatives, Serbian women’s associations that before the war were active mostly in Hungarian parts of the Habsburg empire. While most organizations from former Serbia joined, this was not the case of former Habsburg territories, as only the Yugoslav-oriented Slovenian and Croatian organizations joined the NCW.¹⁹²

Many of these women met in September 1919 for the very first time: accordingly, a lot of time was dedicated to the presentation of organizations’ previous work, divided into humanitarian, cultural, feminist, and hygienic sessions. Although the feminist session formed a very small part of the NCW in the beginning, presenters in this session included some of the women who published in Kveder’s journal, and they would in the later years use the NCW to enhance their cooperation and pursue their organizations’ common agendas related to women’s rights issues. On this occasion, for instance, the president of Belgrade ŽP, Leposava Petković, discussed the issue of equal pay for equal work and the legal inequality of women and men, and argued against the notion of women’s biological inferiority.¹⁹³ A year later, at the Council’s 1920 congress, they established a section called “feminist-cultural-hygienic section,” which would remain active in the NCW.¹⁹⁴

As time went by, the feminists continued their cooperation both within and outside of the NCW. An important reason for the increased cooperation were the Constitutional Assembly

¹⁹¹ Stolić, *Sestre srpkinje*; See also: Offen, *European Feminisms*, 213–249.

¹⁹² See: Ograjšek Gorenjak, “Yugoslav Women’s Movement,” 728; Selišnik, “Volilna pravica žensk.”

¹⁹³ *Spomenica*, 100.

¹⁹⁴ “Osnivanje feminističko-kulturne-higijenske sekcije” [Establishment of the feminist-cultural-hygienic section], *Ženski pokret* 4–5 (1920): 8–9; Zagorka Stojanović, “Skupština Narodnog ženskog saveza u Ljubljani” [Assembly of the National Council of Women in Ljubljana], *Ženski pokret* 7–8 (1922): 235–236.

meetings held in early 1921 at the National Parliament. In this context, there was much talk about whether the new constitution would grant suffrage rights to women, and the feminists intensified coordinated campaigns for broader political and social rights.¹⁹⁵ However, when the constitution was passed in June 1921, it did not include women's voting rights. The feminists publicly protested this decision at the NCW's plenary session held the same year in Split.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, Leposava Petković from Belgrade, Alojzija Štebi from Ljubljana, and Mira Kočonda Vodvarka from Zagreb gave reports on the legal position of women in the three contexts, for the first time offering a comprehensive and comparative view on the subject.¹⁹⁷ The legal position of women in different parts of Yugoslavia varied, as the new state had inherited six different legal systems from the nineteenth century. Yet, in all systems women were denied active and passive suffrage rights, had limited rights to conduct business, with married women being legally and by custom subjected to their husbands, who in most cases had to approve all of their legal (and financial) actions.¹⁹⁸

It was around the issue of women's suffrage that the feminists had a conflict with the leadership of the NCW. Following the Split meeting in 1921, the NCW president Danica Hristić resigned from her position. According to her, the Council's goal was "not to help suffragists receive voting rights" (even though, as we know, the suffragists demanded suffrage rights for all women), and she emphasized that under her name and leadership the NCW would not advocate for women's suffrage.¹⁹⁹

Following the conflict with the NCW's leadership, the feminists increasingly began to meet independently of the Council, and these gatherings led to the establishment of the Alliance. First, on the twentieth anniversary of SŽD in Ljubljana in 1921, Slovenian feminist

¹⁹⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 180.

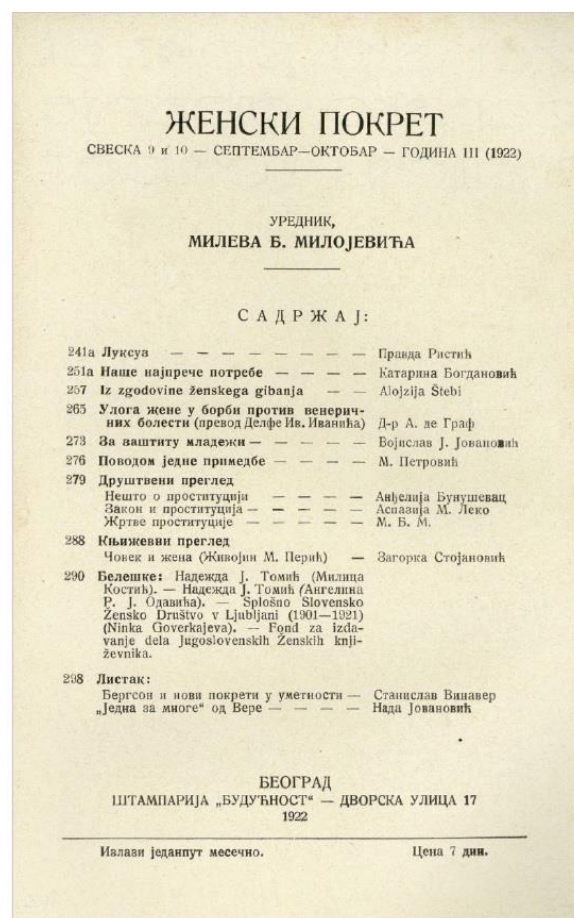
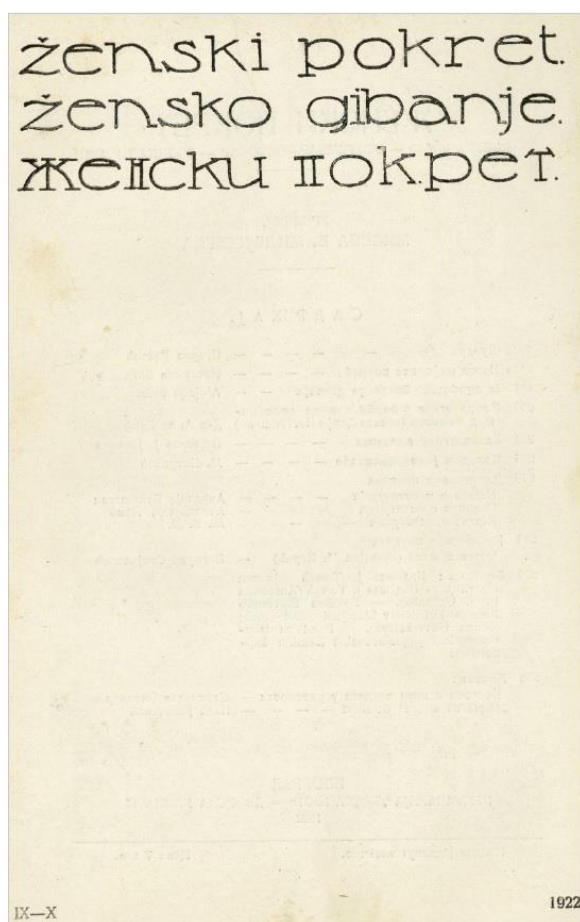
¹⁹⁶ See their reports in *Ženski pokret* 11/12 (1921): 337–362.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 95–103; Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 56–63.

¹⁹⁹ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 170; Selišnik, "Socialna feministka," 52–3.

Alojzija Štebi suggested a closer cooperation between the feminists from Belgrade and Ljubljana, and proposed that the Belgrade journal *Ženski pokret* would become the official journal of both Ženski Pokret and SŽD. From January 1922, the journal's name was written in Cyrillic and Latin script (in Serbian and Croatian variants of the Serbo-Croatian language), and in the Slovenian language: Женски покрет / Ženski pokret / Žensko gibanje. *Ženski pokret* became the center of the Yugoslav feminist public sphere from that point, in many ways continuing what Kveder had started with her *Ženski svijet/Jugoslavenska žena*.²⁰⁰



1.3. *Ženski pokret*, cover page and the first page of the September-October issue of 1922, Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije, https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD_7220578B8A0C6650CF7E01E1359E86A7-1922-09-B009-10

²⁰⁰ The publication of Kveder's journal ended in 1920.

Finally, on September 22 and 23, 1923, in Ljubljana, ŽP from Belgrade and Sarajevo, SŽD from Ljubljana, and UJŽ from Zagreb established the Feminist Alliance (Feministička Alijansa, FA). The elected president was Alojzija Štebi, and the headquarters were in Ljubljana.²⁰¹ Arguably, the Alliance's most important achievement was the consolidation of the Yugoslav women who self-identified as feminist, as opposed to the charitable and philanthropic women's organizations that predominantly formed the NCW. According to the Feminist Alliance's program, which was published in November 1923 in *Ženski pokret*, the "Feminist Alliance in the State of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes"—as the name was written in full—was an organization that brought together "women's associations whose main goal was the protection of woman and her rights," and its goal was "the liberation of women," to be attained through women's political participation and through legal and social reforms, with the end goal of reaching complete equality between men and women."²⁰²

The first point in the Alliance's program was the demand for women's suffrage rights, which, as the second point emphasized, was understood "only as a means for complete women's liberation."²⁰³ The third point highlighted that women were equal to men (*ravna muškarcu*), and because of that, also had to have equal rights (*ravnopravna*) in both public and private life. The fourth and fifth points listed the most urgent legal changes that would allow women to reach this equality: women's work as mothers and housewives should be considered productive work; economic independence of married women; equal parenthood rights; ensuring that mothers received allowances; women's right to inheritance; the protection of mothers and protection of women as workers, equal pay for equal work, and the appointment of women as labor inspectors; equal educational and professional opportunities; and full

²⁰¹ "Alijansija feminističkih društava" [Alliance of Feminist Associations], *Ženski pokret* 7 (1923): 325–327.

²⁰² "Pravila Feminističke Alijancije u Državi SHS" [Rules of the Feminist Alliance in the State SHS], *Ženski pokret* 9/10 (1923): 455–460.

²⁰³ Ibid., 459.

participation in political life, for the purpose of women's influence on the state and society, particularly in the spheres of education and social politics. It was emphasized that women, because of their *special abilities*, could contribute to some spheres more effectively than men (for more about this argument, see chapter 4). Finally, the program stated some more general demands for the "progress of our nation," which included protection of children and young people, public health improvement, a campaign against alcoholism, equal morality and equal legal treatment of children born in marriage and out of wedlock, etc.²⁰⁴

In September 1926, Alojzija Štebi again initiated an assembly of the Feminist Alliance, this time held in the small town of Bosanski Brod (Bosnia). On this occasion, the Feminist Alliance was renamed the Alliance of Women's Movements. Alojzija Štebi remained the president, with headquarters remaining in Ljubljana until September 1927, when the organization—and its Slovene president—moved to Belgrade.²⁰⁵ The main difference between the Feminist Alliance and the Alliance of Women's Movements was that only *Ženski pokret* (Women's Movement) organizations could be members of the Alliance of Women's Movements—hence the change of the organization's name. These *ŽP* organizations were modeled after the Belgrade *ŽP*, and had in the meantime began to mushroom around the country. A report of the 1926 founding meeting of the *AŽP* claimed that "the cornerstone has been laid for the unique work of all *Ženski pokret* organizations, of all the collaborators with shared ideas, of equal devotion to the great work that stands before us."²⁰⁶ Reportedly, fourteen *ŽPs*, which had been formed since 1923, participated at the September 1926 meeting in Bosanski Brod.²⁰⁷ All *Ženski pokret*

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 458–460.

²⁰⁵ The reason for this change might be Alojzija Štebi's relocation to Belgrade. The present delegates were from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Bosanski Brod, Kragujevac, Split, Bugojno (Bosnia), and Beli Manastir. The new executive committee was chosen: president Alojzija Štebi, vice president Milica Vlajić, secretaries Milena Atanacković and Vera Kičevac, cashier Darinka Marodić. "Sa skupštine Alijanse ženskih pokreta" [From the Assembly of the Alliance of Women's Movements], *Ženski pokret* 17 (1927): 3.

²⁰⁶ "Organizovanje Alijanse Ženskih pokreta" [Founding of the Alliance of Women's Movements], *Ženski pokret* 8 (1926): 360–361.

²⁰⁷ Darinka Marodić, "Izveštaj Ženskog pokreta za 1926 g." [Report of *ŽP* for 1926], *Ženski pokret* 7, 9–10 (1926): 425–435.

organizations had the same program, although each of them worked autonomously.²⁰⁸ The women used the 1926 Assembly to demand active and passive suffrage rights,²⁰⁹ and on this occasion decided that from 1927 the journal *Ženski pokret* would transform from a multi-page book-like monthly periodical to a four-page bi-monthly newspaper, and become the common organ of all ŽPs in the country. At the time of the change, *Ženski pokret* had 1300 subscribers, with 1500 copies of each issue printed.²¹⁰ Starting with the February 1927 issue, the front page articles were usually signed either by Alojzija Štebi, or by the Alliance, and the reports in the journal in subsequent years showed that cooperation among women from various parts of the country was increasing.²¹¹

The available information about the formation of the ŽP organizations before and after the Alliance assembly illustrates the steady rise of the movement, as well as the cooperation of women from Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrade, and other parts of the country in the mid-1920s. The first two *Ženski pokret* organizations had already been founded in 1919 in Belgrade and in Sarajevo. What we know is that the Belgrade ŽP numbered around nine hundred members in the first year,²¹² and that its first president was Leposava Petković, who left this position when she became the president of the National Council of Women in 1925.²¹³ Through the journal *Ženski pokret*, which was an important part of their activism, they discussed “various, unsolved

²⁰⁸ Ksenija Atanasijević, “Izveštaj sa Treće Konferencije Male Antante Žena” [Report from the Third LEW Conference], *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1926): 36–43.

²⁰⁹ “Organizovanje AŽP,” 360–361.

²¹⁰ Marodić, “Izveštaj ŽP za 1926, 425–435; AŽP, “Нашим женама – Našim ženama – Našim ženam” [To Our Women], *Ženski pokret* 1 (1927): 1–2. 1920 The journal started in 1920 with 1200 subscribers (371 from Belgrade, 292 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, around 300 in other Serbian parts of the country, 113 in Croatia and Slavonia, and only 6 in Slovenia. Katarina Bogdanović, “Na početku druge godine” [At the Beginning of the Second Year], *Ženski pokret* 1 (1921): 1–5.

²¹¹ Darinka Marodić, “Program rada nove Uprave Ženskog pokreta” [The Program of the New Administration of ŽP] *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1926): 61–63.

²¹² The organization had around 600 members in the fall of 1920. *Spomenica*, 50–52. (Two goals: educational, and the protection of women).

²¹³ Zorka Kasnar Karadžić, “Izveštaj UO Društva za prosvetivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava” [Report of the Board of the Association for Enlightenment of Women and the Protection of her Rights] *Ženski pokret* 4 (1921): 117, and “Ženski pokret kod nas i na strani” [Women’s Movement Here and Abroad], *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1922): 19.

feminist questions,” and aimed to explore women’s role in “the making of the social life of our country.”²¹⁴ More generally, as ŽP members saw it, the job of educated women consolidated



1.4. *Ženski pokret*, cover page of the first issue of the new format of *Ženski pokret*, published in February 1927. Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije, https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD_7220578B8A0C6650CF7E01E1359E86A7-1927-02-B001

²¹⁴ “Našim čitaocima” [To Our Readers], *Ženski pokret* 1 (1920): 2.

in a feminist organization was to set an example and prepare other women for paid employment outside the home.²¹⁵ In Sarajevo, the president of ŽP was the physician Maša Živanović, and this organization reportedly began working more forcefully in 1927 when it opened its club.²¹⁶ In pursuing their goal of “awakening” women’s social and political consciousness, Belgrade ŽP organized numerous lectures to propagate feminist ideas, including lectures on women in history, women’s culture, dowry, women and the League of Nations, political system and reforms, democracy and the state, and so on.²¹⁷ The Belgrade ŽP organized numerous literary courses, sewing courses, and domestic schools for peasant women (see chapter 5), and in 1923 it set up a labor bureau to help unemployed women find work.²¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Sarajevo ŽP organized various courses (cooking, domestic, English and French courses), lectures, literacy courses, pedagogy and public health courses, and domestic courses.²¹⁹

ŽP organizations continued to be founded across the country. In Zagreb, ŽP was founded in 1925, with Mira Vodvařka Kočonda elected president. Upon its founding in January 1926, the ŽP board in Ljubljana counted twenty women: the president was Alojzija Štebi,²²⁰ and later her sister Cirila Pleško Štebi, while Angela Vode was elected vice-president.²²¹ Although in the Slovenian language the name of the organization would have been *Žensko gibanje*, they chose to maintain the name *Ženski pokret*, in Serbo-Croatian, for the purpose of “documenting unity with the other feminists from the state.”²²² ŽPs were also founded in 1925

²¹⁵ Kasnar Karadžić, “Izveštaj UO,” 117–124. Kasnar Karadžić, “Ženski pokret kod nas i na strani,” 19.

²¹⁶ Jelka Ostojić, “Ženski pokret u Sarajevu” [ŽP in Sarajevo], *Ženski pokret* 2 (1927): 2; “Beleške: Godišnja skupština Ženskog pokreta u Sarajevu” [Notes: Annual Assembly of ŽP in Sarajevo], *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1930): 4.

²¹⁷ Kasnar Karadžić, “Izveštaj UO,” 117, and “Ženski pokret kod nas i na strani,” *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1922): 19.

²¹⁸ “Rad Društva za prosvetčivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava” [Work of the Association for Enlightenment of Women and the Protection of her Rights], *Ženski pokret* 11–12 (1921): 393; “Izveštaj UO ženskog pokreta za godišnju skupštinu” [Report of the Board of ŽP for the Annual Assembly] *Ženski pokret* 7 (1924): 292.

²¹⁹ See two notes before.

²²⁰ “Osnivanje Ženskog pokreta u Ljubljani” [Founding of ŽP in Ljubljana], *Ženski pokret* 3 (1926): 65–68.

²²¹ This was in 1931, although it is possible to assume that these women were already the president and vice-president in 1927. The secretary was Malči Prijatelj, the cashier was Ema Peče, and the committeewomen Vera Albreht, Pavla Hočevār, Karla Modić, Marija Mahorčič, Jožica Novak, and Stana Šturm. “Rad Ženskih pokreta” [The Work of Ženski Pokret Organizations], *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1931): 2.

²²² Vera Albrechtova, “Ženski pokret v Sloveniji” [ŽP in Slovenia], *Ženski svet* 6 (1926): 180–182.

and 1926 in Split²²³ and Šibenik (Dalmatia), Slavonski Brod (Slavonia), Varaždin (Croatia), and Požarevac (Serbia).²²⁴ This trend continued after the restructuring of the Alliance in September 1926: in Macedonia, ŽP was established in 1928 in Skopje, and there were also ŽPs in Bitola and Resen.²²⁵

Often, the founding of a ŽP was a direct consequence of Belgrade and Zagreb ŽP members holding lectures in various towns. In Ljubljana the *spiritus movens* was Alojzija Štebi, but upon the founding of the organization in Ljubljana, the presidents of Belgrade and Zagreb ŽP were present, as well as the Belgrade ŽP member in charge of the domestic schools, Darinka Lacković (see chapter 5), who held a lecture about her sphere of work. Belgrade ŽP board member Jelica Jevđenijević visited Bosanski Brod and Slavonski Brod and held lectures on the idea of the women's movement, inspiring the women there to establish their own ŽPs.²²⁶ Belgrade ŽP members Leposava Petković and Milena Atanacković were present for the founding meeting in Skopje, where Draga Jovanović was elected president.²²⁷ Some ŽPs were founded after participation in the NCW congress; this was the case with Beli Manastir (Slavonia) in 1926.²²⁸ The women in Varaždin were inspired by the feminists in Zagreb, and when their ŽP was founded, its president, Lucija Persoli-Miškuljin, held lectures on the duties and rights of women, discussing the unsatisfactory position of women in the state. The women from Varaždin were also in contact with women from Slavonski Brod and Čakovec

²²³ Vinka Bulić, "Godišnja skupština Ženskog pokreta u Splitu" [Annual Assembly of ŽP Split], *Ženski pokret* 7 (1927): 4; "Ženski Pokret u Splitu" [ŽP in Split], *Ženski pokret* 20 (1927): 3; "Savremena žena" [Contemporary Woman], *Ženski pokret* 8, (1927): 3–4; "Aktivnost Ženskog Pokreta u Splitu" [Activity of ŽP in Split], *Ženski pokret* 8 (1928): 3.

²²⁴ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 183; Marodić, "Izveštaj ŽP za 1926, 425–435; "Rad ženskog pokreta u Požarevcu" [Work of ŽP in Požarevac], *Ženski pokret* 8 (1926): 378; "Ženski pokret u Požarevcu" [ŽP in Požarevac], *Ženski pokret* 2 (1927): 2; Lucija Persoli-Miškuljin, "Ženski pokret u Varaždinu" [ŽP in Varaždin], *Ženski pokret* 3 (1927): 4.

²²⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 190.

²²⁶ The presidents upon founding were: Terezija Goldberger, Bosanski Brod, and Sofija Mihletić, Slavonski Brod. "Naš Ženski pokret u Brodu" [Our ŽP in Brod], *Ženski pokret* 4 (1926): 142–143. Another report said that Anka Popović founded the ŽP in Bosanski Brod. Milena Atanacković, "Anka Popović", *Ženski pokret* 8 (1928): 1.

²²⁷ "Osnivanje Ženskog pokreta u Skoplju" [Founding of ŽP in Skopje], *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1929): 2.

²²⁸ "Odjek Ženskog pokreta" [Echo of the ŽP], *Ženski pokret* 8 (1926): 378.

(Croatia).²²⁹ The main activities of the ŽPs were lectures, and the existing reports demonstrate that the topics included either what was called “propaganda of feminist ideas,” or the political education of women, in terms of discussions about the state, the electoral system, and so forth.²³⁰

The material clearly shows that the feminists began their activism within the framework of the NCW, and then founded the Feminist Alliance in opposition to it. The main impetus for this was the 1921 conflict about the priority of suffrage in the organization. Importantly, however, after 1921 feminists still continued to be active in the NCW, and in fact played a pivotal role in the leadership shift within the Council in 1924,²³¹ which historian Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak has helpfully termed a “feminist breakthrough.”²³² In 1925 Leposava Petković, until then the president of the Belgrade ŽP, became the new NCW’s president, and from then on the feminists had a big influence in the NCW. Petković remained in this position until the Council’s discontinuation in 1941.

The cooperation between Yugoslav feminists, therefore, grew steadily in the 1920s, first within the NCW, and then in the framework of newly formed Alliance of Women’s Movements. The rise of Ženski pokret organizations, which together formed the AŽP in

²²⁹ Persoli-Miškulín, “Ženski pokret u Varaždinu” 4.

²³⁰ For some examples, see: “Predavanje g-đe Dr. Vinter o ženskom pravu glasa” [Lecture of Mrs. Vinter on Women’s Right to Vote], *Ženski pokret* 4 (1926): 143-144; “Predavanja” [Lectures], *Ženski pokret* 21 (1927): 4; “Aktivnost Ženskog Pokreta u Splitu” [Activity of ŽP in Split], *Ženski pokret* 8 (1928): 3.

²³¹ On this occasion, Delfa Ivanić from the patriotic and charitable organization Kolo srpskih sestara (The Circle of Serbian Sisters) and a member of the Belgrade ŽP won the majority of votes against the other candidate from Beogradsko žensko društvo (Belgrade Women’s Society). Historian Svetlana Stefanović has rightly described this as a conflict between the two biggest Serbian women’s organizations, Beogradsko žensko društvo (Belgrade Women’s Society) and Kolo srpskih sestara. The former leadership was not ready to give up their leading roles easily, so in a heated atmosphere of conflict, the newly elected president, Delfa Ivanić, resigned from this position. When Petković became the Council’s president, some members of the Council’s former leadership formed a different organization. Therefore, in the mid-1920s, not only did the former president of the ŽP Leposava Petković take up the leading role in the Council, but the more conservative women’s groups left this organization and decided to organize independently. Narodna ženska zajednica (National Women’s Union). Stefanović, “Nation und Geschlecht.”

²³² Ograjšek Gorenjak, “Yugoslav Women’s Movement,” 728. According to Alojzija Štebi’s claim from 1926, the Feminist Alliance was not very active because the feminists from the Alliance were mainly concerned with the NCW at that time, as they had to “invest all [our] strengths to ameliorate and stabilize the situation in the Council. “Organizovanje Aliance Ženskih pokreta,” 360–361.

different parts of the country, demonstrates the existence of a feminist agenda shared among many women who aimed to work together in their local contexts, and nationally in the framework of the Alliance. At the same time, the chapter showed that even though the Alliance was initially formed in opposition to the Council, feminists gained influence in the NCW as well, so the leadership of the two organizations would to an extent overlap after 1925.

Having in mind the amount of cooperation among the Yugoslav feminists, what was their national ideology? The next two sections will examine this by looking at two case studies from two different periods: the 1919 founding meeting of the NCW, and then the discussions around the assassination in parliament of three Croatian Peasant Party members in 1928 and the introduction of the dictatorship in 1929.

1.3. Different versions of Yugoslavism at the 1919 founding congress of the National Council of Women

In exploring the Yugoslav feminists' national ideology, the first case study I will focus on is the founding congress of the NCW, held in September 1919 in Belgrade. The main proclaimed goals of the meeting were, firstly, "the unification of all Yugoslav women," and secondly, as the first president of the NCW Danica Hristić (1865–1923) explained, to get all women "on the road of consensual and harmonious work."²³³ As mentioned earlier, the women's organizations which joined the NCW supported the establishment of the new Kingdom SHS. On this occasion, there was a famous debate about the name of the NCW. During one of the congress sessions, the leaders of the pre-WWI Serbian NCW—who were also the hosts of the meeting in Belgrade—declared the establishment of the Narodni ženski savez Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca (National Council of Women of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes). In response to this,

²³³ *Spomenica 7.*

Zofka Kveder argued that the name of the new national women's organization should include Yugoslav (*Ženski jugoslavenski narodni savez*, Yugoslav National Council of Women), asserting that the organization's name should convey national unity. In her view, the Council should be “one, centralized, women's, Yugoslav, and national.” In an atmosphere of post-WWI anxieties, she added that “the enemies are all around us, and they should know that we are one.”²³⁴ A conflict emerged; whereas the minority of women supported Kveder, the former group—mostly consisting of women who identified themselves as Serbian—maintained that the name should reflect the official name of the state, and include “Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.” What ideological positions underpinned this conflict, and how do they fit the four categories of Yugoslavisms discussed in the introduction?

The discussion around Kveder's proposal reflected the differences between the four conceptions of Yugoslavism, and I will begin by discussing “unitarist” and “centralist” conceptualizations. The “centralist” conception of Yugoslavism advocated for a political unity of three “tribes,” Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, who together co-existed within the larger, Yugoslav “trinominal” nation. Some Serbian women were fiercely against naming the organization Yugoslav; for example, a woman reported as “Samardžić from Bosanska Gradiška” cried: “Please, sisters, I am thirty-six years old and I am eager for the Serbian name. Let the name [of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes] stay for now, and the younger ones will [later] gladly accept the Yugoslav name.”²³⁵ Most of the women who were against Yugoslavism were Serbian women who came not from Serbia, but from the former Habsburg territories: Vojvodina, Bosnia, Croatia.²³⁶ They were mostly representatives of charitable organizations, who at the congress largely talked not about women's rights, but about issues ranging from

²³⁴ Ibid., 28–9.

²³⁵ Ibid., 31.

²³⁶ Zofka Kveder, “Dojmovi sa kongresa jugoslavenskih žena u Beogradu” [Impressions from the Congress of Yugoslav Women in Belgrade], *Jugoslavenska žena* 8-10 (1919): 296.

their involvement in collecting money for the churches, to organizing a convalescent home for soldiers during the 1915 typhus pandemic, to anti-Turkic activities, to the establishment of institutions taking care of children whose mothers had died at birth, or who were born out of wedlock.²³⁷ In their speeches, moreover, these women emphasized Serbian women's victimhood during the war, which was a predominant narrative at the first NCW congress and generally in the early post-WWI period; as historian Melissa Bokovoy has shown, Serbian women's mourning and remembering of their loved ones fallen in WWI had the effect of privileging the Serbian sacrifice in the new state, when truly huge tragedies of Serbian women and men during WWI were discussed through tropes of the Serbian people's tragic national past and their suffering during the "Ottoman yoke."²³⁸

By contrast, the "unitarist" conception of Yugoslavism promoted an understanding of the "national unity" and a diminishing of the "tribal" differences between Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Kveder was the main proponent of this position at the Council, and she was supported mostly by the former Habsburg Yugoslav women. Stefanija Vimpulšek from Croatia, for instance, agreed with Kveder's views; she compared Yugoslavia's development with that of France, and argued that the state name should reflect unity to the outside world.²³⁹

Despite this division between the "unitarists" and "centralists," however, the two views in fact to a large extent overlapped. As discussed in the thesis introduction, in the early 1920s the main political parties in the new state were the People's Radical Party and the Democratic Party, which were "centralist" and "unitarist," respectively. Kveder's example contributes to our understanding of how these two political parties could cooperate. Regardless of the name of the organization, her view was in many aspects similar to the "centralist" one. For instance,

²³⁷ *Spomenica*, 38–81.

²³⁸ Melissa Bokovoy, "Kosovo Maiden(s): Serbian Women Commemorate the Wars of National Liberation, 1912–1918," in *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, ed. Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur (United States: Indiana University Press, 2006), 157–170.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

Kveder went along with the Serbian position, and she expressed agreement with the speech by the Serbian representative from Rijeka, Milica Vidović, in which Vidović praised Serbian women in a conservative and traditionalist tone.²⁴⁰ However, Kveder also emphasized the one point that they disagreed on: Vidović's suggestion to include into the NCW statutes that a Serbian woman must preside the Council (which ultimately did not make it into the rules, but "only" in the report).²⁴¹

Kveder's political position in the early 1920s was indeed close to that of the Yugoslav Democratic Party, and this party's national ideology was, in turn, similar—although not identical to—the national ideology of the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA). ORJUNA was formed in 1921 with the goal of guarding the state and national unity and, according to historian John Paul Newman, was one of the "most avowedly and unabashedly violent of all the patriotic and veterans' associations in Yugoslavia in the 1920s."²⁴² Discussing Kveder's connection with ORJUNA, the scholar Natka Badurina has written about Kveder's ideological turn in the 1920s, which Badurina sees as a turn to authoritarianism.²⁴³ Badurina's analysis can be confirmed with the fact that men connected with the Democratic Party and ORJUNA published in Kveder's journal: Kveder's second husband Juraj Demetrović, a former social democrat and at the time a member of the Democratic Party and a minister in some

²⁴⁰ *Spomenica*, 105. Milica Vidović was the president of the Jugoslavenko žensko demokratsko društvo (Democratic Association of Yugoslav Women), established in January 1919 in Sušak, Istria. For the organization, information about Vidović, and the developments in Fiume and Sušak, see: Rolandi, "Women's organizing in a contested borderland," 51–66.

²⁴¹ *Spomenica*, 105–106.

²⁴² John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in The Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903-1945* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 150; Stevo Djurašković, "Ideologija Organizacije jugoslovenskih nacionalista (ORJUNA)" [Ideology of the Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (ORJUNA)], *Časopis za suvremenu povjest* 43, no. 1 (2011): 225–247, especially 232.

²⁴³ In her analysis of Kveder's plays *Arditi na otoku krku* (1922) and *Unuk kraljevića Marka* (1922), which Kveder wrote under the male pen name of Dimitrije Gvozdanović, Badurina argued that Kveder's late works were in fact "an early expression of ORJUNA literature and propaganda." Natka Badurina, "Od strepnje do autoritarnog subjekta (ideološki zaokret Zofke Kveder)" [From Anxiety to an Authoritarian Subject (The Ideological Turn of Zofka Kveder)], in *Riječki filološki dani*, ed. Danijela Bačić-Karković (Rijeka: Filozofski fakultet Rijeka, 2010), 49–86, particularly 58.

Yugoslav governments,²⁴⁴ and a leader of ORJUNA, Milan Pribićević. Both men wrote about women's emancipation through the lens of Yugoslavism. Demetrović, using the pen name Nikias in the journal, advocated for women's participation in the national work and struggle,²⁴⁵ and called for a demonstration of national unity by showing that "we do not make differences between Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes," so that this "single nation [*jedinstveni narod*] passes through all tempests and storms with as few victims as possible."²⁴⁶ Milan Pribićević published "New Woman in the New State," in which he argued that it was time to deal with the "woman question," to "demand a free, equal citizen," and that "apart from being our mother, wife, sister, or daughter, a woman is also our comrade/friend and coworker and voter and legislator."²⁴⁷ While supporting the emancipation of Yugoslav women, these men, and more generally the proponents of this stream of "unitarist Yugoslavism," did not balk from using violence and state repression to achieve their goals,²⁴⁸ which their affiliation with ORJUNA confirms.

Naturally, both these positions could be highly problematic for many women who came from former Habsburg territories, and especially Croatia: for instance, that of the writer and journalist Marija Jurić Zagorka, who before 1919 published in Kveder's journal about the suffrage reforms in Croatia in 1917.²⁴⁹ Hers was a completely different position towards the conflict, as she was appalled with the Serbian nationalism at the 1919 meeting. Zagorka attended the 1919 congress in Belgrade as a journalist, and published a rather negative

²⁴⁴ Vojtěchovský et al, "Yugoslavism," 437.

²⁴⁵ Nikias, "Rasprava o izbornom pravu žena u hrvatskom Saboru" [Discussion about Women's Suffrage Right in the Croatian Parliament], *Ženski svijet* 1 (1918): 6–10.

²⁴⁶ Nikias, "Rad za narodno jedinstvo" [Work for National Unity], *Ženski svijet* 2 (1918): 49–50.

²⁴⁷ Milan Pribićević, "Nova žena u novoj državi" [New Woman in New State], *Jugoslavenska žena* 4 (1919): 129–132.

²⁴⁸ Vojtěchovský et al, "Yugoslavism," 438.

²⁴⁹ Zagorka showed up at the session of the Croatian Sabor (Parliament) when the terms of the suffrage reforms were debated and demanded that women—and not only all men—were included into the new suffrage law. The law adopted by Sabor on December 19, 1917, however, introduced "universal" suffrage rights for men only, and became the first of many laws in interwar Yugoslavia which excluded women from participatory politics. Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* [Croatian Contemporary History] (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1999), 49. For the parliamentary discussions, see: Andrea Feldman, "New Women in a New State: Feminist Expectations from Yugoslav Unification," *Review of Croatian History* 18, no. 1 (2022): 160–166.

evaluation of it. According to Zagorka, the majority of the women present at the congress were Serbian nationalists, whose nationalist feelings had only been strengthened by the war, and for whom Yugoslavism was merely a geographical concept, not a national idea.²⁵⁰ In her words:

While this great unwavering Serbian patriotism provides the psychologist and the poet with a perfect image of national pride and tribal love, and the fiery excitement of an ideal majestic poem, it disappoints the Yugoslavist. For the strong and convinced Yugoslavist, it is only worrying, but for the weak one it is disarming and it returns him to his tribal patriotism. He almost feels ashamed that he left it in the first place, and he feels encouraged to follow the example set by these Serbian women.

Zagorka's assessment was, thus, fairly pessimistic.

Her position regarding Yugoslavism falls into the third category: that of the Croatian opposition close to the Croatian Peasant Party of Stjepan Radić, which initially supported the idea of Yugoslavism, but did not agree with the centralist organization of the country (see 5.4). Zagorka's position can further be useful for a better understanding of the relationship between Yugoslavism and feminism. Notably, Zagorka opted out of the Yugoslav feminist movement early on; she wrote for Kveder's journal in 1917 and 1918, but did not actively participate after that, despite her initial interest in feminism. She was among the rare women to use the concept of *feminizam* in *Ženski svijet*. In a 1917 text, she explained that until that point in time, there had not been a "special movement for women's rights" and an organized "feminist movement" in Croatia because of the nation's "specific circumstances," which she described as "immense suffering." She contrasted the lack of a feminist movement in Croatia with the existing women's rights movements in "independent states."²⁵¹ Zagorka argued that men and women were equal in Croatia in their "common oppression," i.e., "equal suffering."²⁵² The way Zagorka used the concept of feminism suggests that she identified the term with the idea of

²⁵⁰ Zagorka, "Snimke iz Beograda" [Recordings from Belgrade], *Jutarnji list* (8.10.1919): 3.

²⁵¹ Zagorka, "Hrvatska izborna reforma i žene", 145.

²⁵² Ibid.

national independence. Zagorka had been active in the political struggle for Croatian independence from Hungary since the early 1900s, so the fact that she maintained that there was no feminism in Croatia before WWI can be understood as her rejecting identification with Hungarian feminists and Schwimmer's Feminist Association, which had been established in 1904. In 1917, however, Zagorka's use of *feminizam* suggested a feeling of greater national autonomy than earlier. After 1919, however, feminism would become increasingly identified with the Yugoslavist AŽP (see 1.4), with which Zagorka would not cooperate, in my view because she disagreed with their Yugoslavism, and not with their feminism. Zagorka continued her interwar career disconnected from the Yugoslav feminist movement.²⁵³

There was a fourth group of women at the congress, a group I refer in this thesis as “civic feminists.” These were the younger women from the Belgrade ŽP and the women who made the “feminist section” of the Council (see 1.2); this group of women presented the Council's congresses as “Yugoslav” and “feminist.”²⁵⁴ According to Zagorka, who also wrote positively of these women, all Yugoslavists could find a stronghold in this minority of Serbian women of the younger generation, who in the discussion about Yugoslavism embraced the idea of national unity and said that they accepted the trialist name of the organization if the majority wished so, but then added that: “We, the young ones, will create Yugoslavia.”²⁵⁵ At the 1919 meeting, the “civic feminists” supported Kveder's idea of Yugoslavism. Kveder assessed these women positively, saying that their views were much closer to her own than those of the older Serbian elite women.²⁵⁶ These ideas were espoused at the 1919 meeting by Zorka Kasnar Karadžić, a member of the Belgrade ŽP who also wrote several articles for Kveder's journal.

²⁵³ De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 195–199. Zagorka worked as a journalist and later edited the journal *Ženski list* (Women's Paper, from 1925 until 1938) and then *Hrvatica* (Croat Woman, 1938–1941). Perhaps one of the reasons of her detachment from the Zagreb feminists from *Ženski pokret* was that Zagorka's former husband, Slavko Amadej Vodvařka, was later married to the leader of the Zagreb ŽP, Mira Kořonda Vodvařka.

²⁵⁴ “Velika feministička skupština u Zagrebu” [Big Feminist Assembly in Zagreb], *Ženski pokret* 3 (1920): 3.

²⁵⁵ Zagorka, “Snimke iz Beograda,” 3.

²⁵⁶ Kveder, “Dojmovi,” 299–302.

While we do not know much about Kasnar Karadžić, we know that she was a friend of Paulina Lebl Albala, also a Belgrade ŽP member, from 1927 president of the Yugoslav Association of University Educated Women (Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena, established in 1927), and in the late 1930s editor of the Yugoslav Women's Council periodical *Glasnik Jugoslovenskog ženskog saveza* (Yugoslav National Council of Women's Tribune, 1935–1940).

I see these women as part of the fourth version of Yugoslavism, as discussed in the chapter introduction. This was a version of “cultural” Yugoslavism which stood for national state unity, but generally criticized the postwar political establishment. This type of Yugoslavism was described by historians through analysis of the Zagreb-based journal *Nova Evropa* (New Europe, 1920–1941). According to scholars who analyzed *Nova Evropa*, there was much overlap with the “unitarist” and “cultural” versions of Yugoslavism, yet the *Nova Evropa* editors opposed ORJUNA's violence, and expressed discontent that the violence was in fact damaging the Yugoslavist idea.²⁵⁷ If we approach the difference between Kveder's “unitarism” and the Belgrade ŽP delegates' “cultural” Yugoslavism, it becomes obvious that this is the same parallel. One difference between the two was that Kveder advocated for Yugoslavism equally as for women's rights, whereas this group of women put Yugoslavism in the background, and slowly began to form a Yugoslav alliance around the feminist issues they were interested in, an alliance which would be formalized through the AŽP.

These women's political language, moreover, was similar to what the authors of the *History of Modern Political Thought* called “civic radicalism,” and were influenced by political thinkers such as literary scholar and politician Jovan Skerlić (1877–1914) and writer Ivan Cankar (1876–1918).²⁵⁸ Specifically, the aforementioned Kasnar Karadžić and Lebl Albala had

²⁵⁷ Newman, *Yugoslavia in The Shadow of War*, 154.

²⁵⁸ Trencsényi et al., *History I*, pages 443–444.

studied literature together before the war, and, as Lebl Albala wrote in her memoirs, were very much influenced by their professor, the literary critic Jovan Skerlić. Skerlić was a leading Serbian pre-WWI intellectual who had been a proponent of the idea of national unity; he claimed that “for every reasonable person, it is indisputable that Croats and Serbs are one and the same nation.”²⁵⁹ Skerlić advocated for “democratic and social” nationalism in a “socially oriented state” and had trust in the progress and slow evolution of Serbian society from a patriarchal to a modern European nation, although on the other hand, he retained pessimism regarding Serbian political life.²⁶⁰ This ideology of democratic nationalism was also closely tied to the ideology of the journal *Nova Evropa* and its argument that there could be no Yugoslavism without Yugoslav women.²⁶¹

Alojzija Štebi, the initiator of the Feminist Alliance whom I will discuss more later, held similar views, and was influenced by another proponent of “civic radicalism,” Ivan Cankar, who likewise was a supporter of Yugoslavism. Štebi was not present at the first Council’s assembly, as at the time she was still mainly working with Slovenian social democrats and edited the journal *Demokracija* (Democracy, 1918–1919). This group demanded democracy and socialism on the basis of self-determination of the nations. They wanted the federalist unification of Yugoslavia, and explicitly opposed the “nationalist understanding of nationalities, which takes the nation not as a consequence, but as the goal of life.”²⁶²

In sum, the four main iterations of Yugoslavism existing at the time were all present at the 1919 founding meeting of the NCW. Zofka Kveder supported a “unitarist”

²⁵⁹ Jovan Skerlić, *Današnji srpskohrvatski nacionalizam* [Serbo-Croatian Nationalism Today] (Rijeka: Izdanje Knjižare G. Trbojević, 1913), 3; Lebl Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo*.

²⁶⁰ Trencsényi et al., *History I*, 443–444.

²⁶¹ Mira Bogdanović, “Žensko pitanje u časopisu *Nova Evropa* (1920–1941),” *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 285–293. Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 115–124.

²⁶² Socijalistična omladina, “Naša poslanica” [Our Message], *Demokracija* 1–2 (1918): 1–4.

conceptualization, and saw the Yugoslav nation as one, whereas some Serbian women advocated for a “centralist” conceptualization which understood the Yugoslav nation as a “trinominal nation,” constituted by the three “tribes” of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Zofka Kveder would not take part in the Alliance, most likely due to her deteriorating health, but perhaps also because of her ideological turn to the Democratic Party and the Yugoslav nationalist organization ORJUNA. The Serbian women who were against the Yugoslav name would remain in the leadership of the Council until 1925, when the feminists took over (see 1.2). The third position was that of Zagorka, who was appalled with Serbian women’s nationalism. Disappointed with the Serbian women’s position, Zagorka opted out of the feminist movement and continued her activism in Croatian women’s organizations in the interwar period. Finally, the fourth approach of “cultural Yugoslavism,” represented by young members of ŽP Belgrade, advocated for national unity in a similar way to Kveder, but, unlike her, was not aligned with the political parties. It was this approach that would become the foundation of the Alliance of Women’s Movements, which, however, put feminist rather than national goals in first place.

1.4. “Let us be assured that work brings us closer”: Feminists and Yugoslavism in the time of political turmoil (1928–1934)

In order to examine further the Yugoslav feminists’ national ideology, in this section I will focus on the leadership of the Alliance of Women’s Movements, and how they reacted to the 1928 assassination in the parliament and to the introduction of the royal dictatorship in 1929. This analysis will further confirm that the cooperation between feminists from Zagreb, Belgrade, and Ljubljana was based on their conscious decision to overcome their historical differences, and that their common work on feminist issues represented a political stance in the context of the rising tensions between different nation-building projects in the country, which

I argue the feminists saw not as inherent to the nation, but as tensions produced by politicians. Moreover, the section will demonstrate that these two events, the dictatorship in particular, impacted the work of the Alliance negatively, as many of the ŽP organizations ceased their work after 1929.

The growth of the ŽP organizations discussed earlier was not linear. The first big blow for the Alliance was the shooting in the parliament in June 1928, when a representative of the populist People's Radical Party Puniša Račić killed four members of the Croatian Peasant Party and fatally wounded its president, Stjepan Radić. Historians have argued against the interpretation of this event being an expression of an inter-ethnic, Serbian-Croatian conflict, in contrast maintaining that the parliamentary shooting should be seen as an expression of an inter-party conflict between the regime Serbian People's Radical Party, and the oppositional Croatian Peasant Party and Independent Democratic Party.²⁶³

Historiographical interpretation which focuses on the inter-party struggle is similar to the view held by “civic feminists” from the AŽP. The Alliance and the NCW reacted immediately, publishing words of condolence: to my knowledge, this is the first time the Alliance's leaders published explicitly their views on Yugoslavism in *Ženski pokret*.²⁶⁴ Alojzija Štebi insisted that the whole nation was complicit in the parliament murders; she emphasized that this included women, whom she held responsible even though they had not voted the

²⁶³ Svetozar Pribićević, one of the former leaders of the Democratic Party, formed the Independent Democratic Party in 1924, which was in opposition. In 1927, Pribićević united with the other oppositional leader, Stjepan Radić, together forming the Democratic Peasant Coalition. The new coalition united not only the two biggest oppositional parties, the Independent Democratic Party and the Croatian Peasant Party, but it also united the leading Serbian and Croatian politician from Croatia-Slavonia (former Habsburg lands), thus forming the most serious threat to the People's Radical Party's power at that time. As Mira Kolar Dimitrijević showed, Račić aimed to shoot the oppositional leaders Radić (a Croat) and Pribićević (a Serb from Zagreb). Missing Pribićević, Račić killed four HSS members and fatally wounded Radić, who died on August 8, 1928.

Kolar-Dimitrijević, “Višestruki Razlozi;” Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 83.

²⁶⁴ Leposava Petković, “Izjava saučešća Narodnog ženskog saveza” [Statement of Condolence of the NCW], *Ženski pokret* 13 (1928): 1; “Zagrebačke ženske organizacije na pogrebu poginulih poslanika” [Women's Organizations of Zagreb at the Funeral of the Dead Parliament Members], *Ženski pokret* 13 (1928): 1; See also: Alijansa ženskih pokreta, “Ob smrti Stjepana Radića” [Upon Death of Stjepan Radić], *Ženski pokret* 16 (1928): 1.

assassin into the parliament.²⁶⁵ At the same time, Štebi invited women to be the rational actor in the public sphere, to be “that element that calms, advises, and puts the events [i.e. the parliamentary shooting] into the real light.”²⁶⁶ After the shooting, on July 5, ŽP organized a public meeting of its members and friends; reportedly, some of the Croatian women who lived in Belgrade attended. The speakers at this meeting, among them the Alliance president Alojzija Štebi and Belgrade ŽP member Milena Atanacković, insisted that more collaboration among women was needed, and invited all the women to act in order to make sure that this crime would not create an “unbridgeable gap” in the common life of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.²⁶⁷

Several women held speeches on this occasion, among them Milena Atanacković. Her opening words revealed her concern that the assassination would influence “national unity”:

In the desire to manifest [the existence of] our women’s political consciousness in the context of every important moment in our country, Ženski pokret decided to dedicate this first wider meeting to the painful political event that happened in our country. June 20 will remain recorded in our history as one of the most ferocious days we went through in the development of our national life.²⁶⁸

She argued that women had to come forward and, with their sense of justice and fairness, had to contribute to the “national unity” remaining intact “even through this crisis.” She added that it was necessary to find out where the hindrance to the “strong development of our nation” lay, a nation which she thought had “all the conditions for an ideal organization.”²⁶⁹

In her speech, moreover, Atanacković directly expressed her view of the parliamentary shooting. She rejected the notion that its cause was, as some argued, Serbian-Croatian hatred,

²⁶⁵ Alojzija Štebi, “Crni dani” [Black Days], *Ženski pokret* 13 (1928): 1.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ “Ženski Pokret u Beogradu i sadašnja politička situacija” [ŽP in Belgrade and Contemporary Political Situation], *Ženski pokret* 14–15 (1928): 1–2; See also: Alojzija Štebi, “Frontovi mržnje” [Fronts of Hatred], *Ženski pokret* 17 (1928): 1.

²⁶⁸ In original: “U želji, da se u svakom važnom momentu u našoj zemlji manifestuje i politička svest naše žene, Ženski Pokret je odlučio da ovaj prvi svoj širi sastanak posveti bolnom političkom događaju, koji se desio u našoj zemlji. 20 juni ostaće u našoj istoriji zabeležen, kao jedan od najsvirepijih dana, kroz koji smo prošli u razvitku našeg narodnog života.” “Ženski Pokret u Beogradu i sadašnja politička situacija”, 1–2.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

and reified the pro-Yugoslav stance of the feminists and their conscious effort to overcome the differences through their common work:

It is not true that it had to come to that [the assassination] due to the tribal intolerance of our nation (*plemenska netrpeljivost našega naroda*). We, the women, have in our work clearly felt that this tribal difference (*plemenska razlika*)—which to an extent has to exist due to the historical development through which our nation has gone, and due to the perfidious game of the century-old enemy of our nation, who had attempted to set us against each other and separate us—that this tribal difference can be smoothed out if one reaches out to the other with trust, and if there is only an honest desire for cooperation in all fields. Let us be assured that work brings us closer, that work raises the spirit and empowers, and that the positive results of an honest common work create the strongest spiritual unity.²⁷⁰

According to Atanacković, the main problem in the Kingdom SHS was a “terribly suffocating atmosphere” between the political parties. Contrasting “tribal” or inter-ethnic intolerance to inter-party intolerance, Atanacković argued that the latter was the main problem, and saw the differences between Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes as a side-effect, rather than the cause of the problem. She concluded that the events in the National Assembly were not only “the greatest disgrace of our country” but also “a horrific and heavy warning” that its political methods needed to change: “We appeal to women, with their stance, their work, their influence in the family and social life, to act upon it so that the consequences of the crime of June 20 do not excavate an unbridgeable gap in the common life of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.”²⁷¹

Alojzija Štebi echoed the need for Yugoslav cooperation between people in Yugoslavia. She likened it to the reconciliation attempts between France and Germany after WWI, stressing that such efforts should be led by women, youth, artists, and scientists, rather than solely by professional politicians.²⁷² On another occasion, she explained that even though the country was “nationally homogeneous,” for years it had been “a theatre of bitter national struggles, and

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Štebi, “Frontovi mržnje”, 1.

the number of those who were not seduced by this unnatural phenomenon was small.”²⁷³

Emphasizing how much effort was needed to gather the Alliance organizations under one name—*Ženski pokret*—she added:

That women gathered in different parts of the country under one and the same name, guided by equal aspirations, that they so firmly advocated for the principle that social aspirations must be elevated above artificial national frictions, ladies, we must record this as a significant and true victory. This victory has been achieved by women only because they were deeply convinced that after the war, we entered an age that groups people according to social aspirations.²⁷⁴

Her further statement confirmed that the Yugoslav feminists consciously engaged in cooperation, not only in spite of but also against the conflicts and misunderstandings and the conflicting nation-building projects. The Alliance of Women’s Movements, then, responded to the rise of tensions after the June 1928 assassinations with calls for more common work and cooperation, and explicitly stated their views of the “national unity.”

Referring to the Croatian women’s response, Štebi wrote that sadly some Croatian women have succumbed to the viewpoint of the political parties “to ruthlessly and without reflection destroy everything, which is common to us.”²⁷⁵ She further insisted that “even the most fanatical separatist must admit, that the NCW has thrown out from its vocabulary the word of tribal hegemony and that it has always protected with equal love the Croatian, Slovenian, and Serbian woman.”²⁷⁶ There are no sources which would show that Croatian women left the Alliance, but we know that some Croatian women decided to leave the NCW, with which the Alliance at this point closely cooperated, and formed their own alliance of Croatian women’s associations.²⁷⁷ Among them were writer and publicist Marija Kumičić

²⁷³ “O desetogodišnjici Ženskog pokreta u Beogradu” [On the 10-year Anniversary of ŽP Belgrade], *Ženski pokret* 17–20 (1929): 1–2.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Alojzija Štebi, “Ipak!” [After All!], *Ženski pokret* 18 (1928): 1.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

(1863–1945) and Zdenka Smrekar (1886–1946) from Zagreb, who had previously taken part in the Alliance’s demonstrations on October 9, 1927.²⁷⁸ There were some Croatian women’s associations and women that stayed in the Council, including Zlata Kovačević Lopašić and Danica Bedeković, who consequently suffered public attacks from some other Croatian women, whereas the Council stood in their defense.²⁷⁹

Kumičić and Smrekar leaving the NCW, however, did not affect the Yugoslav feminists’ work, as their agenda had been very different anyway. Marija Kumičić was a founder of a conservative and Croatian nationalist women’s organization Hrvatska žena (Croatian Woman, 1921–1943), and an ardent supporter of pre-WWI Croatian politician Ante Starčević, whose nineteenth-century ideology was rooted in the idea of the Croatian state right, sought to oppose Austrian and Hungarian, and later also Serbian “oppression,” and was against the Yugoslavist camp in Croatia before WWI.²⁸⁰ It is in this framework that Kumičić approached the “woman question” in her 1906 antimodernist publication *Žensko pitanje* (The Woman Question), in which she argued that the “woman question” was imported from abroad, argued that she was a slave as a Croat and not as a woman, and opposed women’s suffrage rights.²⁸¹ We know very little about her cooperation with the Alliance in the 1920s, except that in 1927 she participated in the Alliance’s pro-suffrage assembly, which means that she changed her mind regarding suffrage.²⁸² Zdenka Smrekar (1886–1946) was a prominent member of the Hrvatska žena organization and was, like Kumičić, of anti-Yugoslavist orientation. Although comparatively more interested in feminist questions than Kumičić, her ideology still

²⁷⁸ “Naši zborovi” [Our Assemblies], *Ženski pokret* 18 (1927): 1–2.

²⁷⁹ Narodni ženski savez, “Saopštenje zagrebačke sekcije NŽS” [Statement of the Zagreb section of the NCW], *Ženski pokret* 19 (1928): 1; “‘IZDAJSTVO’ GĐE ZLATE KOVAČEVIĆ” [‘Betrayal’ of Mrs Zlata Kovačević], *Ženski pokret* 18 (1928): 1–2.

²⁸⁰ Trencsényi et al., *History I*, 285–286. See also: Marija Kumičić, *Govor u spomen stogodišnjice rođenja Dra Ante Starčevića 23.V 1923* (Naklada Hrvatske žene, 1923).

²⁸¹ Lucija Benyovsky, “Marija Kumičić i *Žensko pitanje*” [Marija Kumičić and the *Woman Question*], in *Kako je bilo... O Zagorki i ženskoj povijesti* [How it was... About Zagorka and Women’s History], ed. Sandra Prlenda (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije, 2011), 119–144, especially 128.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 130.

predominantly focused on conservative values of family and motherhood. Between 1935 and 1938, she edited and published the journal *Naša žena* (Our Woman), in which she published texts in support of Nazi Germany, and in June 1941 became the division head for women's education in the Ministry of Religion and Education in the fascist Independent State of Croatia.²⁸³

After the parliamentary shooting, the royal dictatorship, established in 1929, was another major blow for the Alliance. In January 1929, King Aleksandar responded to what the feminists saw as the “suffocating political atmosphere” in his own way: he abolished the 1921 Constitution, dissolved the Parliament, banned all political parties, and assumed all political power in the state. Moreover, he also changed the name of the country to Kingdom of Yugoslavia and introduced a new administrative structure which divided the country into nine regions, *banovine* (*banovina* in singular), named after rivers and in one case the Adriatic sea.²⁸⁴ In order to preserve the Yugoslav national unity after the shooting the abolition of parliament was deemed necessary. The royal dictatorship promoted and enforced a kind of Yugoslavism called “integral Yugoslavism,” which banned promotion of any “tribal” or religious differences in the political and cultural life of Yugoslavia. Even a new Law on the Press banned publications which would contribute to the hatred among the “tribes” or Yugoslav disunity.²⁸⁵ The abolition of the parliament and banning of the political parties in this context were justified by claiming that parliamentarism, in its present form, lead to “spiritual disintegration and national disunity.”²⁸⁶ As historian Pieter Troch has recently argued, this Yugoslavism presented a synthesis of the various particularist symbolic resources into the Yugoslav national

²⁸³ Melissa Bokovoy, “Croatia,” *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*, ed. Kevin Passmore (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 113–117.

²⁸⁴ Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 104. The banovinas (and their capitals) were: Drava (Ljubljana), Sava (Zagreb), Littoral (Split), Vrbas (Banja Luka), Drina (Sarajevo), Zeta (Cetinje), Danube (Novi Sad), Vardar (Skopje), Morava (Niš). For a useful table with the explanations of each of the banovinas, see: Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 27.

²⁸⁵ Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 27.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

idea, so, as Troch argued, historians are not right to simplify it as Serbian nationalism in disguise. Yet, as he further argued, the manner in which this model of “integral Yugoslavism” was applied discredited the idea, as it tied Yugoslavism to authoritarian politics. Because of this, the opposition to the regime began to see the previously progressive idea of Yugoslavism as a conservative and authoritarian idea.²⁸⁷

The dictatorship affected the Alliance in at least two ways. First, in this new context, the Yugoslav feminists’ idea of cooperation and “national unity” became almost unseparable from that of King Aleksandar’s conservative and authoritarian regime. The Yugoslav women’s national ideology seems to have changed slightly in the new context, but the leaders of the AŽP remained tied to the practice of cooperation. An example that confirms this is Alojzija Štebi’s reaction to the protest of some Croatian women that they could not take part in the 1936 ICW congress hosted in the Dalmatian town of Dubrovnik, just because they were not members of NCWY. On this occasion, Zdenka Smrekar and some members of Kumičić’s organization *Hrvatska žena* (Croatian Woman) came to the congress and protested the fact that the Croatian women had not been invited.²⁸⁸ In her reaction, Štebi confirmed her position on the importance of cooperation, yet she talked no longer of “national unity” but of cooperation of women and seeking “what is common for a variety of national individualities.”²⁸⁹ Finally, Štebi highlighted that the NCWY, even though it was called Yugoslav, never offended any of the members’ national sentiments, but that its main goal was to bring together women for the purpose of “solving issues which were important for all national groups of our women, who live together in one state community.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Troch, “Yugoslavism,” 232–236, particularly 236.

²⁸⁸ For more about this, see: Ograjšek Gorenjak, “Yugoslav Women’s Movement,” 730–731.

²⁸⁹ Alojzija Štebi, “Umesto izveštaja o Kongresu Internacionalnog ženskog saveza u Dubrovniku” [Instead of Report on the ICW Congress in Dubrovnik], *Ženski pokret* 7/10 (1936): 50–55, especially 55.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

Secondly, the dictatorship had a huge impact on most of the voluntary associations in the state,²⁹¹ the Alliance being no exception. As one of the aspects of the dictatorship was the abolition of all political organizations, in March 1929 ŽP Belgrade was reported to have held an urgent meeting, and to have made changes in its rules to keep the organization legal, because it could no longer have the demand for women's political rights in its program. It furthermore announced that:

ŽP will in the future completely remain within the scope of its previous work, providing the widest protection to women, investing the combined power of organized women to improve their position before the law, it will be an interpreter of the aspirations and needs of our women, it will enlighten them to see the need for a general improvement of women's position in society and the state. The main task of ŽP in this regard will be to direct women as conscious citizens to perform their civic duties in the broadest and highest sense of the word. This work of ŽP, which has been the foundation of all its actions until now, will best contribute to our women responding to all the duties that are expected of an enlightened woman in modern society and the state.²⁹²

At this meeting, Alliance's president Alojzija Štebi was also chosen to be the president of Belgrade ŽP.²⁹³

The new political context brought a decrease in the number of organizations, and at the Alliance Assembly in January 1930 it was noted that since its previous meeting (which had been before the dictatorship), many ŽPs were discontinued; present were only delegates from Belgrade, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Skopje, and Varaždin.²⁹⁴ In 1932, there were only seven active ŽPs.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ See Fabio Giomi and Stefano Petrunaro, ed., "Voluntary Associations in Yugoslavia (1918-1941)," *European Review of History* 26, no. 1 (2019): 1–162.

²⁹² "Vanredna skupština Ženskog pokreta u Beogradu" [Extraordinary Assembly of ŽP Belgrade], *Ženski pokret* 6 (1929): 2.

²⁹³ Ibid; "Nova uprava Ženskog pokreta u Beogradu" [New Administration of ŽP Belgrade], *Ženski pokret* 17–20 (1929): 4. The elected vice-presidents were Zorka Kasnar Karadžić and Dr. Ksenija Atanasijević, board members Milena Atanacković, Darinka Lacković, Vera Kičevac, and others.

²⁹⁴ "Sastanak Alijanse ženskih pokreta" [AŽP meeting], *Ženski pokret* 3–4 (1930): 2. ŽPs in Split, Kragujevac, Bosanski Brod, Beli Manastir, and Bitola were apparently discontinued.

²⁹⁵ Belgrade, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Varaždin, Beli Manastir, and Skopje. Alojzija Štebi, "Sednica upravnog odbora Alijanse ženskih pokreta" [AŽP Board Meeting], *Ženski pokret* 5 (1932): 70–71.

However, notwithstanding the decrease in the number of member organizations and the removal of the demand for women's suffrage, the Alliance remained active. Some new efforts were undertaken to publish more; for example, the Zagreb ŽP president Kočonda Vodvarka edited *Moderna žena* (Modern Woman), a weekly supplement to the Zagreb newspaper *Novosti* (News) in the period between October 1929 and May 1931,²⁹⁶ and in Ljubljana the ŽP vice-president Angela Vode published weekly in the newspaper *Jutro* (The Morning). In 1931, ŽP Ljubljana adopted a program for the upcoming three years, which encompassed the establishment of a club and reading rooms, various lectures, an asylum for unemployed workers whose goal would be to protect women apprentices, as well as counselling and assistance offices for the choice of professions, for the protection of women released from prison, for the tutoring of children born out of wedlock, and so forth.²⁹⁷

In the early 1930s, the Alliance demanded equal pay for equal work, equal dearness allowance²⁹⁸ for all men and women, and a two-month maternity leave.²⁹⁹ In 1932, the Alliance was active in responding to the new government regulations according to which married women would lose their paid positions. Large demonstrations were held in Belgrade, Zagreb, Split, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo in 1934, and with success, as the government decree to decrease the number of women working in state institutions was eventually withdrawn.³⁰⁰ The main activity of the Alliance and ŽP in the early 1930s was the holding of lectures, focused on making women familiar with legal changes (regarding, for instance, inheritance law, civic law, and so on).³⁰¹ In Ljubljana, lectures included topics such as the development of social and

²⁹⁶ Slava Rastovčan, "Izvještaj o glavnoj godišnjoj skupštini Ženskoga pokreta u Zagrebu" [Report on the Main Annual Assembly of Zagreb ŽP], *Ženski pokret* 11–12 (1930): 2–3; "'Završna riječ' – prva riječ" [Final Word, First Word], *Ženski pokret* 23–24 (1931): 1–2.

²⁹⁷ "Rad Ženskih pokreta," 2. See also: Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 283.

²⁹⁸ A component of one's salary aimed at hedging the impact of inflation.

²⁹⁹ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 281–284.

³⁰⁰ "Profesionalni rad žena" [Professional Work of Women], *Ženski pokret* 7–8 (1931): 1–2. Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 290.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

economic conditions in the Western and Central states of Europe, economic crisis, Soviet Russia, Marxism and Christian socialism, and so forth.³⁰²

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the ways in which feminists created cooperation from 1917 onward, in four steps: first, by exploring the journal *Ženski svijet/Jugoslavenska žena*, then by exploring the rise of cooperation among Yugoslav self-identified feminists through the NCW from 1919 and then independently from the NCW until they formed the Feminist Alliance in 1923, which was renamed AŽP in 1926. The third section examined different versions of Yugoslavism which women at the founding progress of the NCW in 1919 propagated, and then in the fourth section I explored the feminist responses to the political turmoil of the late 1920s, predominantly the parliamentary shooting and the introduction of the royal dictatorship.

As I argued, the cooperation among women from different parts of Yugoslavia, from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and many other parts of the state, is far more extensive than the historiography has so far demonstrated. As shown, the initial “place” of cooperation of the women who would in the 1920s and 1930s cooperate in the Alliance of Women’s Movements, but also the NCW, was the journal *Ženski svijet/Jugoslavenska žena*, edited by Ljubljana-born and Zagreb-based feminist Zofka Kveder. *Ženski svijet*, in 1918 renamed *Jugoslavenska žena*, was a pro-Yugoslav journal which advocated for women’s suffrage rights and their political participation in the new state, as well as voicing the first common demands for the social and political equality of women. Many of the women who would become the leaders of the Yugoslav feminist movement throughout the interwar years initially “met” through Kveder’s journal. A closer cooperation among these and many other women began in the framework of

³⁰² Angela Vode, “Socijalno-politički tečaj Ženskega pokreta v Ljubljani” [Socially-Political Course of ŽP Ljubljana], *Ženski pokret* 10 (1932): 151.

the NCW, which was established in September 1919. Yet very soon, primarily because of the NCW leadership's negative stance toward the need to demand women's suffrage, self-identified feminists began to meet independently of the NCW. After some coordinated campaigns in the early 1920s, and after the 1923 IWSA congress in Rome, feminists founded the Feminist Alliance in 1923, with a clearly stated program demanding "women's liberation" through political participation *and* through legal and social reforms, for the purpose of a complete equality between men and women. In 1926, the organization was renamed the Alliance of Women's Movements, from then on uniting only *Ženski pokret* organizations, organizations modeled after the Belgrade *ŽP* founded in 1919, which expanded across Yugoslavia in the second half of the 1920s. At the same time, feminists remained involved in the work of the NCW, with their influence rising when the former Belgrade *ŽP* president Leposava Petković became the Council's president in 1925. In terms of the history of organization, the chapter showed that the Alliance continued to function well until 1929, when the royal dictatorship was proclaimed, and when the leadership decided to remove the demand for suffrage from the Alliance's program, which remained the case until 1935, as I will discuss in chapter 3.

If feminists from the whole of Yugoslavia cooperated from even before the end of WWI, what was their national ideology? This chapter argued that the cooperation of feminists from various parts of the country must be examined through their pro-Yugoslavist orientation. At the 1919 NCW founding congress, as I showed, there were four main different versions of Yugoslavism present among the women activists in attendance. First was Zofka Kveder's "unitarist Yugoslavism," which understood Yugoslav national unity as singular and indivisible, and diminished the "tribal" differences between Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. This was also the position of the Democratic Party and the Yugoslav nationalist paramilitary organization ORJUNA, with which, as I showed, Kveder was increasingly connected. The second was

“centralized” or “compromised” Yugoslavism, which was the kind of Yugoslavism propagated by the Serbian Radical Party and advocated by Serbian women who understood Yugoslavism as a “three-named-nation” of three different “tribes”: Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The third was that of the Croatian journalist and writer Marija Jurić Zagorka, who, disappointed with the Serbian women’s position, soon opted out of the Yugoslav feminist and women’s movement and turned to Croatian women’s organizations. Women who advocated for these three positions would not remain in the Yugoslav feminist organization. The position of the fourth group, which I referred to as “civic feminists,” advocated for “cultural Yugoslavism,” which would remain the core of the Yugoslav feminists’ future national ideology.

As I argued, the “civic feminists” supported Yugoslavist national unity, seeing it as a useful framework for their cooperation and advocacy for feminist issues, with which they were primarily concerned. In other words, it could be argued that the “civic feminists” thought that the feminist movement could be successful only if women from all parts of the state participated in building it, and together worked for changes which would improve women’s position in Yugoslav society. As shown in section four, in the analysis of feminist responses to the 1928 assassination in parliament, the leading women in the Alliance, Alojzija Štebi and Milena Atanacković, kept their stance of national unity. The core of their political position was that the shootings in the parliament, when a member of the Serbian Radicals killed three members of the Croatian Peasant Party, were *not* an expression of hatred between Croats and Slovenes, but rather a consequence of “inter-party intolerance” and the corrupt work of the political parties. The fact that they reiterated the need for cooperation between people from the whole country, and highlighted that women could especially help in this, confirms that the feminists were mindful about their cooperation, which they pursued despite and against the rising tensions in the country. The two case studies from two different periods—the early and late 1920s—point to the continuity of their orientation towards the idea of national unity.

Nevertheless, the example of Štebi's 1936 response to the Croatian nationalist women's attack and her use of the 1930s concept of "national individualities," rather than "Yugoslav nation" or "tribes" suggest that their conceptualization of Yugoslavism was flexible, as long as the cooperation remained at its core.

2. The Yugoslav feminists and the Little Entente of Women: transformation of liberal feminism

Yugoslav women organized not only at the national but also at the international level, and they drew inspiration from and co-constituted transnational feminist agendas. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, Yugoslav women in the interwar period actively participated in the two major international women's organizations that historian Leila J. Rupp examined in her seminal 1997 book *Worlds of Women*: the International Council of Women (ICW, founded in 1888) and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (since 1926 the International Alliance of Women, IWSA/IAW, founded in 1904).³⁰³ This chapter's central focus is the Yugoslav women's involvement in another international women's organization, the Little Entente of Women (LEW), founded by Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, Romanian, Greek, Polish, and Bulgarian feminists during the IWSA's ninth congress in Rome in 1923. In connection to the LEW and as a secondary focus, the chapter will briefly examine the Yugoslav women's connections with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), established in 1919 in Zurich. Although the Yugoslav women officially joined this organization only in 1934, this chapter will offer more insight into why this happened only then, despite the attempts of both Yugoslav women and WILPF women to forge the connection as early as the 1920s.

Although a decade ago the LEW was only briefly mentioned in scholarship,³⁰⁴ recent research has meaningfully advanced our knowledge about the LEW, as historians have published on the organization's structure, membership, and congresses, its pacifist and political program, and the limited aspect of its transnationalism.³⁰⁵ Particularly since the 2022 special

³⁰³ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*.

³⁰⁴ For example: Offen, *European feminisms*, 343.

³⁰⁵ Roxana Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies and Activism in Romania (Approx. 1890–1940s): Nationalism and Internationalism in Romanian Projects for Women's Emancipation (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2005), 475–533; Jasmina Milanović, "Regionalna ženska udruženja, Mala Antanta žena i Jedinstvo slovenskih žena" [Regional Women's Associations, Little Entente of Women and the Unity of Slav Women] in

forum on the LEW published in the journal *Aspasia*, we know significantly more about the political aspect of the LEW, the ethno-nationalist ideology of many of its members, as well as the alignment of the LEW's agendas with each of the respective states' foreign policy goals.³⁰⁶ Building on the existing research, in my analysis I consider LEW an ambiguous organization: that is, an organization that is difficult to characterize because of its two equally dominant characteristics. Namely, on the one hand, LEW was an organization through which feminist organizations from the above-mentioned countries established cross-border cooperation with the aim of challenging women's political, social, and economic inequality in their respective nation-states. On the other hand, scholars have highlighted the anti-revisionist and ethno-nationalist character of LEW, even calling it a "transnational ethno-nationalist community," reminding us that the link between feminism and nationalism was the rule rather than the exception in interwar Europe.³⁰⁷ According to historian Maria Bucur, "as they forged transnational bridges and built friendships across borders, the feminists of the LEW articulated a vision of progress deeply rooted in ethno-nationalism and racialized rhetoric."³⁰⁸ Many studies have shown that nationalism, internationalism, and feminism commonly went hand in hand. Carol Miller showed that feminists in the interwar period often turned to the international arena to bolster their national demands, while the ICW and the IWSA, as historian Susan

Jugoslavija i Poljska u XX veku: međunarodni tematski zbornik radova sa konferencije Jugoslovensko-poljski odnosi u XX veku. (Beograd, Bidgošć: Institut za savremenu istoriju: Društvo istoričara Srbije "Stojan Novaković", Institut za istoriju i međunarodne odnose, 2017); Ograjšek Gorenjak and Kardum, "Mala ženska antanta"; Isidora Grubački, "The Emergence of the Yugoslav Interwar Liberal Feminist Movement and the Little Entente of Women: An Entangled History Approach (1919–1924)," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/8515>; Marijana Kardum, "Interwar Women's Movements from the Little Entente to Nationalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History*, ed. John R. Lampe, Ulf Brunnbauer (London: Routledge, 2020), 223–230.

³⁰⁶ Katerina Dalakoura, "Feminisms and Politics in the Interwar Period. The Little Entente of Women (1923–1938)," *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 37–55. See also: Krassimira Daskalova, "The Little Entente of Women, Feminisms, Tensions, and Entanglements within the Interwar European Women's Movement," *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 13–36; Maria Bucur, "The Little Entente of Women as Transnational Ethno-Nationalist Community. Spotlight on Romania," *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 79–102; Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová, "Between Transnational Cooperation and Nationalism. The Little Entente of Women in Czechoslovakia," *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 56–78;

³⁰⁷ Bucur, "Little Entente of Women", 79–102.

³⁰⁸ Bucur, "Little Entente of Women", 79.

Zimmermann has demonstrated, have significantly contributed towards the nationalization of women's movements in East Central Europe.³⁰⁹

By focusing on the LEW, and briefly also on the WILPF, this chapter will examine more closely the activity and ideas of the Yugoslav liberal feminist generation, the cooperation of feminists of different political orientations within this movement, as well as the transformation of their political alliances from the 1920s to the 1930s. The chapter proposes two arguments. First, I argue that the LEW must be taken into account as part of the transnational activism of Yugoslav women's feminisms, as it was the most important organization in which Yugoslav feminists were active in the 1920s. Characterizing LEW as an ambiguous organization which could be used for the propagation of both feminist and nationalist aims, I will demonstrate that the Yugoslav women used the LEW framework predominantly for propagating feminism. My second argument concerns the transformation of liberal feminism, which I suggest can be illustrated through the analysis of the ideological differences of the feminists involved with the LEW.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I explore the Little Entente of Women from its founding in 1923 until its final congress in 1929 and delineate in more detail the organization's ambiguous character mentioned above. After that, I discuss who the Yugoslav delegates at the LEW congresses were, arguing that these were all women active in the Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP). The third section analyzes the Yugoslav feminists' political thought as expressed in their speeches at the LEW and their reports on the organization. The fourth section examines the restructuring of the LEW in the 1930s and argues that the LEW in the 1930s was no longer a feminist, but rather a women's political organization. Section five

³⁰⁹ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 107-129; Miller, "Geneva - the Key to Equality"; Zimmermann, "The Challenge of Multinational Empire for the International Women's Movement," 87-117.

briefly explores why Yugoslav women did not participate in the WILPF, analyzing it in light of the LEW's aims.

2.1. The LEW in the 1920s: an ambiguous organization

At the ninth IWSA congress, held in May 1923 in Rome, the congress participants from Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland, Greece, and Bulgaria came together and established a transnational women's organization, which they named the Little Entente of Women.³¹⁰ At this IWSA congress, as elaborated by historian Mona L. Siegel, the veteran female activists who had entered the political stage during the 1919 Paris Peace negotiations “came together with eager newcomers to take stock of their achievements, reflect on their disappointments, and build momentum for the battles to come.”³¹¹ The congress was an important catalyst for a consolidation of feminist initiatives that had been surging in the post-WWI period in Europe and beyond. The founding of the Feminist Alliance in Yugoslavia several months after the Rome congress (as demonstrated in chapter 1) was a part of this broader trend, as well as, for example, the leading Czech feminist Františka Plamínková's founding of the Czech National Council of Women that same year.³¹²

Apart from Ženski pokret, the Yugoslav organization that co-founded the LEW, the organizations that participated in founding of the LEW were the National Council of Romanian Women (Romania), the League of Greek Women for Woman's Rights (Greece), the Alliance of Women's Suffrage and the Central Association of Czech Women (Czechoslovakia), and the Political Club of Progressive Women (Poland).³¹³ Individual women who were active members

³¹⁰ As I discuss later, the Bulgarian women were soon afterwards excluded from the organization.

³¹¹ Mona L. Siegel, *Peace on our terms. The Global Battle for Women's Rights After the First World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 238.

³¹² Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1950* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 52–53.

³¹³ Bucur, “Little Entente of Women”. See also: *1er conference de la petite entente des femmes. Discours prononcés aux seances publiques des 3 et 4 novembre 1923* (Bucuresti. Tigografija “Dorneanu” Cala Mosilor 129, 1923).

of these feminist organizations took part in the LEW's activities, and the LEW had a rotating presidency.³¹⁴ The LEW's main activities were the five congresses it organized in the 1920s, which took place in Bucharest in 1923, Belgrade in 1924, Athens in 1925, Prague in 1927, and Warsaw in 1929. This is why, when I write about women "involved with the work of the LEW" or "participating in the LEW" in this chapter, I will in fact refer to the women who were members of the LEW member organizations, and more specifically the women who participated in the LEW congresses, as this is the most important way the sources allow us to evaluate individual women's activities in the LEW. The LEW had a rotating presidency.

What was the LEW, and what brought the women who participated in this organization together? Milena Atanacković, one of the Yugoslav representatives at the Rome congress, wrote a report about it in *Ženski pokret*: she detailed the two main goals which were set upon the LEW's founding. The first goal concerned increasing the visibility of women from the six countries in international women's organizations by having a member from the LEW in the Executive Bureau of the IWSA who would represent the interests of all LEW members.³¹⁵ This was quite an important issue for the Yugoslav feminists; it had been brought up earlier by the writer and activist Isidora Sekulić, one of three Yugoslav delegates to the 1920 ICW congress in Oslo. In her report on the 1920 congress, Sekulić expressed discontent with the organized women's work in the international circles. Due to the lack of financial support, she said, it was difficult for women from smaller and poorer countries such as theirs to participate in social networking, but as she further suggested, Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian women needed to be consistent in their "thoughtful and intelligent cooperation in ten boards of the ICW" through

³¹⁴ The presidents were: Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1923–1924), Leposava Petković (1924–1925), Avra Theodoropoulou (1925–1927), Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka (1927–1929), and again Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1929–1933). Ograjšek Gorenjak and Kardum, "Mala ženska antanta."

³¹⁵ Milena Atanacković, "Mala feministička antanta, liga za mir i slobodu" [Little Feminist Entente, League for Peace and Freedom], *Ženski pokret* 6 (1923): 264–268. See also Cheşchebec, "Feminist Ideologies," 525.

steady correspondence.³¹⁶ Sekulić thus already articulated in 1920 the need for the Yugoslav women to think about *how* they could become more involved in the work of the international women's organizations.

The strategy of increasing the LEW women's visibility within international women's organizations was quite effective. The idea of assigning one LEW member in the IWSA Executive Bureau proved successful; as early as 1923, Avra Theodoropoulou of the League for Women's Rights in Greece was elected to the board of the IWSA.³¹⁷ The LEW congresses were also used to exchange information about other international congresses: for example, at the 1924 congress in Belgrade, the Czechoslovak delegate Františka Plamínková³¹⁸ reported about an ICW conference on the prevention of war, held in Wembley in May 1924, whereas the Polish representative Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka reported on the WILPF 1924 congress held in Washington.³¹⁹ In the following years, the women from the LEW member organizations became increasingly active in the ICW and the IWSA/IAW. At the 1925 ICW Congress in Washington, the Serbian journalist Ana Hristić was elected one of the ICW secretaries;³²⁰ the Romanian and Czechoslovak representatives Alexandrina Cantacuzino and Františka Plamínková were elected ICW Vice Presidents;³²¹ the president of the Yugoslav NCW, Leposava Petković was elected ICW board member in 1925; and Milena Atanacković from

³¹⁶ Isidora Sekulić Stremnicka, "Izveštaj sekretara saveza za stranu korespondenciju u 1921" [Isidora Sekulić Stremnicka, Report of Secretary for Foreign Correspondence in 1921], *Ženski pokret* 11–12 (1921), 376.

³¹⁷ Atanacković, "Mala feministička antanta," 264–268; Women and Social Movements, International Database, 1923 IWSA Report of Ninth Congress, Rome, Italy, May 12th to 19th, 1923, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C1631885 (Accessed May 30, 2023), 70.

³¹⁸ De Haan, et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 436–440.

³¹⁹ De Haan, et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 80–84. "Izveštaj g-đe Frantiske Plaminkove o konferenciji Međunarodnog ženskog saveza u Wembley-u" [Report of Mrs Františka Plamínková on the Conference of ICW in Wembley], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 343–348; "Izveštaj Dr. J. Budzinske-Tilicke sa kongresa Internacionalne lige za mir i slobodu" [Report of Dr. J. Budzińska-Tylicka, *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 356–361.

³²⁰ M. Krstić, "Kongres Međunarodnog Saveza Žena u Vašingtonu" [ICW Congress in Washington], *Ženski pokret* 6 (1925): 221–124. Ana Hristić lived in the United Kingdom and had represented Serbia in the ICW since the 1900s.

³²¹ Milena Atanacković, "Izveštaj sa kongresa I.Ž.S. održanog u Vašingtonu" [ICW Washington congress report] *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1925): 330.

Belgrade ŽP was elected a IWSA board member in 1926.³²² Hence, feminists from Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Greece became gradually involved with the work of the international women's organizations already in the 1920s.

Whereas the first LEW goal of promoting women from ECE countries in the ICW and IWSA was rather straightforward, the second one was less clear, as it was defined in two parts. Namely, as Milena Atanacković reported, the second goal encompassed “joint work on the social, economic, and political empowerment of women” and “working in solidarity to eliminate all misunderstandings that might arise between [our] countries, with the aim of preserving general peace.”³²³ These two complementary, yet different aspects were maintained throughout the work of the LEW in the 1920s, organized through five congresses. On the one hand, the congresses' programs encompassed women's rights, including the issues of women's suffrage and women's political participation, the position of children born out of wedlock and their mothers, the marriage codes in different countries, and the position of women public servants.³²⁴ On the other hand, the women at the LEW advocated the idea that durable peace and regional stability were only possible if women participated equally with men in the consolidation of the post-WWI nation-states.³²⁵ Moreover, apart from holding congresses, the LEW engaged in other activities, such as providing stipends for students between Czechoslovakia and Romania and organizing exhibitions of women's art and handiwork.³²⁶ However, congresses were the most visible aspect of the LEW's work, and in the upcoming analysis I will mainly focus on them.

³²² Milena Atanacković, “Izveštaj o radu kongresa Internacionalne Alianse za Žensko Pravo Glasa” [Report on the work of IWSA congress], *Ženski pokret* 6 (1926): 194; 204. Marodić, “Izveštaj ŽP za 1926, 433.

³²³ Milena Atanacković, “Mala feministička antanta,” 264. The founding act of LEW, printed in the report of the first congress held in Bucharest in November 1923, confirmed this. “Acte constitutive de la Petite Entente des Femmes. P.E.F.”, *1er conference*, 3–4. The signatories from Yugoslavia were Leposava Maksimović-Petković and Milena Atanacković.

³²⁴ Ograjšek Gorenjak and Kardum, “Mala ženska antanta.”

³²⁵ Cheşchebec, “Feminist Ideologies,” 515.

³²⁶ Ograjšek Gorenjak and Kardum, “Mala ženska antanta,” 131.

Because the LEW had a name very similar to the Little Entente (LE), it is easy to assume that the LEW was the female version of LE, which was an antirevisionist political, economic, and military alliance founded in 1919 by Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia to counter the tendencies of the countries defeated in World War I, mainly Hungary, but also Bulgaria, Germany, and the Soviet Union.³²⁷ The LE's primary goal was to protect the territorial status quo of these new, Habsburg successor states, and more broadly the European international order set up with the post-WWI peace Treaties of Versailles (June 1919), Neuilly-sur-Seine (November 1919), and Trianon (June 1920), after which Germany, Bulgaria, and Hungary lost significant territories to their neighboring Allied countries, Yugoslavia included.³²⁸ The feminists active in the LEW, like the LE, supported the postwar territorial status quo,³²⁹ and in many ways excluded non-dominant ethnic groups. For instance, there were no Hungarian, Austrian, or German women represented at the LEW congresses; this, as Maria Bucur has argued, significantly weakened the effectiveness of the LEW's work.³³⁰

However, we should be careful not to understand the LEW as simply the female version of the LE. First, because the view on the LE/LEW relationship was not the same among all the participants in the LEW. To begin with, the LEW also included Greek and Polish feminists, whose countries were not a part of the LE.³³¹ A report in *Ženski pokret* underlined the difference: whereas the men's LE was based on "resistance towards the enemy," the LEW was based on "pacifist principles"; all the disagreements among the nations, the report concluded, were the work of insincere male politicians.³³² Moreover, the LEW was also co-constituted by the Bulgarian representative in Rome, Jeni Bozhilova-Pateva, who signed the agreement to

³²⁷ Zdenjek Sladek, *Mala Antanta 1919-1938. Njene privredne, političke i vojne komponente* [The Little Entente 1919-1938. Its economic, political, and military components], transl. Vladan Matić (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2019 [2000]).

³²⁸ Michael S. Neiberg, *The Treaty of Versailles. A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³²⁹ Češčebeć, "Feminist Ideologies," 512.

³³⁰ Bucur, "Little Entente of Women," 80.

³³¹ Češčebeć, "Feminist Ideologies," 513.

³³² "Izveštaj UO ženskog pokreta za godišnju skupštinu." *Ženski pokret* 7 (1924): 292.

participate in the LEW. I see the fact that Bulgaria initially joined the LEW not as “somewhat ambiguous and against the logic of regional political groupings and the anti-revisionist character of the new organization,” as Krassimira Daskalova recently assessed,³³³ but rather as an indicator that the political agenda of the organization which all participating women could agree on was at the time only vaguely defined.³³⁴ The participants themselves were also not on the same page about the LEW’s relationship with the LE. While some, such as the Greek delegate Avra Theodoropoulou, reminded their colleagues that the LEW had never been an offshoot of the LE and explained that the name of the LEW was chosen merely for the sake of defining its “geographical scope,”³³⁵ others, such as the Romanian delegate Alexandrina Cantacuzino, continuously insisted on the LEW’s connection with the LE.³³⁶ Milena Atanacković’s understanding was closer to that of Theodoropoulou, as at the 1927 congress in Prague, she stated: “we cannot say that we are the vanguard of a political union, because we cannot know whether we will always agree with the political L.E.”³³⁷ From these examples, it is evident that there was no unified view on the LEW and its relationship with the LE.

What, then, did the women who participated in the LEW agree on and where did they differ? When it comes to the points of agreement, I see the LEW in the 1920s as an apogee of cooperation of liberal feminist generation in East Central Europe. Namely, the LEW united women’s organizations from different countries which all advocated for women’s equal political, social, and legal rights. For all the women participating in the LEW, the nation-states created after WWI were their main frame of reference; they engaged in this cross-border initiative with the goal of reforming their own, national states. At the same time, the nation-state was the women’s main focus of criticism: they critiqued it from a liberal feminist

³³³ Daskalova, “Little Entente of Women,” 18.

³³⁴ For more about Bulgaria, see 2.4.

³³⁵ Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 66; Dalakoura, “Feminisms and Politics,” 43.

³³⁶ Dalakoura, “Feminisms and Politics”; Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 66.

³³⁷ Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 66.

perspective, demanding reforms to be achieved in the sphere of women's political, social, and legal rights. Furthermore, neither the state framework, nor the post-WWI international state-order were to be challenged, and the LEW feminists would not tolerate feminists who did not agree with this. In this way, the idea of peace that the LEW promoted was very much tied to the aforementioned postwar peace treaties. Both concepts that the LEW promoted, women's rights and peace, were strictly tied to the idea of the existing nation-state.

Yet, this is where the commonality ended; as will become additionally visible below, although the feminists in the LEW based their cooperation on the idea of political rights for women and the struggle for reform of women's rights in the liberal post-WWI nation-states, they ultimately profoundly differed ideologically, and they had different understandings of the nation-state, as well as different visions of the LEW. The "civic feminists" among them would place greater emphasis on women's equal political, social, and legal rights, and understood the nation in social terms, highlighting social justice and social equality, whereas for "conservative" feminists the focus was on more traditionalist or ethnic nationalist notions of family, "race," and strengthening the nation.

As such, I view the LEW as an organization which was co-constituted by women of different political orientations, who had different aims and ideas of how this organization would be useful for them. Following this logic, what was the LEW for the Yugoslav feminists, and how was it connected to their vision of feminism?

2.2. Yugoslav feminists at the LEW congresses

So far, historians have written little about the Yugoslav women's participation in the LEW. An exception is Marijana Kardum's chapter on interwar women's movements published in the 2020 *Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History*, in which the author explores the LEW from the perspective of nationalism and the geopolitics of the region. Her

analysis of the Yugoslav women's participation in the LEW mainly focuses on the "political and ideological conflicts, joined by nationalist quarrels."³³⁸ Yet, a closer look at the internal dynamics within the Yugoslav feminist movement and the cooperation of Yugoslav feminists as analyzed in chapter 1 can bring to light new aspects to the existing analysis. In order to do so, it is necessary to first explore who the Yugoslav women active in the LEW were. The following section will therefore offer an overview of the Yugoslav women who attended the LEW congresses and were involved with the work of the LEW in this way, as apart from the congresses there were no other LEW activities in which, based on the sources available, the Yugoslav women appeared to participate. It will become clear from my analysis that the women who attended the LEW congresses were mostly "civic feminists" affiliated with different ŽP organizations (from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Split), which were all members of the AŽP. The two most important women were Milena Atanacković and Leposava Petković.



2.1. The Little Entente of Women group photographed at the 1926 IAW meeting in Paris, sitting. Leposava Petković is the second one from the left, sitting, whereas Milena Atanacković is the fifth one from the left, standing. Archiv Národního muzea, Prague, Fond PLAMÍNKOVÁ Františka.

³³⁸ Kardum, "Interwar Women's Movements," 226.



2.2. The Little Entente of Women group photographed at the 1926 IAW meeting in Paris, standing. Milena Atanacković is the second, and Leposava Petković the sixth from the left. Archiv Národního muzea, Prague, Fond PLAMÍNKOVÁ Františka.

Going back briefly to the 1923 IWSA congress, when the LEW was formed, it is important to recognize that the Yugoslav delegates to this congress were all either from *Ženski pokret*, or a part of the feminist “circle” of the National Council of Women; in the words of Milena Atanacković, the 1923 delegation was the “first purely feminist” Yugoslav delegation.³³⁹ Although Yugoslav representatives had participated in the IWSA and ICW congresses in 1920, at that time they were still consolidating their connections at the national level. It was only after the 1923 IWSA congress, and the establishment of the LEW and the Feminist Alliance, that the Yugoslav women’s involvement with the international women’s organizations increased. After 1923, Yugoslavia was represented at all congresses of the ICW, IWSA, and LEW in the interwar period, and even hosted the 1936 ICW Congress in Dubrovnik.

³³⁹ Atanacković, “Mala feministička antanta,” 264.

The Yugoslav delegations to the international women's organizations varied over the years in terms of size and diversity of origin of representatives, but the one woman represented in almost all delegations and the woman who wrote most of the reports on Yugoslav women's international activism, including the LEW, was Milena Atanacković.



2.3. Milena Atanacković, a photograph from *International Women's News, Jus Suffragii* 29, no. 7 (April, 1935): 62. LSE Digital Library, The Women's Library Collection, <https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1wr030030300004>.

Despite her very active participation as a Yugoslav representative in numerous women's congresses and congresses of other international organizations, historians have so far almost completely overlooked Milena Atanacković, mentioning her only occasionally in footnotes. According to Jovanka Kecman, whose extensive footnote on Atanacković is sadly the main source for this mini-biography, Atanacković was a “well-known social worker” born in Belgrade in 1894.³⁴⁰ She came from a well-known Belgrade military family and was one of seven children of General Jovan Atanacković (1848–1921) and his wife (name unknown to me).³⁴¹ After graduating from high school in Belgrade, Milena Atanacković worked as a nurse during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and World War I, which was relatively common for Serbian activist women during that period. When she retreated with the Serbian army to Corfu via Albania in 1915, she landed in Geneva, where she completed her law studies in 1919 and worked as a secretary for the Consulate of the Kingdom of SHS in Geneva until January 1921. After returning to Belgrade at the end of 1921 (likely due to her father's death), she began working at the Ministry of Social Policy in Belgrade.³⁴² Atanacković's professional career was, thus, from the beginning closely connected to the (newly established) state, and although we do not yet know much about what kind of work she did, the ministry she worked for indicates her involvement with social questions.³⁴³

Atanacković's career of feminist activist encompassed and connected the national aspect, mainly through the AŽP and to a lesser extent the National Council of Women; the regional aspect, through the LEW; and the international aspect, through the IAW. She was a member of the Belgrade Ženski pokret, likely since 1921. She became its president in 1935 and

³⁴⁰ Jovanka Kecman, “Žene Beograda u borbi za pravo glasa” [Women of Belgrade in the Struggle for Women's Right to Vote], *Godišnjak grada Beograda* XVII (1970): 159.

³⁴¹ “Jovan Atanackovic (1848-1921)”, The Military Intelligence Agency website, Prominent figures of the Military intelligence service section, <http://www.voa.mod.gov.rs/en/history/prominent-figures-of-the-military-intelligence-service/jovan-atanackovic> (Accessed April 4, 2023).

³⁴² Kecman, “Žene Beograda.”

³⁴³ The focus on this is beyond the goals set in this thesis, and would seek for a different kind of research with a focus on the systematic research of the archival fonds of the state institutions.

was the one who agreed to establish the *Ženski pokret* Youth section in Belgrade.³⁴⁴ She was also, from 1921 until WWII, active in the AŽP and the NCW, and usually wrote the reports on the congresses of these organizations for *Ženski pokret*. In the international sphere, Atanacković was the most important mediator between Yugoslav and international women's organizations, serving as vice president of the IAW between 1926 and WWII. Regarding the history of Yugoslav women's involvement in the LEW in the 1920s, Milena Atanacković's role is crucial; she participated at the founding congress, and at the 1923, 1924, and 1927 congresses. Her international activities increased in the 1930s: for instance, Atanacković and some other Yugoslav women participated in four Balkan conferences, which Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Bulgaria organized between 1930 and 1933 with the aim of bringing the Balkan countries closer.³⁴⁵ Atanacković was also among the main organizers on the Yugoslav side of the 1931 peace and disarmament conference of the IAW in Belgrade.³⁴⁶ Finally, internationally organized women had been lobbying the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the League of Nations since their founding in 1919 and 1920 respectively,³⁴⁷ and Atanacković was among the delegates at the ILO conferences in 1931 and 1932.³⁴⁸ Her internationalist work in the 1930s, still under-researched, stays beyond the focus of this chapter. What happened to Atanacković after 1941 remains very vague. As Kecman reports (without citing any sources, and I have been unable to obtain further information),

³⁴⁴ Mitra Mitrović, "Žena danas," *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 6 (1959): 413–423.

³⁴⁵ L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York: Rinehart, 1958): 736–739. For more about the Balkan conferences, see: Suzana Vuljević, "The Crisis of Spirit: Pan-Balkan Idealism, Transnational Cultural-Diplomatic Networks and Intellectual Cooperation in Interwar Southeast Europe, 1930-1941" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2020), 22-111.

³⁴⁶ "Konferencija za mir održana u Beogradu od 17 do 19 maja 1931 godine" [Peace Conference Held in Belgrade May 17–19, 1931], *Ženski pokret* 11–16 (1931): 1–6, and *Ženski pokret* 17–20 (1931): 1–4.

³⁴⁷ Offen, *European feminisms*, 347.

³⁴⁸ See Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmerman, ed., *Women's ILO: transnational networks, global labour standards and gender equity, 1919 to present* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018). Milena Atanacković, "Konferencija Internacionalnog biroa rada" [ILO Conference], *Ženski pokret* 21/22 (1931): 1–2; "Delegat na zasedanju Internacionalnog biroa rada u Ženevi" [Delegate on the Meeting of ILO in Geneva], *Ženski pokret* 4 (1932): 64; Milena Atanacković, "XVIII Međunarodna konferencija rada," 7/8 (1934): 70–72.

Atanacković was imprisoned in the Banjica Nazi German concentration camp in Belgrade from May 1943 to September 1944. She retired in 1945, and the date of her death and her activity after World War II are unknown.³⁴⁹

Overall, Atanacković's biography points to two things: her focus on women's rights and on social rights more generally, and her professional liaison with the state. In this, her biography is comparable to that of some other prominent women involved with the LEW, such as the Romanian representative Alexandrina Cantacuzino, the Czechoslovak representative Františka Plamínková, and the Greek representative Avra Theodoropoulou. In the Yugoslav case, the similarities are obvious with the president of the Feminist Alliance, Alojzija Štebi, and the writer and activist Adela Milčinović's professional trajectories. According to the Slovenian feminist and communist Angela Vode, Atanacković, Štebi, and Milčinović were the most influential women in the Yugoslav women's movement in the early 1920s.³⁵⁰ These three women were members of the Yugoslav delegation at the 1923 IWSA congress and the 1925 ICW congress.³⁵¹ They preferred the IWSA to the ICW, as Štebi thought that the ICW set its work according to the measure of the great nations and had little understanding for the smaller nation, whereas the IWSA congress had "far more real international spirit" and that it was significantly more important for the Yugoslav women.³⁵² Like Atanacković, Štebi and Milčinović worked for the state, and were interested in social questions. In the new state in December 1918, Alojzija Štebi³⁵³ (see chapters 1 and 4) got a job at the Department of Youth

³⁴⁹ Kecman, "Žene Beograda."

³⁵⁰ Angela Vode, *Skriti spomin* [Hidden Memory] (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2004).

³⁵¹ Alojzija Štebi was also present at the 1923 LEW congress in Belgrade, whereas for Milčinović the mentioned IWSA and ICW congresses were the only ones she participated in; after the 1925 ICW meeting, she moved permanently to the United States. De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 340–343. Adela Milčinović, "Autobiografija" [Autobiography] in *Autobiografije hrvatskih pisaca* [Autobiographies of Croatian writers], ed. Vinko Brešić (Zagreb: AGM, 1997), 617–622.

³⁵² Štebi, "Na kongresu Internacionalnega Ženskega Saveza," 230–232.

³⁵³ The information on Štebi in this paragraph is based on: Selišnik, "Socialna feministka"; De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 530–33; Irena Selišnik, "Alojzija Štebi in jugoslovanski feminizem ter Ženski pokret" [Alojzija Štebi and Yugoslav Feminism in Ženski pokret] in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, 85–98; Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (SI AS), Fond Alojzija Štebi, 1510/9 and AS 1510/12. Alojzija Štebi

Welfare in Ljubljana, becoming the department's coordinator in 1922. She began publishing in *Ženski pokret* in 1921, and her first texts concerned issues of youth welfare. Between 1923 and 1925, she was the editor of the journal *Naš glas* (Our voice, 1919–1942), a professional periodical of public employees in Slovenia, and moreover published several booklets on the protection of children and women, and on temperance. In 1927, Štebi moved to Belgrade after the Catholic authorities in Ljubljana attempted to forcefully retire her. In Belgrade, she began working as a clerk in the Central Hygienic Institute and then as a secretarial assistant in the Ministry of Social Protection and Public Health. In 1940, she stepped away from her presidency of the AŽP and moved back to Ljubljana, but she continued to work for the socialist state after WWII until January 1956. Similarly, the writer Adela Milčinović from Zagreb became active in politics around 1915. In the new state, she first worked at the Croatian National Council (*Narodno vijeće*), and then at the National and University Library. In the Yugoslav women's movement, she was particularly interested in the social question, the problems of Yugoslav émigrés in the US, as well as “white slavery,” i.e., human trafficking.³⁵⁴

Other than these three, another important Yugoslav representative in the LEW (present at the founding and the 1923 and 1925 congresses, but absent from the 1924 Belgrade congress due to her child's illness) was Lepasava Petković (1875–1952), who was also the president of the LEW in 1924. We know still very little about Petković. According to a brief note from a 1936 Yugoslav Red Cross publication,³⁵⁵ she was the daughter of a well-known lawyer, Stevan Maksimović, from the small Serbian town of Požarevac (her mother's name was not mentioned). After finishing elementary school and gymnasium studies in Požarevac, she

survived the war, yet her closest relatives, her brother and sister-in-law, were killed in 1942 by the Germans; Anton Štebi in Ljubljana, and Cirila Pleško-Štebi (1885–1942) in Auschwitz.

³⁵⁴ The information on Milčinović in this paragraph is based on: De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 340–343. Milčinović, “Autobiografija.”

³⁵⁵ *Spomenica: 1876–1936* [A Memorial Book: 1876–1936] (Beograd: Društvo crvenog krsta Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1936), 448.

graduated in history and philology in Belgrade in 1897, passed her teaching exam in 1898, and then reportedly spent a year studying in Geneva. After getting married, she lived abroad for several years, and continued working as a teacher after she came back to Serbia.³⁵⁶ At the time of the LEW conferences in which she participated, Petković was president of the Belgrade ŽP, a position she held until 1926, when she took up the role of the president of the National Council of Women, and her involvement with the LEW in this capacity.

The Yugoslav women who took part in the remaining LEW congresses were members or presidents of ŽP organizations from Belgrade, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, or Split. At the LEW's 1925 congress in Athens, one of the Yugoslav delegates was the first woman professor at the University of Belgrade, the philosopher and feminist activist Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981), who might have been chosen for her knowledge of the Greek language. With her were Leposava Petković, the president of the Zagreb ŽP Mira Kočonda-Vodvarka, and the president of the Sarajevo ŽP, physician Maša Živanović. Most of these women also attended the Tenth IWSA congress in Paris in 1926. In 1927, the Yugoslav delegation also included, among others, the representatives of the Split ŽP Jelka Perić and Vinka Bulić, as well as the Slovenian feminist and communist activist Angela Vode (see chapter 3). Finally, at the 1929 LEW congress, which was held in Warsaw right after the 1929 Berlin IAW congress, Yugoslavia had only one delegate, the aforementioned Maša Živanović (1890–1960) from Sarajevo. Maša Živanović, whose maiden name was Skopcsinsky, might have been delegated by the AŽP to go to Warsaw because of her Polish origins, as her father was an engineer from Cracow who worked in the Slavonian town of Slavonski Brod.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Ibid.; Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Planirana elita: o studentima iz Srbije na evropskim univerzitetima u 19. veku* [A Planned Elite: About Students in Serbia at European Universities in 19th Century] (Beograd: Istorijski institut, Službeni glasnik, 2003), 192.

³⁵⁷ Maša Miloradović, “Dr Maša Živanović (1890–1960) – lekarka i saradnica časopisa Ženski pokret” [Maša Živanović (1890–1960), a Pediatrician and an Associate of the Magazine Women's Movement], in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, 307–322.

The Yugoslav women involved with the work of the LEW through its five congresses were, thus, mainly connected to the ŽPs, the Yugoslav feminist organizations which were all members of the Alliance of Women's Movements, with Milena Atanacković and Leposava Petković as the main representatives. What was the Yugoslav feminists' contribution to the LEW congresses? The next section focuses on Yugoslav feminists' contribution to the LEW's congresses, and through this analysis brings forward their feminist political thought.

2.3. A “purely feminist” organization for the Yugoslav feminists?

The Yugoslav feminists' vision of women's rights was closely related to the nation-state; as we have seen, Atanacković's biography points to the relationship between her feminist activism and her work for the state. More broadly, the relationship between women's rights and the nation-state was common to all liberal feminists. However, women's political orientations within the liberal feminist movement significantly differed. As mentioned earlier, Maria Bucur has referred to the LEW as a “transnational ethno-nationalist community.”³⁵⁸ Yet, there were other streams within this movement, predominantly the “civic feminists” who prioritized women's rights and did not use the ethno-nationalist arguments which were evident in many representatives' speeches, as shown by Bucur. As I argue in this section, most of the Yugoslav feminists who participated in the LEW were “civic feminists.”

In her analysis, Bucur emphasized the racist and ethno-nationalist language which the representatives of different countries used at the 1923 and 1924 LEW congresses, coupling their demands for equal women's rights with “ethnic nationalist claims.” According to Bucur's analysis, the Romanian representative Alexandrina Cantacuzino, spoke about the need for “the spirit of association, fraternity, and conciliation” for the people of “central and oriental

³⁵⁸ Bucur, “Little Entente of Women.”

Europe.” She invoked the “fraternal” spirit and drew on the concepts of “race” and “tradition.”³⁵⁹ Like Cantacuzino, most of the representatives had a shared understanding of the pre-WWI suffering of their nations: at the 1923 LEW congress in Bucharest, the Polish representatives talked about the Polish people’s “enslavement” under German, Austrian, and Russian imperial powers; the Czechoslovak representative Františka Plamínková compared Romania and Czechoslovakia as both suffering from “barbarian invasions,” and explicitly named Hungarians as common enemies of these two countries.³⁶⁰ The perceived (former or current) enemies of the LEW countries were not only former empires or Hungarians; for the Czech delegate Eliška Purkyňová, communists were also notable “enemies of the state” in post-WWI countries, due to their antinationalist perspective.³⁶¹

In contrast to all other speeches at the Bucharest congress, Leposava Petković, whose political language was that of national liberal feminism, focused exclusively on her organization’s activities.³⁶² Rather than discussing the issues of prewar “slavery” and the “suffering” of her nation, like all the other representatives did, Petković prioritized talking about women’s rights. In her speech, Petković mentioned WWI, but in this context, she focused primarily on women’s increased participation in economic life as a consequence of the war, and the failure of the new state to give Yugoslav women equal political rights.³⁶³ Thus, in her speech she criticized the state from a feminist perspective. In this context, she contrasted Yugoslav women’s position to the position of women in Poland and Czechoslovakia, where women *did* gain suffrage rights after WWI. Petković spoke of Ženski pokret and its feminist library in Belgrade, their struggle to popularize feminist ideas, the domestic courses ŽP

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 86.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 90.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 91.

³⁶² Ibid., 92.

³⁶³ *1er conference*, 31.

organized in the villages, the professional bureau which enabled young women to seek employment, and so forth. Here are her concluding thoughts:

All nations are going through a crisis today that can only be overcome through love and justice. Justice demands the protection of the rights of each person: justice demands that women also be granted all civil rights. The state requires that each person, without distinction of sex, put all their intellectual and physical strength, as well as all their love at the service of the fatherland. Justice demands that the state gives every person equal rights, regardless of sex. We women must unite in the fight for women's rights because we will only reach our idea, which is the protection of children and the prosperity of all humanity, when we have our representatives in parliament.³⁶⁴

From this example, it is evident that Petković drew on some traditional language and used concepts such as “service of the fatherland” and the “state.” The authors of the *History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* noted another case where Petković coupled the heroic-religious references of the “knights” who had died in WWI with the demands for women's rights to work and for their legal equality, during her speech at the founding conference of the National Council of Women. Analyzing Petković's argumentation in the context of the coupling of feminism and national liberalism, the authors of that volume argued that the strategy of using more traditional vocabulary to demand radically new things was not unusual; although these references would normally not be a part of the liberal democratic political agenda, they suggested that it might be the case that Petković “believed that this was the only acceptable format to express her feminist views in a traditional environment.”³⁶⁵ Indeed, in her 1919 speech, Petković put the heroic war references only at the very end of her speech, while three quarters of it was dedicated to the injustices of women's legal and professional inequality. In the context of the 1919 meeting of the NCW where, as I have demonstrated in chapter 1, much of the time was dedicated to discussion about women's war efforts, Petković strongly underlined the issue of women's inequality with men, and located

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 82.

the cause of the inequality in the “misuse of force”; although not explicitly stated, it is obvious to the reader that this misuse was from the side of men. After a careful elaboration of the legal inequality of women within the Serbian Civil Law, Petković’s 1919 speech concluded with a discussion of women’s contribution to the war efforts, explaining that this was an example when women were considered equal, as women and men were equally killed.³⁶⁶ Thus, the focus on women’s rights was dominant in both Petković’s speeches, held at the NCW in Belgrade in 1919 and at the 1923 LEW Bucharest congress.

“Civic feminist” Milena Atanacković’s view was similar. Upon her return from Rome and from Bucharest, Atanacković found it important to emphasize the feminist aspect of the LEW, particularly referring to it as an organization made of “purely feminist” organizations (“the members can be only feminist associations of these countries”).³⁶⁷ In this context, Atanacković defined feminism as “the aspiration of women to share with men all the concerns and responsibilities for the management of the biggest social community: the state.”³⁶⁸ Her definition of feminism was closely related to the nation-state, yet it is interesting that she defined it not in ethnic nationalist terms, but as a “social community,” and as one big family, “in which each of the members must perform their duty based on their innate and acquired abilities.”³⁶⁹ In this context, Atanacković argued about the importance of women’s contribution to the state in the following way:

We—the women—have the sacred duty to develop all our activities in this direction and make it possible—through the common thread of all humanity, and in a society where every member, regardless of their sex, class, or nationality, would have all rights and be subject to equal social obligations—for each human being to reach the pinnacle of true cultural development.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶ Leposava Petković, “Jedan divan ženski govor” [A Lovely Female Speech] *Žena* 9 (1919): 520–529.

³⁶⁷ Atanacković, “Mala feministička antanta,” 266

³⁶⁸ Milena Atanacković, “Mala ženska antanta”, *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1923): 421.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Atanacković, “Mala feministička antanta,” 267. In original: “Mi – žene – imamo tu svetu dužnost, da u ovome pravcu razvijemo svu svoju delatnot i omogućimo da, zajedničkim životom celoga čovečanstva, u društvu gde će

She connected the idea of the equality of all individuals with the idea of the equality of all nations, because “all nations, as well as all individuals in a state, must be equal and independent, equal to each other in their moral dignity, and whether big or small, weak or strong, [they must] have equal rights and equal duties for the fulfilment of their obligations.”³⁷¹ To this, she added that “the feminists of the whole world are united in their demand, to reach the empire of justice among all of the countries, which would guarantee to all individuals, in the regime of general peace, their natural evolution: that the development of all nations continues freely and fairly.”³⁷²

This example shows that Atanacković’s argumentation connected women’s contribution to the state and society with equal rights of individuals on the one hand—not only of women, but of all individuals, regardless of their sex, class, and nationality—and the equal rights of all nations on the other hand. Although she drew on the concepts of the state, family, and duty—which, as in Petković’s case, seem like a part of a more traditional vocabulary—the language in her report on the LEW included no ethno-nationalist or racist elements. She did not invoke the “fraternal” spirit, nor “tradition” or “race,” like the representatives of other countries in Bucharest did. In a similar way to Atanacković, Ksenija Atanasijević, “a clear-cut example of a feminist thinker who based her views on the philosophical premises of European liberalism,” connected women’s rights and the nation, and argued for women’s individual rights again in the framework of participation in social life and politics.³⁷³

Equal rights were, then, the core of Atanacković’s understanding of the LEW and the Feminist Alliance, and the framework through which these organizations functioned. Upon her return from the IWSA meeting in Rome, Atanacković explained that it was necessary to unite

svaki član, bez razlike *pola, staleža, i narodnosti*, imati sva prava, i podleći jednakim društvenim obavezama, *čovjek dostigne vrhunac svoga istinskog kulturnog razvitka.*”

³⁷¹ Atanacković, “Mala ženska antanta,” *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1923): 422.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Trencsényi et al., *History II/1*, 81.

the work of all the women's organizations in the country whose goal was the protection of women's rights, or, in other words, the "purely feminist Alliance in our country" which would be in direct cooperation with the IWSA and the LEW.³⁷⁴ When the Yugoslav feminists established the Feminist Alliance, the core of its program was to "liberate women by granting them political rights and by introducing reforms, both in terms of legal change, and in terms of changes to social customs."³⁷⁵ The final emphasis was, thus, on the women's political rights and legal and social reforms regarding women's position in society.

To understand Atanacković's and Petković's ideas better, it is useful to compare them to other dominant discourses of the time, from which the way Atanacković's discussion of women's contribution to the state radically differed. Atanacković's views clashed with the pre-WWI dominant narrative of women's contribution to the ethnic nation in the Serbian conservative feminist narrative. An example of this narrative is literary scholar Ana Kolarić's analysis of the journal *Žena* (Woman, 1911–1914 and 1918–1921), in which the main narrative of women's emancipation centered around women's biological and reproductive role in society, as mothers and educators of the sons and daughters of the nation.³⁷⁶ These discourses were widespread across Europe before WWI,³⁷⁷ and certainly did not disappear in the interwar period. In the Yugoslav case, one example is the speech of conservative feminist Delfa Ivanić, who in 1924 was president of the NCW and, as such, one of the speakers at one of the sessions at the LEW congress in Belgrade. Ivanić had been active in the Serbian women's movement since the 1900s and was in the 1920s also the vice-president of the Serbian philanthropic and

³⁷⁴ Atanacković, "Mala feministička antanta," 267.

³⁷⁵ "Pravila Feminističke Aliancije," 455–460.

³⁷⁶ Kolarić, *Rod, modernost i emancipacija*.

³⁷⁷ Offen, *European Feminisms*, particularly 213–249.

nationalist organization Kolo srpskih sestara (Circle of Serbian Sisters), one of the biggest women's organizations in predominantly Serbian-populated parts of Yugoslavia.³⁷⁸



2.4. Delfa Ivanić. *Žena i svet*, 9 (1925). Digitalna Narodna biblioteka Srbije, https://digitalna.nb.rs/wb/NBS/casopisi_pretrazivi_po_datumu/zena_i_svet/1925/09/b009#page/0/mode/1up

³⁷⁸ Kolo Srpskih Sestara was a patriotic Serbian nationalist women's society, founded in 1903 in Belgrade. It had branches all across Serbia and, in the interwar period, was among the most massive women's organizations in Yugoslavia. Stolić, *Sestre srpkinje*, 141–142.

In her speech at the LEW congress, “conservative feminist” Delfa Ivanić spoke of the LEW by using the term *feminizam*, which she connected with Serbian ethnic nationalism. She spoke of the “Little Feminist Entente” and the goals of the “liberation of women from centuries-old slavery and inactivity in public work” and attaining of “all rights, so that she [the woman] can freely and in an undisturbed manner put herself into the service of not only her family, as until recently, but also so that she can serve her city, her country and nation, and humanity in general.”³⁷⁹ Unlike Petković’s speech one year earlier, Ivanić’s speech was traditionally oriented in terms of references to the royal connections between Kingdom SHS and Romania, to Christianity as the connecting thread between the LEW members, and to the common “slavery” of Greek and Serbian nations, implying the shared Ottoman past. When discussing feminism, she opposed the view that feminism was sectarianism, and explained that “God had created man and woman to live together in harmony, to prolong the human race, and to care together about the happiness of their own core family, as much as for the happiness of the whole humankind”; luckily, she said, “today there are many women and many men who want and who feel that all human beings should develop into free individuals and give them equal rights, regardless of sex, so that they can cooperate, according to their abilities, on the welfare [*dobro*] of humanity”.³⁸⁰

On the other hand, when speaking about the “woman question,” Ivanić talked specifically about the “Serbian woman” and argued that Serbian history was necessary in order to “better understand her role in the life of the nation.”³⁸¹ Here, Ivanić made references to the medieval Serbian dynasty, the battle of Kosovo, and the anti-Ottoman endeavors of the Serbian nation, as in the nineteenth century “a part of the Serbian Nation [capital letters in original]

³⁷⁹ Delfa Ivanić, “Pozdrav” [Greeting], *Ženski pokret* 10 (1924): 393–394.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 395.

³⁸¹ Delfa Ivanić, “O slovenačkoj i srpskoj ženi” [On Slovenian and Serbian Woman], *Ženski pokret* 10 (1924): 413.

stood up bravely and began to liberate, plot by plot, the land of the Serbian Fatherland, managing each time to take as much land, as much as they were capable to soak with the blood of its best sons and sow it with the graves of his children.”³⁸² Regarding women’s rights, Ivanić explained that “the position of Serbian women in the family and in society was never too difficult, whenever that depended on the Serbs.”³⁸³ This kind of discourse was somewhat typical of the “conservative feminists” in East Central Europe even before WWI, although its form differed depending on the context. Czech feminist Františka Plamínková argued that the Czech nation had a specific democratic spirit which would oppose limiting women’s rights; some Hungarian feminists similarly claimed that ancient Hungarians were generous towards women; while in Bulgaria, feminists argued that due to the existence of *zadruga* in Bulgarian society, Bulgarians were more inclusive towards women than some Western European nations.³⁸⁴ She continued her speech by praising Serbian women in general, particularly their charitable character, and by retelling nineteenth-century Serbian popular poetry. Ivanić’s speech at the 1924 congress represented a typical Serbian nationalist discourse, based on the idea of “blood and soil,” and presenting the Serbian nation as a victim of Ottoman aggression.³⁸⁵ It was, thus, much closer to the discourse of Alexandrina Cantacuzino, as analyzed by Bucur, so it could be argued that Ivanić—rather than Petković—was Cantacuzino’s counterpart. Although Ivanić embraced feminism and equal rights, her discourse was primarily ethno-nationalist, and focused on discussion of the national character of Serbian women and their inherently positive position in Serbian society.

Importantly, Ivanić held her two speeches *not* during the regular LEW sessions, but at the “gala session” (*svečana sednica*) of the LEW, which took place on November 2. At the

³⁸² Ibid., 415.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Trencsényi et al., *History I*, 599.

³⁸⁵ Delfa Ivanić, “O slovenačkoj i srpskoj ženi”, 413.

regular LEW sessions in Belgrade, by contrast, the “civic feminists” such as Milena Atanacković and Alojzija Štebi attempted to push for a discussion about feminism. Atanacković held an introductory speech in which she thanked all those who were present to “manifest the need for the liberation of women, as well as the need for international solidarity in social and political questions.”³⁸⁶ She continued by arguing that women fulfilled their duties towards the state, as they paid taxes, obeyed the law, and contributed to the state through their work, either as mothers, or as intellectual and manual labor. Because women had been slaves for centuries, Atanacković concluded, “she will be the most able to defend the freedom which every human being has the right to demand today.”³⁸⁷ The conference proceeded in a feminist direction: a Greek delegate talked about the difficult position of feminism in Greece, whereas Alexandrina Cantacuzino spoke about the work of the Romanian Women’s Council and the organization’s feminist activities, such as advocating for reforms regarding the equal position of women in the Civil Law, the issue of marriage and divorce, and so on.³⁸⁸ Another session at the 1924 LEW congress, finally, opened up the issue of feminism. The Yugoslav feminists’ report in *Ženski pokret* emphasized the wish of the Yugoslav delegation to “give a deeper significance to this question,” and the need of the LEW to set the ideology of its work: “Our delegation demanded that the conference does not stop at the discussion about the practical propaganda of feminism, but to get to the main principles, which would form the basis of future LEW work.”³⁸⁹ The Yugoslav women stated that this basis was necessary in order to build the LEW’s stable character, but announced that this was not quite done at the 1924 congress, as the discussion ceased at the level of propaganda methods.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ “Konferencija Male ženske antante u Beogradu” [LEW conference in Belgrade], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 338.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 339.

³⁸⁸ Helena Negropontes, “Feminizam u Grčkoj [Feminism in Greece], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 348–350. “Izveštaj Aleksandrine Kantakuzen” [Alexandrina Cantacuzino’s Report], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 351–356.

³⁸⁹ “Feminističko pitanje” [Feminist Question], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 376.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Comparing Atanacković, Petković, Štebi, and others with Ivanić, I see two tendencies, mainly concerning the “civic” and “conservative” feminist approaches to social reforms. Namely, whereas all the women agreed on the question of the inequality of the sexes, and all put their trust in the state, they differed in the following. The first group’s idea of feminism was closer to the concept of social justice and social equality, whereas the other group was significantly more socially conservative. Moreover, the latter group drew on more traditional vocabulary, such as family, generally prioritized ethnic nationalism over women’s rights, and did not challenge the social hierarchies which existed in society.³⁹¹

I will illustrate these two tendencies through the discussion about the rights of children born out of wedlock, also at the 1924 congress. The delegates agreed unanimously that all children should have equal rights, regardless of whether they were born in marriage or not. All the delegates also agreed that the state should do something about it, so Plamínková suggested that each state establish a common fund which would be used to financially assist children born out of wedlock, until the father is found. All the fathers of children born out of wedlock would have to contribute to this fund, progressively, according to their income. However, while agreeing on all this, the women disagreed on whether all the children should receive equal funds, or each child should receive financial assistance proportional to their fathers’ income. Among those who voted for the first suggestion were Milena Atanacković, Alojzija Štebi, Avra Theodoropoulou, and Františka Plamínková, whereas among those who voted for the latter suggestion were Delfa Ivanić, the Romanian representatives Alexandrina Cantacuzino and Calypso Botez, and the Czechoslovak representative Eliška Purkyňová.³⁹² As I argued elsewhere, and as Dudeková Kováčová confirmed in her analysis of the Czechoslovak case,

³⁹¹ I argued this already in: Grubački, “Little Entente of Women”; Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” partially confirms this argument.

³⁹² “Diskusija o vanbračnom detetu” [Discussion about Children Born Out of Wedlock], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 374–375; “Sednica posvećena detetu, ljubavniku i mužu” [Meeting Dedicated to a Child, Lover, and Husband], *Vreme* (1.11.1924): 3.

the previous example is an illustration of the transnational ideological divergence within the LEW.³⁹³

The division between “civic” and “conservative” feminists, as detected above, would become increasingly problematic in subsequent years. In November 1926, Františka Plamínková complained to the Polish representative Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka that there were too few “progressive” feminist organizations coming to the LEW congresses, and—interestingly for my argument—she noted that the most progressive organization was the one from Yugoslavia.³⁹⁴ She further complained that Romania and “half of the Czechoslovak representatives” were conservative, and expressed distress that the Polish National Committee was in backward hands.³⁹⁵ In 1927, the LEW reformed, finally bringing forth a feminist program which encompassed five aspects: political rights of women, family rights, labor rights, the protection of children, and public morality.³⁹⁶ At the Prague congress, some delegates proposed a broader alliance to represent feminists from other countries, including Bulgaria, Turkey, Hungary, and Albania.³⁹⁷ A related suggestion was to change the name of the organization to “Women’s and Peace Union of Southeastern Europe.”³⁹⁸ In 1929, the proposition was repeated. The main initiator of the enlargement was the Greek progressive feminist Avra Theodoropoulou, who was among the delegates arguing for a more transnational feminist direction of the organization, and opposed by Romanian nationalist feminist Alexandrina Cantacuzino, who defended the antirevisionist political aspect of the organization.³⁹⁹ The congress voted to transform the organization into what Roxana Cheșchebec called a “genuinely internationalist federation of women’s organizations.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹³ Grubački, “Little Entente of Women”; Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 56–78.

³⁹⁴ Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 70.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ “Program rada Male ženske antante” [LEW program of work], *Ženski pokret* 11 (1927): 2.

³⁹⁷ Cheșchebec, “Feminist Ideologies,” 514; Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 64.

³⁹⁸ Dudeková Kováčová, “Between Transnational Cooperation,” 64.

³⁹⁹ Cheșchebec, “Feminist Ideologies,” 514.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 513.

2.4. Restructuring of the LEW in the 1930s: from a feminist organization to the female version of the Little Entente

As mentioned earlier, the last LEW congress was held in Warsaw in 1929, yet, as Gabriela Dudeková-Kováčová has shown, the organization restructured in the 1930s.⁴⁰¹ After the 1929 congress, the LEW ceased its work for several years. In 1932, the attempts to re-establish the LEW came from the Czechoslovak feminist Františka Plamínková, whose invitation was to renew the LEW with a new goal of tightening cooperation between Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.⁴⁰² The LEW was then renewed in 1933–1934;⁴⁰³ more specifically, it was restructured at the ICW meetings in Stockholm and Paris in 1933 and 1934.⁴⁰⁴ By exploring the LEW's work in the 1930s, this section will show first, that in the 1930s the LEW was no longer a feminist organization, but that it became at this time straightforwardly a female version of the LE. Secondly, the section will show that, perhaps because of this organizational transformation, the Yugoslav women's enthusiasm for the work of the LEW in the 1930s was significantly lower compared to the 1920s.

Three important changes came with the restructuring of the LEW in the 1930s. First, from 1934, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia remained the three members of the LEW, whereas Poland and Greece were no longer involved. Secondly, the LEW was no longer connected to the IAW, but the ICW.⁴⁰⁵ From then on, the LEW member organizations could be only the national councils of women, which were also member organizations of the ICW. In the Yugoslav case, this was the Yugoslav Women's Council, which was established in 1919

⁴⁰¹ Dudeková Kováčová, "Between Transnational Cooperation."

⁴⁰² ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, MŽD 1933, Františka Plamínková to Alexandrina Cantacuzino, 24.05.1933; ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, MŽD 1 Korespondence se zahraničím 1933–1934, Irena Malinská and Františka Plamínková to Alexandrina Cantacuzino, 8.1.1934.

⁴⁰³ Dudeková Kováčová, "Between Transnational Cooperation," 65.

⁴⁰⁴ ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, "Procès-verbal de la réunion de la Petite Entente des Femmes ayant lieu à Paris, l'hôtel du Rhone, 1.7.1934."

⁴⁰⁵ Dudeková Kováčová, "Between Transnational Cooperation," 67.

as the National Council of Women of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (see chapter 1), and which was renamed National Council of Women of Yugoslavia (*Jugoslovenski ženski savez*) in 1929. In other words, the LEW members were no longer feminist organizations, but national women's organizations from the three states.

The third change was that in the 1930s, the LEW became straightforwardly connected to the LE. This was particularly visible in Czechoslovakia, where Františka Plamínková was named one of the LE vice-presidents.⁴⁰⁶ At this point, the only issue which concerned the women in the LEW seems to have been women's equal participation in (national and international) politics,⁴⁰⁷ while a secondary concern, in the words of Plamínková, was the economic difficulty affecting women and "her role of a consumer and manager."⁴⁰⁸ In 1938, Milena Atanacković retrospectively described the LEW's program in the 1930s as narrowing down to the "work on the mutual acquaintance and rapprochement of the nations, and particularly women, of the countries of the LEW, and on mutual support in all international, and when needed also national, endeavors and actions."⁴⁰⁹ Having all this in mind, my conclusion is that in this new framework, the LEW's earlier feminist aspects continued to exist only in a very limited sense.

Consequently, the LEW in the 1930s became a straightforwardly "female version" of the LE and gathered women who represented solely their own national interests. The way Poland was excluded as an affiliate can additionally illustrate this transformation. In the process of restructuring the LEW in 1933–1934, the Political Club of Progressive Women in Poland tried their best to remain in the LEW. About three months after the above-mentioned Stockholm meeting, the new president of the Political Club of Progressive Women in Poland,

⁴⁰⁶ Dudeková Kováčová, "Between Transnational Cooperation," 65.

⁴⁰⁷ ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, "Procès-verbal de la réunion de la Petite Entente des Femmes ayant lieu à Paris, l'hôtel du Rhone, 1.7.1934."

⁴⁰⁸ ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, MŽD 1933, Letter from Plaminkova to Cantacuzino, 24.5.1933.

⁴⁰⁹ Milena Atanacković, "Mala ženska antanta" [LEW], *Glasnik Jugoslovenskog ženskog saveza* 1/2 (1938): 1-2.

Anne Paradowska-Szelągowska, wrote to Cantacuzino, reacting to the minutes from the Stockholm meeting at which she had not been present. “We are strongly affected by your decision that only the National Alliances can be a part of the work of the LEW,” she said, explaining that her organization was not a part of the Polish National Council of Women, because the latter was “composed of the parties of the extreme right.” At the same time, she expressed her organization’s wish to remain a part of the LEW, as she found that the collaboration should be “pursued ardently, given the current necessities.”⁴¹⁰ At this point, Cantacuzino consulted with Plamínková, who further consulted with the Czechoslovak ambassador in Poland; the ambassador and Plamínková then decided that this Polish association was not an important factor in the country’s political life, and that excluding them from the LEW would not harm Czechoslovak-Polish relations.⁴¹¹ Even though Plamínková allegedly had nothing against the Polish organization remaining in the LEW—indeed, she was willing to cooperate with them in the framework of the Association of Slavic Women formed in 1929⁴¹²—she did not see them as a part of the LEW any more. This was because with her 1932 invitation to revive and restructure the LEW, Plamínková’s principal aim was to make the LEW a women’s version of the LE, and thus establish a straightforwardly political and antirevisionist women’s organization, working hand in hand with the LE.⁴¹³

Taking into account the feeling of immediate danger the Czechoslovak delegates had regarding Hitler’s rise in Germany—which was further proven with the Nazi annexation of a part of Czechoslovakia through the 1938 Munich Agreement—it is not surprising that the initiative to regroup came exactly from Plamínková, who opposed Hitler and, after 1938, the

⁴¹⁰ ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, MŽD 1 Korespondence se zahraničím 1933-1934, Letter from Anne Paradowska Szelągowska to Alexandrina Cantacuzino, 18.11.1933.

⁴¹¹ ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, MŽD 1 Korespondence se zahraničím 1933-1934, Velvyslanectví Československé republiky ve Varšavě to Plamínková, 8.1.1934.

⁴¹² ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, MŽD 1 Korespondence se zahraničím 1933-1934, Plamínková to Vyslanectví republiky Československé ve Varšavě; 22.12.1933.

⁴¹³ ČNA, ŽNR, box 55, 30.12.1933. Plamínková Vyslanectví republiky Československé ve Varšavě. 25.1.1934.

Czechoslovak right-wing government too, until she was executed by the Germans in 1942.⁴¹⁴ Her invitation to reorganize the LEW came in the context of Hitler's rise to power. Although Dudeková Kováčová suggested that reducing the LEW's activities to the new framework must have been frustrating for Plamínková,⁴¹⁵ she may have felt that making the LEW a part of the LE made sense for political purposes, whereas she could propagate her feminist ideas through other organizations.

On the other hand, Yugoslav feminists in this period were less interested in the work of the LEW. The NCWY president Leposava Petković participated in the LEW's restructuring and the NCWY became LEW's member, yet the letters preserved in Prague suggest that Petković's enthusiasm was significantly lower than Plamínková's. As the NCWY documents are not preserved, it is only possible to guess why. The first reason might be that at the time of the restructuring of the LEW, the NCWY was in 1933–1934 undergoing restructuring and decentralization,⁴¹⁶ so its leadership's attention was focused on the local and national aspects of their work, rather than on the reenactment of the LE as pushed by Plamínková. Secondly, the assassination of King Aleksandar in October 1934 caused another huge disruption in Yugoslav public life. With the political future of the country and its new international orientation uncertain, it is possible that the Yugoslav feminists would not choose to engage in a new political organization. A third potential reason for the Yugoslav women's reduced participation in the 1930s might be that some of them, particularly Milena Atanacković, turned to other kinds of internationalist work, including the ILO, League of Nations, and, of course, the continued involvement with the IAW. Nevertheless, although perhaps less enthusiastically than the Czech women, the Yugoslav women did participate in the 1930s as well, and they also

⁴¹⁴ Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 159–189.

⁴¹⁵ Dudeková Kováčová, "Between Transnational Cooperation," 67–68.

⁴¹⁶ Grubački and Selišnik, "National Women's Alliance," 246.

hosted the exhibition of women's artwork that was organized to travel across the three LEW countries.

2.5. The LEW and the WILPF: towards an entangled history

For Milena Atanacković and her fellow feminists, then, the central concept was equal rights, regardless of sex, but also—as Atanacković emphasized—regardless of class or nationality. Social justice—as will be further explored in chapter 4—was an equally important concept in Atanacković's and Štebi's political thought of “civic feminism.” This kind of politics was close to that of many of the members of another international women's organization, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, although the Yugoslav feminists did not participate in it. In this section, I will discuss the Yugoslav “civic feminists”' lack of involvement with the WILPF, arguing that their involvement with the LEW and their non-participation in the WILPF should be seen as two sides of the same story.

The WILPF, which Leila Rupp sees as a “daughter” organization in relation to the “grandmother” ICW and the “mother” IWSA, was a radical pacifist organization initiated on April 28, 1915 in The Hague, and officially founded in 1919 in Zurich.⁴¹⁷ The group's first meeting was when in the midst of war in 1915, over 1200 women gathered in The Hague aiming to discuss the possibility of ending the war through peace negotiations. Almost all the women were members of the IWSA, but those who eventually met in the Hague were those who prioritized the international alliances between the women over allegiances to their respective nations.⁴¹⁸ Whereas suffrage had been the central issue of the IWSA in this period, the women who met in The Hague added the demand of a peaceful resolution of international conflicts to

⁴¹⁷ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 14.

⁴¹⁸ Laura Beers, “Advocating for a Feminist Internationalism between the Wars,” in *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 202–221.

the demand for equal suffrage rights of men and women. After the war, in May 1919, participants from sixteen countries gathered in Zurich and officially established the WILPF, with its new headquarters in Geneva and a program oriented towards the double goal of women's emancipation and peace, yet peace without victory.⁴¹⁹ On this occasion, they discussed the new European political order and rejected the Treaty of Versailles, which they saw as problematic for supporting the victors and potentially the cause of a new conflict. In the words of Leila Rupp, choosing a radical pacifist stance, and a radical position towards issues such as the question of minorities in post-WWI Europe and continuing imperialism, the WILPF “maintained its vanguardist self-conception, radical if contested politics, and controversial reputation.”⁴²⁰

In the following decades, “WILPF would emerge as one of the most consistent non-communist critics of the colonial system,” gaining it a reputation as “one of the most socially radical international organizations outside the communist sphere.”⁴²¹ It could be argued that what made the WILPF unique in the context of women's international organizations were the group's feminist emphasis on social justice and, moreover, on feminist internationalism. This meant that the WILPF women formed an international body which was not, as in the case of the ICW and the IWSA, a federation of national sections, but a “transnational voice” which transcended national interests.⁴²² Although many of the member organizations truly transcended nationalism and in many cases repudiated their governments' actions, the question remains to what extent many of the sections—for example, the Czechoslovak or the Bulgarian—did indeed manage to embrace this kind of transnationalism.⁴²³ The WILPF, furthermore, aligned women of various leftist ideological identifications, who all gathered

⁴¹⁹ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 26–37, especially 29.

⁴²⁰ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 30.

⁴²¹ Beers, “Advocating for a Feminist Internationalism,” 204.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ This is still a huge gap in research, but for initial information see: Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 116.

around the pledge for peace in the context of WWI, and can serve, according to Laura Beers, as an excellent case study of the cooperation of women across ideological divides before the Popular Front policy.⁴²⁴ In its 1919 resolutions, the group took a strong stand against capitalism and nationalism, condemned support for the opposition to the revolutions in Hungary and Russia, and, most importantly for this story, rejected the Versailles peace system, suggesting a more radical interpretation of Wilson's "Fourteen Points."⁴²⁵ They were among the women who lobbied for the inclusion of the Women's Charter in the Versailles Peace Treaty, a charter which was to guarantee women's equal rights with men; they were concerned about poverty, equated peace with social reform, and were in the 1930s the most vocal of all women's international organizations in criticizing the Nazi regime.

Concerning the Yugoslav participation in the WILPF, according to those WILPF sources which I managed to view, the WILPF had difficulties reaching out to Eastern European women, which is why this was a special topic at meetings of the WILPF board. The Yugoslav League for Peace and Freedom (YLPF) was officially formed in 1928 or in July 1929 (the sources are conflicted), Mileva Petrović elected president.⁴²⁶ Of Petrović, we know only that she was a high school teacher in Belgrade and on the editorial team of *Ženski pokret* in 1920–1921, and she published about thirty texts in *Ženski pokret* during the 1920s. Despite the attempts to be admitted into the WILPF since the YLPF's founding, the Yugoslav section was officially admitted into the WILPF in 1934,⁴²⁷ but only after the leadership of the organization changed in 1932, with the new president Danica Zečević (1889–1967) in charge. On September

⁴²⁴ Laura Beers, "Bridging the Ideological Divide: Liberal and Socialist Collaboration in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1919–1945," *Journal of Women's History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 115–116.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁴²⁶ The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Papers, 1915–1978, microfilm edition (Microfilming Corporation of America, Sanford, North Carolina, 1983) (henceforth WILPF papers), reel 56, 1917–1920, Mosa Anderson to Mary Sheepshanks, January 19, 1928. See also: WILPF papers, reel 97, 1483, "Mileva Petrovitch, 19.7.1929."

⁴²⁷ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1747 Emily G. Balch to Danica Zečević.

7, 1936, 88 women formed a section of the YLPF in Zagreb, organized by Darinka Prelog and Maša Kovačić.⁴²⁸ The group was active until March 1937, when it ceased to function due to police pressure.⁴²⁹ In this period, the YLPF also had members who were non-Yugoslav minorities, one of them the Hungarian-born ophthalmologist and communist Olga Palić Szanto (1890–1971).⁴³⁰

However, let's backtrack a bit to untangle, at least to some extent, the concise history of Yugoslav women's involvement in the WILPF, which, I argue, is intertwined with the history of the Yugoslav women's participation in the LEW. Milena Atanacković, for instance, referred to the establishment of the LEW in the same report after the 1923 IWSA meeting in Rome. In this report, she also mentioned "a new international organization," the WILPF, suggesting that "Yugoslav women" should become part of it.⁴³¹ As previously mentioned, the ideologies of Atanacković and Štebi closely aligned with that of the WILPF, especially in their strong link between feminism and social justice. However, despite their shared focus on equality and social justice, and Atanacković's call for universal social, political, and legal equality, the Yugoslav "civic feminists" refrained from challenging the Yugoslav state framework. Therefore, the inclusivity implied by Atanacković's statement of equality, "regardless of their sex, class, and nationality," demands further analysis to determine whom this claim might have excluded. Through the LEW, the Yugoslav feminists opted for the rapprochement of nations and aspired to establish the prerequisites for their vision of enduring peace.; however, their understanding of peace was based on the post-Versailles international state system, which was not to be challenged under any circumstances.

⁴²⁸ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1841.

⁴²⁹ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1918, Lotti Birch to the Zagreb group, March 20, 1937; WILPF papers, reel 97, 1922, Darinka Prelog to the WILPF, January 17, 1938.

⁴³⁰ See: WILPF papers, reel 97, 1856, Clara Ragaz to Olga Palić. Vera Litričin, "Olga Palić-Szanto (1890–1971), M.D., Ophthalmologist: biographical notes," <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23539925/> (Accessed January 12, 2022).

⁴³¹ Atanacković, "Mala feministička antanta," 267.

Despite their largely overlapping ideology with the women from the WILPF, therefore, most probably the reason why the women who formed the Alliance, mainly Štebi and Atanacković, did not join the WILPF was exactly their support for the post-Versailles system. While further research would be needed to draw a more comprehensive image of the Eastern and Southeastern European women's involvement with the WILPF—the Czechoslovak case would be particularly interesting due to its similarity with Yugoslavia in terms of support for Versailles international order—we know that Bulgarian women were among the first to join the organization.⁴³² This information is important also for the story about the LEW, as initially Jeni Bozhilova-Pateva, the Bulgarian representative at the 1923 IWSA congress in Rome, had signed the agreement to participate in the LEW.⁴³³ Bozhilova-Pateva had been the representative of Bulgarian women's organizations at the IWSA and ICW also before WWI, and was also in 1918 among the founders of the organization Traen mir (Durable Peace). Since 1919, Traen mir had been affiliated with the WILPF, and it was as representative of this organization that Bozhilova-Pateva had participated in the establishment of the LEW.⁴³⁴

The Yugoslav women's nation-state focus made it less easy to cooperate with feminists from countries defeated in WWI, including Hungary and Bulgaria, and the example of Bulgarian exclusion from the LEW already in 1923 is useful for a better understanding of the Yugoslav liberal feminists. The Yugoslav women expelled them from the organization at the Bucharest LEW congress held in October 1923; according to Ograjšek Gorenjak and Kardum, one reason for this was the insistence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom SHS, which was financing the LEW's representatives.⁴³⁵ It is also not without importance that in

⁴³² Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 17.

⁴³³ 1923 IAW Report of Ninth Congress, Rome, Italy, May 12th to 19th (1923). Available at: Women and Social Movements, International Database: <https://alexanderstreet.com/products/women-and-social-movementsinternational-1840-present> (Accessed September 20, 2019).

⁴³⁴ Daskalova, "Little Entente of Women," 18.

⁴³⁵ Kardum, "Interwar Women's Movements," 119.

June 1923, a coup d'état in Bulgaria saw the military forces overthrow the agrarian peasant government of Aleksandar Stamboliyski. The armed forces killed Stamboliyski who had, among other things, signed the Neuilly-sur-Seine Treaty in 1919 by which Bulgaria lost significant territories to Yugoslavia, and who subsequently initiated the postwar rapprochement with Yugoslavia.⁴³⁶ The change of regime meant also the end of the rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, yet no English-language literature yet explains how this regime change impacted the Bulgarian feminists.

According to the Yugoslav sources, the reason for the expulsion of the Bulgarian feminists from the LEW concerned an incident which happened at the WILPF 1923 international summer school. Slovenian feminist Vera Albrechtova, who had attended this summer school, reported that the Bulgarian delegation was spreading brochures which proclaimed the Yugoslav state responsible for “terrible massacres of the Bulgarians.”⁴³⁷ Related to this event, Atanacković wrote in *Ženski pokret* that the Bulgarian women spread brochures which treat the “Macedonian question in a tendentious and fallacious way.”⁴³⁸ In fact, this was a part of a bigger conflict between Bulgarians and Serbians concerning what Atanacković referred to as “the Macedonian question.” The origins of this problem dated back some way into the nineteenth century, when Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbians, and of course Macedonians themselves all made claims on the contested Macedonian territory, at the time still a part of the Ottoman Empire; as historian Tchavdar Marinov has argued, these conflicting nation-building ideologies constituted each other.⁴³⁹ Whereas the Bulgarians saw the territory as a part of “Greater Bulgaria,” Serbia from 1878 claimed a part of the Macedonian territory

⁴³⁶ Stavrianos, *Balkans since 1453*, 648–651.

⁴³⁷ Vera Albrechtova, “Za mir in svobodo” [For Peace and Freedom], *Ženski pokret* 1–2 (1924): 12–18; Atanacković, “Mala Ženska Antanta,” 424.

⁴³⁸ See also: Krassimira Daskalova, “Little Entente of Women/Malkata zhenska antanta i feministkite dvizhenia na Balkanite prez 20-te i 30-te godini na XX vek,” *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 50, no. 2 (2018): 675–695. Ograjšek Gorenjak and Kardum, “Mala ženska antanta,” 119–120. Daskalova, “Little Entente of Women,” 19.

⁴³⁹ Tchavdar Marinov, “We, the Macedonians: The Paths of Macedonian Supra-Nationalism (1878–1912),” in *We, the People*, ed. Diana Mishkova (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2022), 107–138.

as a part of its own “Greater Serbia,” referring to it as Old Serbia (Stara Srbija) or South Serbia (Južna Srbija). In 1913, after the Second Balkan War, this region was incorporated into Serbia, then again occupied by Bulgaria during WWI, and through the Versailles treaty given to the Kingdom SHS.⁴⁴⁰ The Yugoslav government and political elites considered the Macedonian Slavs to be Serbs, and consistently attempted to “Serbianize” the Macedonian Slavs since at least the 1890s and into the interwar years. The predominant “Greater Serbian” stance was that the Macedonian Slavs were “southern Serbs” who basically had to learn this through Serbian schooling and nationalist propaganda.⁴⁴¹ Because of this, the Yugoslav state refused to recognize Macedonians as one of the state minorities, and continuously directed policies towards the Macedonians which were not aimed at integration but, as historian Nada Boškovska noted, “bore the hallmarks of colonialism and remained exploitative.”⁴⁴² Going back to the report from the 1923 WILPF summer school, both sides of the conflict supported their governments’ stances on the Macedonian question: the Yugoslav women saw the Bulgarian women’s brochures as a provocation, whereas for the Bulgarian women their stance could be interpreted as an insistence on the application of the United States President Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points.”⁴⁴³

Regarding the continuation of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian conflict in the 1920s, Krassimira Daskalova has analyzed a conflict in 1927 and 1928 between two women: Mileva Petrović from Serbia and Dimitrana Ivanova from Bulgaria.⁴⁴⁴ This confrontation unfolded within the pages of the *Ženski pokret* and the Bulgarian journal *Zhenski glas*. To unravel the details of

⁴⁴⁰ According to 1844 *Načertanije* (Outline) written by the Serbian statesman Ilija Garašenin, the Greater Serbia was imagined as the liberation and unification of all the lands which they regarded as Serbian, referencing the medieval empire of Stefan Dušan. See: Alexis Heraclides, *The Macedonian Question and the Macedonians: A History* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–19, particularly 10–11.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 13. See also: Nada Boškovska Leimgruber, *Yugoslavia and Macedonia before Tito: Between Repression and Integration* (London, New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017).

⁴⁴² Boškovska Leimgruber, *Yugoslavia and Macedonia*, 283.

⁴⁴³ Daskalova, “Little Entente of Women,” 19–20.

⁴⁴⁴ Krassimira Daskalova, “The Women’s Movement in Bulgaria in a Life Story,” *Women’s History Review* 13, no. 1 (2004): 91–104.

Yugoslav women's engagement with the LEW as opposed to the WILPF, this case is worth exploring further. Mileva Petrović, as mentioned, was the president of the YLPF since its founding until 1932. The correspondence she had with Dimitrana Ivanova was among the last articles she published in that journal; it is not clear what happened to her afterwards. Krassimira Daskalova has analyzed the exchange between Petrović and Ivanova and demonstrated that their conflict was about the question of whether the Versailles Peace Treaties could bring peace to the Balkans. Whereas Petrović accused “Bulgarian women” of “professional patriotism,” Ivanova criticized the Yugoslav feminists for not respecting the rights of Bulgarian minorities, and even accused “the Serbian feminists” of being procommunist.⁴⁴⁵ However, in analyzing these two examples, it is important to pay careful attention to ideological differences between Atanacković (involved with the LEW), and Petrović (the president of the YLPF), and not equate the two. It does not seem that Petrović was involved with the LEW’s work, nor close to Atanacković’s circle, so her views are not directly relevant for the LEW. More important than for the LEW, I suggest, is Mileva Petrović’s role in the Yugoslav League for Peace and Freedom, and it is through the analysis of her involvement with the WILPF that we can understand the difference between her and Atanacković better.

Since the organization’s formation, Petrović as the president of the YLPF attempted to join the WILPF, and was in continuous correspondence with the leadership, yet her organization’s bid to become the official national section of the WILPF was unsuccessful. In 1928, WILPF board member Mosa Anderson travelled to the Balkans and afterward commented negatively on Serbian women’s nationalism and their hostility towards Bulgarians; she elaborated, “I think that Yugoslav women genuinely believe that the Macedonians are not only Yugoslavs, but are actually Serbs and that the disturbances in Macedonia are entirely due

⁴⁴⁵ Daskalova, “Little Entente of Women,” 20–21.

to Bulgarian agitation. They naturally, therefore, do not see any need for minority treatment.”⁴⁴⁶

The WILPF international secretary Camille Drevet directly confronted Mileva Petrović about this view in a letter to her in April 1930.⁴⁴⁷ In October 1930, the Yugoslav social democrat Milica Djurić Topalović, at the time apparently involved with the work of the YLPF, confirmed that this was indeed the official stance of the YLPF.⁴⁴⁸

Furthermore, in 1930 another WILPF board member, Mary Sheepshanks, wrote three things in her report on the WILPF Summer School held in Sofia in August–September 1930, all of which are helpful for a better understanding of the relations between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian women. First, she noted that she “felt a strong nationalist spirit in the Bulgarian section,” and expressed an understanding of why, for Serbian women, it would be rather undesirable to attend such a public meeting. Secondly, Sheepshanks reported to have spoken with Milena Atanacković, who told her that the Yugoslav feminists “would be unable to work with chauvinists in their own country and they could not be expected to work with chauvinists in Bulgaria though they were very wishful to work with pacifists in Bulgaria.”⁴⁴⁹ Sheepshanks’s view on Atanacković was rather positive, and she suggested organizing a private meeting between Serbian and Bulgarian women, to which Atanacković agreed. Thirdly, Sheepshanks suggested that it might be worthwhile to include in the WILPF “the best members of the Yugoslav group,” including those who “have left the organized group because they are not in sympathy with its president, Mile Petrovich.”⁴⁵⁰ Thus, the WILPF board members were in favor of Atanacković’s politics, whereas they criticized the YLPF leadership. On the other

⁴⁴⁶ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 117. See also: WILPF papers, reel 56, 1957, “Prospects for the Women’s International League in Yugoslavia”.

⁴⁴⁷ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1521, Camille Drevet to Mileva Petrović, April 15, 1930.

⁴⁴⁸ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1630–1639, “Memorandum du groupe Yougoslave de la Ligue de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberte, presente par M-me Topalovitch oralement a l’Executif le 11.-16./X.1930. a Amsterdam et Loenen.”

⁴⁴⁹ WILPF papers, reel 10, 371–373, Mary Sheepshanks, “Report to the Executive on the Summer School in Sofia.”

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

hand, Milena Atanacković's silence and inactivity related to the YLPF in the late 1920s and early 1930s signifies, perhaps, an unwillingness to express openly her point of view, which was nevertheless closer to the WILPF than to Petrović.

In 1932, the WILPF officially rejected Petrović's request for admission of the YLPF in 1932, because the WILPF international secretary general Camille Drevet judged that the Yugoslav section "had given no evidence of carrying on really international work."⁴⁵¹ In an earlier meeting, she said that work in Eastern Europe was generally difficult because of nationalism, and expressed her suspicion that national sections would be formed in the region without guarantees that they would have the "right spirit."⁴⁵² Because the YLPF held the government stance about the Macedonian and Bulgarian questions, then, it was unsuitable for joining this radical women's organization which, unlike ICW and IWSA, in fact challenged the postwar Versailles European order and, more generally, criticized nation-states in a way which was too radical for the Yugoslav women.

According to a letter that the new president Danica Zečević (1889–1967) sent to the WILPF headquarters, Mileva Petrović had to give up her leadership due to health reasons on January 17, 1932.⁴⁵³ Zečević was described in the only biographical note I could find about her as "a communist sympathizer";⁴⁵⁴ and this can be substantiated with the letters she sent to the WILPF central office, in which she offered support against the imprisonment of Romanian communist Ana Pauker, who was—in Zečević's words—imprisoned "just because of her political beliefs."⁴⁵⁵ She also sent a letter expressing protest against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, which was a significant ideological leap in contrast to the previous correspondence

⁴⁵¹ WILPF papers, reel 10, 1128, "International Executive Committee, Grenoble, May 11–14, 1932," page 5.

⁴⁵² WILPF papers, reel 10, 389, "International executive committee, Geneva, Thursday afternoon April 24," page 2.

⁴⁵³ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1710, Danica Zečević (Danitza Zetchevitch) to the WILPF.

⁴⁵⁴ Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela* [Collected Works] vol. 5, ed. Pero Damjanović (Beograd, Zagreb: Komunist, 1978), p. 325.

⁴⁵⁵ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1853, Danica Zečević (Danitza Zetchevitch) to the WILPF.

of Mileva Petrović.⁴⁵⁶ It was only in 1934 that the Yugoslav YLPF was officially admitted to the WILPF.

In the meantime, there had been a rapprochement between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian women. It was only in 1931, on the occasion of the IAW's Peace Conference held in Belgrade, that Bulgarian women officially visited the Yugoslav capital, and Bulgarian and Yugoslav feminists subsequently became closer. In 1932, Zorka Kasnar Karadžić, a Yugoslav feminist from ŽP Belgrade and the Yugoslav Association of University Educated Women gave a lecture on the "Yugoslav idea in literature" in Sofia in 1932 as a delegate of the Association of University Educated Women and YPLF. In the second half of the 1930s, youth sections of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian Associations of University Educated Women organized exchanges, which fostered further cooperation.⁴⁵⁷ The rapprochement intensified still further when, according to one of Zečević's letters to the WILPF headquarters from February 1937, Danica Zečević and the German feminist and pacifist Gertrud Baer (1890–1981) visited Bulgaria together, seeking the best possible means of rapprochement between the two countries.⁴⁵⁸

To conclude, although Atanacković's feminist ideology with its focus on equal rights, social justice, and peace was close to that of the WILPF, neither she nor other Yugoslav feminists from the Alliance ever became involved with the WILPF directly. Initially, she did think that joining this organization was important, yet when the Yugoslav League for Peace and Freedom was finally established in 1928–1929, Atanacković and other women from *Ženski pokret* organizations did not find their way to it. The YPLF was headed by teacher Mileva Petrović, who was not close to Atanacković, and had no real connection to the LEW. Looking more closely at and mapping the Yugoslav women's involvement with the LEW and the

⁴⁵⁶ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1710, Danica Zečević (Danitza Zetchevitch) to the WILPF.

⁴⁵⁷ Atanacković, "Prvi korak" [The First Step], *Ženski pokret* 11 (1932): 159–160; D.P., "Utisci iz Sofije" [Impressions from Sofia], *Ženski pokret* 11 (1934): 113–114.

⁴⁵⁸ WILPF papers, reel 97, 1889, Danica Zečević to the WILPF.

WILPF, and the relationship between Yugoslav and Bulgarian women, my intention in this section was to point to the entangled character of the Yugoslav women's participation in the LEW and the Bulgarian women's participation in the WILPF. As shown, this was more broadly connected to the "Macedonian question" and the stances of the LEW and the WILPF towards the Treaty of Versailles and the post-WWI international order in Europe. Thus, I note that a careful contextualization of each of the characters involved with the LEW and the WILPF is essential for a correct evaluation of the developments in both organizations.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the Yugoslav women's participation in the regional transnational organization the Little Entente of Women, which was established by feminists from Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Greece, and Poland during the 1923 IWSA Rome congress. It did so from the perspective of the Yugoslav women's involvement with this organization and in conversation with the existing historiography on the Romanian, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Greek and Bulgarian participation in the LEW.

First, I argued that that the LEW should be acknowledged as an integral facet of Yugoslav women's transnational activism, considering it was the primary organization in which Yugoslav feminists played a pivotal role during the 1920s. Whereas the existing scholarship predominantly emphasized the ethno-nationalist aspect of this organization and the feminists' alignment with the politics of their respective nation-states, I took a slightly different perspective, suggesting that the LEW in the 1920s had an ambiguous character. Namely, in my interpretation, LEW was in the 1920s neither a female counterpart of the male political alliance Little Entente, nor was it an organization which women used for the propagation of women's rights across borders. Rather, it was an organization which different women could differently interpret and present, for the propagation of primarily feminist or, conversely, feminist aims.

In this context, the engagement of Yugoslav feminists within the LEW predominantly revolved around advocating for women's equal political, social, and legal rights. Unlike some other LEW members, Yugoslav feminists were less preoccupied with nationalist objectives.

Secondly, the case of the LEW and the Yugoslav women's participation in this organization served as a good illustration of the ideological differences among various political orientations of liberal feminists. Namely, in the LEW of the 1920s, together with feminist representatives from Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Greece, the Yugoslav feminists met in the international sphere. What brought these women together was their wish to improve the women's position through legal and social reforms interest in women's rights, and, secondly, their political agreement with the post-Versailles European international order. However, there were significant ideological differences among all the feminists involved. On the one hand, the analysis of the speeches and reports of the Yugoslav feminists who participated in the LEW congresses—and mostly on Milena Atanacković, *the* most active interwar Yugoslav feminist in the international sphere—I showed that one group of women prioritized the discussion of women's rights and attempted to build a feminist basis for the organization. Their understanding of feminism encompassed the idea of social justice and legal equality, and it called for equality of all, regardless of sex, class, or nationality. On the other hand, there were women such as Alexandrina Cantacuzino, Eliška Purkyňová, or Delfa Ivanić, politically and socially more conservative, who—as my analysis and the previous scholarship showed—relied on traditionalist language of family and nation, understood in ethnic nationalist terms, and in some cases also race.

This ideological diversity can further illustrate well the transformation of liberal feminist political alliances from the 1920s to the 1930s. Namely, whereas the women's rights and post-Versailles political order were sufficient to hold the feminist group together in the 1920s, in the 1930s the context had significantly changed, and civic feminist, national liberal

feminist, and conservative feminist goals were far less compatible. In other words, in the context of the rise of ultra-nationalism across Europe and the rise of authoritarian and right-wing regimes, ethnic nationalism, women's rights, and social reforms for all could hardly be demanded together. It is in this context that, as I showed, the LEW transformed in the 1930s from a feminist to an organization with political goals aligning with those of the Little Entente. During this transformation, the LEW's structure evolved to encompass the National Councils of Women of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia (excluding Greece and Poland) instead of feminist organizations. Consequently, the Yugoslav "civic feminists" had less interest to participate in the LEW, and the Yugoslav women's participation in the LEW was with waned enthusiasm. On the other hand, I suggested that the Yugoslav "civic feminists" ideology was quite similar to that of the WILPF. Delving deeper into the issue of the level of involvement of Yugoslav feminists with the WILPF, I suggested that they did not take part in the Yugoslav League for Peace and Freedom exactly because their "civic feminism" was limited by their adherence to the post-Versailles international order.

3. Yugoslav left feminists and the Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme

Continuing the story of the Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP), this chapter focuses on the cooperation of AŽP with communist women. While this collaboration had roots in the 1920s, it gained momentum in 1934 when young communist women started forming Youth sections and, in certain instances, new Ženski pokret organizations. This chapter contextualizes AŽP's history during the late 1930s within the broader backdrop of the 1930s Popular Front and antifascist collaborations, and places special emphasis on the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism (CMF, Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme).

Following the 1929 economic crisis and the subsequent Great Depression, as well as the rise of National Socialism and Hitler's ascent to power in Germany, the Popular Front was a strategy that the Communist International (Comintern) adopted at its Seventh Congress in July–August 1935, when the Bulgarian communist and Comintern general secretary Georgi Dimitrov officially ended the Comintern's period of rejecting cooperation with reformist political groups. Previously, the Comintern had discouraged communist cooperation with social democrats. After 1935, Dimitrov declared the new goal to be the preservation of democratic institutions and movements, and the cooperation of communists with all progressive and antifascist forces in the framework of the popular front.⁴⁵⁹ Thus far, Yugoslav historiography has predominantly situated the establishment of the ŽP Youth sections in the context of this development, and has presented the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, KPJ) as the main initiator of the Youth sections.⁴⁶⁰ However, as historian James Barrett argued, the Popular Front should be approached not from

⁴⁵⁹ Barrett, "Popular Front," 531–532. Also Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: MacMillan, 1996), 130–133.

⁴⁶⁰ Branko Petranović mentions *Žena danas* in this context in his seminal *Istorija Jugoslavije*, 220.

a narrow organizational definition which focuses on Stalin, Dimitrov, and the Comintern. Rather, when exploring the Popular Front and its broader implications—which, as Barrett emphasizes, were “breathtaking”—historians should take into account the experiences of millions of workers, artists, intellectuals, women, and youth who participated in the Popular Front movement, as well as “the ways in which this new broader approach changed the definition of who a Communist was and, in the process, the identity of the Party itself.”⁴⁶¹ Although it was adopted officially in August 1935, the Popular Front strategy which ended the Comintern’s “ultra sectarian” period had already been in motion informally in previous years. One example of a women’s antifascist organization before the official start of the Popular Front is the CMF.

The CMF was founded in 1934 in Paris, “a hub of international political emigration in the 1920s and 1930s”⁴⁶² and the “capital of antifascism”⁴⁶³ by the French feminist and communist sympathizer Gabrielle Duchêne, the president of the French section of the WILPF. While Jovanka Kecman has offered some initial information about Yugoslav women’s participation in the CMF, more recently Stanislava Barać has pointed to the importance of Gabrielle Duchêne and the CMF for the Yugoslav Popular Front magazine *Žena danas*.⁴⁶⁴ As its name stated, the CMF was an organization whose goal was to gather and mobilize women against war and fascism. Existing historiography on the CMF is limited, with most focus placed on its feminist dimension. Siân Reynolds noted its shared focus on women’s rights and antifascism,⁴⁶⁵ and Sue Bruley highlighted the emergence of “politically developed cadres with feminist consciousness” who opposed war and fascism appeared in the Communist Party

⁴⁶¹ Barrett, “Popular Front,” 539–540.

⁴⁶² Bresciani, *Learning from the Enemy*, 8.

⁴⁶³ Anson Rabinbach, “Paris, Capital of Anti-Fascism,” in *The modernist imagination : intellectual history and critical theory : essays in honor of Martin Jay*, ed. Warren Breckman et al. (New York : Berghahn Books 2009), 183–209.

⁴⁶⁴ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 363, 387–412; Barać, *Feministička kontrapunkcija*, 196.

⁴⁶⁵ Siân Reynolds, *France between the wars: gender and politics* Reynolds (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 173.

of Great Britain during the 1930s, discussing the CMF in this context.⁴⁶⁶ Julie Gottlieb’s research revealed unexpected alliances with the CMF in Great Britain; the feminist Six Point Group, which criticized fascism by highlighting the ways the Nazi regime treated women, was more inclined to participate in the CMF than the British WILPF section, which warned against the CMF’s communist orientation.⁴⁶⁷ Katherine M. Marino has moreover demonstrated the CMF’s significant impact in South America, where national chapters were formed in Mexico, Cuba, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.⁴⁶⁸ In contrast to earlier research, Jasmine Calver has in her 2022 study—which is the only book-length study exploring the CMF from the perspective of its congresses, leading women, and global, national, and local campaigns⁴⁶⁹—evaluated that “feminism was expressed most clearly in the committee’s focus on the experiences of women in conflict and on topics that affected women in a national context, including universal suffrage.” Yet, shifting its focus from feminism to the maternalist language in the CMF’s campaigns, Calver concluded that “feminist demands were not central to their goal.”⁴⁷⁰

In this chapter, then, I delve into the rise of Ženski pokret Youth sections in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 1930s. To provide context, I explore this phenomenon within the broader history of the Popular Front movement in Yugoslavia and the transnational endeavors of women’s antifascist mobilization, particularly initiated by the CMF, an organization which I regard important for a better understanding of “united front from below” in Yugoslavia and

⁴⁶⁶ Sue Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism, and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1920-1939* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014 [1986]), especially 226–229.

⁴⁶⁷ Julie Gottlieb, “Varieties of Feminist Responses to Fascism in Inter-War Britain”, in *Varieties of Anti-Fascism. Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 101–118.

⁴⁶⁸ Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 128–129.

⁴⁶⁹ Jasmine Calver, *Anti-fascism, gender, and international communism: the Comité mondial des femmes contre la guerre et le fascisme, 1934-1941* (Abingdon, New York : Routledge, 2023). For the CMF, see also: Reynolds, *France between the wars*, 197–198; Reynolds, “The lost generation of French feminists?”; Susan Zimmermann, *Frauenpolitik und Männergewerkschaft: Internationale Geschlechterpolitik, IGB-Gewerkschafterinnen und die Arbeiter- und Frauenbewegungen der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Wien: Löcker, 2021), 484–486; Myriam Everard, “Fateful Politics: The Itinerary of Rosa Manus, 1933–1942”, *Rosa Manus (1881-1942). The International Life and Legacy of a Jewish Dutch Feminist*, ed. Myriam Everard and Francisca de Haan (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 262–263;

⁴⁷⁰ Calver, *Anti-fascism*, 179–181.

its transnational implications for women's activism. Firstly, it underscores that the history of the Alliance cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the collaboration between the Alliance and communist women. This collaboration, as I will illustrate, extended beyond the Popular Front era and can be traced back to the 1920s, gaining momentum in the mid-1930s. In advancing this argument, my aim is to go beyond the focus on the KPJ as the main agent in cooperation between the AŽP and communist women, and instead examine the role of the women themselves in forging these alliances.⁴⁷¹ Secondly, the chapter argues that the CMF was the key transnational organization for understanding the developments in the Alliance in the second half of the 1930s. By examining the feminist responses to fascism in 1930s Yugoslavia, in contrast to Calver, I will argue that the Youth sections carried a significant feminist undertone within the Yugoslav context. Thirdly, no sources I have seen so far indicate that Yugoslavia had a formally organized section of the CMF, in comparison to countries like Great Britain. Given this absence and the substantial impact of the CMF in Yugoslavia, my third point contends that delving into Yugoslav women's involvement in the CMF significantly enriches our comprehension of the CMF's broader influence on women transnationally, beyond France, Britain, and South America, which have so far been discussed by historians.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first two sections outline the broader context of the KPJ and examine the cooperation of the Alliance with communist and social democratic women prior to the Popular Front, and then discuss the establishment of changes in the Alliance in the second half of the 1930s in the context of the Popular Front, also outlining the ends of cooperations between the ŽP members and young communist women. The third

⁴⁷¹ This is the case, for example, with Kecman, Simić, and Batinić. For example, see Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 88: "The party viewed women mainly as a reserve team of the revolution, to be drawn into the political arena as needed to replace men." For an opposing approach, see Francisca de Haan, ed., "Ten Years After. Communism and Feminism Revisited," *Aspasia* 10 (2016): 102–168, and particularly page 105 of de Haan's introduction: "Our work, in short, regards a totalitarian or top-down model (from the state or the Party to women) as inadequate and tries to replace it with more complex and multidirectional approaches."

section explores Yugoslav women's participation in the CMF and situates the establishment of the ŽP Youth sections and their activities within this transnational framework. The fourth section explores the antifascist political thought of the Slovenian communist and feminist activist Angela Vode, who discussed the dangers of fascism even before the launch of global action through the CMF, and then turns to the antifascist core of the “new feminist” program in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*, the two journals which resembled the CMF's journal *Les Femmes dans l'Action Mondial*.

3.1. Convergences between the Alliance and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia before the Popular Front

The history of the AŽP would be incomplete without examining the cooperation between the Alliance and communist women. This is mainly because communist women had entered the Alliance's ŽP organizations en masse across the country and thus contributed to their revival, but, as this section will demonstrate, the cooperation between communist women and the Alliance had a longer history, reaching back all the way to the early 1920s. By contrast, in Yugoslavia there was very little cooperation of both these groups of women with social democratic women. Who were communist feminists in the 1920s, and what was their relationship with the KPJ?

Before discussing the women in the KPJ, it is necessary to discuss the KPJ in more depth. The emergence of the KPJ was a part of the broader European story of splits among social democrats during WWI. The war had produced a split among the social democratic parties within the Second International (1889–1914), between the factions that supported their states' participation in the conflict and the factions that opposed what they regarded as an imperialist and bourgeois war. As a consequence of this split, after the Soviet Union, the first workers' state, was formed after the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the Communist

International (Comintern, 1919–1943) was founded in March 1919 in Moscow. This body united all those who favored the revolutionary path over the reformist one, and who supported keeping the class struggle at the center of their program while avoiding cooperation with the “bourgeois” political parties. It was in this international context that in April 1919, Yugoslav former social democrats who rejected cooperation with the new Yugoslav state and government organized the Unification Congress in Belgrade. On this occasion, a party was formed called *Socijalistička radička partija Jugoslavije (komunista)* (SRPJ[k], Socialist Workers’ Party of Yugoslavia [Communist]),⁴⁷² changing its name to Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1920.⁴⁷³

Initially, the KPJ gained significant support from the voters, and at the Constituent Elections in November 1920 ranked fourth (12.4%) at the ballot with almost 200,000 votes.⁴⁷⁴ After this brief surge, however, in the context of the (transnational) anti-revolutionary atmosphere and fear of Bolshevism,⁴⁷⁵ the government introduced two laws which made the Communist Party illegal; at the end of 1920, the government banned “communist propaganda” and prohibited the work of party-affiliated organizations; and then, in August 1921—after an attempt by a communist acting on his own authority to assassinate Regent Aleksandar—the National Assembly officially prohibited the KPJ by passing the Law for the Defense of Public

⁴⁷² Toma Milenković, *Socijalistička partija Jugoslavije (1921-1929)* [Socialist Party of Yugoslavia (1921-1929)] (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, NIP export-press, 1974), 21–23. Some former social democrats—particularly those from Slovenia, Croatia, and Slavonia—were in favor of establishing cooperation with nonsocialist parties; some of them subsequently joined the new Yugoslav government as ministers.

⁴⁷³ The first name was a compromise between two big factions who attempted to unite under this name: on the one hand, the so-called “centrists” (centrumaši), who were either undecided or hostile towards the revolutionary position; and on the other hand, the representatives who supported a revolutionary platform. At the second SRPJ(k) congress held in June 1920 in the Croatian town of Vukovar, there was another split, when the revolutionary current won by an overwhelming majority against the “centrists.” As a result of this victory, the party was renamed *Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* (KPJ, Communist Party of Yugoslavia). In October 1920, one month before the elections for the Constituent Assembly were held, the “centrists” published the Manifesto of the Communist Opposition, and, as a response to this, the revolutionaries expelled the “centrist” opposition from the KPJ. Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 45–48; Stefan Gužvica, *Before Tito. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the Great Purge (1936-1940)* (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2020), 33–36.

⁴⁷⁴ It followed the Democratic Party, the Radical Party, and the Croatian Republican Peasant Party. Banac, *National Question*, 330.

⁴⁷⁵ John Paul Newman, “Revolution and Counterrevolution in Europe 1917–1923,” in S. P. Smith, *The Cambridge History of Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 74–95.

Security and Order in the State.⁴⁷⁶ The outlawing of the KPJ resulted in a rapid decrease of its membership: in 1921, only 688 activists remained, less than 2% of the figure a year earlier.⁴⁷⁷ Historians agree that the history of the party after 1921, and more or less until 1928, is one of factional struggles within the KPJ.⁴⁷⁸ In 1928, the Comintern and its constituent parties, including the KPJ, decided to radicalize their actions and prepare for more revolutionary measures, and thus the so-called “Third Period” of working-class radicalization and “ultra-leftist” attacks on social democracy began.⁴⁷⁹ According to historian Stefan Gužvica, although this shift was supposed to end the factional struggles and orient the communist parties towards a revolution,⁴⁸⁰ in the Yugoslav case the factional struggles continued unofficially until Milan Gorkić (1904–1939) was appointed party leader in 1932. In his view, Gorkić’s work “marked a clear break with the earlier sectarian attitude towards the reformist left” within the KPJ and encouraged cooperation with the non-communist trade unions and the social democratic rank and file (but not the leadership).⁴⁸¹

The existing scholarship reveals that women’s involvement in the KPJ in the 1920s and early 1930s was not large. According to Kecman, the overall number of women in the KPJ was small in the 1920s; only twelve women were active in the illegal KPJ in 1924 (1.5% of its membership), fifty out of three thousand members in 1926, and one hundred women in 1928.⁴⁸² Initially, communist women’s activism was on the rise in the brief period of legality of the SRPJ(k)/KPJ.⁴⁸³ The women who participated at the founding congress of the SRPJ(k) in April 1919 united into Centralni sekretarijat žena socijalista (komunista) (Central Socialist

⁴⁷⁶ Banac, *National Question*, 332. Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, 44.

⁴⁷⁷ Banac, *National Question*, 332.

⁴⁷⁸ For factional struggles in the KPJ in the 1920s, see Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 45–116; Gužvica, *Before Tito*, 33–54.

⁴⁷⁹ McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 81–119.

⁴⁸⁰ Gužvica, *Before Tito*, 41.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁸² Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 134, 137, 140.

⁴⁸³ Bujaković, “Reinvestigating communist women’s activism,” 12–13.

[Communist] Women's Secretariat).⁴⁸⁴ The main goal of this Women's Secretariat—which its members did not consider a separate women's organization, but a part of a bigger entity, i.e., the SRPJ(k)/KPJ—was to educate women by establishing libraries, organizing courses and women's groups, and publishing the journal *Jednakost* (Equality, from March to December 1920, in 4000 copies).⁴⁸⁵ After the KPJ's prohibition in 1921, the communist women organized briefly during an attempt to legalize communist activism through a newly established Independent Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (NRPJ, Nezavisna radnička partija Jugoslavije, January 1923 to July 1924).⁴⁸⁶ According to Kecman, it was only at its fourth congress in 1928 that the KPJ adopted a resolution on the “woman question,” which stated that the KPJ had been largely underestimating working-class and peasant women until then, and consequently planned a separate women's committee within the Party.⁴⁸⁷ According to Minja Bujaković's recent research, the communist women's activity indeed increased in this period: she shows that in 1929, after the royal dictatorship had begun, many young women between fifteen and twenty-eight years old—mainly unmarried, literate, and without private property—got arrested for spreading leaflets and brochures. Bujaković moreover showed that between 1931 and 1933, a spectrum of communist practices developed.⁴⁸⁸ It was only in the 1920s that the number of women in the KPJ rose from 1% to 6% of its overall membership.

Whereas in the pre-WWI period in the Yugoslav lands there was little collaboration between socialist and nonsocialist women,⁴⁸⁹ the situation changed after WWI, as there is proof

⁴⁸⁴ Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 106–107. In Slovenia, communist women's organizing began only in 1920, when the Workers' Socialist Party (Radnička socijalistička partija) established in the same year joined the SRPJ(k). The leading figure of communist women's organizing in Slovenia was Antonija Tončka Čeč, a trade union organizer. In the more rural parts of the country, such as Montenegro and Macedonia, women became more active only in the late 1920s, even though there are examples of women—such as Rosa Plaveva from Skopje—who had been active since 1909. Bujaković, “Reinvestigating communist women's activism,” 9–13.

⁴⁸⁵ Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 106–107.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

⁴⁸⁸ Bujaković, “Reinvestigating communist women's activism,” 27–28.

⁴⁸⁹ Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 81.

that some communist women in the early 1920s cooperated with the Alliance. This was the case with three women, Desanka Cvetković, Draga Stefanović, and Milica Kostić, who published in *Ženski pokret* between 1922 and 1924, and in some cases also participated in events organized by the Feminist Alliance.⁴⁹⁰ The information we have about them is rather fragmentary, yet it points to the fact that they were among the leading women in the KPJ in the 1920s. Desanka Cvetković (1889–1967) had begun her activism in 1905 and became a member of the Serbian Social Democratic Party in 1908; after WWI she joined the KPJ. According to Kecman, Cvetković, among other things, edited the KPJ magazines for women and children,⁴⁹¹ and was a KPJ delegate at the Fourth Comintern Congress in Moscow in 1922.⁴⁹² We know slightly more about another communist woman who published in *Ženski pokret* in the early 1920s, Draga Stefanović (1890–1967).⁴⁹³ In her early youth, she moved to Belgrade and began to work as a bookbinder. She became active in trade unions when she was fifteen, and at the age of eighteen became a board member of the Association of the Bookbinding Workers of Serbia. At the founding congress of the SRPJ(k) in April 1919, she was elected secretary of the Centralni sekretarijat žena komunista (Central Secretariat of Women Communists). She held several other important functions, including that of KPJ Executive Committee member, yet she was not re-elected to this position in May 1923, possibly due to the fact that she was a member of the “right” faction, whereas the “left” faction emerged victorious at this conference.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁰ Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 149–153. In *Ženski pokret*, Milica Kostić mainly published poems and short stories, literary critiques, and reports. Bujaković, “Reinvestigating communist women’s activism,” 43.

⁴⁹¹ The magazines are: *Jednakost* (Equality, 1910–1912; 1914; 1920), dedicated to the woman question, and the children’s magazine *Budućnost* (Future, 1920, 1923–1928).

⁴⁹² Information about Cvetković in this paragraph is from Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 92, 129, 183, 185; and Bujaković, “Reinvestigating communist women’s activism,” 37–41.

⁴⁹³ For so far the most detailed biography of Draginja Draga Stefanović, as well as her speech at the Alliance’s protest in 1923, see: Stefan Gužvica, “Draga Stefanović, ‘O nevoljama naše dece,’” *Novi plamen*, <https://www.noviplamen.net/glavna/draga-stefanovic-o-nevoljama-nase-dece/>; Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 67–68, 185.

⁴⁹⁴ Draga Stefanović’s daughter, Dr. Dušica Stefanović (1913–1941), was in the 1930s one of the most active women in the ŽP Youth Section.

Concerning their participation with the feminists, we know that Cvetković was vice-president of the Executive Committee of the Feminist Alliance in 1923 and 1924,⁴⁹⁵ whereas Stefanović was a Belgrade ŽP board member at one point in the early 1920s.⁴⁹⁶ Cvetković published in *Ženski pokret* about Alexandra Kollontai's "new woman" and reviewed Rosa Luxemburg's *Letters from Prison (Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, Berlin, 1920)*.⁴⁹⁷ The preserved traces of Stefanović's participation at Alliance events demonstrate that she spoke of various issues for the Alliance, putting particular attention on women workers' perspectives. Stefanović spoke at the big protest of women held in May 1921 during the Constitutional Assembly of the Parliament; she spoke of the "reactionary parts of the Constitution" (which was eventually passed by the Constitutional Assembly in June 1921), and emphasized that the new Constitution was a disgrace because it deprived half of the population of their rights. She also spoke of children's labor (especially of girls aged 12–13), and women's labor, which encompassed 10–12 hours of factory work and then further housework.⁴⁹⁸ In 1923, she held a speech at the Gathering for the Protection of Children and Youth in Belgrade, organized by the Alliance, in which she demanded that the state budget be redirected from "feeding the police dogs" to "the nourishment and protection of the children."⁴⁹⁹ We find her again in sources about the May 1926 major assembly organized by the Belgrade ŽP on the hygienic conditions in the city, where she protested against the conditions in which most inhabitants of Belgrade lived, and particularly mentioned the position of women workers.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁵ "Alijansija feminističkih društava," 327; Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 185.

⁴⁹⁶ Gužvica, "Draga Stefanović." Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 67–68, 185.

⁴⁹⁷ Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 150–152.

⁴⁹⁸ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 180.

⁴⁹⁹ Bujaković, "Reinvestigating communist women's activism."

⁵⁰⁰ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 188.



3.1. Angela Vode (1892-1985) (1939). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-D2E300AL from <http://www.dlib.si>

Whereas KPJ members Cvetković and Stefanović cooperated with the Alliance in the early 1920s, an even more significant example of a “communist feminist” is the Slovenian Angela Vode (1892–1985). Vode’s father Anton was a railway worker and her mother Frančiska probably a housewife, and like most other women mentioned here, Angela Vode studied to become a teacher and began teaching in elementary schools around Ljubljana in 1912. After WWI, she began to work with children with disabilities. Vode was a member of various (mainly women’s) voluntary associations, most importantly of Ljubljana ŽP from its foundation in 1926 until 1937, serving also as its vice-president from 1927 until 1937. As a

representative of Ljubljana ŽP, she participated in the congresses of the LEW in 1927 in Prague, the IAW in Berlin in 1929, and the ICW in Dubrovnik in 1936. In 1922, Angela Vode joined the KPJ, and although there are no sources which can help us better understand her activity in the KPJ, Alenka Puhar noted that she was expelled from the KPJ in the winter of 1939/1940 because she disagreed with the non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.⁵⁰¹ Whereas Cvetković and Stefanović were primarily members of the KPJ interested in the position of women in society and participated in the feminist movement occasionally, Angela Vode was primarily dedicated to women's organizations in which she acted from a consciously Marxist position, but then opted out of the KPJ after she disagreed with its official line.

By contrast, there was less cooperation between the AŽP and the women from the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia (SPJ, Socijalistička partija Jugoslavije), which was formed in December 1921 and assembled the social democrats who opposed the KPJ.⁵⁰² According to Toma Milenković, the only historian who wrote comprehensively about the SPJ (in 1974), the SPJ condemned the communists for what they perceived as the communists' dictatorial and antidemocratic positions.⁵⁰³ Milenković argued that the SPJ was neither a big nor an influential party, as it had less than 2% of the vote in elections during the 1920s. In contrast to the KPJ, Milenković moreover argued that the SPJ was not an antiregime party.⁵⁰⁴ The SPJ had its own Sekretarijat žena socijalista (Secretariat of women socialists), which according to Milenković was not a really active organization, numbering approximately three hundred female party members.⁵⁰⁵ Although the social democratic women's work in interwar Yugoslavia has

⁵⁰¹ Šelih, et. al, *Pozabljena polovica*, 275–279; See also: De Haan et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, 604–607.

⁵⁰² Milenković, *Socijalistička partija*, 21–28.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10–12; 168.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 502–504, 516.

remained under-researched,⁵⁰⁶ we know that the leading woman in the SPJ was Milica Djurić (1893–1972, from 1919 Djurić Topalović). From a well-situated and well-known military Belgrade family, Milica Djurić began her activism in the Serbian Social Democratic Party around 1911, when she was still in high school. Later, she graduated from pedagogical and biological studies in Belgrade, after which she reportedly studied economics and sociology at the University of Geneva for another three years. Subsequently, she worked at different gymnasiums, first in the Macedonian town of Bitola, and then in Belgrade.⁵⁰⁷ Djurić Topalović contributed actively to public discussions about feminism and the woman question in interwar Yugoslavia; however, she was generally unfavorable towards the Alliance of Women's Movements. In one 1928 article, Alojzija Štebi commented on the way the socialists organized International Women's Day that year, and complained that on these protests, the social democratic women did not, as expected, protest for women's rights, but against what the social democrats called the "bourgeois" women's movement, i.e., the Alliance.⁵⁰⁸ Djurić Topalović was even more opposed to communist women.

Whereas the SPJ leadership was against cooperation, it seems that in Slovenia there were attempts to establish cooperation between the Alliance and the Slovenian social democratic women's organization, the Association of Working Women and Girls (ZDŽD, Zveza delavskih žena in deklet, established 1924). At first formally independent from the SPJ, the organization's aims included organizing and educating women and girls about their rights

⁵⁰⁶ An exception is the recent article: Kristina Jorgić, "Milica Djurić Topalović i žensko pitanje u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji" [Milica Djurić Topalović and the woman question in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia] *Tokovi istorije* no. 1 (2021): 85–108.

⁵⁰⁷ Milica Djurić-Topalović and her husband Živko Topalović (1886–1972) joined the nationalist and royalist Četnik movement of the Serbian general Dragoljub Draža Mihajlović. After the war, the couple lived in Paris, and then briefly in Vienna, and until their death they actively opposed Tito's regime in post-1945 Yugoslavia, which is also the reason why they would not and could not return to the country. The information about her outlined here is from her autobiographical note in the book about her husband, published in 1988: "Milica Đurić-Topalović o sebi," in *Iz života i rada dr Živka Topalovića. Prilozi za biografiju* [From the life and work of Dr. Živko Topalović. Contributions for a Biography], ed. Marko Milunović and Đorđe Radovanović (Stockholm: Zadužbina dr Živko i Milica Topalović 1988), 56–60; See also: Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 16.

⁵⁰⁸ Alojzija Štebi, "Internacionalni ženski dan" [International Women's Day], *Ženski pokret* 7 (1928): 2.

to political, economic, social, and cultural equality, and it had its own journal *Ženski list* (Women's Paper, 1924–1935, Maribor). Although it did not work closely with the Alliance, the ZDŽD did support it at certain points; for instance, *Ženski list* published a note about the foundation of *Ženski pokret* in Ljubljana in January 1926, noting that despite class differences there were issues, such as equal suffrage rights, around which all women should cooperate.⁵⁰⁹ In February 1927, *Ženski list* informed its readers that *Ženski pokret* magazine had begun to come out in a new form, accompanied by a comment that the feminists were in fact similar to the social democratic women.⁵¹⁰ Subsequently, ZDŽD cooperated with the Ljubljana ŽP on common public actions in Ljubljana, and together demanded general, equal, secret, active and passive suffrage rights for men and women, in 1927 and then again in 1934.⁵¹¹

It is clear, therefore, that in the 1920s and early 1930s there was already some cooperation between the Alliance and communist women. On the other hand, there was significantly less cooperation between the Alliance and social democratic women, partly because the SPJ was not a very active party. The only exception was the Slovenian ZDŽD, which occasionally cooperated with the Alliance. As the next section will show, this cooperation significantly increased in the mid-1930s in the context of the Popular Front.

3.2. The Popular Front in Yugoslavia: The KPJ's leading role and the changes in the structure of the Alliance of Women's Movements

In contrast to seven ŽP organizations in the country in 1932 (see chapter 1), in the mid-1930s, the Alliance's work significantly increased due to the rise in participation of communist women who entered the local *Ženski pokret* organizations. According to historian Danilo Kecić's 1989 findings based on the Alliance's archives, there were altogether eighteen ŽP organizations in

⁵⁰⁹ “Ženski pokret”, *Ženski list* 1 (1926): 2.

⁵¹⁰ “Ženski pokret”, *Ženski list* 2 (1927): 4.

⁵¹¹ “Akcijska za žensko volilno pravico” [Action for Women's Right to Vote], *Ženski list* 9 (1927): 1.

the country in 1940.⁵¹² What do we know about the dynamics of this revival of the Alliance? And how can this surge be understood within the context of the Popular Front in Yugoslavia?

The increase in the work of the ŽP organizations and the Alliance overall must be read in the context of the Yugoslav Popular Front because, as historians have argued before, the communist women's involvement in the Youth sections was a part of the KPJ's strategy to legalize communist women's activism.⁵¹³ The Popular Front in Yugoslavia and some other Eastern European countries was distinct to the Popular Front in countries such as, for example, France. Namely, the Popular Front strategy recommended to the national communist parties to forge a united front against fascism between communist, social democratic, and other democratic forces, and the preservation of "bourgeois democracies." As the Communist Party of France was legal, it could cooperate with the social democrats and other political parties, and their cooperation led to an electoral victory and change of government in 1936.⁵¹⁴ By contrast, in countries such as Yugoslavia, Poland, Bulgaria, or Austria, liberal democracies had already been under great threat, with parliaments dissolved, constitutions revoked, and political parties banned.⁵¹⁵ In Yugoslavia, the royal dictatorship ended in 1934, when Croatian and Macedonian terrorists assassinated King Aleksandar in Marseille. Subsequently the new regime of Milan Stojadinović came to power between May 1935 and August 1939.⁵¹⁶ The most important aspect of Stojadinović's regime was that it drew Yugoslavia closer to fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; in 1937, Yugoslavia signed a friendship pact with Italy, and from 1938 it became a part of the German economic sphere, supplying Germany with iron, cooper, and food

⁵¹² Danilo Kecić, "Žene Vojvodine u radničkom i revolucionarno-demokratskom pokretu u predvečerje revolucije" [Women of Vojvodina in the Workers' and Revolutionary-Democratic Movement on the Eve of the Revolution], in *Revolucionarni tokovi* [Revolutionary Currents] (Novi Sad, 1989), 69–74.

⁵¹³ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 290–291.

⁵¹⁴ David A. L. Levy, "The French Popular Front, 1936–37," in *The Popular Front in Europe*, ed. Helen Graham and Paul Preston (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987), 58–83.

⁵¹⁵ Cristina Diac, "An Obvious Nonstarter: The Popular Front in Eastern Europe," *Etudes Balkaniques*, no. 4 (2017): 595–649, especially 620–621.

⁵¹⁶ Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 106; Troch, "Yugoslavism", 236.

in exchange for weapons.⁵¹⁷ In the framework of the Popular Front, the KPJ attempted to forge cooperations with various oppositional parties, including the social democrats, Croatian and Serbian peasant parties, Slovene Christian Socialists, and others; however, because of its illegality and the weakness of the oppositional parties, electoral success was highly unlikely.⁵¹⁸

Historians have argued, however, that the story of the Popular Front in Yugoslavia should be seen in broader terms than the cooperation between the KPJ and other political parties after 1935. Namely, according to Stefan Gužvica, the KPJ had followed the line of the “united front from below” since Milan Gorkić’s ascendance in the KPJ in 1932, which in both Banac’s and Gužvica’s interpretation made the KPJ’s approach “a sort of cautious vanguard” of the developments which would be sanctioned by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935.⁵¹⁹ The pre-1935 developments in Yugoslavia are thus in line with historian James Barrett’s argument that in reality, the rank-and-file communists had initiated cooperation with other progressive forces in various local and national contexts before 1935. This agitation from “below,” predominantly by the youth activists and radical intellectuals, was among the causes of the shift to the Popular Front strategy.⁵²⁰ In addition, as Ivica Mladenović and Stefan Gužvica persuasively argue, the basis of the Yugoslav Popular Front strategy was the foundation of illegal cells within legal organizations, including political parties and various voluntary associations.⁵²¹ It was in this period of openness of the KPJ that the party’s membership grew, and that party members and sympathizers engaged in activities through which they aimed to influence and gather together peasants, workers, and intellectuals. The

⁵¹⁷ Calic, *History of Yugoslavia*, 109; 118–119.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.; Banac, *National Question*, 64.

⁵¹⁹ Gužvica, *Before Tito*. See also: Banac, *National Question*, 64; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 120–157.

⁵²⁰ Barrett, “Popular Front,” 531–550.

⁵²¹ Stefan Gužvica and Ivica Mladenović, “L’antifascisme et les fronts populaires en Yougoslavie. Le chemin vers le pouvoir, 1935–1945,” *Mouvements* 104, no. 4 (2020): 58–68; for an example, see: Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European*, 314–332.

party also significantly increased its activity and reach through periodicals, newspapers, and literature.⁵²²

It was in this context that in the mid-1930s young communist women began to enter ŽP organizations and establish Youth sections or formed new ŽP organizations; while I explore their work more closely in the next section (3.3), here I mainly list the organizations in order to illustrate their scope. The first ŽP Youth section was formed in Zagreb in March 1934, and it was active until 1937. In Belgrade, the ŽP Youth section was active between the fall of 1935 and 1940. The information which Kecman and Kecić offer about the other ŽP organizations is relatively fragmentary, but we know that in some cases communist women formed Youth sections, whereas in some cases they formed new ŽP organizations. According to Kecman, “in the beginning of the 1930s,” there were only five active ŽP organizations in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo and Skopje, whereas by 1937 there had been new organizations formed in Subotica, Čačak, Kragujevac, Banja Luka, Slavonski Brod, and Jasenovac.⁵²³ According to Kecić, who focused on ŽP organizations in Vojvodina, a new ŽP organization was established in Novi Sad in 1937 gathering almost seven hundred members from around Vojvodina. Other Vojvodina ŽPs were, besides the aforementioned Subotica, founded in Sombor (September 1937), Vršac (end of 1937), Kisač, Šid (June 1938), Senta (March 1939), Srbobran, Sremska Mitrovica, Kikinda, and Zrenjanin/Petrovgrad. Kecić did not write much about the activity of these organizations, although he emphasized that the most active organizations were in Novi Sad and Vršac, the former comprising around 700 members.⁵²⁴ In the second half of the 1930s, ŽP organizations or Youth sections were also founded in Serbia (ŽP Niš in December 1937, ŽP Jagodina in October 1938, and ŽP Šabac in the fall of 1938); Kosovo (ŽP Priština in March 1938 and Kosovska Mitrovica in December 1939); Macedonia (ŽP Veles in May 1939,

⁵²² Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, 226–228.

⁵²³ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 286–287.

⁵²⁴ Kecić, “Žene Vojvodine,” 69–74; Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 287–289.

Skopje—ŽP Youth section in autumn 1938); and Montenegro (ŽP Podgorica, 1936).⁵²⁵ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ŽP Youth section was founded in August or September of 1935, and in Banja Luka the ŽP was founded in September 1935; according to existing research, some Muslim women were members of the ŽP in Banja Luka.⁵²⁶

The Youth sections existed in almost all parts of the country, *except* in Slovenia.⁵²⁷ In Ljubljana and Slovenia, communist women had prior to 1934 been a part of the aforementioned social democratic organization ZDŽD, from which they were expelled in May 1934 as their open communist activism endangered the organization's functioning.⁵²⁸ ŽP in Ljubljana did not have a Youth section, most probably because the ŽP mostly worked in the framework of the bigger entity, the NCWY *Dravska* section.⁵²⁹ Female students in Slovenia organized mainly through the society Dom visokošolk (Female Students' Dorm, established 1935), which also gathered students from the University of Ljubljana who did not live in the dorm. There were overlaps among the membership, as there were women who were active in Dom visokošolk and the Council's *Dravska* section.⁵³⁰

With the communist women's involvement with the AŽP and growth of the ŽP organizations in the second half of the 1930s, the Alliance's campaigns became broader and more inclusive. In this period, the Alliance returned to demands for suffrage rights, organized major demonstrations across the country in October 1935, and then again participated in

⁵²⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 287–289. According to Kecman, there were also women active in Prilep, Macedonia, yet not in ŽP but in an organization called Trezvena loža, founded in 1936.

⁵²⁶ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*; 346. Perko Vojinović, “Ženski Pokret u Banjoj Luci (1918–1941),” *Zbornik Krajiških Muzeja* 5 (1973): 113–124, especially 116–117. According to Kecman, in Bijeljina, another town of Bosnia and Herzegovina, young communist women organized youth sections of the conservative organizations Kolo srpskih sestara (Circle of Serbian Sisters) and Kneginja Zorka, because there was no ŽP in this town.

⁵²⁷ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 345.

⁵²⁸ The police nevertheless banned the organization in 1935. Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 317.

⁵²⁹ The National Council of Women of Yugoslavia decentralized in 1933, and one of the sections was *Dravska* section, named after one of the nine administrative units, *banovinas*, in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929. For more about the decentralization, see 5.2.

⁵³⁰ Slavko Kremenšek, *Slovensko študentsko gibanje 1919–1941* [Slovenian Student Movement]. (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1971), 281–2.

suffrage demonstrations organized by young communist women in the fall of 1939. In the second half of the 1930s, the Alliance also organized a campaign for an equal minimum wage for men and women and demanded an eight-hour working day; it campaigned to introduce insurance for all unemployed women and men older than 55; it demanded the withdrawal of decrees which discriminated against married women who worked in the public sector; and it protested against the law amendment from 1937, due to which married teachers lost their jobs.⁵³¹

The history of the AŽP and the establishment of the ŽP Youth sections in the second half of the 1930s, then, is a part of this broader story of the Yugoslav Popular Front strategy, the basis of which was legalizing communist activism through forming illegal cells in legal organizations. The KPJ's "united front from below" approach, initiated in 1932, was already underway when the first ŽP Youth section was formed in Zagreb in 1934. This reflects local and national antifascist efforts preceding Dimitrov's official endorsement of the Popular Front policy, as well as a concurrently emerging transnational women's movement against war and fascism. The CMF, in the words of Marino, "raised the consciousness of feminists throughout the world to the need to confront racism, fascism and imperialism as interconnected struggles, and it proved critical to launching new, broad forms of left and left-liberal feminisms throughout the Americas and the world."⁵³² The next section will explore the Yugoslav women's connection with the CMF.

⁵³¹ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 293–305.

⁵³² Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 128.

3.3. The Comité Mondial des Femmes Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme and the Yugoslav Ženski pokret Youth sections

Founded in 1934 in Paris, the CMF was a women's organization initiated as a part of the broader transnational antifascist movement growing in France and elsewhere in Western Europe, specifically the Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement, named after the two committees against war and fascism formed in Amsterdam in August 1932 and at the Salle Pleyel in Paris in June 1933. Initiated by Western antifascist and communist politicians and intellectuals, these two committees made space for the collaboration of various leftist and communist activists, which eventually led to the creation of the World Committee against War and Fascism in late 1933.⁵³³ As Jasmine Calver has noted, the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement was indicative of the attempts and willingness of left activists to organize against fascism even before this became the Comintern's official stance in 1935,⁵³⁴ and both the World Committee against War and Fascism and the CMF should be interpreted with this in mind.

The CMF can be, then, described as a women's version of the Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement, diverging from it predominantly by membership and by a combination of feminist and antifascist goals. Its main initiator was Gabrielle Duchêne (1870–1954), the president of the French section of the WILPF who was also a member of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, as well as a labor activist and a communist sympathizer who, however, never joined the communist party.⁵³⁵ Duchêne's initial idea was to organize an antifascist meeting through the WILPF in late 1933; however, many WILPF organizations refused to congregate around what they saw as a rally against one political system.⁵³⁶ Because of this, Duchêne turned to the Comintern, and initiated the CMF with women who were members of the French Communist

⁵³³ Calver, *Anti-fascism*, 6–11.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18–21.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

Party (CPF), including Bernadette Cattaneo, a member of the CPF since 1923 who became CMF's international secretary general and the editor of the CMF journal *Femmes dans l'action mondiale* (Women in Global Action).⁵³⁷ The Comintern, Calver emphasized, played an important role in the establishment of the CMF, a platform which gave women space to voice concerns.⁵³⁸

Jasmine Calver's recent research usefully offers an overview of the organization's work. The CMF primarily functioned through its two congresses (1934 in Paris and 1938 in Marseille) and through global, national, and European campaigns initiated through its journal. Calver describes the appeal for the 1934 congress as one which invited women of all ages and social and professional backgrounds to join, discussed the issues of war and fascism, and explored how fascist regimes revoked women's rights. The preparation for the congress included an enquiry about women's experiences in work, divided by types of work (workers, teachers, government employees, agricultural workers, housewives), as well as the ways these workers combined their work with domestic work, and similar gendered questions. The second congress was supposed to be held in 1938 in the Czechoslovak capital of Prague, yet because of the Sudeten crisis and Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938, it was moved to Marseille.⁵³⁹ The third congress should have taken place in Cuba, but eventually never happened. In March 1939, the CMF was renamed the Women's Committee for Peace and Democracy, moved from Paris to London, and its presidency was handed over to the previous president of the British CMF section, Charlotte Haldane. Yet, as Calver explained, the CMF organs—both the French *Les Femmes dans l'Action Mondial* (September 1934–August 1939)

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 14–15; 29.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 38–42.

and the British *Woman To-day* (September 1936–February 1940)—continued to be published without interference.⁵⁴⁰ The organization discontinued in 1940.

There is not much information about the Yugoslav women's participation in the CMF. The Yugoslav delegation at the CMF congress was among the smaller ones, with only four representatives; by contrast, France had 630 delegates, Britain had 77, Italy, the Netherlands, and the US between 40 and 50, Poland and Romania almost 30, and the USSR, Spain, Germany, and Czechoslovakia between 10 and 20 each.⁵⁴¹ According to Jovanka Kecman, the Central Committee of the KPJ tried to legally send Yugoslav delegates to the congress, suggesting that a worker, or at least a student, was sent to the congress, and demanded the KPJ members "widen the agitation among proletarian and other working women for the popularization of the congress."⁵⁴² The four delegates at the congress from Yugoslavia were Jelena Nikolić (alias Mira Panić), Marija Vilfan (1912–1994), and, as Kecman put it rather vaguely, "a representative of working women who lived in Paris and one woman from Dalmatia."⁵⁴³ Jelena Nikolić, in her report to the KPJ leadership, disregarded the latter woman as "not fit for serious work."⁵⁴⁴ Who were these women?

Jelena Nikolić, born in 1904 in the Bosnian Bijeljina, was a member of the KPJ. The few things we do know about her include the fact that she was born in Bosnia and was active politically in her home town; she was a student of medicine; she had a sister, Zora Nikolić, who was four years older and also active in the KPJ; and both sisters were politically active until the 1948 Tito-Stalin split, when they opted for Stalin and were subsequently imprisoned:

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 42–43.

⁵⁴¹ Calver, *Anti-fascism*, 46.

⁵⁴² Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 387.

⁵⁴³ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 388; Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), KI (Communist International), 1934/178, "Izvještaj sa Svjetskog kongresa žena protiv rata i fašizma u Parizu" [A Report from the Women's World Congress in Paris]. Comité Mondial des Femmes, *Rassemblement Mondial des Femmes ! Contre la guerre et le fascisme. Paris, les 4, 5, 6, 7 Aout 1934, Compte Rendu des Travaux du Congrès*.

⁵⁴⁴ AJ, Fond 790/1, Communist International (KPJ Section) (KI), 1934/178, "Izvještaj." Additionally, Nikolić mentioned also a representative of the female Youth in Macedonia, who was however not a part of the Yugoslav, but of the Bulgarian delegation.

Zora until 1951 and Jelena until 1952. The other three Yugoslav delegates chose Jelena Nikolić to speak in their name at the 1934 congress. According to Nikolić's report, she managed to hold a speech in German, although, reportedly, she could hardly take the floor to speak as too many delegates from "big countries" wanted to address the congress. She also reported to have been voted into the CMF executive committee.⁵⁴⁵ In her speech, Nikolić discussed the low wages of women workers, the exploitation of young women workers, the Royal Dictatorship and the consequences of the economic crisis. She concluded by emphasizing that not enough had been done for the enlargement of the women's movement in the struggle against war and fascism, and that in Yugoslavia, the KPJ led the struggle against these forces.⁵⁴⁶ Marija Vilfan, the second delegate in Paris, was from a clerk family in Ljubljana, and was at the time of the congress a student of French and English at the University of Ljubljana. She was a member of the social democratic women's organization ZDŽD, and a member of the KPJ from 1934.⁵⁴⁷ At the congress, she represented four legal Slovenian organizations, including the Ljubljana ŽP.⁵⁴⁸

These two cases demonstrate that the Yugoslav women's delegation at the Paris 1934 CMF congress was directly connected to the KPJ, and only very indirectly connected to the AŽP. So far, I have not managed to find sources which would further point to the connection between the Alliance and the CMF in this period, except a document in Gabrielle Duchêne's archival fond on which the name of Alojzija Štebi was written. It is an unsigned, typed, four-

⁵⁴⁵ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1934/178, "Izveštaj."

⁵⁴⁶ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 388-389; AJ, KI, 1934/178, "Izveštaj." Nikolić also reported to have met with some Yugoslav women workers in Paris, and that she also organized a meeting of Balkan communists (women and men), where they shared ideas about how to increase the work among women and discussed the possibilities of organizing a special congress in the Balkans.

⁵⁴⁷ "Vilfan, Marija (1912–1994)," *Slovenska biografija. Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU*, 2013. <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi788612/#slovenski-biografski-leksikon> (Accessed May 18, 2023).

⁵⁴⁸ The others were: The Association of University Educated Women, Ženski pokret, The Organization of Domestic Servants (u pismu piše organizacija hišnih poslov), and ZDŽD. National and University Library Ljubljana (NUK), MS 1432, Fond Erne Muser, VIII. 1. 25. 4. Korespondenca Vode Angela.

page document in which the unknown author suggests Alojzija Štebi as an intermediary of the CMF.⁵⁴⁹ The document in question gave an overview of the organizations in Yugoslavia, characterizing the Alliance as antifascist,⁵⁵⁰ and to us it demonstrates that Duchêne had little knowledge of the Yugoslav feminist movement.

Although it does not seem that Duchêne was in contact with the Alliance's president Alojzija Štebi, a preserved letter reveals that she did have contact with the Ljubljana ŽP vice-president Angela Vode, who was also a member of the KPJ (see 3.1). Namely, on July 27, 1934, Gabrielle Duchêne signed a letter for Vode, written in German on the official headed paper of the Comité d'initiative de la conférence mondiale des femmes. In the letter, Duchêne expressed her contentment that they were in direct contact and that Marija Vilfan was chosen to be a delegate at the congress in Paris.⁵⁵¹ Vode was also in contact with Vilfan, as two other preserved letters reveal that Vilfan first asked Vode about the work of the Ljubljana ŽP, explaining that in Paris she would represent the work of the Ljubljana ŽP "as a part of Slovenian women's work against war and fascism."⁵⁵² Then, on August 1, 1934, Vode responded to Vilfan, describing the Ljubljana ŽP activities to her. After explaining that the aim of Ženski pokret encompassed the political equality of women for the purpose of attaining social equality of all citizens, under point two Vode emphasized that "ŽP has always fought against fascism and considers this struggle as a *matter of principle*: fascism and war endanger women and children the most, in a spiritual and in a material manner."⁵⁵³ Already before the CMF congress, then, Vode explained that the ŽP had been actively antifascist, but from the

⁵⁴⁹ Štebi is mentioned as the author of "the mentioned" brochure, which is probably the brochure *Le travail des féministes Yougoslaves* published in French in Belgrade in 1931. La Contemporaine LC, Nanterre, Gabrielle Duchêne Papers (GD), 63150, F[^]res 316, doc. 19; Alojzija Štebi, *Le travail des féministes Yougoslaves* (Beograd: 1931).

⁵⁵⁰ LC, GD, 63150, F[^]res, doc. 19.

⁵⁵¹ NUK, MS 1432, Fond Erne Muser, VIII. 1. 25. 4. Korespondenca Vode Angela, "Gabrielle Duchêne to Angela Vode, 27.7.1934."

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ NUK, MS 1432, Fond Erne Muser, VIII. 1. 25. 4. Korespondenca Vode Angela, "Vode to Vilfan, 1.9.1934."

descriptions it is clear that Vode herself was the main speaker on this topic, as she held lectures on women and fascism in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Maribor, and had written several antifascist articles and brochures.⁵⁵⁴ I will come back to this in the next section.

Following the 1934 congress, the CMF's Manifesto invited women from the whole world to begin the struggle against war and fascism, and to fight for the economic, social, and cultural interests of women, as well as against nationalism, chauvinism, and militarism.⁵⁵⁵ Kecman noted vaguely that women's committees formed in Zagreb and Ljubljana in 1934, and the Belgrade *Ženski pokret*'s Youth Section in 1935, started working in accordance with the CMF manifesto.⁵⁵⁶ A closer look at the work of the ŽP Youth sections' activities in Zagreb and Belgrade confirms the ideological connection with the CMF.

In Zagreb, where over 150 women participated in the activities of the ŽP Youth section between 1934 and 1937, the section organized internal reading groups, as well as public lectures on women and pacifism and the social status of female students, along with organized sections to work on issues such as pacifism and suffrage.⁵⁵⁷ According to Jelena Jančić, who was a member of this section and who in 1979 published a preface to the *Ženski svijet* re-edition, the idea that the students join the ŽP organization in Zagreb and form the Youth section came from the student Danica Oreščanin, who was at the time a League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije, SKOJ) activist.⁵⁵⁸ According to Ana Lovreković's recent research, many women who participated in the work of the Zagreb Youth section were members of trade unions, and some were also active in the antifascist youth circle of the Association of University Educated Women's Youth section in Zagreb.⁵⁵⁹ However, the

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. See 3.4.

⁵⁵⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 389–390.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 325.

⁵⁵⁷ Odbor omladinske podružnice Ženskog pokreta u Zagrebu, "Omladinska podružnica ženskog pokreta u Zagrebu" [ŽP Zagreb Youth Section, *Ženski pokret* 3–4 (1935): 59–60.

⁵⁵⁸ Starc Jančić, "Ženski svijet," 19.

⁵⁵⁹ Ana Lovreković, "Zato zbijmo svoje redove da uzmognemo što strašnije povesti borbu za politička i ekonomska prava žene u društvu! – Sindikalke u redovima omladinske sekcije Ženskog pokreta u Zagrebu" [*So let's get*

disagreements between the Zagreb ŽP board and its Youth section were quite strong from the beginning. As early as 1934, the ŽP board expelled ŽP Youth section member Jelena Jančić from the Youth section, with the excuse that her speech about the need to fight against fascism was too political. In 1936, the new Zagreb ŽP rules limited the autonomy of the Youth Section.⁵⁶⁰

In Belgrade, the ŽP Youth Section was formed in the fall of 1935, after the Popular Front strategy was adopted. While the scholarship has so far emphasized that the KPJ delegated the women to join ŽP, Mitra Mitrović, who was the president of the Belgrade ŽP Youth section, wrote in a 1959 text that she and her friends themselves had the idea to join the ŽP, and then the KPJ approved it.⁵⁶¹ According to Mitrović, she and the student Dobrila Karapandžić initiated the Youth section and negotiated the cooperation with Milena Atanacković, the Belgrade ŽP president at the time. The Youth Section in Belgrade organized events that were, as in Zagreb, ideologically aligned with the CMF: weekly meetings in which they discussed the political situation in the country, the position of women in Yugoslavia and globally, the development of socialism in the Soviet Union, and so forth. While some of these meetings were attended by up to 300 people, many young women—students, office workers, and manual workers—came to the ŽP center every evening, where they would discuss topics such as political economy and the history of progressive women’s movements in subsections of twenty to forty members.⁵⁶² The Youth section, moreover, published wall newspapers, which

closer together so we can lead as strongly as possible the struggle for the political and economic rights of women in society” – Female trade unionists in the lines of the Youth section of the Women’s Movement in Zagreb], in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, ed. Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev, (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 249–259.

⁵⁶⁰ Jovanka Kecman, “Mladi komunisti u organizacijama Ženskog pokreta” [Young Communists in Ženski pokret Organizations] *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret Jugoslavije* [Revolutionary Youth Movement of Yugoslavia] (Beograd: Predsedništvo konferencije Saveza socijalističke omladine Jugoslavije, 1982), 90–94, especially 91. After the Zagreb Youth Section was discontinued in 1937, many of the section’s members founded a new antifascist women’s organization, Društvo za prosvjetu žene (Society for Women’s Education). Lovreković, “Sindikalke u redovima omladinske sekcije”, 251.

⁵⁶¹ Mitrović, “Žena danas,” 414.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 413.

illustrated the position of women in various contexts, and also organized many live events (choirs, evenings with cultural programs, lectures, and literacy courses in the peripheral parts of Belgrade). The Belgrade Youth Section also organized aid to support the communists fighting in the Spanish Civil War: to do this, they sold a graphic by a Youth section member, Boba Djordjević, of the Spanish communist Dolores Ibárruri (1895–1989), better known as *la Pasionaria*: according to Kecman, ten thousand copies were sold.⁵⁶³

In Slovenia, the NCWY *Dravska* section was aligned with this political program as well. Ljubljana ŽP was a member of the NCWY *Dravska* section, through which its vice-president Angela Vode spread antifascist feminist ideas, as I will further show in the next section. Erna Muser's 1967 article—and Muser was herself active in the 1930s left feminist movement in Ljubljana—also confirms that the JŽZ *Dravska* section was active in the antifascist movement, and, together with the social-democratic ZDŽD, organized women's assemblies against war and fascism across Slovenia in the autumn of 1934.⁵⁶⁴ As mentioned earlier, there were also overlaps between membership of the NCWY *Dravska* section and another communist student organization, Dom Visokošolk: examples include Erna Muser (1912, Trieste–1991, Ljubljana), who was the *Dravska* section's secretary and active in the Dom visokošolk, and Zlata Pirnat (1912, Trsat, Croatia–2009, Paris), a Slovenian writer and publicist who studied Serbo-Croatian language and literature and after graduating in 1935 continued her studies in Paris. The latter was among the initiators of the countryside camps (1937–1940), the purpose of which was to spend time in different Slovenian villages and talk to peasant women, to learn about their social position and offer them courses.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 325–332.

⁵⁶⁴ Muser, "Socialisti in komunisti," 209.

⁵⁶⁵ Slavko Kremenšek, *Slovensko študentsko gibanje 1919-1941* [Slovenian Student Movement]. (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1971), 281–2.

Yugoslavia, moreover, was mentioned in a report in *Les Femmes dans L'action Mondial* quoted by Jasmine Calver, which noted that the CMF women of Yugoslavia:

organized mass demonstrations against the war in several major cities and towns, including Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje, Split, Banja-Luka, Varaždin, Sarajevo, Novi Sad, and Ljubljana. The demonstration in Belgrade saw 2,500 people gather “to denounce the Italian fascist aggressor,” while the Zagreb meeting attracted more than 1,000 women. The Yugoslav CMF also claimed that Skopje and Split had “never seen such impressive women’s meetings” before, underscoring the success of these meetings in numerical terms.⁵⁶⁶

These were, in fact, the first major campaign of the “rejuvenated” Alliance in 1935, about which *Ženski pokret* reported in the November 1935 issue,⁵⁶⁷ and which is in Yugoslav historiography mainly discussed as the big pro-suffrage protests of October 20, 1935 (discussed in 3.2.).⁵⁶⁸ The October 1935 suffrage protests were held in eleven towns throughout the country, and were the first pro-suffrage protests since the royal dictatorship (1929–1934), when the Alliance removed the demand for women’s suffrage from its program (see chapter 1). In the meantime, as mentioned earlier, the King had been assassinated, and the former finance minister had formed a government which began a rapprochement with fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

At these 1935 demonstrations across the country, women again demanded active and passive suffrage rights. While there was nothing new about the demand itself, the novelty was that, after a long time, women of different professions, social backgrounds, and ideologies came together: peasant women, workers, mothers, intellectuals, housewives, students, and many others participated. The women who spoke were announced as the representatives of these groups. The speakers were feminist leaders active since the early 1920s, many of them also contributors to Zofka Kveder’s journal (see chapter 1): Alojzija Štebi, Leposava Petković,

⁵⁶⁶ Calver, *Anti-fascism*, 121. Calver quotes: Gertrude Duby, ‘L’action de nos comités nationaux’, *Femmes dans l’action mondiale* (November 1935), 10.

⁵⁶⁷ Alojzija Štebi, “Za pravo glasa za žene,” *Ženski pokret* 7-9 (1935): 82–84.

⁵⁶⁸ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 291–293.

Zorka Kasnar-Karadžić, Mira Vodvarka Kočonda, Minka Govekar, Angela Vode, and Jelka Perić; some communist women active in the 1920s, such as Draga Stefanović (see 3.1) and the trade union organizer and member of the Zagreb ŽP's Youth section, Lucija Borjan; and women of the younger generation, such as Ana Prokop (1912–1975)⁵⁶⁹ from the Zagreb ŽP's Youth section.⁵⁷⁰ Thus, these pro-suffrage demonstrations were also demonstrations against war and fascism, and they assembled women who had been contributing to the Alliance's work in the 1920s alongside the young women who joined the cause in the mid-1930s.

An important aspect of left feminist activism in Yugoslavia in the 1930s were the Popular Front journals which the young women initiated. The young communist women in Belgrade began publishing the journal *Žena danas* (Woman Today, September 1936–August/September 1940). One month later, in October 1936, women in Zagreb published the one and only issue of the magazine *Mlada žena* (Young Woman, October 1936). As *Mlada žena* had only one issue, *Žena danas* remained the only women's left feminist magazine in the Serbo-Croatian language for almost three years. Twenty-nine issues of *Žena danas* are preserved; its thirtieth issue was confiscated by the police, and the journal was discontinued in September 1940.⁵⁷¹ In February 1939, women in Zagreb began publishing *Ženski svijet* (Women's World, 1939–1941), which had fifteen issues: 2,500 copies of the first issue were printed, while the last issue, in January–February, 1941, had 17,000 copies printed. When the police forcibly discontinued *Žena danas*, the “Belgrade comrades” brought the archive of *Žena danas* to Zagreb and shared their address list with the editors of *Ženski svijet*, allowing the latter's reach to increase significantly.⁵⁷² In Slovenia, the women's youth journal *Naša žena*

⁵⁶⁹ Ana Prokop (1912–1975) was in 1935 a student, a member of the Zagreb ŽP's Youth section, and a member of the Association of University Educated Women's Youth section in Zagreb. In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, she published professional legal literature on matrimonial and family law.

⁵⁷⁰ For the speeches, see the issue *Ženski pokret* 7–9 (1935): 84–115.

⁵⁷¹ At first, the magazine was published in 3000 issues. See: Mitrović, “Žena danas,” 417.

⁵⁷² Starc Jančić, “Ženski svijet,” 27.

(Our Woman, 1941–2015) began to be published only in 1941, but some women were before then active on the editorial board of *Mlada pota* (Young Path), which was published in Ljubljana between November 1935 and June 1936.⁵⁷³ Similarly, the women from Zagreb had published in *Novi student* (New Student, 1935–1939).⁵⁷⁴

These journals represent an important element of the Yugoslav women's connection with the CMF. Namely, the Belgrade-based *Žena danas* and the Zagreb-based *Ženski svijet* were visually similar to the French CMF journal *Les Femmes*, and we know from the aforementioned 1979 text by Jelena Starc Jančić that the editors of both Yugoslav journals were directly influenced by this publication.⁵⁷⁵ It is no less significant that Duchêne herself wrote the introductory text for *Žena danas*, although we do not know who exactly initiated this and how.⁵⁷⁶ The text was written after the Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix (RUP) 1936 congress in Brussels. In it, Duchêne invited the Yugoslav women to defend together their rights and peace, and spoke of the importance of the League of Nations and its “democratization.”⁵⁷⁷ However, *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* should be seen as a part of the transnational network of antifascist, Popular Front, left feminist journals which were published around this time. These journals include *Mujeres: Portavoz de las mujeres antifascistas* (Spain), *Kvinner* (Norway), *Vrouwen* (The Netherlands), *Les Femmes dans l'action mondiale* (Belgium), *La Voce delle Donne* (Italy), *La Mujer en la Action* (Uruguay), as well as the US *Woman Today*, the British *Woman To-day*, the Chilean *La Mujer Nueva*, and the German-language journal published in Paris, *Die Frau*.⁵⁷⁸ These periodicals represent valuable sources for comparative

⁵⁷³ For *Mlada pota*, see: Bratko Kreft, “Mlada pota” [Young Path], in *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret Jugoslavije 1919-1979* [Revolutionary Youth Movement of Yugoslavia, 1919-1979] (Beograd: Eksport Pres, 1979), 131–6.

⁵⁷⁴ Starc Jančić, “Ženski svijet,” 14.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁷⁶ Barać, *Feministička kontrapunkcija*, 191–192.

⁵⁷⁷ Gabrielle Duchêne, “Novo polje rada za žene” [New Field of Work for Women] *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 2.

⁵⁷⁸ Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*; McDuffie, *Sojourning*; Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002); Katherine M. Marino, “Marta Vergara, Popular-Front Pan-American Feminism and the Transnational Struggle for Working Women's Rights in the 1930s,” *Gender & History*, 26 no.

research of what might be called the global left feminist 1930s, and could further enhance our understanding of the similarities and differences among left feminist struggles in different locations throughout the 1930s. Scholars have already comparatively analyzed some of these journals.⁵⁷⁹

I have yet to find sources which reveal that the Yugoslav women formed a special section of the CMF. The printed report of the 1938 congress in Marseille shows that there were eleven sections at the time, and Yugoslavia was not on the list.⁵⁸⁰ Although there was no one from Yugoslavia at the 1938 CMF congress in Marseille, *Žena danas* published a text marking four years of the CMF's work, translated from the French CMF journal *Les Femmes dans l'Action Mondiale*, and introduced with the words: "The CMF has existed for four years, under the leadership of Gabrielle Duchêne, a woman already gray-haired, but unusually energetic and active. Today, this organization is powerful and one of the largest on the planet. It has its sections in all parts of the world."⁵⁸¹ Many Yugoslav organizations, however,

3 (2014): 642–660; Humathèque Condorcet (HC), Bernadette Cattaneo Papers, Box 6, 4-BC11 to 4-BC18. As Zsófia Lóránd's recent research has shown, the French CMF journal *Les Femmes* was also immensely influential for the Hungarian communist feminist Magda Aranyossi and her post-WWII work on the journal *Asszonyok* (Women, 1945-1949). Lóránd, "International Solidarity."

⁵⁷⁹ 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*, eds. Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 167–184; Jelena Lalatović, "Internacionalizam ženske periodike: časopisi *Žena danas* i *Woman Today* (1936–1937)," in *Časopis Žena danas (1936–1940): Prosvećivanje za revoluciju*, ed. Stanislava Barać (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2022), ed. Stanislava Barać (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2022), 127–149.

⁵⁸⁰ The member organizations listed in the 1938 report were from the following countries: Cuba, Spain, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, India, Ireland, Mexico, Sweden, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia. *Les femmes du monde entier au service de la paix! Compte rendu de la Conférence Internationale des Femmes, Marseille 13-14-15 Mai 1938*, 27.

⁵⁸¹ "Četvorogodišnjica Svetskog komiteta žena" [Four-year Anniversary of the Women's World Committee], *Žena danas* 16 (1938): 20.



3.2. *Žena danas*, cover of the 14th issue from June, 1938. My photograph.



3.3. *Ženski svijet*, cover of the 13th issue of November-December, 1940.

sent greetings to the conference, among them: NCWY *Dravska* section; Yugoslav Association of University Educated Women, section Zagreb; NCWY; Yugoslav League for Peace and Freedom; Alliance of Women's Movements; and "Progressive Students of Croatia."⁵⁸² Later on, the Zagreb-based *Ženski svijet* announced the 1939 CMF congress in Cuba, described as a congress which would bring women of all continents together, to connect and organize them, and to raise consciousness against war. However, as mentioned earlier, this congress did not take place.⁵⁸³

Even though Yugoslavia did not form a formal CMF section, then, and even though there were only four Yugoslav delegates present at the 1934 CMF congress in Paris, and none at the second congress in Marseille, the CMF greatly influenced Yugoslav women's turn to the struggle against war and fascism. As I demonstrated by looking at the activities of the ŽP Youth sections, communist women's activism in the feminist organizations followed the CMF program in the second half of the 1930s; the first pro-suffrage demonstrations after the royal dictatorship had an antifascist aspect and were presented as a CMF activity in the French CMF journal *Les Femmes dans l'Action Mondial*; and the journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* were part of the transnational network of Popular Front journals. I argue that the cooperation between young communist women and the Alliance contributed to the emergence of what I call here left feminism, and in the next section, I examine the relationship between feminism and antifascism in this context.

3.4. Left feminist responses to fascism and war

Following the story of the Yugoslav women's participation in the CMF, this section more closely focuses on the Yugoslav left feminists' conceptualization of antifascism as the core of

⁵⁸² Ibid., 37–38.

⁵⁸³ d.d., "Svjetski kongres žena za mir i slobodu" [Women's World Committee for Peace and Freedom], *Ženski svijet* 5–6 (1939): 12.

the dominant feminist political thought in the 1930s, which I call “communist feminism.” I see this as key for the political transformation of feminism in the 1930s, both in Yugoslavia and transnationally. First, I analyze here the political thought of communist feminist Angela Vode, as an example of a “communist feminist” response to fascism even before the CMF and the emergence of an organized left feminist movement in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 1930s. Then, I turn to feminist responses to fascism in 1930s Yugoslavia within the pages of *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*, mainly because the first issue of *Žena danas* in 1936 contained a program for a “new feminism” (*novi feminizam*) which proclaimed the struggle against fascism as its core value.

My analysis contributes to the scholarship on women and antifascism, a still under-researched topic.⁵⁸⁴ Mercedes Yusta has compared the French and Spanish CMF journals in a chapter published in a co-edited volume in 2016, and argued that historians have largely neglected the intertwining of feminist and antifascist political cultures in the early years of antifascist mobilizations.⁵⁸⁵ While offering many useful remarks in her analysis, however, Yusta approached the feminist and antifascist movements as separate, identifying the former with the liberal feminist tradition, and the latter with the labor movement which considered the feminist activists “bourgeois.”⁵⁸⁶ By contrast, my analysis is closer to the interpretative lens of Katherine M. Marino, who explored the South American *feminismo americano* as a version of feminism which included equal rights, social justice, democracy, and antifascism.⁵⁸⁷ However, whereas *feminismo americano* developed in negotiation with the US National Women’s Party insistence on equal rights without protective legal rights specifically for women,⁵⁸⁸ in the

⁵⁸⁴ Isabelle Richet, “Women and Antifascism. Historiographical and Methodological Approaches,” in *Rethinking Antifascism*, 152–166; Isabelle Richet, “Marion Cave Rosselli and the Transnational Women’s Antifascist Networks,” *Journal of Women’s History* 24, no. 3 (2012): 117–139; Gottlieb, “Varieties of Feminist Responses.”

⁵⁸⁵ Yusta, “Strained Courtship,” 167.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 168–169.

⁵⁸⁷ Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*.

⁵⁸⁸ In the Yugoslav case, the question of the protection of women was, to my knowledge, not an issue of conflict.

Yugoslav case the dominant idea of feminism already encompassed the ideas of equal rights, democracy, and social justice (see chapter 4). As such, the “new feminist” program argued for the inclusion of the struggle against fascism in the core of the feminist program.

First, I turn to Angela Vode, the communist feminist and vice-president of the Ljubljana ŽP who most consistently approached the issue of fascism. In the early 1930s, Vode published articles in the rubric “Žena v sodobnem svetu” (Woman in the Contemporary World), in which she wrote about feminism, fascism, and many other topics.⁵⁸⁹ In 1934, she published a book, *Žena v današnji družbi* (Woman in Contemporary Society),⁵⁹⁰ while her booklet *Fašizam i žena* (Fascism and Woman) was published in 1935 in the Serbian language in Belgrade.⁵⁹¹ In both books, she discussed, among other things, the relationship between women and fascism in the context of the economic crisis in the early 1930s. In the interwar period, she also published two volumes of the book *Spol in usoda* (Sex and Destiny, part I in 1938, part II in 1939).⁵⁹²

The core of Vode’s argumentation was that fascism endangered the abovementioned women’s rights, particularly women’s political rights and right to work, and simultaneously pushed them toward marriage and motherhood. In Vode’s conceptualization, women’s emancipation was the most significant positive consequence of capitalist economic development and the first condition for her true equality.⁵⁹³ By contrast, Vode referred to one of the ideologues of national socialism Alfred Rosenberg, well-known for using misogynistic slurs against women,⁵⁹⁴ and argued that he made a clear division by which state, society, and the battlefield belonged to men, whereas the women’s sphere encompassed motherhood and

⁵⁸⁹ The list of her published articles is printed in Angela Vode, *Spomin in pozaba* [Memory and Forgetting] (Ljubljana: Krtina, 2000), 11–29.

⁵⁹⁰ Angela Vode, *Žena v današnji družbi* [Woman in Contemporary Society] (Maribor: “Žena in dom”, 1934). Republished in Angela Vode, *Spol in upor* [Sex and Resistance] (Ljubljana: Krtina, 1998), 93–210.

⁵⁹¹ Angela Vode [Vodetova], *Fašizam i žena* [Fascism and Woman] (Beograd: Štamparija ‘Ž. Madžarević’, 1935).

⁵⁹² Angela Vode, *Značaj in usoda* [Significance and Destiny] (Ljubljana: Krtina, 1999).

⁵⁹³ Vode, *Žena i fašizam*, 27.

⁵⁹⁴ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 59.

the home.⁵⁹⁵ Indeed, as historians have demonstrated, fascism was a male ideology opposed to both feminism and socialism, and fascists' core argument regarding women was that their primary role was domestic and reproductive.⁵⁹⁶ In this way, the fascists responded to what they saw as a "crisis in gender relations" and a "sign of a general social decay," and pushed for a regeneration of society through male values, whereas femininity was seen in negative terms, and associated with socialism, Jews, homosexuals, and other perceived enemies of fascism.⁵⁹⁷

Vode's main message was that "women of the whole world" must unite in their struggle against fascism and war.⁵⁹⁸ Yet, Vode was aware that this could not include all women, but predominantly women who had resisted fascism from the beginning: class-conscious working-class women *and* those from the women's movement who were politically more mature.⁵⁹⁹ Thus, Vode located the resistance to fascism as common to women of the working class and in the feminist movement, or at least those from these two groups who were politically conscious. What about other women? Historians have noted that there were women who were attracted by fascist ideology; Kevin Passmore mentioned, among other women, the Romanian feminist Alexandrina Cantacuzino (see chapter 2). In the late 1930s and early 1940s, she supported the fascist Iron Guard, and noted that various women's groups supported fascism, all of which shared a disdain towards the left and the existing political parties.⁶⁰⁰ Vode was also aware of this phenomenon, and sought to understand why. Her explanation was that the economic emancipation of women had been turned upside down in the contemporary political system, with women working as paid slaves, meaning that many women did not feel that the right to work and equality were good for them.⁶⁰¹ The German women who voted for Hitler were, in

⁵⁹⁵ Vode, *Žena i fašizam*, 11–12.

⁵⁹⁶ Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 123.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 123–124.

⁵⁹⁸ Vode, *Žena i fašizam*, 27.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁰⁰ Passmore, *Fascism*, 128–129; for Cantacuzino, see also chapter 2.

⁶⁰¹ Vode, *Žena i fašizam*, 28.

Vode's view, "naïve provincial women" (*naivne malogradjanke*), who suddenly had an ideal type of a Germanic woman before them, opposed to the ideas of women's work, economic independence, the right to work, and equality.⁶⁰² However, once women had experienced the fascist "salvation"—as Vode ironically put it—they had many reasons to stand on the front lines against it, which means the struggle against slavery, poverty, and war, which affect women the most.⁶⁰³

In the writings of the Yugoslav "communist feminists," there were not many attempts to define fascism as such. Angela Vode, one notable exception to this, based her analysis on historical materialism and interpreted fascism as the last stage of capitalist development and as a revolt of the middle classes who were losing their economic position, due to big capital on the one hand and the revolutionary working class on the other.⁶⁰⁴ Apart from Vode's writings, there was another discussion about fascism in 1939, between the social democrat Milica Djurić Topalović and the communists Mitra Mitrović and Milica Šuvaković. Djurić Topalović defined fascism in her book *Žena kroz vekove* (Woman through the centuries).⁶⁰⁵ In their review of Djurić Topalović's book, Belgrade ŽP Youth section member Mitra Mitrović disagreed in an ironic tone with their big social democratic opponent; she maintained that fascism was not a "new ideology," but a compilation of various beliefs, in which the only new element was its attempt to represent itself as an ideology, or as a sort of messianism.⁶⁰⁶

Far more important for these feminists than defining fascism was explaining what fascism *did*, and especially what it did to women. Vode insisted that, although fascism was seemingly revolutionary in its anticapitalistic and anti-Marxist stance, the first thing fascists

⁶⁰² Ibid., 16.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁰⁵ Milica Djurić Topalović, *Žena kroz vekove* [Woman through the Centuries], (Belgrade: Oslobođenje, 1939).

⁶⁰⁶ Mitra Mitrović and Milica Šuvaković, "Knjiga g-de Milice Đurić-Topalović, 'Žena kroz vekove,'" *Žena danas* 23 (July 1939): 8–9.

did both in Italy and Germany was destroy the workers' movement and the trade unions, and introduce dictatorship.⁶⁰⁷ She gave examples of the relationship between capital and practice, for instance fascist regimes' rejection of inheritance tax or the increase in rent and the decrease in working-class salaries.⁶⁰⁸ Besides destroying trade unions and the workers' movement, Vode argued fascists especially harmed women, by taking away "all of her rights."⁶⁰⁹ She gave the examples of Italy, where women had no political rights and women's organizations were dissolved, and of Germany, where women's salaries were 50% lower than men's and women were losing their jobs.⁶¹⁰ In Vode's image of the fascist regimes, women were allowed to work only before marriage and if they were not endangering the positions of men, but after marriage women had to orient themselves exclusively towards family and children, with the aim of regenerating the German family.⁶¹¹

Vode, therefore, was the first "communist feminist" in Yugoslavia who wrote about fascism from the perspective of its negative impact on women already in the early 1930s, and though her writing she paved the way for the broader response of the left feminist generation to fascism. The 1936 program of "new feminism" in *Žena danas* located the fascist threat to women in a similar way:

Today we clearly see that with a single decree fascist countries stripped women of all the rights they had gained throughout the years. Fascist ideology is founded on the idea that women are considered second-class citizens who are not able to perform public work, and as such must return to the hearth of the home. The fascist "hearth of the home" is the greatest fallacy by which women are fooled into giving up their social roles without a fight. In Germany today a woman has to serve as a reproductive machine, so that there will be enough soldiers for fascism's militant plans.

⁶⁰⁷ Vode, *Žena i fašizam*, 8.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 19–21. For how fascism treated women, see Passmore, *Fascism*, 129–130.

⁶¹¹ Vode, *Žena i fašizam*, 25.

Because of the understanding of fascism as directly endangering women's rights, the left feminists argued that, in the context of the rise of fascism, antifascism had to become the core of feminism.⁶¹² Thus, the 1930s left feminists in Yugoslavia saw this not as a rejection of feminism, but as its reconceptualization in a new context. As an illustration, the president of the Belgrade ŽP Youth section Mitra Mitrović stated in one of their meetings: “We are, on the basis of the feminist principle of the equality of women, against the ideology of fascism, which carries in itself a deadly weapon against women. We will persevere in this, aware that only by organizing and fighting together will our first shaky steps become the upright and firm walk of an independent and progressive woman.”⁶¹³ An even better example for the proclamation of the new feminist program is the program of “new feminism,” published as the programmatic text in *Žena danas*, which put the feminist organization at the center of the contemporary society. “Although its program remains unchanged, the essence of feminism has undergone great changes,” the text explained, emphasizing that in this new context, feminism had gained a new, deeper meaning. In the framework of this argumentation, the “new feminist” demand for women's rights—specifically suffrage, equal pay for equal work, broad social institutions, equal rights of both parents, equal morality, divorce relief, and the right to work and salary—is connected to antifascism and the struggle for (political and social) democracy.⁶¹⁴ The left feminist consensus of the time, then, was that fascism and feminism were diametrically opposed.

Another important conceptual binary introduced through the “new feminism” concept was the binary between democracy and fascism. As one text underlined, the contemporary challenge was between democracy, “which carries in itself already the idea of women's liberation,” and fascism, which “takes away women's rights in the name of ‘eternal principles

⁶¹² “Novi feminizam,” *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 4.

⁶¹³ “Skupština ženskog pokreta” [ŽP assembly], *Žena danas* 4 (1937): 2–4.

⁶¹⁴ “Novi feminizam” [New Feminism] *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 4.

and traditions,’” and underlined that: “Women’s liberation without democracy cannot even be imagined; nor can true democracy without liberated woman.”⁶¹⁵ This binary was introduced through spatial references. In contrast to Italy and Germany, presented as fascist countries where women had no rights, in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* other countries were considered positive and “democratic,” and the focus was always on the rights women had in these countries. Above all, this was the case with France, the country where the Popular Front government was formed in 1936. France was specifically contrasted to Germany in the “new feminism” text:

On the other hand, we have democratic countries like France. In the fight for the preservation of democracy, women have performed on par with men, won all rights for themselves, and today we see them in the highest positions of the state administration. Scientists like Mrs. Curie-Joliot and others can serve as an example to all women, to show that in democratic countries skill alone decides your position, and women are forced by their circumstances to accept one of these two paths.⁶¹⁶

The references to France also encompassed the French Revolution, because of the active role of women in the French revolution and the post-1789 “feminist demands” of the women’s right to education, political rights of women, legal equality of women, and the right to divorce, which, the author emphasized, were demanded in the broader framework of their demands for democracy.⁶¹⁷ Czechoslovakia was another example of a democratic country, yet in February 1939 Nada Doroški (1915–1998) wrote about the experiences in Czechoslovakia after the Sudeten crisis and the fall of the liberal-democratic government (see chapter 2), where suddenly—as in Germany—the problems with women’s “return to home” became prominent.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ “Češke parlamentarke” [Czech Female Members of Parliament], *Žena danas* 7 (1937): 6–7.

⁶¹⁶ “Novi feminizam,” 4.

⁶¹⁷ See the text Ž.Ž., “Francuska revolucija i uloga žene u Revoluciji” [French Revolution and the Role of Women in the Revolution], *Ženski svijet* 5–6 (1939): 3–6.

⁶¹⁸ Nada Doroški, “Žene u Češko-Slovačkoj bore se za svoja prava” [Women in Czechoslovakia are Fighting for Their Rights], *Žena danas* 19 (1939): 4–5.

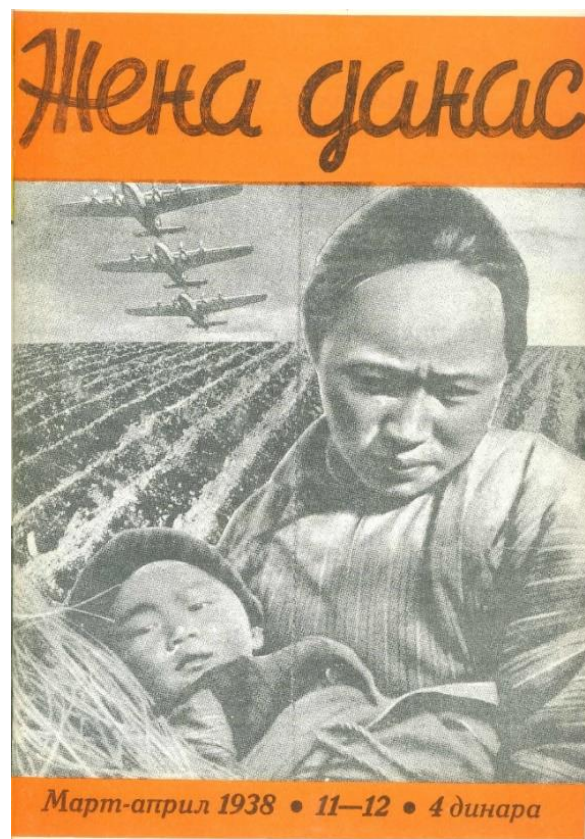
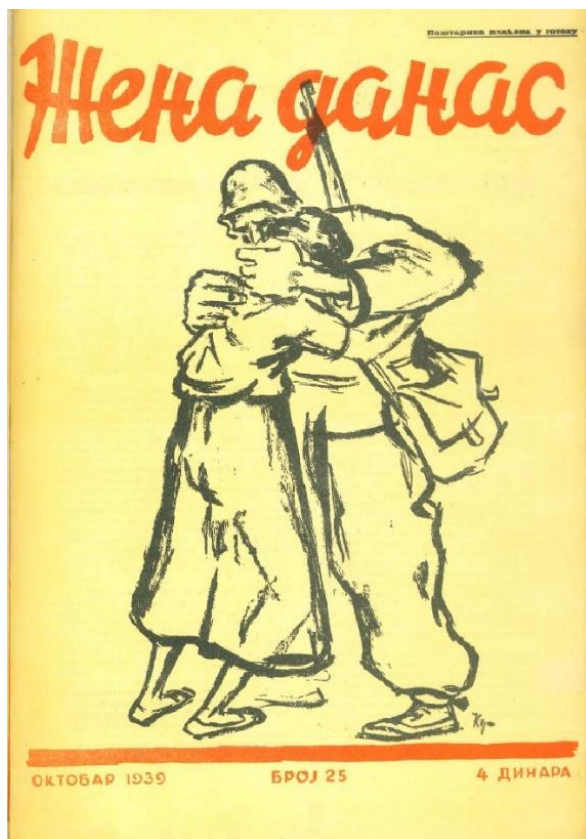
Another concept important for the left feminists was war, in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* closely entangled with mentions of fascism.⁶¹⁹ In most cases, the references to war were somehow tied with women, women's rights, or women's suffering. Austrian writer Hermynia Zur Mühlen's story "I do not need you for this!" thematized conflict between a pacifist wife and a militarist husband regarding their child's education, while "Hans's birthday" discussed the relationship between pacifist parents and their child who is exposed to militarist education in school.⁶²⁰ The latter was not signed, but it was introduced as a "sincere report of a mother," and it appeared also in the October 1936 issue of the German-language journal *Die Frau*, published in Paris.⁶²¹ Both texts, therefore, focused on women's concerns and experiences in the context of the militarization of society. Moreover, texts were published about the Spanish Civil War, fought between 1936 and 1939 between the Popular Front Republicans and General Francisco Franco's Nationalists, and the Second Sino-Japanese war, which began in July 1937. The texts about Spain were written by Yugoslavs, including the communist Vladimir Dedijer's reportage from Spain, and about the experiences of women fighters there, followed by pictures, while Ela Nenadović wrote a text about the rescuing of Spanish children from the war.⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ Besides war, peace was another topic important for *Žena danas*. For the discussion about peace in *Žena danas*, see: Stanislava Barać, "Pacifistički i antifašistički diskurs u listu *Žena danas* (1936-1941) [The Pacifist and the Antifascist Discourse in the Journal *The Woman Today* (1936-1941)], in *Intelektualci i rat 1939.-1947. Zbornik radova s međunarodnog skupa Desničini susreti 2011*, ed. Drago Roksandić and Ivana Cvijović Javorina (Zagreb, Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu, Plejada, 2012); Ivana Pantelić, "'Obrazovanje za mir': pacifistički sadržaji u časopisima *Ženski pokret*, *Jugoslovenska žena* i *Žena danas* ["Education for peace": Pacifist content in periodicals *Women's Movement*, *Yugoslav Woman*, and *Woman Today*], in *Ženski pokret (1920-1938): zbornik radova* [Women's Movement (1920-1938): Collection of Essays] (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 131-145.

⁶²⁰ Hermynia Zur Mühlen, "Za ovo mi ti nisi potrebna!" [I do not need you for this!], *Žena danas* 3 (1937): 16. "Hansov rođendan" [Hans's Birthday], *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 18.

⁶²¹ I. Fechenbach, "Bubi hat Geburtstag," *Die Frau* 2 (1936): 13.

⁶²² Vladimir Deijer, "Reportaža iz Španije" [Report from Spain], *Žena danas* 3 (1937): 2-4; Ela Nenadović, "Put španske dece" [The Path of Spanish Children], *Žena danas* 8 (1937): 15.



3.4. (Left) *Žena danas*, cover of the 25th issue from October, 1939. My photograph.

3.5. (Right) *Žena danas*, cover of the 11-12th issue from March-April, 1938. My photograph.

Far more numerous were articles about the war in China, which constitutes another similarity with the French CMF journal. According to Jasmine Calver, the CMF was concerned about the gendered nature of the violence and its impact on children in the Second Sino-Japanese war.⁶²³ In her analysis of the representation of Chinese women in the CMF journal, Calver argued that although the CMF provided a space for Chinese women to gain an international voice, “colonialist tropes, maternalist language, and a certain infantilization of the Chinese people were invoked to stimulate sympathy despite the committee’s ideological and political positions.”⁶²⁴ As she showed, Chinese women activists participated at the CMF congresses and discussed the mass sexual violence which Chinese women experienced under

⁶²³ Jasmine Calver, “‘Warphans’ and ‘Quiet’ Heroines: Depictions of Chinese Women and Children in the Comité Mondial des femmes contre la guerre et le fascisme’s Campaigns during the Second Sino-Japanese War,” *International Review of Social History* 67 (April 2022): 23–47.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

the Japanese soldiers' attacks, but Calver argued that these discussions served primarily for consciousness-raising among Western women.⁶²⁵ Was it the same in the Yugoslav case?

In the Yugoslav left feminist journals, China was mainly presented through the writings of the feminist and socialist American journalist Agnes Smedley (1892–1950) and her 1933 book *Chinese Destinies*, and those of the American novelist and 1938 Nobel laureate in Literature Pearl Buck (1892–1973), who both supported China in the Sino-Japanese war. The focus in these texts were women's role in the war or women's unequal position in Chinese society. For instance, one report talked about a "Chinese women's society for the salvation of the fatherland," where women were organized to participate in the war by making clothes for the soldiers and guarding roads, but also learning to read.⁶²⁶ Through another text about Chinese women, the editors of *Žena danas* reified their commitment to the importance of women's paid employment. An excerpt from Smedley's text was about working-class women who, although they worked hard for low wages, still managed to build their independence and challenge traditional values, primarily marriage which they were often forced into by parents.⁶²⁷ Another text in *Žena danas* thematized the issue of marriages in China. Dušanka Sretenović contrasted the tradition of arranged marriages between very young people and aspects of the "sexual subordination of women" in China with the relatively independent position of Chinese working-class women, who had gained their independence through factory work.⁶²⁸ Thus, the Yugoslav women focused on the issues of women's inequality in Chinese society and focused on the importance of women's paid employment. As will become visible

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁶²⁶ "Kineskinje u odbrani slobode" [Chinese Women in the Defense of Freedom], *Žena danas* 21 (1939): 21; See also T., "Kineske žene u odbranu domovine" [Chinese Women in the Defense of Freedom], *Ženski svijet* 3 (1939): 8.

⁶²⁷ Agnes Smedli, "Kina u odbrani nezavisnosti i slobode" [China in the Defense of Independence and Freedom], *Žena danas* 8 (1937): 12–14.

⁶²⁸ Dušanka Sretenović, "Svadbeni običaji u Kini" [Wedding Customs in China], *Žena danas* 11–12 (1938): 5–6.

in chapters 4 and 5, the Yugoslav women discussed the position of women in their country similarly.

Moreover, Calver's article on depictions of Chinese women in the CMF journal strongly linked the CMF and maternalism, identifying it as part of a longer tradition of maternalism as a feminist strategy, from the ICW to the postwar Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).⁶²⁹ As Calver argued, the CMF's strategy was to publish about women who suffered under fascism and war as mothers or fighters, with the aim of creating an "emotional solidarity and 'sisterhood' across borders."⁶³⁰ This was to an extent true for *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*, where maternalist rhetoric was present, as some of the aforementioned examples also confirm. One instance of this is Pearl Buck's text in *Žena danas*, about the grief of a Chinese mother whose son had been killed in war.⁶³¹ This was only one possible representation of mothers in the journals. Another example is the Czech writer Karel Čapek's play *Matka* (Mother, 1938), an excerpt from which was published in the January 1939 issue of *Žena danas*.⁶³² This excerpt thematized the pain of a mother who had lost a husband and two sons in the war, and who does not want to send her youngest child to war, yet ultimately tells him to go after she hears that enemy planes were killing small children. The third example is Maxim Gorky's novel *Mat'* (Mother, 1906), about a mother of a Russian revolutionary who joins in her son's revolutionary struggle. In its third issue, *Ženski svijet* published Magda Terek's review of these three texts about mothers, in which Terek interpreted these three mothers as those of the past (a Chinese peasant woman who knows her duties, but does not yet know she is a slave), present (mothers

⁶²⁹ Calver, "'Warphans' and 'Quiet' Heroines," 34.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁶³¹ Perl Bak, "Majka" [Mother], *Žena danas* 18 (1938): 10–11;

⁶³² Karel Čapek, "Mati" [Mother], *Žena danas* 19 (1939): 6–7. This was a reprint from *Srpski književni glasnik*, from November 1938.

who are conscious that their children would have to join the struggle against evil), and the future (a conscious mother of Gorky who joins her son's revolutionary struggle).⁶³³

However, there was more to the discussion of motherhood in *Žena danas* than using maternalist language; one important example is the text “Right to Motherhood,” possibly written by Mitra Mitrović. The introductory words suggest that the text was written against an accusation: “It seems almost unbelievable that women must be defended also against the accusation that they have lost their motherly feeling.”⁶³⁴ As the author argued, it is “banal” to blame women for the decrease in birthrate, because motherhood was a social problem, which should be discussed in relation to issues such as housing, public health, low salaries, and the threat of war. Moreover, she argued that women had the “problem of motherhood,” like they had the problem of high unemployment rates, which could *not* be solved with women's “return to the home,” but through the increase of salaries which would improve food quality, along with housing and kindergartens.⁶³⁵

In the 1930s, then, antifascism became the core of feminism. The left feminists in Yugoslavia voiced their concerns about fascism's negative affect on women; Angela Vode discussed this already before the CMF, while between 1936 and 1940, *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* published texts which problematized fascism from a feminist perspective. These two journals relied on the conceptual binary between fascism and democracy, and consistently underlined the importance of women's rights, particularly women's right to paid employment, in their published articles. Maternalist language, as shown, was represented in the journals to some extent, yet motherhood was only one of many topics dealt with in the journal. Still, the “right to motherhood” was again discussed through the demands for women's paid employment and, moreover, for kindergartens and improved social conditions.

⁶³³ Magda Terek, “Tri majke” [Three Mothers], *Ženski svijet* 3 (1939): 4–5.

⁶³⁴ M., “Pravo na materinstvo” [Right to Motherhood], *Žena danas* 20 (1939): 12–13.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

Conclusions

This chapter examined the history of the AŽP in the second half of the 1930s, by contextualizing it within the broader narrative of the Popular Front, and the history of the CMF. Before that, however, the chapter briefly outlined the history of the KPJ and women's activity in this political party, illegal since 1921. The section showed that there was already in the 1920s and early 1930s some cooperation between the AŽP and "communist feminists". I then discussed the character of the Popular Front, which in Yugoslavia was not conceived primarily as a cooperation between communists and other political parties, as for example in France, but as a "united front from below" and a way to legalize communist activism by founding illegal cells within political parties and legal organizations; this included the establishment of the ŽP Youth sections. Further situating the history of the ŽP Youth sections in the context of the CMF, a transnational women's organization established in 1934 that advocated for women's rights, social justice, and antifascism, the chapter analyzed the Yugoslav women's participation at the first CMF congress in Paris, and showed how women in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade began working and publishing against war and fascism, and in accordance with CMF conclusions.

The chapter advanced three arguments. First, my analysis showed that the history of the Yugoslav AŽP cannot be understood without exploring the cooperation between the Alliance and communist women. As I highlighted, this cooperation was not a simple consequence of the KPJ's turn to the Popular Front policy, but was a part of a broader trend of growth of the KPJ and young women's own initiative to join the existing feminist organizations of Ženski pokret. Although this cooperation was strongest during the Popular Front period, one must be careful to consider cooperation at other times too. This is the case with the KPJ members Desanka Cvetković and Dragica Stefanović, who participated in the work of the Feminist Alliance in

the early 1920s. It is even more so the case with Slovenian communist Angela Vode, one of the leading activists in the Ljubljana ŽP in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Secondly, the chapter argued that the CMF was the key transnational organization for understanding developments in the Alliance in the second half of the 1930s, despite the fact that unlike Britain or France, the Yugoslav women did not form a CMF branch. As historians have so far paid little attention to the Yugoslav women's participation in the CMF, this chapter has provided new knowledge about the topic, and more generally the Yugoslav women's feminist responses to fascism, which the Slovenian left feminist Angela Vode already initiated in 1933. The KPJ sent four delegates to the first CMF meeting held in August 1934 in Paris, whereas the AŽP was not directly involved. However, after the congress, the Yugoslav women in Zagreb and Ljubljana, and then also in Belgrade, began organizing for women's rights and against fascism within the existing feminist ŽP organizations. The Yugoslav women's major suffrage demonstrations in 1935 were a part of the CMF's global campaign against war and fascism. Furthermore, the Belgrade and Zagreb Popular Front left feminist journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* are comparable with other left feminist Popular Front journals published across the world, particularly the French CMF journal *Les Femmes dans l'Action Mondial*. It is in this transnational context, then, that I have analyzed the work of the ŽP Youth sections in the second half of the 1930s, situating this local and national history in its transnational context.

Finally, unlike Britain or France, where official sections of the CMF existed, Yugoslav women did not organize a CMF branch, yet their work was largely aligned with the CMF. I argue therefore that exploring the CMF also from the perspective of the countries where a section did not exist is worthwhile. The analysis of Angela Vode's political thought and articles in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* showed that Yugoslav women participated in and contributed to building the emerging (global) left feminist agenda, where antifascism was moved to the core of the feminist program. Angela Vode, thus, wrote as early as 1933 on the dangers of

fascism when it came to women and further reiterated the need for women's paid employment. The "new feminism" program published in *Žena danas* in 1936 argued that antifascism was to become the core of the new, mass feminist movement. The discussion was based on the binary between fascism and democracy, which was discussed through references to Italy and Germany on the one hand, and France, Czechoslovakia, Spain, and China on the other. In their discussions of both fascism and democracy, the Yugoslav left feminist framing was always through women's rights: to paid employment, to higher salaries, to safe motherhood, to a life without the danger of war. Therefore, in the second half of the 1930s, the Yugoslav (left) feminists actively contributed to the "global action" against war and fascism.

4. *Feminizam* and *novi feminizam*: conceptual transformations

This chapter explores what women who described the Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP) and their activism in the 1920s as “feminist” meant within their use of this term, what kind of political statement they intended to make by it, which ideas they associated with it, and how or if this changed during the interwar period.

In the analysis of the uses and the meanings of the concept of feminism, I follow the approaches of intellectual historians who, by insisting on the importance of language in understanding the beliefs and practices of political agents, pointed to the interconnectedness between political change and conceptual innovation.⁶³⁶ More specifically, I research how the changing use of the term “feminism” and its accompanying political vocabulary related to shifts in the movement, and focus more explicitly on the intellectual history of feminism in interwar Yugoslavia. Examining how the leader and other members of the Alliance used the term can help shed light on the politics of the leaders of the main feminist organization in interwar Yugoslavia, as well as helping us understand what this “change in vocabulary,”⁶³⁷ as historian Nancy Cott has termed it, entailed in the Yugoslav context. An analysis of the contemporary understanding of the term “feminism” or *feminizam* allows me to explore continuities and ruptures between the dominant understanding of feminism in the 1920s and the new type of feminism that emerged in the second half of the 1930s, within what I call the organized left feminist movement. In 1936, a programmatic text in the journal *Žena danas* (Woman Today, 1936–1940), published by young communist women who joined the AŽP, was titled *novi feminizam* (new feminism), so the second half of this chapter will examine the meaning of *novi feminizam* in relation to 1920s *feminizam*.

⁶³⁶ Terence Ball, James Farr, Russel L. Hanson, “Editors' Introduction,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, Russel L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1–5.

⁶³⁷ Cott, *Modern feminism*.

As discussed in the thesis introduction, the historiography of women's movements and feminisms in interwar Yugoslavia has often referred to the terms "feminist" and "antifeminist" in an ahistorical and decontextualized manner. Arguably, this reading stems from a lack of exploration of how the historical actors used the concept of feminism, not only in the Yugoslav context, but also more broadly throughout East Central Europe. Before WWI, "feminism" was not widely used in this region, as the predominant concept was the "woman question."⁶³⁸ One famous exception is the Hungarian feminist Rosa Schwimmer's Feministák Egyesülete (Feminist Association, established in 1904). More generally, historians have demonstrated that the concept of feminism has been in use since the 1870s, when the concept was coined in France.⁶³⁹ A more widespread—albeit highly contested—use of this word can be identified since the early twentieth century,⁶⁴⁰ but its meaning varied, depending on the context. Exploring the British periodical *Freewoman* (1911–1912), Lucy Delap showed that feminism in 1910s Britain was a newly coined label, and argued that "[t]he disappointments and constraints of suffrage were a key motivator in the *Freewoman*'s exploration of a broader conceptual basis for women's emancipation, termed 'feminism.'"⁶⁴¹ Nancy Cott showed that in the United States in the interwar period, the concept of feminism was largely associated with the National Woman's Party, which since its founding in 1916 advocated for women's suffrage, and after attaining this goal in 1920, shifted its focus to the Equal Rights Amendment.⁶⁴² Leila Rupp researched the use of the term feminism in relation to the three main international women's organizations of the pre-1940 era: the ICW, the IWSA, and the WILPF, and showed that the term feminism was mainly associated with the IWSA.⁶⁴³ The final example I will

⁶³⁸ Trencsényi, et al., *History I*, 593–608.

⁶³⁹ Offen, *European Feminisms*.

⁶⁴⁰ Offen, "Defining feminism," 126–130; Lucy Delap, *Feminisms. A global history* (Pelican Books: 2020), 10–11.

⁶⁴¹ Delap, et al., *Feminist Media History*, 160.

⁶⁴² Cott, *Modern feminism*.

⁶⁴³ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 131–135.

mention is that of Katherine M. Marino, who showed how in the 1930s, communist and leftist women in Latin America used the terms *feminismo americano* and *feminismo práctico* to advocate for a type of feminism which fused equal rights with demands for social justice, protection of women's labor rights, and antifascism.⁶⁴⁴

There are two main arguments I advance in this chapter. First, I argue that there were significant continuities between the dominant conceptualizations of feminism in the 1920s and 1930s. As this chapter will demonstrate, the concept of feminism became “institutionalized” mainly by the “civic feminists” with the founding of the Feminist Alliance in 1923. Although the organization was renamed in 1926, the concept of feminism remained synonymous with the AŽP and with the work of individual Ženski pokret organizations which formed it. Moreover, the concept of “new feminism” was used by the young “communist feminists” in the magazine *Žena danas* (1936–1940) and in some other communist youth publications, and with the use of this term, the young women aimed to reconceptualize its meaning. It was only in 1940, after left feminists left the AŽP, that Vida Tomšič at the Fifth Land conference of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) denounced the term feminism, yet her program was still largely contiguous with the earlier feminist program of the AŽP.

My second argument is that the ideological difference between the two was largely an expression of their generational difference. Historians have already noted the importance of generational change in the histories of both feminism and communism in the interwar period. Christine Bard pointed to the crisis of traditional feminism in the 1930s, but also to the new kind of involvement—global and responsive to the radicalized political situation—which was appealing to younger generations of women, and which at the same time retained feminist demands.⁶⁴⁵ Siân Reynolds further highlighted the importance of generation when analyzing

⁶⁴⁴ Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*.

⁶⁴⁵ Bard, “Crise.”

antifascist women in the 1930s.⁶⁴⁶ My analysis will show that the key difference between *feminizam* and *novi feminizam* was that for the 1920s *feminizam*, the central political concept was the state, whereas in the 1930s conceptualization of *novi feminizam*, revolution was the concept through which the women involved thought about changing their position in society. This conceptual change must be seen in the horizons of expectations of the two generations of feminists within the broader context of the interwar period, a period of post-Versailles insecurities and discourses of the “crisis of (liberal) democracy,” the Great Depression and subsequent economic crisis, and the rise of fascism and ultra-nationalism.⁶⁴⁷ It is against this background that Yugoslav feminists built their movement and developed their feminist political thought, but different generations of feminists had differing experiences of and views on these post-WWI developments.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first two sections focus on the political thought of Alojzija Štebi, the leader of the AŽP, and examine her use of the term *feminizam* considering the discussions she had with other feminists at the time. The next two sections contextualize the meaning of 1930s *novi feminizam* by focusing on the political thought of Mitra Mitrović (1912–2001) and the journal on whose editorial board she sat, *Žena danas* (Woman Today, 1936–1940). The fifth section contextualizes the conflict between the AŽP and its Youth section, and contextualizes Vida Tomšić’s rejection of feminism, both in 1940.

⁶⁴⁶ Reynolds, “Anti-Fascist Women in the 1930s,” 679–688.

⁶⁴⁷ Matera and Kent, *The Global 1930s*; Rüdiger Graf, “Either-Or. The Narrative of ‘Crisis’ in Weimar Germany and in Historiography,” *Central European History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 592–615; Michael A. Wilkinson, “Beyond Weimar: The Long Crisis of Liberalism, the Political Economy of the Interwar Conjuncture and the Foundations of Neo-liberalism,” in *Authoritarian Liberalism and the Transformation of Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 44–71; Hagen Schulz-Forberg, ed., *Zero Hours: Conceptual Insecurities and New Beginnings in the Interwar Period* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013), 233–267. In the Yugoslav case more specifically, Christian Nielsen referred to the 1920s political situation in Yugoslavia as “crisis,” and similarly the historian Branka Prpa suggested that this Yugoslav crisis was both in “deformations of the parliamentary system and toxic inter-party relations.” Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, 41–73; Branka Prpa, *Srpski intelektualci i Jugoslavija: 1918–1929* [Serbian Intellectuals and Yugoslavia] (Beograd: Clio, 2018).

4.1. What was “purely feminist” in 1920s Yugoslavia? The case of Alojzija Štebi

As one of the central figures in the interwar feminist movement in Yugoslavia, as well as the initiator and long-term president of the Feminist Alliance and the Alliance of Women’s Movements, Alojzija Štebi was mentioned multiple times in the previous chapters. In 1921, she initiated a closer cooperation among the Yugoslav feminists, which would be formalized through the AŽP, and was this organization’s president until 1941. I showed that she firmly believed in the importance of cooperation between women from Ljubljana, Belgrade, Zagreb, and other parts of the country and advocated for an ideology of Yugoslav national unity (chapter 1), and discussed that she was employed in various state institutions for social politics in Ljubljana and Belgrade (chapter 2). As the Alliance leader, moreover, she supported its cooperation with young communist women in the second half of the 1930s (see chapter 3). Overall, as Selišnik rightly noted, Štebi dedicated her life to the feminist and social cause, managing to connect her professional and expert work with her socially engaged work. Very little is known about her personal life. She never married and had no children. She died in August 1956.⁶⁴⁸ While we do not know exactly when she began using the term “feminism,” we know that in 1923 she initiated the founding of the Feminist Alliance, and with this “institutionalized” the concept and made it indistinguishable from the new organization. In this section, I will examine what Štebi meant by *feminizam* and “purely feminist”⁶⁴⁹ (her words in 1924), and what the political vocabulary associated with her *feminizam* was.

It is useful to start with Štebi’s political position before she initiated the formation of the feminist movement. Initially a teacher, Štebi quit her job in 1912 and began working for the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (Jugoslavenska Socialdemokratska stranka, JSDS), where, among other things, she was the editor of the first social democratic women’s journal

⁶⁴⁸ Selišnik, “Socialna feministka.”

⁶⁴⁹ Alojzija Štebi, “O našem radu u društvima” [About our work in associations], *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1926): 394.

in the Slovenian language, *Ženski list* (Women's Paper), of which five issues were published in 1913.⁶⁵⁰ After WWI, she joined the younger current of the Slovenian social democrats, whose views are visible from their journal *Demokracija* (Democracy, 1918–1919), which Štebi edited. Their political proclamation is relevant for understanding Štebi's political position. This group demanded democracy and socialism on the basis of self-determination of nations. For them, the nation (*narod*) was the framework for all social and political activism, and the national state with the broadest possible self-governance was a precondition for national freedom. Democratization in all spheres was their stated goal, as were state reforms that would enable the development of individuals under equal conditions.⁶⁵¹

This group criticized social democracy as it had been understood and practiced among the Slovenes until then; they argued that it was too theoretical and insufficiently connected with the social conditions of the Slovenian people, who were predominantly peasants rather than industrial workers.⁶⁵² *Demokracija* contributors problematized the discrepancy between the radical ideological views of the social democrats, and what they considered to be their deeply unimpactful praxis, which was out of touch with the people.⁶⁵³ This political position could be understood in the tradition of “civic radicalism,” which the authors of the HMPT describe as the position of those whose ideological position was close to, yet still quite critical of the socialist left; because those belonging to the tradition of “civic radicalism” do not fit neatly into any of the major political streams of the period, the authors of the HMPT see them as somewhere between liberalism and socialism (see also 1.3.).⁶⁵⁴ As her political thought was close to this political stream, I will call Štebi's political language civic feminism.

⁶⁵⁰ Selišnik, “Socialna feministka”; Selišnik, “Alojzija Štebi in jugoslovanski feminizem.”

⁶⁵¹ “Naša poslanica,” 1–4.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁵³ Dr Ferfolja, “Po novi poti” [On a New Path], *Demokracija* 5–7 (1918): 67–68.

⁶⁵⁴ Trencsényi, et al., *History I*, 431–445.

In the first issue of *Demokracija*, Štebi wrote about the “woman question,” the concept she still used at the time.⁶⁵⁵ Mirroring the *Demokracija* group’s criticism of social democracy, she criticized the existing women’s movement in Slovenia by claiming that “it wanted to transplant the slogans of the women’s movement from abroad onto our soil without any critical judgement, it was purely theoretical, and it did not consider the practical needs of our nation.”⁶⁵⁶ Thus, for social democracy, as well as for the women’s movement, she considered the relationship between the ideology and the social context crucial. In relation to this, she had two points. First, in accordance with the classic socialist view, she saw the “woman question” as a part of a broader social question, so she argued that it was necessary to organize a mass women’s movement which would be useful for the whole nation, which her political group considered the main framework for any political and social action.⁶⁵⁷ Secondly, she argued that the women’s movement had to overcome its focus on urban women and focus on peasant women as well;⁶⁵⁸ I will examine this in more detail in chapter 5. It was in this period that Štebi also published the booklet *Demokratizem in žensstvo* (Democracy and Women, 1918). In the context of “true democracy” (*pravi demokratizem*), she argued that women had a wide array of possibilities to contribute to society, and she foregrounded the concepts which would remain the basis of her idea of feminism: political rights for women, sexual difference and motherhood, opposition to charity, and the importance of women’s social and public work for the state. As I will demonstrate, these views informed the way she attempted to build a consensus around feminism later on. Štebi left the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party in 1919 after a dispute regarding whether or not the party should take part in the “bourgeois” government; whereas the leader of the JSDS, Anton Kristan (1881–1930), was in favor of cooperation and later

⁶⁵⁵ Alojzija Štebi, “O ženskem gibanju na Slovenskem” [On the Women’s Movement in the Slovenian Lands], *Demokracija* 1–2 (1918): 13.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

became a minister in the government, Alojzija and her brother Anton Štebi (1877–1942) were against it.⁶⁵⁹ After leaving the party, Štebi became active in the SŽD and NCW, and soon after initiated the founding of the Feminist Alliance in 1923, as explored in chapter 1.

At first, Štebi wrote and gave lectures about the “woman question” and the “women’s movement.” On March 16, 1922, she gave a lecture in Ljubljana on the “history of the women’s movement.” The first sources I found where Štebi used the term *feminizam* were from one of sessions of the 1924 LEW congress; I will come back to this text later.⁶⁶⁰ Then, in 1925, she used the term “purely feminist” (*čisto feministički*) in a text in which she discussed the “new direction in the feminist movement,” in order to differentiate the Alliance from the women’s organizations which constituted a majority in the NCW. According to her, the number of “purely feminist” organizations in the NCW had not been big.⁶⁶¹ Although she did not specify what she meant by it, analysis of the difference between the Alliance and the NCW (chapter 1) indicates that the notion of “purely feminist” was associated with suffrage and women’s equal political, legal, and social rights, whereas the NCW consisted predominantly of charitable women’s organizations. Suffrage might have been the main issue of contention, but I see here a bigger ideological division between charity and, on the other hand, Štebi’s *feminizam* which besides suffrage and equal rights encompassed social reforms and women’s public “social work” (as opposed to charitable work, as I will explain further), an emphasis on the state, and a focus on women’s role in society. With this, she associated the ideas of sexual difference, motherhood, and so forth. I will demonstrate this one by one.

⁶⁵⁹ Along with this, another reason for her leaving was the dispute regarding an anonymous letter allegedly sent by her brother. We do not know more about this. See: Selišnik, “Socialna feministka,” 45–46.

⁶⁶⁰ Alojzija Štebi, “Mišljenje javnosti i feminizam u Jugoslaviji,” *Ženski pokret* 9 (1924): 376–379. This source was translated and published in: Alojzija Štebi, “Mišljenje javnosti i feminizam u Jugoslaviji” (Public Opinion and Feminism in Yugoslavia) *Ženski pokret* [Women’s Movement] 9 (1924), 376–379, translated and introduced by Isidora Grubački, *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 103–109.

⁶⁶¹ Alojzija Štebi, “Za novi smer u feminističkom pokretu” [For a New Direction in the Feminist Movement], *Ženski pokret* 7 (1925): 241–46; Štebi, “O našem radu u društvima,” 392–393.

The state was another key concept for Štebi and other liberal feminists. As mentioned in chapter 2, Štebi's close collaborator Milena Atanacković defined feminism as "the aspiration of women to share with men all the concerns and responsibilities for the management of the biggest social community: the state,"⁶⁶² and argued that the development of women's joined work would allow for all members of society to have the same rights, "regardless of their sex, class, or nationality."⁶⁶³ The central concept in Atanacković's definition was the concept of the state, understood as a *social* community. Thus, she emphasized the importance of social justice and social reform, implying that a socially just state was one where all sexes, classes, and nationalities were equal (see also 2.3). Similarly, the Alliance made statements declaring that the aim of organized women was not to "offend men" or "group women against them," but rather to "organically cooperate" with men, share responsibilities with them through political equality and participation in society and state, and unite "all morally strong individuals" of a national community.⁶⁶⁴

Štebi was explicit in her rejection of charity and defined "social work" in opposition to it. The rejection of the idea of charity in the postwar period is visible also in Zofka Kveder's journal, in which several authors presented charitable women's organizations in a positive light, but as a thing of the past, arguing essentially that women's charitable work had to be transformed into broader socio-political work.⁶⁶⁵ In other words, they attempted to redefine and broaden the idea of charitable work women had been engaged in before WWI, and argued that women's work had to be more directly connected with the social and political concerns of the society. Similarly, Štebi in her 1918 text denoted charity as an artificial and humiliating

⁶⁶² Atanacković, "Mala ženska antanta", 421.

⁶⁶³ Atanacković, "Mala feministička antanta," 264–268.

⁶⁶⁴ Radunka Andjelković-Čubrilo, "Za novi smer u feminističkom pokretu" [For a New Direction in the Feminist Movement], *Ženski pokret* 4 (1926): 107–115; AŽP, "Našim ženama," 1–2.

⁶⁶⁵ Zorka Janković, "Naša ženska društva" [Our women's associations], *Ženski svijet* 1 (1918): 37–40; Vinka Bulić, "O sposobnostima žene" [On Women's Abilities], *Ženski svijet* 2 (1918): 55–60; Nikias, "Što treba raditi?" [What should be done?], *Ženski svijet* 2 (October 1917): 49.

endeavor, both for those who offered and those who received it.⁶⁶⁶ She furthermore argued that true social assistance must come from a feeling of social duty towards the social community to which one belongs.⁶⁶⁷ It was along these lines that Štebi spoke of the difference between charity and social work almost a decade later, in 1926, defining social work as “a clear feeling and understanding, pure will and pure acting for what is needed and purposeful for the whole, and not only for the individual.”⁶⁶⁸ In her speech about the work of the Yugoslav women’s associations, Štebi argued that only a small number of associations had managed to overcome “the ordinary charitable and educational sphere of work and were engaged in social work,” and called for a systematic transformation of women’s work from charitable to social work.⁶⁶⁹ She noted that many of the associations avoided saying they did social work because it sounded “like something revolutionary” to them.⁶⁷⁰ Her criticism was explicitly pointed at humanitarianism, which was supposed to be something “elevated above the mad political struggles” that could unite people of different confessions and of various worldviews; yet, she argued that this was only an ideal, and not reality, since those who preached humanitarianism offered aid only to those who were of the same religious orientation. Thus, in Štebi’s understanding, social work meant in fact a systematic cooperation between associations and the state, and it was the only possible way forward. She specified further that this cooperation should not be in the form of subventions the state gave to the associations (as in Yugoslavia at the time), but that the state should take moral and material responsibility to make sure the work

⁶⁶⁶ A broader discussion on this was published in Isidora Grubački, “Međuratni liberalni feminizam: Narodni ženski savez i odnos humanitarnog i socijalnog pitanja u dvadesetim godinama 20. veka” [Interwar Liberal Feminism: National Women’s Alliance and the Relationship Between the Humanitarian and Social Questions in the 1920s], in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, ed. Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 17–35.

⁶⁶⁷ Alojzija Štebi, *Demokratizem in ženstvo* [Democracy and Women] (Ljubljana, Slovenska Socijalna Matica, 1918), 6–7.

⁶⁶⁸ Štebi, “O našem radu u društvima”, 396.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 392–393. By charity, she gave examples of giving aid to senior citizens, collecting clothes for children, and organizing lectures, whereas for the latter she gave examples of supporting kindergartens for children, health institutions for babies, counselling offices for mothers, and so forth.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 395.

was done properly. She concluded that the only way to reach this was to demand it from the state.⁶⁷¹

Štebi's conceptual differentiation between charity and social work, understood at the time as a more systematic cooperation between women's associations and the state, was part of these women's postwar "political turn," as they rarely brought forward suffrage demands without further reference to social reforms, as I will elaborate further in the next section. The focus on social reforms and social justice would become the core of the Alliance's feminism. In one of the Alliance's articles from 1927, probably written by Štebi, social justice was described as "the strongest and most solid basis of a calm and fruitful common life for all members of society." On this basis, they claimed that the Alliance's role was to propagate, among other things, the correct understanding of what they called the "modern social movement."⁶⁷² Noticing that different groups of people were exploited and that there was a growing inequality among the people, for the Alliance it was crucial that various political and social movements demanded—"as socialists had demanded in the past", as Štebi emphasized it—that every individual had the possibility of a decent life.⁶⁷³ In Štebi's conceptualization of feminism, then, social reform, social justice, and state placed an important role.

Another idea that was part of Štebi's civic feminist language was women's work for the state. Namely, the idea was that women, different from men, would contribute towards solving the social issues of the time. This argumentation was of course not unique to the Yugoslav case; it was, as Leila Rupp described it, based on the widespread essentialist idea of biologically or socially grounded sexual difference between women and men, and encompassed maternalist ideas that women were inherently pacifist because of their biological capacity for reproduction,

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² AŽP, "Našim ženama," 1–2.

⁶⁷³ Alojzija Štebi, "Naš rad" [Our Work], *Ženski pokret* 16 (1927): 1.

and that women's contribution to society could make a difference because of this.⁶⁷⁴ Yugoslav feminists were inspired by internationally renowned feminists, including the US writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), the Swedish writer Ellen Key (1849–1926), as well as the German pedagogue, politician, and activist Helene Lange (1848–1930).⁶⁷⁵ For example, in a text she wrote about Ellen Key in 1926, Štebi argued that Key's most important contribution was in the sphere of motherhood. Agreeing with Key, Štebi highlighted that "motherhood is the central problem in each woman's life and a central problem of the women's movement."⁶⁷⁶ Further, Štebi positioned herself close to Key and opposed what she called "extremist feminists" who opposed Key's idea of the "legal protection of motherhood," and demanded equal legal rights between men and women.⁶⁷⁷ This is one example confirming that Yugoslav civic feminists were in favor of women-specific protective regulation.⁶⁷⁸ In the Yugoslav public sphere, the only woman who directly opposed the idea of sexual difference was the Prague-based feminist Julka Chlapcová-Djordjević, who argued that it was wrong to demand equality on the basis of difference between men and women.⁶⁷⁹

Yet, the way Štebi used these ideas of difference between men and women and motherhood was to differentiate the Alliance's work with that from the pre-WWI period. Štebi maintained that the predominant idea before WWI had been that of individual motherhood and women had organized to demand their rights because through the influence on their children,

⁶⁷⁴ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 83–89.

⁶⁷⁵ Svetlana Stefanović, "Differenzfeminismus: O recepciji ideja nemačkih feministkinja među pripadnicima ženskog pokreta," in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, ed. Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev, (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 387–405; Bojana Maksimović, "Recepcija ideja švedske feministkinje Elen Kej u časopisu ženski pokret (1920–1938)" [Reception of Ideas of the Swedish Feminist Ellen Key in the Women's Movement Journal], in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, ed. Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev, (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 407–419.

⁶⁷⁶ Alojzija Štebi, "Ellen Key: (1849–1926)," *Ženski pokret* 5 (1926): 147–151.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Susan Zimmermann, "Equality of Women's Economic Status? A Major Bone of Contention in the International Gender Politics Emerging During the Interwar Period," *The International History Review*, 41, no. 1 (2019): 200–227. See also Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*; Cobble, *For the Many*.

⁶⁷⁹ Stefanović, "Differenzfeminismus," 399–400; Kolarić, *Periodika u feminističkoj učionici*, 190–192

they would influence society more broadly.⁶⁸⁰ According to Karen Offen, this was a dominant discourse in Europe before WWI, and the literary scholar Ana Kolarić showed that this was the case in the pre-WWI Serbian journal *Žena* (Woman, 1911–1914) as well.⁶⁸¹ Opposing this pre-WWI dominant argumentation, and following Key’s ideas on collective motherliness,⁶⁸² Štebi argued that in the post-WWI context women’s role in society should be that of social motherhood, which was broader than individual motherhood, and which made it possible for women to influence not only their families, but also the state more directly.⁶⁸³ Yet, Štebi and the Alliance made clear that motherhood should not be devalued, nor should it be women’s only purpose:

Motherhood is recognized by everyone as the most natural vocation of a woman, as the most beautiful and sublime. And we, feminists, wholeheartedly admit that. But one thing makes us different from those who demand that a woman should be just a mother and a housewife, whereas everything else should for women be “unknown lands”.... We are looking for a social order that would enable every woman to be a true mother.⁶⁸⁴

Štebi’s feminist thought is easily comparable to that of Jane Addams (1860–1935), co-founder of the famous Hull House settlement house in Chicago, as well as a co-founder of the WILPF and its president in the interwar period. Štebi wrote about Addams on several occasions. After she attended the 1925 ICW congress in Washington, Štebi enthusiastically reported on Jane Addams’s work in her world-renowned Hull House settlement. Upon Addams’s death in 1935, Štebi wrote that Addams’s whole life had been “a shining example of sacrifice, selflessness, and of social responsibility.”⁶⁸⁵ As argued by philosopher Judy Whipps, Addams was a pragmatist social thinker who offered a model of communitarian

⁶⁸⁰ *Demokratizem in ženstvo*, 7–8.

⁶⁸¹ Offen, *European Feminisms*; Kolarić, *Rod, modernost i emancipacija*.

⁶⁸² Ulla Åkerström, “Collective Motherliness in Italy. Reception and Reformulation of Ellen Key’s Feminist Ideas in Sibilla Aleramo and Ada Negri (1905–1921),” *Bergen Language and Linguistics Studies* 10, no. 1 (2019): 1–10.

⁶⁸³ *Demokratizem in ženstvo*, 7–8.

⁶⁸⁴ AŽP, “Našim ženama,” 1–2.

⁶⁸⁵ Štebi, Jane Addams; Alojzija Štebi, “Jane Adams”, *Ženski pokret* (1936): 46.

thought; Whipps defines communitarianism as a philosophy that “emphasizes how the individual is embedded in and ontologically connected to community associations, values, and political life, and advocates for political actions that reinforce those values.”⁶⁸⁶ Whipps sees Addams’s social thought as an example of an alternative, feminist social theory, in which community is seen not in conservative, antifeminist terms, but in terms of “progressive process-oriented methods of change” and an expression of interdependence among individuals and groups who together belong to the same “social organism.”⁶⁸⁷ It is exactly such an understanding of the entanglement of the individual and the community and social justice, coupled with equal rights, which I see in Štebi’s feminist political thought, thought she put into practice through the organization she led for seventeen years.

For Štebi and many other Yugoslav feminists, therefore, women’s equal political, social, and legal rights were the core of feminism. Nevertheless, they did not consider these demands sufficient, as social justice, social reforms, women’s paid work, and women’s work for the state were equally important. They made this explicit in their writing. Already in her 1918 booklet, Štebi rejected what she called the “old combative call of the women’s movement,” that women must receive “the same amount of rights as men.”⁶⁸⁸ In the late 1920s, Atanacković emphasized that “our feminism is not so narrow as to be identified only with the struggle for women’s political rights.”⁶⁸⁹ Similarly, the Alliance’s statements highlighted that the feminist movement in Yugoslavia was different from other feminist movements, as it never limited itself to “purely feminist questions,” but always insisted on connecting these questions with life more broadly.⁶⁹⁰ Some historians, including the American Nancy Cott, have been

⁶⁸⁶ Judy D. Whipps, “Jane Addams’s Social Thought as a Model for a Pragmatist-Feminist Communitarianism,” *Hypatia* 19, no. 2 (2004): 118–133.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 120–121.

⁶⁸⁸ In original: “stari bojni klic ženskoga gibanja—kolikor pravic imajo moški, toliko jih morajo dobiti ženske.” See Štebi, *Demokratizem in ženstvo*, 3.

⁶⁸⁹ Milena Atanacković, “Plenarna sednica Uprave Alianse Ženskih Pokreta,” [Plenary session of the Alliance of Women’s Movements’ leadership], *Ženski pokret* 12 (1928): 1–2.

⁶⁹⁰ Štebi, “Naš rad,” 1.

wary of calling this stream of political thought which had a strong focus on social justice “feminist.” In context, this was because the concept of feminism in the US was predominantly identified with the National Woman’s Party and its strong focus on equal rights per se and opposition to protective or social rights specifically for women.⁶⁹¹ Compared to the US context, Štebi was closer to what the historian Dorothy Sue Cobble has called “full rights feminism.”⁶⁹²

It is evident that in the Yugoslav context, Alojzija Štebi, as well as Milena Atanacković and other ŽP members, used the terms *feminizam* and “purely feminist” to differentiate Yugoslav feminists from charitable women’s organizations in Yugoslavia, but also from the idea that feminists were merely asking for equal rights; as shown in the Yugoslav case, they demanded much more, comparable to what Cobble and Marino described in their analyses of the US and Latin American feminists who demanded equality and social justice “for the many.”⁶⁹³ By using the term *feminizam* with the political vocabulary of social justice, social reforms, women’s work, and women’s contribution to the state, Štebi in fact sent a political message that women’s equality could not be reached without social equality, and that it needed to be approached in its larger, social context.

4.2. Yugoslav *feminizam* and women’s political participation

When the Feminist Alliance was formed in 1923, the first point in its program was the demand for women’s suffrage, whereas the second point was that suffrage was seen “only as a means for complete women’s liberation” (see chapter 1).⁶⁹⁴ As the previous section showed, social justice and social reform were important aspects of what the Alliance’s program called

⁶⁹¹ Cott, “What’s in a Name?”

⁶⁹² Cobble, *For the Many*.

⁶⁹³ Ibid. Marino, *Feminism for the Americans*.

⁶⁹⁴ “Pravila” [Rules], *Ženski pokret* 9-10 (1923): 455–460; see also 1.2. In 1918, Štebi wrote in her aforementioned booklet *Democracy and Women* that the aim of women’s suffrage was not suffrage in itself, but women should be able to vote (and be elected) so that they could fulfil their social duties and contribute to changing society for the better. Alojzija Štebi, *Demokratizem in žensstvo*, 6–7.

“women’s liberation.” However, in 1929, the Alliance removed women’s suffrage rights from its program. Moreover, the Alliance was formed as a politically neutral organization, one independent from party politics. This section examines Štebi’s views on the relationship between feminism on the one hand, and political neutrality and political parties on the other. I suggest that the removal of suffrage from the demands was, besides being a result of the 1929 royal dictatorship (see 1.4), also a consequence of deeper anxieties about the state of democracy which, as the following examples will make evident, Štebi thought was in “crisis.”

When it comes to the question of whether or not women should be members of political parties, the Alliance was formed as a politically neutral organization, yet Štebi was not always absolutely convinced that this was a good idea. Notably, in September 1925, she published a text in *Ženski pokret* in which she first noted the general indifference towards the feminist movement in Yugoslavia, not only among men but also among women. She then discussed the NCW, explaining that it made sense that it was politically neutral because of what she saw as a deep division among Yugoslav women: one group had more traditional ideas of women’s position in society, while the other group considered “the value of women as full citizens” and social justice.⁶⁹⁵ Yet, she considered the NCW as an important institution, where the two groups of women could cooperate on common issues. The Feminist Alliance united the latter of the two groups, and Štebi pondered in her article whether or not establishing the Alliance as a politically neutral organization had been a good idea. She suggested that perhaps women should in fact join political parties and enter the political arena in this way, either organized or individually. As she explained, “it would be an illusion to think that any political party would support us in our primary demand, the demand for suffrage rights, if they cannot see clearly what and how much they will gain from us in the work on their [political parties’] programs.”⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁵ Štebi, “Za novi smer u feminističkom pokretu,” 243.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 244.

Štebi, therefore, suggested that perhaps women should be encouraged to join political parties, yet her view on the parties was extremely negative, so this suggestion might seem somewhat paradoxical. Formerly a member of the JSDS, she left the party in 1919 and turned her attention to women's separate organizing. In 1924, at the aforementioned LEW congress in Belgrade, she held a speech in which she discussed the decision of the Yugoslav Constitutional Assembly in 1921 not to include women's suffrage in the new constitution, and criticized the existing political parties and politicians' mentality. According to Štebi, "our political parties must undergo evolution before it is possible that they change their opinion in our favor, [and they must] move from petty politics to politics of ideas and principles."⁶⁹⁷ The main criticism she had of the political parties in Yugoslavia was that, except for two smaller parties—the SPJ and the Independent Workers' Party of Yugoslavia—they did not encompass the whole country. Secondly, she considered all bigger parties as encompassing only one ethnicity or religion and having failed to spread their influence much more than before WWI.⁶⁹⁸ In her words:

This is an indisputable fact that seems very important for the development of feminism. The influence of this kind of policy is felt also among women; they are not yet able to free themselves to think and act differently from how politicians instruct them to. The reorganization of political parties, based on economic and social principles, will inevitably have positive consequences for feminist evolution.⁶⁹⁹

As this example demonstrates, Štebi regarded the development of feminism as being conditioned by the development of the political parties, and her hope was that the situation in Yugoslavia would improve. Her criticism of the Yugoslav political parties would only increase over the years.

⁶⁹⁷ Alojzija Štebi, "Mišljenje javnosti i feminizam u Jugoslaviji" *Aspasia* 16 (2022): 107.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

Štebi's 1925 suggestion that feminists should join political parties, however, came after her visit to the US as a member of the Yugoslav delegation to the ICW congress in Washington. Štebi reported on her encounter with the National League of Women Voters, whose aim she described as the political education of women.⁷⁰⁰ She mentioned that the League was specifically against women's organizing in their own political parties, and agreed with its position that women and men should cooperate in political parties because they have common interests. She also stated that the League considered progress "the best guarantee against revolution."⁷⁰¹ Milena Atanacković also wrote positively about the League of Women Voters, comparing it to another organization which she thought was more extreme; most probably, the latter was the National Woman's Party.⁷⁰²

Other ŽP members, however, were less enthusiastic about Štebi's position, and it seems that in 1925, some of them were already thinking of organizing a women's party, which eventually happened in May 1927. Two months after Štebi's text, Belgrade ŽP member Pravda Ristić responded that in her view, "the organization and the mentality of the contemporary political parties do not correspond with the spirit nor with the needs of a modern state." Characterizing the political parties as "outdated," Ristić suggested that it would make more sense that women organize collectively, and that they could make more impact united as a "compact whole," rather than scattered around different political parties.⁷⁰³ In May 1927, eighteen women left ŽP Belgrade and founded *Ženska stranka* (Women's Party), with its

⁷⁰⁰ Alojzija Štebi, "Rad žena u Americi" [Work of Women in America], *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1925): 299–304.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Whereas Atanacković used the original name in the case of the first organization, in the case of the second she just wrote "Društvo za Pravo Žene," which literally translates to Society for Women's Rights. Milena Atanacković, "Feminističke organizacije u Americi" [Feminist Organizations in America] *Ženski pokret* 6 (1925): 225–227.

⁷⁰³ Pravda Ristić, "O aktivnom učešću žena u politici" [On Women's Active Participation in Politics], *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1925): 296–297.

proclaimed goal of “fighting for feminist ideas.”⁷⁰⁴ Not many sources exist about this organization, which was active only until the January 1929 dictatorship, but what we know suggests that it did not differ much from the Alliance in its activities; for instance, one of their activities was sending a petition for women’s suffrage to the president of the National Parliament in October 1927.⁷⁰⁵

Rather than focusing on *Ženska stranka*, here I would like to turn to Štebi’s reaction to its formation, which I find useful for a better understanding of how she conceptualized feminism. Štebi was fiercely against this new organization for several reasons. First, she argued against grouping according to sexual difference within political parties, because sexual difference was, according to her, not something crucial for understanding the life of a nation and of humanity, but rather “a natural phenomenon necessary for the continuation of life.”⁷⁰⁶ Men, she argued, were not the cause of women’s subordination, but they were the cause of women’s economic and social dependence, which is why Štebi thought women should work to gain political equality and to improve their own social and economic condition.⁷⁰⁷ Moreover, Štebi’s position was that the Women’s Party was not, in fact, a *political* party, for two reasons: first, as women had neither active nor passive suffrage rights, their organizing within a party made no sense because they could neither vote for the Women’s Party nor be elected as its representatives; and, secondly, its program was not *political* because it did not have a position on centralism versus federalism, monarchy versus republicanism, and other important issues which Štebi defined as political.⁷⁰⁸ Similarly, Milena Atanacković claimed that it was necessary for women to fight for suffrage rights in politically neutral organizations, because

⁷⁰⁴ Kristina Jorgić Stepanović, “Ženska stranka – (Ne)prijatelj ženskog pokreta,” in *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, ed. Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev, (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021), 37–38.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁰⁶ Alojzija Štebi, “Ženska stranka” [Women’s Party], *Ženski pokret* 9 (1927): 1.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ AŽP, “Metode Ženske stranke” [Methods of Women’s Party], *Ženski pokret* 17 (1927): 2–3.

only that would make it possible for them to contribute to political parties and cooperate with men in the affairs of state.⁷⁰⁹

Štebi, therefore, had clear ideas of what political parties should be, but she also continued to criticize the existing political organizations in the country, and to argue that women needed the right to vote to be able to make changes. An official Alliance statement from February 1927 argued again that the Alliance and ŽP had to reach the goal of women's suffrage rights, for the following purpose:

The essence of those goals is deep and far-reaching. Political rights would remain just an empty phrase, if we did not try to empower those words with an aspiration for the evolution of what today is meant by politics. With all our forces, our movement must strive to demolish the wall which separates the concept of politics from the concept of morality, to oppose the view that the concepts of politics and morality exclude each other. Obtaining political rights for us would not be, therefore, only the attainment of one of our demands....⁷¹⁰

In July 1927, the Alliance published an official comment on the forthcoming national elections (held in September 1927), demanding “real democracy,” and arguing that “we are far from true democracy, and from the elementary basis of the state's life.” Referring to the “moral chaos” and to the “Balkan and Byzantine methods in our political life,” the Alliance's statement concluded by demanding suffrage rights so that women could make changes.⁷¹¹ These two examples are a reflection of the broader problem of elections and the perception of the political “crisis” which not only feminists, but many public actors had.⁷¹²

In one of her 1927 texts, Štebi added another layer of criticism. She discussed the general “crisis” which she felt was happening in the state, and defined it as a crisis of the “whole political life” of Yugoslav society.⁷¹³ Štebi shared the widespread idea that the parliament was dysfunctional, but she additionally argued that the parliament was “only the most visible forum

⁷⁰⁹ Jorgić Stepanović, “Ženska stranka,” 44.

⁷¹⁰ AŽP, “Našim ženama,” 1-2.

⁷¹¹ AŽP, “Za pravi demokratizam” [For Real Democracy], *Ženski pokret* 12 (1927): 1.

⁷¹² AŽP, “Našim ženama,” 1-2.

⁷¹³ Alojzija Štebi, “Čija kriza?” [Whose Crisis?], *Ženski pokret* 3 (1927): 1.

of political life,” and suggested that what was jeopardized was democracy in its broadest terms.⁷¹⁴ Štebi’s view about the “crisis of democracy” indicates a broader, rising feeling of disillusionment with the increasingly dysfunctional political system in the country, from which—as chapter 1 has shown—feminists had great expectations. In 1927, Štebi began to argue that democratic institutions were insufficient to empower democracy, because democracy needed individuals capable of constructive political work. Therefore, she argued, “a true reform of parliamentarism will emerge through a reform of voters and by raising their morals.”⁷¹⁵ In other words, by the end of the 1920s, Štebi was persuaded that reform had to come from below.

In her conceptualization of the crisis of democracy, Štebi referenced Czechoslovak president Tomáš Masaryk, whom the authors of the *HMPT*, as mentioned in 4.1, see as a representative of the “civic radicalism” stream. Masaryk was concerned about the social question, criticized politics as “mere parliamentary squabbles,” and put forward the idea of “non-political politics” as an evolutionary civilizational effort. Adding to Masaryk’s argument, she suggested that even though women were only observers of political life, they could make changes to it: namely, women had to organize and work toward the political education of voters and the raising of voters’ morale. The solution she offered was in fact similar to Masaryk’s suggestion of small-scale work:

The small-scale, local work of each Women’s Movement consists mainly in showing women how they can only perform certain tasks through organized forces, and in showing them that women are only burdened with duties but are not given the basic rights that every citizen should have. This kind of work is preparing women for that fight, whose final victory will bring us political rights. But every work, even the smallest, has its echo in those ideals, which for us are the Alpha and Omega of every work, and which give us the right to exist.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

In the late 1920s, therefore, Štebi still argued that women's political participation was important, and suffrage was absolutely imperative. However, her argumentation was somewhat paradoxical, as she argued that women's political participation would change the political parties and the state of politics in the country in general, and that the development of feminism was conditioned by the character of political culture in the state, which she considered to be at a very low level. This example of her understanding of the "crisis of democracy," therefore, reveals that she began to conceptualize women's political participation more broadly, through the Masarykian concept of "small-scale work," which was essentially an idea of evolutionary progress. As women in Yugoslavia still did not have suffrage rights, Štebi conceptualized an alternative, still leaving political rights as an end goal of women's work.

However, soon after this in 1929, the Alliance removed women's suffrage demands from its program during the dictatorship. With this, the Alliance ended up in quite a paradoxical position, given that it was exactly women's suffrage that made the organization different from the NCW, since Štebi, as its president, argued constantly for it. In the next five years, the Alliance would continue its work in a decreased capacity. As the next section will show, it was exactly in this context of the Alliance's reduced work that a new generation of what I call here left feminists, who would revive the Alliance in the second half of the 1930s, began to form.

4.3. The 1930s generation's framing of "new feminism": the case of Mitra Mitrović

The term *novi feminizam* was used in *Žena danas*'s first issue in October 1936. Before turning to analyzing some aspects of this understanding of feminism, in this section I primarily focus on a case study: that of the activist, editor, and writer Mitra Mitrović (1912–2001), the initiator of the Belgrade ŽP's Youth section and one of the editors of the magazine *Žena danas*, who

after WWII became one of the leading women in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.⁷¹⁷ In my analysis, I rely heavily on historian Veljko Stanić's recent chapter on Mitrović's 1930s intellectual biography, based on Mitrović's soon to be published autobiographical notes, which I also had the possibility to read.⁷¹⁸ By focusing on Mitrović and her peers from the Belgrade ŽP Youth section, this section will outline the generational aspect of "new feminism," which I argue is essential for understanding the transformation of feminism in the mid-1930s.

Mitrović was born in 1912 into a railway worker's family.⁷¹⁹ She belonged to a generation that barely remembered WWI, but was still traumatized by it. Mitrović's father died during the war, so she and her four siblings were raised by her mother, of whom not much is known; this might have increased her sensibility regarding women's position and status in contemporary Yugoslav society. Mitra Mitrović grew up in Užička Požega, a small town of around 2,000 inhabitants located about 150 kilometers from Belgrade. In 1930, she enrolled to study Yugoslav literature at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Belgrade, and soon afterwards became active in the left feminist movement. In this period, she met Milovan Djilas (1911–1995), one of the leading communists in the 1930s, to whom she was married between 1936 and 1952. She was first a KPJ activist, and since 1933 officially a Party member. After

⁷¹⁷ During WWII, Mitra Mitrović joined the partisan army and participated in the forming of the Antifascist Women's Front (Antifašistički front žena, AFŽ); in 1942, she was elected a member of AVNOJ (Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije, Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia). After the war, she held various political functions in the new, socialist Yugoslav state, including that of the first minister of education in the Government of the People's Republic of Serbia. She was sidelined from the Party in 1954, after she publicly took the side of one of the globally most well-known dissidents in state socialism, Milovan Djilas, by then her former husband. She continued to work as a director of the Federal Institute for the Study of Schooling and Educational Issues until her retirement in 1963. She died in 2001.

⁷¹⁸ Stanić, "Mitra Mitrović." Veljko Stanić has edited a collection of autobiographical notes, which Mitrović wrote between 1962 and 1972, and which were preserved in several of the boxes with Mitra Mitrović's documents. The documents are currently held privately in the apartment of Aleksa Djilas, Milovan Djilas's son. I have had access to some of this material through photographs which Veljko Stanić generously shared with me, and have had access to the autobiographical notes Stanić has prepared for the publication: Mitra Mitrović, *Otpisana. Autobiografski zapisi* [Written Off. Autobiographical Notes], ed. Veljko Stanić (Belgrade: Vukotić Media, in print). As the page numbers are still not available for this publication, I will cite the whole section where the sentence I refer to is.

⁷¹⁹ This paragraph is based on: Stanić, "Mitra Mitrović." See also: Stanislava Barać, "(Ne)pristajanje na zaborav: Mitra Mitrović, portret revolucionarke," *Komuna LINKS*, <http://komunalinks.com/home/2017/1/23/nepristajanje-na-zaborav-mitra-mitrovi-portret-revolucionarke>; Ivana Pantelić et. al., *Dvadeset žena koje su obeležile XX vek u Srbiji*, Volume 2 (Beograd: NIN, 2013); Latinka Perović, "De profundis (za Mitru Mitrović: 1912–2001)", *Republika* 13, no. 259 (2001), http://www.yuorpe.com/zines/republika/arhiva/2001/259/259_26.html.

graduating in 1935, she worked in the Library of the National Assembly in Belgrade, and with this work she also financed her husband's activism.⁷²⁰

Her activism, and the activism of the ŽP youth section more broadly, should be seen in the broader context of the “progressive youth movement” (*napredna omladina*), which from the beginning of the 1930s organized a strong anti-regime, pacifist, and antifascist movement in Yugoslavia.⁷²¹ The political radicalization of students in Belgrade, but also in Zagreb and Ljubljana, began first as a reaction to the dictatorship, which later increased and slowly transformed into broader antifascist demonstrations. The first big anti-regime demonstrations were held on the occasion of the 1931 national elections; one of the leaders of these demonstrations was Milovan Djilas.⁷²² The autumn 1931 demonstrations were only the beginning of a long student struggle. During the 1930s, the government suspended the work of the University of Belgrade several times and continuously attempted to restrict its autonomy. Big demonstrations were held in the second half of the 1930s, and university autonomy—that is, its independence from the state or the ministries—was an important aspect of activism by progressive students (including the left feminists) during the 1930s. At the same time, this kind of activism was very dangerous and often led to imprisonment or even death; in 1935 and 1936, the police killed two students, Mirko Srzentić and Žarko Marinović, and during the December 14, 1939 demonstrations the police brutally killed four students, including the Female Students’

⁷²⁰ Barać, “(Ne)pristajanje na zaborav”.

⁷²¹ Miroljub Vasić, *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret u Jugoslaviji 1929–1941. Godine* [Revolutionary Youth Movement in Yugoslavia 1929–1941] (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1977); Milica Damjanović, *Napredni pokret studenata Beogradskog univerziteta: prilog istoriji, Vol. 2, od 1929 do 1941. godine* [Progressive Movement of the Belgrade University Students: Contribution to History, Vol. 2, from 1929 to 1941] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1974).

⁷²² Stanić, “Mitro Mitrović,” 72.

Dorm tenant Bosa Milićević.⁷²³ Mitrović herself was arrested for one day in 1934, whereas her partner Milovan Djilas was imprisoned from 1933 to 1936.⁷²⁴

The three main experiences which affected this generation of left feminists were the intra-party struggles in the 1920s and the royal dictatorship (1929–1934), the economic crisis, and the rise of fascism (as discussed in chapter 3). As Mitra Mitrović wrote in her autobiographical notes, the shooting in parliament in June 1928 was her first “political memory.” What she clearly remembered about this occasion was that the policemen did not allow the people to stand in groups consisting of more than three persons on the street.⁷²⁵ As Veljko Stanić aptly put it, the dictatorship “not only divided political life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into two periods, but also had a fateful effect on the political awareness of an entire young generation.”⁷²⁶ The young communists active in the 1930s themselves framed both the dictatorship and the economic crisis in generational terms. One example regarding the dictatorship is that of Mitrović’s peer and fellow activist Avdo Humo (1914–1983), who also studied in Belgrade in the 1930s, and who named his memoir *Moja generacija* (My Generation).⁷²⁷ According to Humo, who grew up and attended high school in the Bosnian town of Mostar, the June 1928 parliamentary shooting “echoed horribly in our town and in our families” and subsequently, their “intellectual development came at the time of King Aleksandar’s dictatorship,” when, in his view, all “democratic tendencies” were persecuted.⁷²⁸

⁷²³ See: Miroljub Vasić, “Revolucionarni pokret studenata 1929–1941. godine,” in *Univerzitet u Beogradu: 1838–1988*, ed. Čedomir Popov (Beograd: Univerzitet, 1988), 861–880. Desanka Protić-Hruščić, “Studentkinje i dom studentkinja u naprednom studentskom pokretu beogradskog univerziteta” [Female Students and the Female Students’ Dorm in the Progressive Student Movement of the Belgrade University], in *Studentkinje beogradskog univerziteta u revolucionarnom pokretu* [Female Students of Belgrade University in the Revolutionary Movement], eds. Dobrica Vuločić and Božidar Drašković (Beograd: Centar za marksizam Univerziteta, Istorijski arhiv, 1988), 72–74.

⁷²⁴ Stanić, “Mitra Mitrović,” 75. Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Moje prvo hapšenje.”

⁷²⁵ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Prvo političko sećanje.”

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷²⁷ Avdo Humo, *Moja generacija* (Zenica: Vrijeme, 2019). This autobiography was written after WWII, and originally published in 1984, after Humo’s death.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

These generational experiences of the dictatorship were, therefore, very different than that of the older generation of feminists. In the words of Mitrović: “What evaded us, as a generation, was the national romanticism in the idea of Yugoslavia, unification of the state, solving centuries-old problems, the immediate disappointment with the war passed us by as well.”⁷²⁹

The women in Mitrović’s circle, moreover, also framed the economic crisis in generational terms. The economic crisis hit Yugoslavia particularly hard in the early 1930s. As I discussed earlier (3.4), the Slovenian communist feminist Angela Vode wrote about the economic crisis. The young women wrote about the crisis in a slightly different way, explaining it in terms of its influence on their generation. In the words of Belgrade ŽP Youth section member Boba Djordjević, from a speech held at a Belgrade ŽP Assembly held in 1938:

The crisis has shaken us and our parents, and with its crushing force interrupted that slow, but potentially safe path; a path, as we had thought, already paved with the sufferings of our mothers and with the sacrifices of our predecessors. It pushed the youth aside, disrupted their dreams, and even before they entered the professional sphere created a new, unprotected social class [*drušveni sloj*], unemployed and excluded from the ranks of social workers. So we, the young women, together with all youth, have become the youth of the crisis; especially us, because we are women, because more and more announcements appear proclaiming that women are undesirable for work....⁷³⁰

However, she offered hope:

But we felt that it was up to us, the youth, to create a better life for ourselves. We, the young women, felt that we, the children of war, and the youth of the crisis, must become a progressive youth and women of struggle. And hence in recent years, our awareness has become increasingly strong and increasingly certain that our fate is not personal, that the fate of the entire youth hurts as much as ours, and that, as long as all youth do not have sufficient conditions for development, development will be difficult and denied to young women as well.⁷³¹

⁷²⁹ Stanić, “Mitrović,” 67.

⁷³⁰ E. A., “Značajna i uspela priredba Ženskog pokreta u Beogradu” [Important and Successful Event of ŽP in Belgrade], *Žena danas* 14 (1938): 8.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

After this speech, the choir of the youth section reportedly sang: “And full of cheerful youth that leads us, in spite of everything, we raise our voice!” (*I pune vedre mladosti što vodi nas, mi dižemo uprkos svemu glas!*)⁷³²

This generation’s activism, then, began after a decade of fragile parliamentary life, the 1928 parliament assassination, and the introduction of the dictatorship in January 1929. Furthermore, it was in the context of anti-regime demonstrations, the rising influence of the KPJ, and the economic crisis. In this context, the Mitrović spoke of a great dissatisfaction felt by her generation:

The nature of our dissatisfaction was far broader than any kind of dissatisfaction with our own situation... Our own situation was such that we could, like others of our generation, have taken a paved road and reached what was called a career... We were certainly that part of the generation which had to think about something else as well, both objectively and subjectively.⁷³³

Interestingly, Mitrović here referred to the issue of individual women’s professional careers, so a part of this dissatisfaction was certainly the difficulty young women faced finding jobs in the context of the economic crisis. But more than that, her recollections suggest a deeper dissatisfaction with the path which seems to have been already delineated for young women who had the privilege to attend University (Mitrović, specifically, had a stipend). As she recalled, she knew that graduating from University would be something which would make her mother happy, but then she added with frustration: “But where will I go? There will be no more poverty. But what will remain? Would I be a teacher in a town like Užice?” Rather than following what she called the “petty bourgeois” (*malograđanski*) way of life which encompassed studies, graduating, marriage, children, and a job, she saw the University as a “hope” and a “rupture with a certain kind of life,” and a quest for new sources of inspiration.⁷³⁴

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Stanić, “Mitra Mitrović,” 68.

⁷³⁴ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Na univerzitetu,” and “Susret.”

As she concluded: “We were, in fact, quite resentful young people choosing to turn to social questions and [rejecting to] participate in the society of robbery, theft, vulgarity, false morality, and wealth on the one hand, and poverty on the other hand.”⁷³⁵

Mitrović’s recollections indicate that her and her friends’ who would later become communists first had a certain feeling of dissatisfaction, and only then came the theory which they saw as useful for understanding the causes and the possible way out of this dissatisfaction. As Mitrović recounted, while she began active in the student movement in November 1931, and became a communist gradually. She recalled that at the time, they did not have the access to *Proleter*, the official KPJ paper, but their intellectual influences originated elsewhere. She mentioned the 1931 Soviet film *Road to Life* (*Putyovka v zhizn*), which she described as a “confirmation for their idea about the revolution which has the power to change the world and create a new man.”⁷³⁶ When it comes to literature, she mentioned as the most influential the various editions of the influential Belgrade publishing house *Nolit* (the shortened form of *Nova literatura*, New literature) led by the communist Pavle Bihali, who published works of leftist authors like Gorky and Agnes Smedley, as well as the journal *Nova literatura* (New Literature, 1928-1930), which she described as her first “ideological literature.”⁷³⁷ It was in the spring of 1932 when more formal Marxist student groups were established, where students gathered and exchanged social and Marxist literature, which included Marx, Bebel, Lenin, Maxim Gorky. Mitrović was in the group of Dušica Stefanović, a biology student, a daughter of communist Draga Stefanović active in the AŽP in the early 1920s (3.1.).⁷³⁸ It is possible to assume that the situation was similar in Zagreb and Ljubljana. Thus, the young women’s communist activism gradually, as a part of what was called the progressive student movement. Her recollections

⁷³⁵ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Drugovi.”

⁷³⁶ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Moja generacija.”

⁷³⁷ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Nolit.”

⁷³⁸ AJ, Fond 516, Memoirs’ Collection of the Participants in the Labor Movement (MG), 1615/2, “Mitrović Mitra: ‘Moja prva akcija’” [My First Action], 3–4. Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “U školi marksizma.”

about the beginnings of her orientation towards communism are invaluable as they point to their “from below” character:

We, or at least I and those similar to me at the time, became communists not because an existing party organization followed our mood and accepted us as their members, not we became communists by joining a political party which offered its program to us. But we all, together, except for a minority, were gradually getting to this. It was almost self-initiated, having in mind the real state of the party organizations at the time. And still, there was a continuity of the [communist] idea, which we, the new generations, were establishing, without completely being aware of it.⁷³⁹

Mitra Mitrović and her fellow activists were, then, a part of the broader, generational movement which called itself “progressive youth.” While their “comradeship” preceded their membership in the KPJ, the intellectual circles of young students, especially women, who began to meet and exchange ideas and political thoughts in the early 1930s, preceded (at least in Belgrade) the organization of the ŽP Youth Section. How did these women, whom I see as a part of the left feminist generation, began to organize? Like the feminists in the 1920s, they advocated for cooperation with men.⁷⁴⁰ However, the female students still organized separately, and sometimes expressed an understanding that their position was slightly more difficult than that of their male colleagues. One example is a 1935 report in the Zagreb *Novi student*: in its report about the women’s suffrage demonstrations which the Alliance had organized, it particularly emphasized the Zagreb student Ana Prokop’s speech, in which Prokop spoke about the unequal position of women at the University, especially with regard to the higher demands professors made on women students, and to the difficult process of finding a job after graduation.⁷⁴¹ At the same event, Slovenian student Hristina Vrhovec argued that in the case of some higher educational institutions in Ljubljana, the female students had to have significantly higher marks than men in order to be accepted.⁷⁴² Moreover, at the Belgrade ŽP

⁷³⁹ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Moja generacija.”

⁷⁴⁰ Marija Đorđević, “Položaj žena nekad i sad” [Women’s Position Before and Now], *Žena danas* 5–6 (1937): 3.

⁷⁴¹ “Žene u borbi za pravo glasa” [Women in the Struggle for Women’s Right to Vote], *Novi student* 3 (1935): 2.

⁷⁴² Hristina Vrhovec, “Omladina,” [Youth], *Ženski pokret* 7–9 (1935): 113–114.

assembly held in 1937, Mitra Mitrović, as the president of the ŽP Youth section, discussed the difficult situation of all the youth: male and female, working, peasant, and intellectual. But she added that the female youth was in an especially difficult position, and that more generally all women had suffered from the economic crisis.⁷⁴³ The representative of female students, Natalija Bajić, made a similar claim in her speech at the Congress of the Association of University Educated Women in Belgrade in February 1939.⁷⁴⁴

While female students often spoke about women's unequal position in relation to men, separate women's organizing, which has often been an issue in various contexts of social-democratic and communist parties, was not uncontested in the Yugoslav case either.⁷⁴⁵ According to a 1934 document, there was a conflict within the KPJ as to whether women in Yugoslavia should form a separate mass organization or not.⁷⁴⁶ In a text published in *Žena danas*, Mitra Mitrović and her comrade Milica Šuvaković argued for women's independent organizing. They did so not by criticizing someone from the Party, but by disagreeing with the social democrat Milica Đurić Topalović's rejection of "the feminist movement" and her claims that separate women's organizations served to intentionally separate women and men.⁷⁴⁷ Unlike Djurić Topalović, Mitrović and Šuvaković argued that the problem with the women's movement was *not* in separate organizing, but in failing to contextualize "the woman question" as a part of the "general question of all women and gathering of all forces for the... struggle

⁷⁴³ "Skupština ženskog pokreta" [ŽP Assembly], *Žena danas* 4 (1937): 2–4.

⁷⁴⁴ Dobrica Vulović and Božidar Drašković, ed, *Studentkinje beogradskog univerziteta u revolucionarnom pokretu* [Female Students of Belgrade University in the Revolutionary Movement], eds. (Beograd: Centar za marksizam Univerziteta, Istorijski arhiv, 1988), 50–53.

⁷⁴⁵ Sandra Prlenda, "Posebne ženske organizacije u komunističkom pokretu i socijalističkim zemljama – povijesni pregled" [Separate women's organizations in the communist movement and socialist states – historical overview], *Treća* 1–2 (2015): 129–144.

⁷⁴⁶ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1934/385, "Izveštaj beogradskog MK" [Report of the Belgrade MK].

⁷⁴⁷ Mitra Mitrović and Milica Šuvaković, "Knjiga g-đe Milice Đurić-Topalović, 'Žena kroz vekove'" [Milica Djurić Topalović's book *Women Through Centuries*], *Žena danas* 23 (July 1939): 8.

for a better and a more human world”; they concluded that this common struggle was particularly important in contemporary society, i.e., “today.”⁷⁴⁸

Generational experience could thus serve as a unifying factor for women from different classes and women and men from the progressive student movement. However, it could also serve to emphasize the differences between them, and this was particularly the case concerning the differences between the younger women and their senior ŽP fellow activists. The sources indicate that the young feminists understood this difference in a pejorative way, as the ŽP feminists were called “older women,” ladies (*gospođe*), or simply grandmothers (*babe*).⁷⁴⁹ In an interview given to historian Ivana Pantelić in 2008, one of the activists in the ŽP youth section in Zagreb, Herta Haas, directly contrasted the older women’s activism with their own: “They did not have what we, the young ones, had: the forcefulness; it was more a cabinet society, they would meet, act appalled, but nothing more than that. While we, the young, we were different.”⁷⁵⁰ Another Zagreb Youth section activist remembered: “*Babe* pestered us, and they did not allow us to do much in the framework of the ŽP. They were all from Zagreb [*zagrebačke purgerice*], as soon as they sensed something, they slowed us down immediately.”⁷⁵¹ In a letter from October 26, 1935, about the forming of the Belgrade Youth Section, Leposava Mihailović-Opi stated that before the young women had joined *Ženski pokret*, a number of its women members had been satisfied with meeting once a week and holding public lectures from time to time. According to Opi, the young women’s main contestation concerned the appropriate form of activism.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Pantelić, *Partizanke*, 171–182; AJ, 720, Progressive Student Movement (NSP), 679/1936, “Pismo Leposave Mihailović Opik sestra Boginji” [Leposava Mihailović Opika to her sister Boginja]; AJ, 790/1 KI, 1935/323, “Naš rad u ženskom pokretu” [Our Work in ŽP].

⁷⁵⁰ Pantelić, *Partizanke*, 173.

⁷⁵¹ Alma Komparić, as quoted in Lovreković, “Sindikalka u redovima omladinske sekcije”, 251.

⁷⁵² AJ, 720 NSP, 679/1936, “Pismo Leposave Mihailović Opik sestra Boginji.”

Regarding the difference in agility and energy of the two groups of women, an obvious example is the Alliance's journal, *Ženski pokret*. Published since 1920, by the early 1930s *Ženski pokret* had begun to lose its vitality, and after 1932 the number of issues per year slowly decreased, until the journal was discontinued in 1938.⁷⁵³ The Zagreb ŽP's Youth section's members complained about the magazine; in May 1935, its representative Marija Stipković wrote to Štebi criticizing the journal. She explained that the Youth section's members were complaining about the magazine's dryness and said that they wished to read more about actual women's concerns, and not only the Alliance's reports and articles about individual feminists.⁷⁵⁴ Štebi published Stipković's letter, and her own response, and this correspondence was followed by a series of articles sent by Zagreb ŽP Youth section members. Interestingly, Štebi's response focused on the generational difference as well: "Every generation of youth lives in the captivating belief that it is exactly their generation that has discovered all the pressing social problems; and not only that they have discovered them, but they also discover the remedy right away." She added that the youth often oversaw the potential obstacles to their solutions, which made them less objective, but at the same time more resilient and forceful.⁷⁵⁵ Finally, Štebi wrote that she could not and should not ask the young women to look at the 1920s *Ženski pokret* issues, which would prove their criticism to be unfounded: "No," she concluded, "you should go further on the path you have taken, because you will encounter obstacles too soon; as long as you can run breathlessly, keep on running without looking left or right."⁷⁵⁶

Generational experience, therefore, was very important for the young women who joined the ŽP Youth sections. This was a generation which grew up during WWI and the

⁷⁵³ In 1932, there were eleven issues; seven in 1933; eight in 1934; five in 1935; three in 1936; two in 1937; and only one in 1938.

⁷⁵⁴ Marija Stipković and Alojzija Štebi, "Jedna prepiska umesto uvoda," *Ženski pokret* 16, no. 3–4 (1935): 57–58.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

politically unstable 1920s in Yugoslavia, and which was formed in the context of the royal dictatorship, the economic crisis, and (as discussed in chapter 3) the rise of fascism. In the second half of the 1930s, they conceptualized *novi feminizam*. What did *novi feminizam* mean for Mitrović and her generation, how did it differ from the 1920s *feminizam*, and what were the continuities with it?

4.4. “New feminism” in the context of 1930s youth magazines: women’s experiences, mass participation, and “new politics”

Before analyzing the main differences and similarities between *feminizam* and *novi feminizam*, it is important to note that the term *novi feminizam* was used only once in the programmatic text of *Žena danas*, which might lead one to think that the use of this term was merely a strategic choice to contribute to legalizing communist women’s activism. The term was not used in the Zagreb journal *Ženski svijet*. However, there is evidence that other left-progressive youth used it and perceived the word positively, too. The 1935 first issue of the Zagreb journal *Novi student* (New Student, 1935–1939), edited by the leader of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije, SKOJ), Stanko Dvoržak, published texts about the position of students, fascism, peace, nationalism, and feminism. The unsigned article titled “Feminism” aimed to explain the meaning of the concept.⁷⁵⁷ The author argued against many negative views about feminism, including those which suggested that feminists were single women who hated men, that feminists wanted sexual licentiousness, and that they endangered the family. Countering these claims, the author explained that all these attacks had the goal of creating a negative image of feminism for the youth, and added that

“today’s feminism is not yet a definite ideology. Its principle is the struggle for the improvement of women’s position in general, bourgeois and working

⁷⁵⁷ “Feminizam” [Feminism], *Novi student* 1 (1935): 6.

women [*žene gradjanske i radničke*], women of black and white skin, briefly, women of the whole world.”⁷⁵⁸

One of the students from Zagreb who published in *Ženski pokret* in 1935, Ana Daor, made a similar claim, insisting that feminism was not a bad thing, as “mothers, church, and schools” claimed, but a struggle for equality and freedom.⁷⁵⁹

In my analysis, I will use the term “new feminism” to bring forward an understanding of feminism which was sometimes called “new feminism,” sometimes just “feminism,” and sometimes other formulations were used, such as the “woman question,” but these all encompassed a similar idea. The 1936 “New feminism” text proclaimed that feminism, in the changed circumstances of the economic crisis and the rise of fascism, became the center of women’s organizing. The program emphasized that women were “massively” entering the already existing feminist organizations and that they had begun establishing new ones, which was an indirect reference to the establishment of the *Ženski pokret* Youth sections and new *Ženski pokret* organizations. Moreover, “new feminism” was proclaimed as a “center around which women gather,” with the need to include as many women as possible, women of all classes, professions, and political orientation foregrounded: “The feminist movement represents the working woman, it represents the progressive woman, and it fights for the rights of all women.”⁷⁶⁰ Countering the fascist ideology, new feminism proclaimed that women’s return to the home was “the biggest delusion.” In conclusion, the program stressed that: “Feminism does not only seek equality with men, because today that equality means equality in misery and unemployment, equality on the battlefields and in death, but it seeks equality for all people in a more beautiful and better future.”⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Ana Daor, “Ženska omladina i ženski pokret” [Female Youth and the Women’s Movement], *Ženski pokret* 3–4 (1935): 58–59.

⁷⁶⁰ “Novi feminizam,” 4.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

The similarities between *feminizam* and *novi feminizam* were many. To begin with, like the 1920s feminists (4.1), the advocates of *novi feminizam* argued that the “woman question” was a part of a broader social question. A good example of this is a brief discussion on what feminism should or should not be, which Mitra Mitrović and her friend Milica Šuvaković included in their criticism of their adversary, social democrat Milica Djurić Topalović’s book. In this text, Mitrović and Šuvaković claimed the idea that “the woman question” was not a part of a social question, but a question of difference between the sexes (*polno pitanje*) was “the most backward and already overcome understanding of vulgar feminism,”⁷⁶² and by this they gave the example of looking at whether women were equally brave as men in the army. They supported their argument by referring to Djurić Topalović’s suggestion that the way to counter the sexual exploitation of women at work was by appointing female supervisors to female workers. In Mitrović and Šuvaković’s view, this was a bad solution, because according to them the sexual exploitation of women was only one aspect of their exploitation, so it could not be solved on an individual level.⁷⁶³

Different texts in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* foregrounded women’s rights in a similar way as the Yugoslav feminists in the 1920s did. The 1936 “new feminism” program listed women’s suffrage, equal pay for equal work, broad social institutions, equal rights in parenthood, equal morality between men and women, marriage and divorce relief, women’s right to paid work, democracy, and peace. The 1935 text “Feminism” from *Novi student* in Zagreb explained that feminists demanded equality in society opposing the existing double subjection of women, in the “economic organism” and in relation to men. The author explained feminism as a general demand for the improvement of women’s position in society, but she also emphasized that the demands and struggles changed over time and across contexts.

⁷⁶² Mitrović and Šuvaković, “Žena kroz vekove,” 8–9.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

Specifically foregrounded demands were those for equality in marriage, women's suffrage rights, the fight against double morality, and pacifism.⁷⁶⁴ A third text, "Woman and Society" by the author Marija Velimirović,⁷⁶⁵ published in *Žena danas* in 1937, emphasized that the basic rights of women as citizens had not been yet solved. Besides the aforementioned rights, this text additionally mentioned acknowledgment of women's work in the house as useful for society, protection of children, and other factors.⁷⁶⁶

Furthermore, the demand for women's suffrage was another continuity with 1920s *feminizam*. The demand for women's political rights was the central issue of the feminist movement in the 1920s, although this demand was removed from the Alliance's program in the context of the dictatorship. The focus on suffrage returned in 1935, when the young communist women joined the ŽP organizations, and when the Alliance organized big suffrage demonstrations. Many texts in *Žena danas* emphasized the importance of suffrage.⁷⁶⁷ Like the Yugoslav feminists from the Alliance in the 1920s, the left feminists saw suffrage rights only as a means for women's liberation.

On the other hand, the main difference between the two conceptualizations of feminism was that in the 1930s conceptualization of "new feminism," the state did not play a positive role. This was so for both theoretical and practical reasons. According to Engels's *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, the emergence of class-based societies, characterized by the ownership of private property, necessitated the development of a state

⁷⁶⁴ "Feminizam", *Novi student* 1 no. 1 (1935): 6.

⁷⁶⁵ It is possible that the name Marija Velimirović is a pseudonym. This name was not mentioned as one of the members of the editorial teams in any of the secondary literature, which is strange, as this was a name which signed many of the texts concerning Marxist ideas. Moreover, in *Ženski svijet* 1979, one of the editors Jelena Jančić Starc listed some of the more openly Marxist texts as being written by Magda Bošković, while the signature under these texts was that of Marta Borić. With this in mind, it is possible that Marija Velimirović could have been a pseudonym of Mitra Mitrović or other members of the editorial board. Starc Jančić "Ženski svijet," 31.

⁷⁶⁶ Marija Velimirović, "Žena i društvo" [Woman and Society], *Žena danas* 3 (1937): 6–7.

⁷⁶⁷ Vera Štajn Erlih, "Politička prava žena" [Women's Political Rights], *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 15; "Uvodna reč" [Introductory Word], *Žena danas* 1 (1936): 3; Nada Jovanović, "Povodom ženskog prava glasa u Mađarskoj i Bugarskoj" [On Women's Right to Vote in Hungary and Bulgaria], *Žena danas* 10 (1938): 6.

apparatus. He sees the state as an instrument of class domination, used to uphold and perpetuate the existing social order, including the patriarchal family structure.⁷⁶⁸ Rather than the state, the 1930s left feminists focused on revolution, understood in the Marxist sense as the working class's conscious struggle for a social revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. Because of censorship, however, the concept of revolution cannot be found in either of the two left feminist journals, *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*. According to Zagreb ŽP Youth section member Jelena Jančić's 1979 introduction to a reprint of *Ženski svijet*, the authors of the journal could not openly advocate their political views, so they used other words and phrases that asked for a somewhat abstract change, solidarity, and a sense of community among women.⁷⁶⁹ Nonetheless, there are still many "traces" of revolutionary thinking in the magazines. Literary scholar Stanislava Barać effectively demonstrated that in *Žena danas*, the implicit calls for a revolution became stronger, specifically through portraits of revolutionaries.⁷⁷⁰ For example, the Polish Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was portrayed one month after WWII had started in September 1939, discussing her revolutionary path and implicitly calling for action. As Barać argued, "if Rosa Luxemburg's *life* was a *symbol* of the struggle of millions for a better world, her *name* was a *code word* for the beginning of action in this direction."⁷⁷¹ Moreover, Barać showed that other texts similarly invited class struggle in a coded way; for example, the text about women in the French Revolution was complemented by German communist artist Käthe Kollwitz's drawing *Uprising*, which added a further layer to the text.⁷⁷²

Another key difference was that the 1930s left feminists analyzed the position of women in society within the framework of Marxist-Leninist thinking. They did this by referencing

⁷⁶⁸ Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 1993, 1999, 2000 [1884], https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf (Access May 15, 2023).

⁷⁶⁹ Starc Jančić "Ženski svijet," 31–32.

⁷⁷⁰ Barać, *Feministička kontrapunkcija*, 199–206.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁷² Barać, 203.

Engels, Bebel, and Lenin's ideas about the position of women in society, as well as Lithuanian art historian Fannina Halle's (1881–1963) 1932 book *Women in the Soviet Union*, which according to Karen Offen was widely read across Europe in the 1930s.⁷⁷³ According to Jančić, most of what she called “ideological texts” in *Ženski svijet* were written by the Zagreb ŽP Youth section member Magda Bošković, who “knew how to summarize even the most difficult material in an understandable way and how to skillfully shape the revolutionary sharpness of Marxist postulates.”⁷⁷⁴ She further revealed that it was relatively easy to find texts by Marx, Engels, and Bebel, though a little more difficult to find Lenin, and explained that the young women all read Fannina Halle's aforementioned book in a manuscript translation which four of their comrades had translated from German.⁷⁷⁵ The women publishing in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* could not openly quote these works; however, there were ways to go around the censor.

One example of a direct reference to Lenin is Magda Bošković's text “Politics is not for women,” in which she rejected the claim from the title and argued that politics is “a matter of our daily and basic needs.”⁷⁷⁶ Following Lenin, she explained to the readers that politics was a means to deal with the affairs of state, which were, she emphasized, closely entangled with matters of everyday life, such as whether or not there would be bread and sugar, how much they would cost, how high salaries would be, whether there would be jobs available, whether there would be peace or war. Bošković gave further examples that politics is “where it is decided whether women will receive an equal salary to men for their work,” “where children born out of wedlock are humiliated and stepped over,” “in the books we read, in the films we watch, in the uncertainties that concern us, in laws, in their enforcement, simply

⁷⁷³ The book was originally published in German as: Fannina W. Halle, *Die Frau in Sowjetrussland* (P. Zsolnay, 1932). Offen, *European Feminisms*, 271.

⁷⁷⁴ Starc Jančić “Ženski svijet,” 31–32.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ “Nije politika za ženu” [Politics is not for Women], *Ženski svijet* 15 (1940): 4.

everywhere.”⁷⁷⁷ The only way for women to be able to influence these everyday issues was to become involved with politics. In this context, Bošković mentioned Charles Fourier, Chernyshevsky, August Bebel, and Tomáš Masaryk, and particularly “Iljič.” Referring to Lenin in this convoluted way, Bošković quoted Lenin’s claim that women, by mere participation in politics, would learn quickly and become as capable as men. She ended by mentioning that this positive view on women had been already put into practice in Iljič’s “homeland” and ended with Lenin’s quote that: “Every cook has to learn how to govern the state.”⁷⁷⁸

Other references to Lenin and Engels concern the importance of women’s paid employment for equal morality. In her text “Him and Her” published in 1940 in *Ženski svijet*, Bošković quoted Lenin’s rejection of the “glass of water theory” in his conversations with Clara Zetkin, published originally in German as *Erinnerungen an Lenin* in 1924.⁷⁷⁹ The quote was signed “Ilić,” and Jančić commented that “the censors must have been insufficiently educated to recognize Lenin’s quote.”⁷⁸⁰ In this text, Bošković⁷⁸¹ describes a couple, a man and a woman with the Russian names Ilja and Katja, who are in love with each other. The couple met, spent time together, talked about shared interests, and then went to register their marriage. The point of Bošković’s text was that this marriage was a marriage of two equals; Ilja did not rely on Katja’s dowry and Katja did not rely on Ilja’s salary, because they were both employed and they both earned their salaries. “And this is why their love is independent, free, not restrained by money.”⁷⁸² Another thing that did not arise was concern about the state their child would be born into, “because in their country children are a treasure, everything is provided for them, kindergartens, schools, theatres, recoveries, children’s castles and—the future.”⁷⁸³

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ Clara Zetkin, *Lenin on the Woman Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1934).

⁷⁸⁰ (Magda Bošković), “On i ona” [Him and Her], *Ženski svijet* 12 (1940): 6–7.

⁷⁸¹ The text was published unsigned in the September 1940 issue of *Ženski svijet*, but in the introduction Jančić noted that it was Bošković who wrote it. Jančić, “Ženski svijet”, 32.

⁷⁸² Bošković, “On i ona,” 6–7.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

Bošković ended her text with a quote of Lenin, opening the topic of the so-called “glass of water theory” and the idea of free love:

Of course, thirst must be satisfied. But will the normal person in normal circumstances lie down in the gutter and drink out of a puddle, or out of a glass with a rim greasy from many lips? But the social aspect is most important of all. Drinking water is, of course, an individual affair. But in love two lives are concerned, and a third, a new life, arises, it is that which gives it its social interest, which gives rise to a duty towards the community.⁷⁸⁴

In the original, Lenin referred to the so-called glass of water theory about the young people’s attitude towards sexual life and rejected the idea of a “revolutionary” and “new” sexual life of the youth. The glass of water theory was a theory, as Lenin summarized, that “the satisfaction of sexual desires, of love, will be as simple and as unimportant as drinking a glass of water.”⁷⁸⁵ Lenin called this theory “completely un-Marxist, and, moreover, anti-social,” with the main point that the child born out of love is not an individual, but a social concern.⁷⁸⁶ As Jelena Jančić recounted in 1979, “the echo of this article was fantastic.” The text, she explained, “was written to refute the insinuations of the church and the bourgeois propaganda about free love in the USSR and among communists in general.”⁷⁸⁷ As the 1935 *Novi student* text “Feminism” explained, feminists were often attacked for being “against the family,” because of their focus on women’s paid employment, and for being “immoral.”⁷⁸⁸ In order to reject this alleged immorality, the young communist women specified that they were against the “glass of water theory,” and that they supported monogamy.⁷⁸⁹ Zagreb student Vjera Andrejević’s 1935 text confirms this. Although, according to her, “the economic chaos has cause ideological chaos,” she made explicit that: “We do not want the free love, as advocated by Alexandra Kollontai

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Zetkin, *Lenin*, 11.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Starc Jančić “Ženski svijet,” 32.

⁷⁸⁸ “Feminizam”, *Novi student*, 6.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

according to the so-called *glasswassertheorie*.”⁷⁹⁰ Rejecting Kollontai directly, and following Engels, the author reiterated the idea that free love meant that women and men could take each other as lovers only on the basis of agreement and real sympathy. Mitrović similarly in her recollections explained that the term “free love” sounded vulgar to them.⁷⁹¹ The young left feminists, then, rejected what they understood Kollontai’s idea of free love to be.

In his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which was published in Serbo-Croatian in 1924, Engels explored the historical development of monogamy and its connection to the emergence of private property and class society. He interpreted monogamy as a product of the institution of private property. In this context, a double standard of morality emerged, which placed different moral expectations and restrictions on men and women regarding sexual behavior and relationships, and afforded men greater sexual freedoms, whereas women were expected to adhere to strict codes of sexual infidelity. In the future, however, monogamy would not disappear: “far from disappearing, it will, on the contrary, be realized completely.”⁷⁹² Marriage would no longer be a product of the institution of private property, but of “individual sex-love.”⁷⁹³ Mitrović and Šuvaković directly referenced Engels on one occasion, and pointed out that a true monogamous marriage is possible, but only in contexts where the social relations which conditioned the double morality could exist. Basing their argument on Engels’s *The Origin of the Family*, they argued that monogamy would not disappear but *be realized* in the new conditions.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹⁰ Vjera Andrejević, “Ženska omladina i moral” [Female Youth and Morality], *Ženski pokret* 3–4 (1935): 60–61.

⁷⁹¹ Mitrović, *Otpisana*, “Put u Lepoglavu i iskušenja ljubavi.”

⁷⁹² See Ljiljana Čalovska and Jelena Starc-Jančić, *Socijalizam i oslobodjenje žene. Antologija tekstova Marksa, Engelsa, Lenjina i drugih* (Beograd: Kultura, 1958), 48–51. For the English excerpt, see: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch02d.htm>

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁴ Mitrović and Šuvaković, “Žena kroz vekove,” 8–10.

4.5. Conceptual shifts in 1940: from the AŽP meeting in January to the KPJ Fifth Land Conference in October

Despite the generational and ideological differences, then, there was a lot of common ground for cooperation between women from Ženski pokret and the young communist women who joined the feminist movement in the mid-1930s across Yugoslavia. If there was so much common ground, then, why did Vida Tomšič at the Fifth Land Conference of the KPJ in October 1940 (as mentioned in the thesis introduction) reject “feminism” as a “right-wing opportunist force”?⁷⁹⁵ In order to answer this question, I discuss first the end of cooperation between the AŽP and communist women, and particularly the meeting of the AŽP on January 14, 1940, when the long-term leadership, headed by Alojzija Štebi, resigned. From this brief analysis, it will become obvious that there was a third current in the AŽP—a group of women whom I will refer to as legal equality feminists. It was against this current, more specifically the women who used the term “feminism” to differentiate themselves from the communists, that the communist feminists took a stand.

The cooperation between liberal feminists and left feminists varied in duration. Most of the time communist women-led ŽP Youth sections or ŽP (and other) organizations were discontinued because of police pressure. In many cases, ŽP Youth sections were dissolved due to the police; this happened in Sarajevo, where the Youth section was established in 1935, the organization stalled in 1936 when its president Djina Vrbica and secretary Bjanka Leci were arrested, and it was discontinued in 1937. However, the ŽPs continued to function.⁷⁹⁶ In some places, police discontinued whole organizations: this was the case with ŽP organizations in Niš, Čačak, and Podgorica, as well as the central organization for female students in Ljubljana’s Dom visokošolk, after the discovery of communist leaflets in the Dorm in 1940.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁵ Šoljan Bakarić, *Žene Hrvatske*, 5.

⁷⁹⁶ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 287–289; 306; 346–348.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 283, 287–289, 306–307.

In some cases, however, ŽP leaders themselves tried to limit young communist women's participation, possibly also because of police pressure. For example, *Žena danas* reported on an event in Skopje in May 1937, where the president of the Skopje ŽP, Emilija Jovanović, suggested a change to one of the organization's rules. Namely, the rule of the organization was that every woman older than 18 could join the ŽP, and her suggestion was that the board should decide whether or not a woman should be allowed to join. The younger women were not allowed to vote on this decision.⁷⁹⁸ Another example is from Zagreb, where the ŽP's Youth section was dissolved in 1937 because of a conflict between the ŽP leadership and the youth.⁷⁹⁹ Supporting the cancelling of the Zagreb ŽP Youth section, Zagreb ŽP president Mira Kočonda Vodvařka used the term "feminism" to differentiate herself from communist women in the Youth section:

We have always emphasized that we respect everyone's political persuasion and women of all legal political parties can gather around our feminist center, but only if feminist interests led them to us. We could never allow ourselves to endure in our group those who would come to us with some other, and not feminist intentions, or who would, in any way, under the label of feminism work for other goals.⁸⁰⁰

This example points to a slowly increasing tension concerning the meaning of feminism among different ŽP members. Moreover, these examples indicate that not all ŽP leaders were willing to cooperate with communist women, which shows that there were divisions within the AŽP and within different ŽP organizations as well; I will come back to both of these claims shortly.

The most important conflict, however, happened on January 17, 1940, which we can consider the beginning of the end of the Alliance's work. On this occasion, the leadership of the AŽP changed, and the president of the Youth section Mitra Mitrović declared that the youth

⁷⁹⁸ R. H. Panzović, "Godišnja skupština Ženskog pokreta u Skoplju" [Annual Assembly of ŽP Skopje], *Žena danas* 7 (1937): 17.

⁷⁹⁹ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 218–325.

⁸⁰⁰ Mira Kočonda Vodvařka, "Sastanak Alijanse ženskih pokreta" [Meeting of the Alliance of Women's Movements], *Ženski pokret* 1/2 (1937): 4–5.

decided to officially leave the Alliance because of political differences. In the meantime, the Alliance's headquarters were moved to Novi Sad in January 1940, and the attorney and president of ŽP Novi Sad, Katarina Marinković, became the Alliance's president. At this point, the Belgrade ŽP board decided to stop their work, and in February 1940 the board gave the keys of the Belgrade ŽP office to the board of the National Council of Women.⁸⁰¹ In June 1940, as we learn from Kecman, the Alliance wanted to hold an emergency meeting in Novi Sad, but this meeting was forbidden. With this, the work of the Alliance overall was discontinued.⁸⁰²

In order to explain the importance of the January meeting, it is crucial to go a bit back in time and discuss briefly two events: the IAW congress in Copenhagen held in July 1939, and the pro-suffrage demonstrations organized by left feminists in November and December 1939.

On May 31, 1939, the AŽP held a special meeting to prepare for the IAW 1939 congress, which would be held in July.⁸⁰³ At the meeting, the AŽP was to discuss which position they would take in Copenhagen; namely, as they explained it, the IAW was “at a crossroads,” and the IAW sent a Declaration to all of its national sections, which constituted the basis for the discussion.⁸⁰⁴ On this occasion, ŽP representatives from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Novi Sad, Skopje, Čačak, Jagodina, Banja Luka, Vršac, Sombor, and Priština met to make a decision on whether or not they would support the proposed change of the IAW's program. As Alojzija Štebi stated, the choice was between these two: “We should unambiguously declare ourselves: do we want a system which is maintained by constant threats and brutal acts, towards individuals as well as towards nations,” or, she asked, “do we want a system which would recognize freedom of speech, action, and choice [*opredeljenje*].” At the

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 311.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 311.

⁸⁰³ *IAW Report on the Thirteenth Congress, Copenhagen, July 8th to 14th (1939)*. Available at: LSE Digital Library, <https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1if010030010085> (Accessed May 16, 2023).

⁸⁰⁴ “Žene u svetu” [Women Abroad], *Žena danas* 20 (1939): 10.

same time, she pointed out that accepting the new IAW program did not mean an alliance with one specific party-political system, but rather widening of the program on the principles of freedom and basic rights of individuals and nations, which then means “the struggle for the political and economic liberation of women in this latter, broader sense,” i.e., the struggle for democracy.⁸⁰⁵ As the ŽP Youth section member Ela Almuli reported in *Žena danas*, a delegate from Vršac⁸⁰⁶ wholeheartedly supported the change in the Alliance’s program, and suggested that the Yugoslav ŽP organizations should act from then on in three directions: first, guaranteeing basic human rights; second, respecting other people’s race and religion; and third, respecting the freedom of small nations. Reportedly, all the delegates then voted for the change in the IAW program.⁸⁰⁷

The Copenhagen IAW congress took place on July 8–14, 1939, and it was, according to historian Arnold Whittick, “generally pervaded by the general consciousness of the darkening clouds of war and the impending storm.”⁸⁰⁸ At the congress, the IAW president Margery Corbett Ashby spoke about democracies, which could “only survive if their theories of equality are logically carried out,” and also made references to totalitarian states’ attitudes towards the position of women, noting that the totalitarian state is “increasingly interested in the physical well-being of its mothers, but not in their intellectual acquirements or in their personality.”⁸⁰⁹ Six Yugoslav delegates were present, among them Milena Atanacković and Alojzija Štebi, as well as two representatives of the youth: a member of the *Žena danas* editorial group, Ela Almuli from Belgrade, and Erna Muser from Ljubljana.⁸¹⁰ The congress adopted fifteen resolutions,⁸¹¹ including a “Programme of action in defense of human values,” which

⁸⁰⁵ E. A., “Aktivnost žena kod nas” [Activity of Women Here], *Žena danas* 22 (1939): 20.

⁸⁰⁶ Most probably Anđelija Milićević, the sister of one of the leading Vojvodina communists, Žarko Zrenjanin (1902–1942).

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ Arnold Whittick, *Woman into Citizen* (London, England: Francis and Company, The Athenaeum Press), 137.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁸¹⁰ *IAW Report on the Thirteenth Congress*, 119.

⁸¹¹ Whittick, *Woman into Citizen*, 139.

stated that: “The feminist organisations recognise the democratic principle throughout the life of the community, and therefore full equality of rights in the political and economic spheres for women and men, and for all social groups without regard to sex, race, or religion.”⁸¹² The recommended practical work encompassed, among other things, education of men and women to “condemn and make effective protest against every form of brutality, cruelty, and persecution exercised under the law.”⁸¹³ Thus, on the eve of WWII and five years after the CMF, the IAW feminists decided to take a fiercer stance, if not directly against fascism, then more vocally “for democracy.”

The report Zagreb-based *Ženski svijet* printed about the IAW congress in its November 1939 issue indicates that Yugoslav left feminists found this congress important and aligned with their own program, not only because of the aforementioned statement, but also because of the inclusion of youth:

Besides the general importance, the congress was particularly significant for female youth. For the first time in the history of the Alliance, the youth was invited to say what they thought about feminism and what they expect from it. For the first time, the Alliance showed that it understands that there is the issue of female youth and that a bigger attention must be given to its solution. It is no coincidence that it came to this contact with the youth exactly at the time when the Alliance itself is at the crossroads. The time had come, when it was enough that women fight only for their own place in society. Today women, by staying true to their basic principles in the struggle for their still unacknowledged rights, must cooperate with men in the struggle for peace, freedom, and general wellbeing.⁸¹⁴

One month after the congress, two significant events took place. On August 23, 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. This political agreement had implications for the broader international landscape. Three days later, on August 26, the

⁸¹² Ibid., 9.

⁸¹³ Ibid.

⁸¹⁴ “Omladina i kongres feminističke alijanse” [Youth and the Congress of the Feminist Alliance], *Ženski svijet* 7–9 (1939): 10. At the congress, two IAW committees were added to the five existing ones (suffrage and equal citizenship, equal moral standard, equal working conditions for men and women, the civil status of women, and peace and the League of Nations): these were the protection of maternity and a youth committee. One of the chairwomen for the youth committee was Milena Atanacković. Whittick, *Woman into Citizen*, 140.

Cvetković-Maček agreement was signed between the Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković and the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček. This agreement established the autonomous Banovina of Croatia. While both events had an impact on the further developments of the AŽP, the Cvetković-Maček agreement had a more significant influence.

Following these events, in October 1939, *Žena danas* published the “Appeal for women’s suffrage rights,” in which they demanded that, in the context of the changed political circumstances, women must gain suffrage rights as well. The reason why it was *Žena danas*, formally independent from the Alliance but with its editorial board largely overlapping with the Belgrade ŽP Youth section, and not the AŽP that initiated this action, was that ŽP Belgrade and some other ŽP organizations were initially against it, arguing that the timing was not right. Several months later, in November and December 1939, the last and largest pro-suffrage state-wide protests and assemblies were held, initiated by the communist women. According to Kecman, the AŽP headquarters eventually decided to join this action, primarily because communist-led ŽP organizations in the provinces had supported the *Žena danas* appeal immediately, without consulting the Alliance board.⁸¹⁵

Overall, this action was, as Kecman rightly described, the “broadest and the most massive action marshalled through the organization of the women’s movement during its existence.”⁸¹⁶ The protests were held across the country in November and December 1939. One of the biggest was in Belgrade, on November 23, which reportedly over a thousand women (and men) of various backgrounds attended; the event was so large that not everyone could manage to get into the space where the protest assembly was held. Three days later, there was another protest assembly in Belgrade, reportedly with over five thousand participants in the

⁸¹⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 341–343.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 334.

audience, most of them youth; the speakers included Alojzija Štebi, Katarina Marinković from Novi Sad, but also the communists and writers Milena Mohorič from Ljubljana and Milka Žicina from Belgrade. A similar protest was organized in Ljubljana by the *Dravska* section of the NCW.⁸¹⁷ The most important part of the whole action was a petition through which the women collected signatures to support the demand for women's suffrage rights; the women collected around fifteen thousand signatures for the pro-suffrage petition, many of which were by illiterate women, peasants, workers, and housewives.⁸¹⁸

It was only after these events—the conference in Copenhagen and the big pro-suffrage demonstrations—that the AŽP meeting took place on January 14, 1940. According to Ćirić Bogetić, the conflict at this meeting was not only between the younger and older feminists, but between the AŽP leadership itself.⁸¹⁹ I see this as a conflict between civic feminists and the legal equality feminists. As far as it is possible to conclude from Ćirić Bogetić's article, which was based on sources unavailable today, and from a *Žena danas* report of this meeting, what happened was as follows. First, following the differing views regarding the importance of the pro-suffrage demonstrations at the end of 1939, and perhaps also because of police pressure, the AŽP president Alojzija Štebi and the AŽP leadership resigned from their leadership position. Štebi then offered the Youth section to take over the leadership, yet they declined.⁸²⁰ According to *Žena danas*, one of the reasons the young women turned down the offer was because their names were not known in public, since the AŽP had always presented them as “young women”; for them, Štebi's resignation meant “yielding to those forces to which the Youth section would never give even an hour of its activity.”⁸²¹ The new president of the AŽP

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., 333–341.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 341–343.

⁸¹⁹ Ćirić Bogetić, “Odluke Pete zemaljske konferencije”; For an overview of this conflict, see also: Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji*, 126–131.

⁸²⁰ Ćirić Bogetić, “Odluke Pete zemaljske konferencije,”

⁸²¹ “Izjava Omladinske Sekcije Ženskog pokreta” [Statement of the ŽP Youth section] *Žena danas* 26 (1940): 17–18.

was ŽP Novi Sad president Katarina Marinković (see below), whom the Youth section had labeled “the most reactionary of all” in the feminist organization. “With those women,” the young women added, “and with all those who today stand in the same line with them, the members of the Youth section will never cooperate.”⁸²²

Thus, the left feminists from the Youth section decided to leave the ŽP and the Alliance. To further substantiate their claims, they referred to the 1939 IAW congress resolutions, describing them as a proclamation that feminist organizations “must no longer limit their work exclusively to the struggle for women’s political rights.” They declared:

For the feminist organizations, the decisions taken in Copenhagen are not a necessity, so these decisions must now be deepened and made concrete. Realized in this [proper] way, they mean struggle. The real representatives of women would have to bring this struggle closer to the masses of different women [*u mase raznih žena*] and to lead it in their favor. To plead for the depoliticization of Ženski pokret today means to be against its own program, declaring oneself against women. And inactivity today means leaving women to wander around without orientation in the whirlpool of events.⁸²³

As they explained, the conflict was not about this or that “form of work, about whether or not assemblies would happen, it was, namely, about whether the masses of women [*široki slojevi žena*] would be mobilized for their rights or not.” Thus, the young women concluded, their place was still with the “interest of the masses of working women and female youth,” and they declared that from then on, they would continue working against the new leadership.⁸²⁴

We do not know much about the new leadership of the AŽP, but from some sources I managed to trace, it is possible to conclude that this was a group of legal equality feminists. The new president was Katarina Marinković (1904–1974), born into a lower middle-class family in Novi Sad, who graduated from the Law Faculty in 1927. After 1929, women were allowed to work as lawyers, so she began practicing law in the 1930s, and became the only

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Ibid.

⁸²⁴ Ibid.

female lawyer in Novi Sad until after World War Two. Most of her clients were women, and she focused predominantly on civil law and issues such as divorce, property division, family law, and so forth.⁸²⁵ The only information I found from this period is from January 1940, published in Danilo Kecić's four-volume collection of sources about the revolutionary workers' movement in Veliki Bečkerek/Petrovgrad (now Zrenjanin). These sources suggest that Marinković insisted on an understanding of feminism in a narrow sense. Responding to a question from a woman in Zrenjanin about the rules of ŽP organizations, Marinković responded in the name of the AŽP and ŽP Novi Sad that a ŽP organization united all women, and emphasized that "in its work there cannot be any party political activities," because ŽP is an association "for questions concerning women, and *by no means for the propaganda of any ideology* (outside of the feminist one) or any political party."⁸²⁶ It is clear, therefore, that with the new leadership, a new, narrow understanding of the term feminism was brought forward, a meaning quite different from what the feminists had proclaimed in the 1920s, as described in the first half of this chapter. Thus, it was only in this post-January 1940 context that the division between feminism and communism became clearly visible.

It was later that year, at the Fifth Land Conference of the KPJ held in October 1940 in Zagreb, that the only female communist delegate present Vida Tomšić (1913–1998) held her famous speech on the position of the KPJ towards feminism. In her speech, Tomšić outlined an agenda which, as historian Lydia Sklevicky noted in 1984, kept all the demands of the Alliance,⁸²⁷ as well as the demands of the "new feminist" program from 1936. In the speech,

⁸²⁵ See: Tanja Arsić, "Istorija žena u advokaturi Srbije" [The History of Women in the Practice of Law in Serbia], *Glasnik Advokatske komore Vojvodine* 1 (2019): 67–74; Gordana Stojaković, "The First Lawyers and Attorneys: The Struggle for Professional Recognition of Women's Rights in Yugoslavia (1918–1953), in *New perspectives on European women's legal history*, ed. Sara L. Kimble and Marion Rowekamp (New York: Routledge, 2017), 174–197.

⁸²⁶ "Uprava Ženskog pokreta dostavlja Zori Krdžalić uputstva za osnivanje i rad ove organizacije u Petrovgradu" [ŽP leadership sends Zora Krdžalić Instructions for the Work of This Organization in Petrovgra], in *Revolucionarni radnički pokret u Zrenjaninu 1918–1941*, vol. 4, ed. Danilo Kecić (Zrenjanin: Skupština opštine Zrenjanin, 1977), 395–396, my emphasis.

⁸²⁷ Sklevicky, "Karakteristike (I)."

as many noted since, Tomšič denounced feminism as “right wing.” Yet, if we look more closely at her exact words, it becomes clear that by opposing feminism in this context she actually argued against the idea “that some reforms can allegedly solve the woman question.”⁸²⁸ Reforms, in her view, were not enough. Tomšič then stated that “the more clearly and confidently our Party deals with the ‘woman’ question, the more feminism loses its justification.”⁸²⁹

While Tomšič’s criticism of feminism is often quoted and used as a reference point for communist women’s relationship to feminism for the whole interwar period, Tomšič’s criticism of the KPJ, which followed right after her criticism of feminism, is not so well-known. According to Tomšič, “a part of our membership has taken a completely different turn, because of their wrong reaction to feminism, and because of their lack of knowledge regarding the correct stance of our Party.”⁸³⁰ She then stated that there were two incorrect stances regarding the woman question within the KPJ: the first was that some understood the woman question only in relation to working women and their readiness to demand equal pay for equal work in trade unions; and the second one, which negated the importance of the woman question and argued that dealing with women separately would diminish the energy of the movement.⁸³¹ Following this, Tomšič delineated the KPJ’s plan of action, which included legalizing communist women’s activities through participation in legal women’s organizations, publishing journals such as *Žena danas*, as well as semi-legal meetings. It concluded with the emphasis that all members of the Party must work with women, and that it would not be right if only some women would engage with this. The idea that only women should work with other

⁸²⁸ Šoljan Bakarić, *Žene Hrvatske*, 5.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

women was, according to Tomšič, “an opportunistic means to get away from work and only a mask to cover up idleness.”⁸³²

The scarce available sources, therefore, suggest that there were different currents within the AŽP, one represented by the civic feminist Alojzija Štebi, and another, represented by the legal equality feminist Katarina Marinković. At the meeting on January 1940, after the events in 1939 which encompassed the Copenhagen 1939 IAW conference and the biggest pro-suffrage demonstrations the left feminists organized in the fall of 1939, there was a split in the AŽP. At the meeting, Alojzija Štebi resigned from her long-term position as the leader of the AŽP. Consequently, the legal equality feminists took over the organization, and the communist feminists—seeing the former as “reactionary”—left the organization. It was only after this that Vida Tomšič denounced the term feminism and “went back” to using the term “woman question.” While presenting a program which was in continuity with that of the civic feminists and of the AŽP Youth sections, Tomšič confronted those within the KPJ who would be against placing a special focus on women in the Party’s work.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to explore the most dominant meanings and uses of the 1920s feminism and 1930s new feminism. The first two sections focused on the political thought of the Alliance president Alojzija Štebi and explored what Štebi meant by using the terms *feminizam* and “purely feminist,” and what she in fact did by using these terms. The third section explored the communist feminist generational framing of the difference between women from ŽP organizations and the women who formed the Youth sections in the second half of the 1930s, with particular focus on the case of Mitra Mitrović. Section four explored

⁸³² Ibid., 6–7.

the continuities and changes between *feminizam* and *novi feminizam*, the new kind of feminism which was proclaimed in 1936 in *Žena danas*. Lastly, the fifth section analyzed the final conflict between the AŽP leadership and the Youth section, putting Vida Tomšič’s official rejection of “feminism” in October 1940 into a new context.

The chapter proposed two arguments. First, there were significant continuities between the dominant conceptualizations of feminisms in the 1920s and the 1930s, more specifically between *feminizam* and *novi feminizam*. When it comes to the former, I showed that the vocabulary of Alojzija Štebi’s feminist political thought in the 1920s centered on a specific understanding of feminism as tied to the state, which Štebi and her collaborators understood in a social sense. Štebi promoted a kind of feminism which was opposed to charity and aligned with the ideas of social reforms and social justice, similar to the kind which Dorothy Sue Cobble has termed “full rights feminism.” The idea that women’s public work and women’s cooperation with men in the affairs of state would make a difference was based on the notion of sexual difference between women and men. Overall, whereas equal political, social, and legal rights were important for liberal feminists, they also argued explicitly that their feminism was broader than that, because it also encompassed social justice. Štebi’s discussions about the political participation of women and the state of democracy in the country revealed some incoherences, which might reflect her attempts to find a way forward in a context where women had no suffrage rights and where the political culture more generally was quite negative.

The conceptualization of *novi feminizam* largely continued this earlier feminist agenda, maintaining the understanding of feminism in a broader sense. Like civic feminists in the 1920s, communist feminists in the 1930s saw the “woman question” as a part of the broader social question, foregrounded women’s rights, and demanded women’s suffrage. Moreover, both streams considered political participation was important, suggested that feminism was more than just the struggle for women’s political rights, and that women should cooperate with

men. The final similarity concerned the demands for women's rights, which in the "new feminist" program were quite similar to the demands of the 1920s feminists, even though, as the cases of how young women discussed the issues of marriage and double moral standards show, the young women's references were mainly Engels and Lenin.

Yet, the major difference was that, whereas for liberal feminists the state was one of the key concepts, and reform of the state was the main idea that led their practice, left feminists centered their ideas around the concept of revolution. Moreover, the intellectual references for the left feminists were primarily Engels and Lenin. As I proposed in my second argument, this ideological difference was an expression of their generational difference. Namely, as shown in this and other chapters, Štebi and other liberal feminists had been active since before WWI, supported the establishment of the Yugoslav state, and continued to focus on the state and reform of it in their feminist activism. Štebi's criticisms of the existing political parties in the country, moreover, reveal that she had a clear idea of how the political culture of the Yugoslav state should look, and that her feminism was closely tied to these ideas. However, as time went by and as the situation did not improve, Štebi's articles expressed increasing anxieties about the direction in which Yugoslav society was heading, and in this context conceptualized what she saw as the "crisis of the whole political life" and the "crisis of democracy." When the Alliance in 1929 removed women's suffrage from its program, the organization became less active. It was in this context that a new generation of feminist activists began to form. As I showed through the case of the president of the Belgrade ŽP Youth section, Mitra Mitrović, hers was a generation of women and men who were born just before WWI, who spent their childhood during the war years and then in the highly politically unstable context of the 1920s. Mitrović began her studies after the dictatorship had been introduced, and was a student in the context of the economic crisis and the rise of fascism in Europe. As a student, she became part of an emerging, leftist antiregime movement, which in the 1930s developed into an antifascist

movement led by students who in the meantime became members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Mitrović herself joined the KPJ in 1933). This youth movement was framed in generational terms, as “progressive youth” (*napredna omladina*). Furthermore, as I demonstrated, the young women themselves used the concept of generation and generational belonging to unite women and men, and women of different classes, but also to differentiate the young women who formed the ŽP Youth sections from the older generation of feminists, whom the younger ones considered not active enough.

Overall, then, in the second half of the 1930s the similarities between *feminizam* and *novi feminizam* were, for the most part, more important than the differences between them, and the cooperation between liberal feminists and left feminists was quite successful. The split happened only in January 1940, after the young women had successfully organized pro-suffrage demonstrations around the whole country in November and December 1939, which the older feminists had not wholeheartedly supported. In January 1940, at the AŽP meeting, the leadership of the AŽP headed by Štebi resigned from their positions, and consequently another current in the AŽP, which understood feminism in a narrower sense and quite differently from both Štebi and Mitrović, took over the AŽP. It was only after this event that communist women officially rejected the term “feminism,” with Vida Tomšič’s October 1940 speech as the most important example. However, as I argued, the program Tomšič outlined was still largely contiguous with that of the AŽP and of “new feminism.”

5. Feminisms in the Yugoslav Countryside

This thesis's predominant focus is on the Alliance of Women's Movements (AŽP) and Ženski pokret (ŽP) organizations which constituted the Alliance. These groups were active in urban centers, including Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade. Even though Yugoslavia was a predominantly peasant country, there were no ŽP organizations established in the countryside. According to the population census conducted in 1931, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had fourteen million inhabitants, and as many as 76.5% lived from agricultural work, animal husbandry, and fishing.⁸³³ According to historian Branko Petranović, there were close to two million small peasant farms in Yugoslavia, and the state received about 6% of its income from agricultural work.⁸³⁴ Illiteracy rates were very high in the country, and highest of all among peasant women; according to the 1931 census, the literacy rate for women was 43.6% (with great differences between the regions; Slovenia was as high as 94.2%, and Macedonia as low as 18.3%), whereas in the countryside this proportion was often lower than 5%.⁸³⁵ With an undeveloped school system, peasant women were, in Kecman's words, often excluded from social life and work.⁸³⁶ The state attempted to include female children into education, yet these attempts were not very successful; a law in 1919, for example, stated that elementary education was compulsory for all children, but parents were still reluctant to send their daughters to schools.⁸³⁷

Keeping in mind that most women in Yugoslavia were peasants, and considering the high illiteracy rate and lack of formal education within this population group, this chapter will

⁸³³ Vera St. Erlich, *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji* (Zagreb: Liber, 1971 [1964]), 33–34; Erlich's study was published also in English: Vera St. Erlich, *Family in Transition: A Study of 300 Yugoslav Villages* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1966), later referenced also as Vera Štajn Erlih.

⁸³⁴ Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, 56–85. The following claims are also based on Petranović's overview.

⁸³⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 24–25.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

⁸³⁷ Momčilo Isiđ, *Seljanka u Srbiji u prvoj polovini dvadesetog veka* [The peasant woman in Serbia in the first half of the twentieth century] (Belgrade: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2008), 50.

ask two questions. First, were the Yugoslav feminists concerned about the peasant women's position in Yugoslav society? Secondly, what were the most important issues raised by Yugoslav feminists concerning peasant women, and how can the analysis of these issues enhance our understanding of both liberal feminism and left feminism, as different strands delineated in previous chapters?

To answer these two questions, I will focus on three case studies, which I chose following the logic of the previous chapters. The first two case studies are relevant to liberal feminist approaches to peasant women. The first case study is that of the Belgrade *Ženski pokret* (ŽP), which organized domestic schools for peasant women, and the coordinator of these schools, Darinka Lacković (years of birth and death unknown). The second case study is that of the Slovenian feminist Minka Govekar (1874–1950), the president of the *Dravska* section of the NCWY, which was the essentially the Slovenian section of the NCWY after it decentralized in 1933 (see also 5.2).⁸³⁸ In contrast, the third case study explores the approaches to peasant women in the left feminist journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski pokret*. While these journals are the main “entry point,” the chapter will explore left feminist approaches to peasant women. Firstly, by exploring the overlaps between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) programs. Secondly, by focusing on the two interwar novels of Milka Žicina, who was in the second half of the 1930s active in the Belgrade ŽP Youth section, and an editor of *Ženski pokret*, and who wrote two novels about a young peasant woman's journey from the countryside to the city.

The chapter advances two main arguments. Firstly, I argue that the Yugoslav feminists have been more concerned with the position of peasant women in the Yugoslav society than the historiography has suggested so far. Indeed, according to the existing scholarship, Yugoslav

⁸³⁸ Grubački and Selišnik, “National Women's Alliance,” 246.

feminists were not particularly concerned with the peasantry. Peasant women's work and organizing them was not a key point in Jovanka Kecman's research, as she kept her focus on trade union organizing, mentioning peasant women only in statistical terms.⁸³⁹ Other historians of women's movements and feminisms have only rarely written about this aspect of Yugoslav feminism; among the exceptions are historian Ana Stolić's research on pre-WWI organized women's relationship to peasant women, literary scholar Stanislava Barać's analysis of the periodical *Seljanka* (Peasant Woman, 1933–1935), and historian Mary Reed's analysis in a 1985 chapter of the relationship the KPJ and HSS had with Croatian peasant women.⁸⁴⁰ Not only the feminist approaches to peasant women, but peasant women themselves were rarely the subject of historians' research in more general historiography on the peasantry in Yugoslavia,⁸⁴¹ with some exceptions.⁸⁴² Recent books on agrarian ideologies, moreover, still do not include women or gender in their research.⁸⁴³

My analysis here indicates that the feminists' focus on peasant women increased in the 1930s. One reason for this could be that during the Great Depression, living conditions in the countryside became significantly harsher than they had been in the 1920s. With the economic crisis, the prices of agricultural products started to fall in 1929, whereas the indebtedness of

⁸³⁹ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*.

⁸⁴⁰ Ana Stolić, "Građanke i seljanke: stavovi predstavnica pokreta za emancipaciju žena o ženama na selu početkom 20. Veka" [Female citizens and peasants: Attitudes of representatives of the women's emancipation movement towards village women in the early twentieth century], in *Selo Balkana. Kontinuiteti i promene kroz istoriju* [The Balkan Village. Continuities and changes through history], ed. Srđan Rudić and Svetlana Čaldović Šijaković (Belgrade: Istorijski institut Beograd, Muzej na otvorenom Sirogojno, 2017), 179–190; Barać, *Feministička kontrapunkta*, 267–288; 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, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 98–112. See also Stefanović, "Nation und Geschlecht."

⁸⁴¹ See, for example: Ruth Trouton, *Peasant Renaissance in Yugoslavia. 1900–1950* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), and Jozo Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics and Economic Change in Yugoslavia* (California: Stanford University Press, 1955).

⁸⁴² Erlich, *Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji*; Isić, *Seljanka u Srbiji*.

⁸⁴³ See, for example: Roumen Daskalov, "Agrarian Ideologies and Peasant Movements in the Balkans," in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans, Volume Two: Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions*, ed. Diana Mishkova and Roumen Daskalov (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014), 281–354; Alex Toshkov, *Agrarianism as modernity in 20th-century Europe: the golden age of the peasantry* (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

peasant households, which even before the crisis had a generally low production rate, grew. Some contemporary studies of villages in the interwar period attest to the difficult position of the peasantry; for example, Rudolf Bićanić, a young economist and a member of the HSS, studied how the rural population lived in the poorest regions of Yugoslavia. He noted that the peasants there, occupied with the struggle for survival and the effort to satisfy their primary needs, felt that the year 1935 was even worse than the year 1917, which they remembered for the disastrous hunger during World War I.⁸⁴⁴ Kecman, moreover, wrote that the position of peasant women was particularly difficult, as they had to do both household work (including the production of clothes and footwear), and agricultural work in the fields, which was enormously challenging due to the lack of modern technology.⁸⁴⁵

The work of historians Amalia Ribi Forclaz and Margreet van der Burg of the Associated Countrywomen of the World (ACWW) and the ICW's focus on peasant women suggests that the increase of interest in peasant women among the Yugoslav feminists was part of a bigger shift in the international women's movement toward peasant women which began in the late 1920s.⁸⁴⁶ According to Van der Burg, the ICW, at an in-between-congresses meeting in Geneva in 1927, adopted a resolution to increase the involvement of rural women in ICW activities.⁸⁴⁷ At the 1929 ICW meeting in London, ICW president Lady Aberdeen suggested forming an ICW sub-committee that would explore how they could support rural women's

⁸⁴⁴ In 1935 Bićanić set out on a journey around the villages of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Dalmatia in order to become familiar with the way the people (*narod*) actually lived: Rudolf Bićanić, *How the people live: life in the passive regions* (Amherst: Dept. of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts, 1981 [1936]). See also: Aleksandar Petrović, *Banjane: Socijalno-zdravstvene i higijenske prilike* [Banjane: Social, health and hygiene conditions] (Beograd: Centralni higijenski zavod, 1932).

⁸⁴⁵ Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 24.

⁸⁴⁶ Amalia Ribi Forclaz, "Guardians of the Countryside: The Associated Countrywomen of the World (ACWW) and International Rural Governance in the Interwar Years," in *Governing the Rural in Interwar Europe*, ed. Liesbeth van de Grift and Amalia Ribi Forclaz (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2018); Margreet van der Burg, "Rural Women's Voices and the Identification of Rural Women's Issues within the Landscape of International Organisations, 1889–1940", *Grenzregime: Geschlechterkonstellationen zwischen Kulturen und Räumen der Globalisierung*, ed. Ernst, W. (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 204–226.

⁸⁴⁷ Van der Burg, "Rural Women's Voices," 206–207.

organizations in becoming more involved with the ICW.⁸⁴⁸ However, the ICW congress in 1930 rejected the idea of forming a separate Rural Section. Consequently, the ACWW was founded in 1933, with nation-based membership through which rural women self-organized.⁸⁴⁹ According to Ribi Forclaz, the ACWW's aims were to "reach out to countrywomen in 'all nations'" and to improve their economic, social, and cultural position in what the organization's leadership considered an apolitical manner.⁸⁵⁰ Yugoslavia did not become a member of the ACWW, but the president of the Belgrade ŽP domestic school section, Darinka Lacković, did send a report about her work among peasant women in Yugoslavia. On the other hand, Yugoslavia was a member of the ICW through its NCW, and Yugoslavia had its biggest delegation in the ICW so far at the 1930 ICW congress.⁸⁵¹

Secondly, I argue that two aspects were crucial for liberal feminist and left feminist approaches to peasant women: the first is the conceptualization of women's work, and the second is the category of the nation. Overall, women's right to paid work and economic independence was the core idea of both liberal and left feminist movements. With regard to the pre-WWI organizations such as the Serbian NCW or the Slovenian General Women's Society, women's right to paid employment was already one of their central demands. It was also a demand of the post-WWI feminist organizations, including ŽP Belgrade which, among other things, argued for changes regarding women's equality to men in legal, political, and professional spheres (see chapter 1). Already in the 1920s, but even more in the context of the economic crisis in the 1930s, women's right to paid employment was under attack, so across Europe in the early 1930s women organized against this backlash. Women's right to paid employment was also at the core of left feminist antifascist organizing in the 1930s, as many

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., 214–215. Ribi Forclaz, "Guardians," 214.

⁸⁴⁹ Van Der Burg, "Rural Women's Voices", 218; Ribi Forclaz, "Guardians," 214.

⁸⁵⁰ Ribi Forclaz, "Guardians," 215.

⁸⁵¹ *Women in a changing world: The dynamic story of the International Council of Women since 1888* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 266–267.

women felt the main danger of fascism lay in its treatment of women (chapter 3). How did these demands “translate” into the East Central European peasantry-dominated context, where women’s dominant occupations were domestic, care and agricultural work?⁸⁵²

Regarding the national question, whereas Yugoslavism was the main national ideology of Yugoslav feminists, King Aleksandar’s dictatorship compromised the Yugoslavist idea, and generally both the regime and the oppositional parties turned to the recognition of Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian nationalities (“national individualities”).⁸⁵³ It is important to note that the KPJ significantly changed its approach to the national question in this period as well. The KPJ had initially supported the Yugoslav idea, yet it abandoned its Yugoslav orientation after its ban in 1921.⁸⁵⁴ According to Hilde Haug, with the Popular Front strategy came the KPJ’s change towards the national question in Yugoslavia, when the KPJ recognized multinationalism and the right of different groups to self-determination. In practice, this change meant a turn to a federal model of the Yugoslav state, and the support of autonomy for Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Vojvodina.⁸⁵⁵ This should not be surprising, as in the second half of the 1930s, according to Eric J. Hobsbawm, there was a rise of the nationalist sentiment on the left more generally. In his interpretation, this nationalism was not the “exclusive nationalism of states or right-wing political movements which substitutes itself for all other forms of political and social identification,” but rather a kind of nationalism of the international left, which was also aligned with the anti-colonial

⁸⁵² Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, “Women’s and Gender History,” in *The Routledge history of East Central Europe since 1700*, ed. Irina Livezeanu and Árpád von Klimó (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge), 283.

⁸⁵³ Milan Stojadinović’s (1935–1939) right wing regime promoted “real Yugoslavism,” which recognized distinct sub-national identities within the larger Yugoslav nation, and these identities were now referred to as “national individualities” that had been formed within the singular, Yugoslav nation. Although there was still a belief that these separate identities would decrease over time, Troch specifies that claims about national unity were no longer pronounced. Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 34–35.

⁸⁵⁴ Banac, *National Question*. Hilde Haug, *Creating A Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 17–36.

⁸⁵⁵ Haug, *Socialist Yugoslavia*, 37–42.

struggles.⁸⁵⁶ Related to the shift in approach to the national question was the shift in the KPJ's approach to the peasant question, as according to Srdjan Milošević the KPJ adopted a special resolution at its Fourth Land Conference in December 1934, which proposed cooperation between “nationally repressed masses and peasants.”⁸⁵⁷ The available literature, however, does not tell us much about *how* this was done, especially concerning peasant women, so my analysis will aim to fill this historiographical gap. Another category through which peasant women were discussed in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* was the regional lens, which led to a diversification of peasant women, but also to a new approach to Yugoslavism, prefiguring the post-1945 brotherhood and unity concept.

The first two sections discuss approaches to peasant women of the women belonging to the liberal feminist generation; 5.1. discusses the cases of conservative feminist Darinka Lacković and national liberal feminist Minka Govekar, and 5.2. analyzes their work with peasant women. Section 5.3 discusses the relationship between the HSS and the KPJ, that is of agrarian feminists and communist feminists, and analyzes *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*'s articles about peasant women. Finally, section 5.4 explores the novels of Milka Žicina, which will illustrate further how left feminists contributed to overcoming the limitations of communist political thought about peasant women.

⁸⁵⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 145-148.

⁸⁵⁷ Srdan Milošević, “Komunistička partija Jugoslavije o seljačkom i agrarnom pitanju u periodu između dva rata” [The Communist Party of Yugoslavia on the Peasant and Agrarian Questions in the interwar period], *Tokovi istorije: Časopis instituta za noviju istoriju Srbije* 2 (2015): 101–127, particularly 111.

5.1. Conservative feminism and peasant women in Serbia: the case of Belgrade ŽP and Darinka Lacković

In this section, I turn to my first example, which is that of the Belgrade Ženski pokret and Darinka Lacković, the head of the section for education of peasant women in this central Belgrade feminist organization. It will become clear that ŽP was very much concerned with the position of peasant women, yet this concern was “segregated”—or, in other words, dealt with and reported on in isolation from other aspects of this organization’s work.⁸⁵⁸

The case study of the Belgrade ŽP and Darinka Lacković can increase our understanding of the Belgrade ŽP’s cooperation with the state, even though this topic needs further and separate research. From the organization’s founding in 1919, Belgrade ŽP members highlighted the importance of educating peasant women, for example at the founding congress of the NCW in Belgrade in 1919,⁸⁵⁹ and the president of the Belgrade ŽP at the time, Leposava Petković, spoke about the importance of peasant women’s education at the 1923 LEW congress in Bucharest.⁸⁶⁰ Annual organizational reports of the Belgrade ŽP published in *Ženski pokret* in the 1920s always had two parts: the first part would be on general work of the ŽP,⁸⁶¹ whereas the second part would be about the “work with peasant women.”⁸⁶² It is evident from these reports that there was cooperation with the state in this sphere from the beginning. As early as 1920, ŽP cooperated with the Ministry of Education in conducting the population census of

⁸⁵⁸ The research in this section was partially published in Isidora Grubački, “Women Activists’ Relation to Peasant Women’s Work in the 1930s Yugoslavia,” in *Women, Work and Agency: Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century*, edited by Eloisa Betti, Silke Neunsinger, Leda Papastefanaki, Marica Tolomelli, and Susan Zimmermann (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2022), 211–233.

⁸⁵⁹ *Spomenica*, 81–85.

⁸⁶⁰ *1er conference*, 31.

⁸⁶¹ I discuss some of this in section 1.2.

⁸⁶² Darinka Lacković, “Izveštaj domaćičke sekcije ŽP: za 1924. i 1925. g.,” *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1925): 340–344; Darinka Lacković, “Izveštaj sekcije za narodno prosvjećivanje za 1926 god.,” *Ženski pokret* 9–10 (1926): 435–442.

illiteracy, and suggested a program for domestic schools for peasant women.⁸⁶³ Domestic schools were, in fact, courses which various organizations organized to educate peasant women. According to historian Momčilo Isić, in September 1920, the Ministry of Education issued the Decree on the Arrangement of Domestic Schools, which defined the goal of these schools as “training and bringing up the female population as rational, respectable, and good housewives.”⁸⁶⁴

From 1922, with financial support from the King’s Fund, *Ženski pokret* organized domestic schools for rural women in ten different villages of Vojvodina, Serbia, Slavonia, and Bosnia,⁸⁶⁵ as well as training schools for future domestic school teachers.⁸⁶⁶ In June 1923, ŽP Belgrade formally established the Section for Domestic Schools, with Darinka Lacković as its head. The members of the section were: Leposava Maksimović Petković, President of *Ženski pokret*; Darinka Lacković, head of the section; Jelica Jevđenijević, Srbijanka Mojić, Anđa Hristić, M. Ivenić, Slavka Glavinić, and Mara Strahinić.⁸⁶⁷

The main organizer of the schools for peasant women in ŽP, and the woman who wrote all the ŽP reports about the work for peasant women, was the conservative feminist Darinka Lacković. Our knowledge about her is (so far) limited to her reports in *Ženski pokret* and in the journal *Seljanka*, as well as the King’s Fund documents from the Archives of Yugoslavia, which preserve some proof of Lacković’s cooperation with the state. We know that Lacković belonged to the Belgrade feminist and women’s activist circles. She was a member of the board of the Belgrade ŽP, likely throughout the organization’s entire existence, and she was the central figure for the education of rural women in the Serbian part of interwar Yugoslavia,

⁸⁶³ Z.K., “Godišnja skupština Društva za prosvjećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava” [Annual Assembly of the Society for the Education of Woman and Protection of Her Rights], *Ženski pokret* 2 (June 1920), 14–16; see also Grubački, “Little Entente of Women,” 6–7.

⁸⁶⁴ Isić, *Seljanka u Srbiji*, 81; Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia, hereafter AJ], Fond 74 - Kraljev Dvor [King’s Court], 433-1.

⁸⁶⁵ AJ, Fond 74, King’s Court, 433-9 to 433-12.

⁸⁶⁶ AJ, 74, 433-13.

⁸⁶⁷ AJ, 74, 433-22.

acting as the head of ŽP's Section for Domestic Schools during the 1920s. These so-called "Domestic Schools" were, in fact, courses which ŽP, as well as other various women's and public health associations, organized for peasant women. She was also one of the three



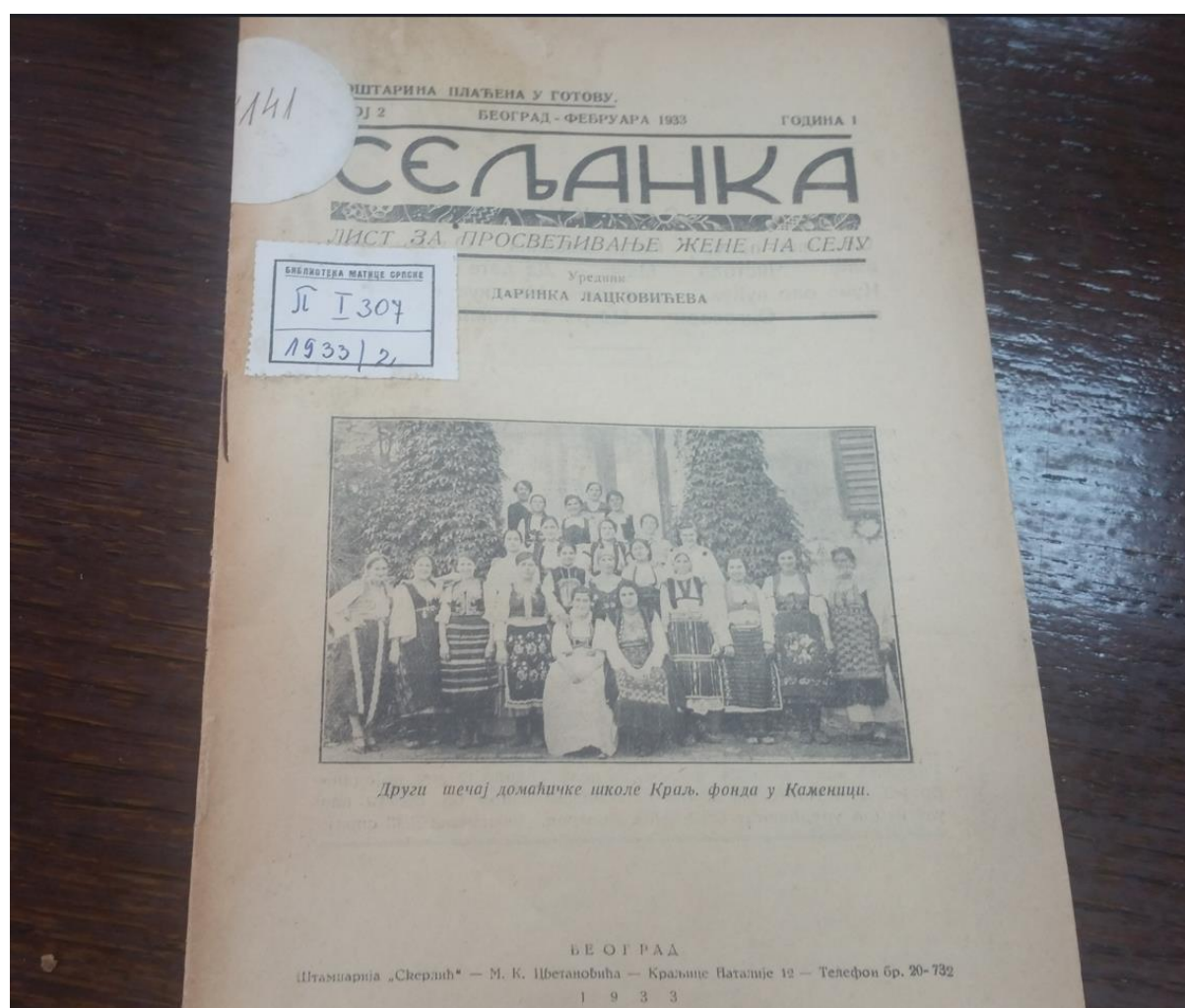
5.1. The first ŽP domestic school, a photograph published in *Seljanka* 1, no. 1 (1933). My photograph.

representatives from Belgrade present at the founding of the Alliance of Women's Movements on September 26, 1926 (together with Milena Atanacković and Milica Dedijer). On this occasion, she reported on the Belgrade ŽP's work with peasant women, and mentioned that it would be great to establish a periodical especially for peasant women.⁸⁶⁸ In some of the documents from the Archives of Yugoslavia, contemporaries described Lacković as a "tireless worker" who made a "great sacrifice" to educate peasant women,⁸⁶⁹ while Lacković herself presented her own work with peasant women as a part of "apostolic" labor that "seeks for

⁸⁶⁸ State Archives in Šibenik (DAŠI), 296, Sekcija "Ženski pokret" (Section "Women's Movement"), "Zapisnik Prve redovne skupštine AŽP u Brodu na Savi 26.9.1926" [Minutes of the First Regular Assembly of the AŽP in Brod na Savi] (documents are not numerated).

⁸⁶⁹ AJ, 74, 433-7 and 433-8.

dedicated and enthusiastic workers.”⁸⁷⁰ With the beginning of the Royal Dictatorship in 1929, Lacković, while remaining a member of ŽP, began working as the director of and an educator at the King’s Fund Domestic School (1929–1941), a school she herself participated in establishing.⁸⁷¹ Between 1933 and 1935, Lacković edited the periodical *Seljanka*, which indeed was the only periodical in interwar Yugoslavia dedicated solely to peasant women. *Seljanka* was Lacković’s personal initiative, which she managed to keep running for three years, before ceasing publication due to a lack of financial resources.⁸⁷²



5.2. *Seljanka*, cover page of the 2nd issue, published in 1933. My photograph.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁷¹ For basic information about the King’s Fond, see: Aleksandra Ilić, “Fond za narodno prosvjećivanje Kralja Aleksandra Karađorđevića,” [King Aleksandar Karađorđević’s fond for public education] *Andragoške studije: časopis za proučavanje obrazovanja i učenja odraslih* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 89–98.

⁸⁷² Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 268.

There was also an important nationalist element in Lacković's activism. *Seljanka*, for example, invited only those "who realize that it is time, that educated sons and daughters of our nation start working for the enlightenment and the revival of the nation" to join her in this quest.⁸⁷³ In one of the journal's programmatic texts, the importance of peasant women's education was framed within the narrative of progress of the family and, consequently, the nation, or, in Barać's words, the peasant woman was "stereotypically presented as the keeper of traditional and collective values of the nation, state, faith, and family."⁸⁷⁴ According to *Seljanka*, peasant women were the most deserving of the "attention of all our cultural and humanitarian male and female workers."⁸⁷⁵ Lacković's school was established in 1929, the same year when King Aleksandar proclaimed the royal dictatorship and introduced, among other things, the national ideology characterized as integral Yugoslavism, aiming to overwrite the particularist (i.e., "tribal") Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian nationalisms and regional differences.⁸⁷⁶ The school promoted Yugoslavism, and it was, as far as we know, the only one dedicated to peasant women from all parts of Yugoslavia. Lacković took the initiative to ensure the equal representation in the school of all "tribal" groups, traveling around the country.⁸⁷⁷ On the other hand, Serbian nationalism is particularly visible in the case of her other school in Štip, Macedonia.

The periodical *Seljanka* illustrates Lacković's devotion to creating a network of activists interested in peasant women's education *and* a network of peasant women themselves. Its introductory article stated: "Here we are, our dear sisters, to take you into our circle (*kolo*), and to prepare the happy future of our people with our common work."⁸⁷⁸ Lacković kept contact

⁸⁷³ J., "List 'Seljanka'" [Paper "Peasant Woman"], *Seljanka* 12 (1934): 8–9.

⁸⁷⁴ Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 273.

⁸⁷⁵ Olga Kerlic Peleš, "Naša seljanka" [Our peasant woman], *Seljanka*, 2 (1933): 2.

⁸⁷⁶ Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, particularly 27.

⁸⁷⁷ Darinka Lacković, "A letter to Stanojka M. Jovanović," *Seljanka*, 12 (1935): 14; Barać, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 269.

⁸⁷⁸ Olga Kerlic Peleš, "Naša seljanka," 2.

with her former school students via letters published in the journal; she would also keep in contact with some of her former students by visiting them, as every year she would travel around the country in search of prospective students. Although we do not know much about *Seljanka*'s reach and readership, the letters suggest that Lacković's journal indeed offered a unique space for correspondence, which in a way served as a peasant women's public forum for keeping in touch and for continuing their "studies."⁸⁷⁹

Darinka Lacković's activism in the 1930s can be seen as a direct continuation of her activism in ŽP during the 1920s, but also as the institutionalization of ŽP's work at the state level. It seems that she was also involved with the work of the NCW. According to her report in *Seljanka*, a peasant woman, Natalija Nešić, took part in the NCW congress in Zagreb.⁸⁸⁰ As Lacković wrote, Nešić gave a speech to the "ladies" (gospođe), asked whether peasant women should organize and demand the renewal of the villages, and suggested that a ministry should be established in which a woman minister would take care of peasant women, because "only a woman can understand the peasant woman, and we believe that the peasant woman will be educated only when a woman would be in charge to take care of her."⁸⁸¹ This argument was in line with the feminist argumentation that, because of the sexual difference between men and women, women were more equipped to do a certain kind of public work and could thus contribute to the state in a way distinct to that of men (see 4.1).

Although she was active in the Belgrade ŽP and the NCW, Lacković never participated in any ICW congress; perhaps because she was too busy with her work with peasant women, or perhaps because she did not speak any foreign languages, her activism was mainly tied to the national sphere. Yet, we do find her name in the ACWW 1929 publication, to which she

⁸⁷⁹ Darinka Lacković to Darinka Ćosić, *Seljanka*, 2 (1933): 15–16; Darinka Lacković to Slavica Baltek, *Seljanka*, 5 (1933): 14.

⁸⁸⁰ Natalija V. Nešić, "Kongres Jugoslovenskog Ženskog Saveza u Zagrebu," [Congress of the NCWY in Zagreb] *Seljanka*, January 1934, 5–7.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid.

sent a report, and her work is much like how Ribi Forclaz described the ACWW, primarily in terms of the division that was created, or rather reinforced, between urban centers and the countryside. Like the ACWW, which portrayed the countryside “as an economic, social, and cultural environment distinct from the urban lifestyle and outlook,”⁸⁸² the ŽP, as mentioned, separately reported on its “general” work and its work among peasant women, and *Seljanka* never published on anything outside of peasant women’s immediate perceived interest. Secondly, as in the case of the ACWW, *Seljanka*’s rhetoric “oscillated between the preservation of traditional ways and the modernization of those ways to ensure the future economic viability of rural life.”⁸⁸³

Regarding the approaches to peasant women’s work, in Lacković’s periodical *Seljanka*, women were primarily presented as mothers, and their primary task was what sociologist Nira Yuval-Davies has called the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation.⁸⁸⁴ This representation had strong continuity with the pre-WWI period. As Ana Kolarić showed in her analysis of gender, modernity, and emancipation in the Serbian women’s magazine *Žena* (Woman) before WWI, Serbian women activists at that time demanded women’s education, which they justified by women’s contribution to the nation as good mothers, who would be able to biologically and culturally reproduce the nation.⁸⁸⁵ Moreover, Kolarić demonstrated that there was an “amalgam of emancipatory and patriarchal discourses” in the years leading up to WWI, in which women argued for their right to education and work, although without questioning the notions of marriage and the family.⁸⁸⁶ Similarly, the 1930s journal *Seljanka* argued that apart from giving birth to and nurturing children, women were also primary

⁸⁸² Ribi Forclaz, “Guardians,” 217.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 225.

⁸⁸⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997).

⁸⁸⁵ Kolarić, *Rod, modernost i emancipacija*.

⁸⁸⁶ Ana Kolarić, “Gender, Nation, and Education in the Women’s Magazine *Žena* (The woman) (1911–1914),” *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 4, no. 1 (2017): 1–23, particularly 7.

teachers to their children. According to Barač, men/fathers were considered to be only “guests in the house,” so women were left with the task of preserving national customs, telling folk tales to their children, and developing their national sentiment.⁸⁸⁷ The articles in *Seljanka* also offered basic information about health (how to boil soap, how to cook healthy food, and how to correctly preserve it for winter)⁸⁸⁸ and hygiene (every house needs to have a spittoon, rooms should be ventilated daily, members of the family should not eat from the common pot, and so forth);⁸⁸⁹ these tasks of a housewife were meant to contribute to decreasing the rate of child mortality and preserving the health of family members. *Seljanka* (as well as other women’s periodicals) saw child mortality as a key issue, so the authors in this periodical aimed to educate peasant women to perform their reproductive labor more efficiently, thus contributing to the nation’s growth.

Besides this traditional women’s role, *Seljanka* offered a specific vision of peasant women’s agricultural work, which can be analyzed as a counterpart to urban women’s paid employment. Namely, rather than finding paid employment outside of the home, a peasant woman was to become economically independent by working in her own peasant household. As a periodical for peasant women, *Seljanka* defined the “peasant woman” and her work as a profession comparable to those of teachers, professors, engineers, craftsmen, peasant men, and so on.⁸⁹⁰ *Seljanka* formulated an idea of the “peasant woman as the co-worker in agriculture,”⁸⁹¹ and argued that women’s work was equally valuable, although structurally different from that of their husbands. Strictly divided along gender lines, peasant women’s agricultural work in *Seljanka*’s conception encompassed poultry raising, dairy production, and

⁸⁸⁷ Barač, *Feministička kontrajavnost*, 274–275. Đ. Karajovanović, “Majka,” [Mother] *Seljanka* 2 (1933): 7.

⁸⁸⁸ “Kuvanje sapuna,” [Cooking soap] *Seljanka* 1 (1933): 13; “Naš kuvar” [Our cookbook] *Seljanka* 2 (1933): 13.

⁸⁸⁹ Darinka Lacković to Ivanka Kuzmanović, *Seljanka* 2 (1933): 15. Ivanka Kuzmanović to Darinka Lacković, *Seljanka* 9 (1933): 15.

⁸⁹⁰ Urednik, “Drage čitateljke,” [Dear readers] *Seljanka* 1 (1933): 2.

⁸⁹¹ D., “Seljanka kao saradnik u poljoprivredi,” [Peasant woman as the co-worker in agriculture] *Seljanka* 1 (1933): 5.

growing vegetables and flowers.⁸⁹² Central to the discussion about vegetable gardens, the raising of hens, and egg production was its economic profitability, as the idea was to sell the products on the market. It was elaborated in detail how one's own garden could represent "a real savings bank for a peasant house," and how eggs could earn up to 2,000 dinars per year.⁸⁹³ In this way, *Seljanka* aimed to make peasant women's work visible and valuable within agricultural households that traditionally relied on subsistence production, but from the late nineteenth century increasingly combined subsistence with commodity production.⁸⁹⁴ It was even argued that cooking and food preservation—obviously crucial for good health—also had an economic element, because through rationalized cooking and food preservation women could save money for the household. By emphasizing the economic profitability of rural women's labor, *Seljanka*'s message was in fact that a peasant woman could, through her agricultural work and through selling her products in the market, generate significant income for the household. By contrast, the larger income (from men's work) was to be used for the improvement of the household in general: for example, repairing buildings, buying healthier cattle, procuring more land, and so forth.⁸⁹⁵ Thus, rather than spending money on products from the market, a peasant woman should work to grow her own vegetables, and by selling her excess produce, make the household self-sufficient.

The changes suggested in peasant women's lives were radical in many ways. Selling goods in the market, for example, was quite progressive for the time, if we have in mind that

⁸⁹² D., "Seljanka kao saradnik u poljoprivredi," 5.

⁸⁹³ "Podižite kućne baste," [Plant home gardens] *Seljanka* 3 (1933): 6; "O gajenju živine," [On raising laying hens] *Seljanka* 2 (1933): 3; "Našim mlađanima—vrtarima," [To our young ones—gardeners] *Seljanka* 4 (1933): 8–9; "Kako da odaberem jaja za nasad," [How to choose eggs for raising chickens] *Seljanka* 4 (1933): 7–8; "Nega stoke," [Livestock care] *Seljanka* 6 (1933): 4–5; "Kad treba voće brati," [When the time comes for fruit picking] *Seljanka* 9 (1933): 10–11.

⁸⁹⁴ For changes in the economic and social structure of the Yugoslav peasantry, see: Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics and Economic Change*, particularly 160–202. For the discussion about agricultural, subsistence, and household labor, see: Eric Vanhaute, "Agriculture," and Eileen Boris, "Subsistence and Household Labour," in Karin Hofmeester, Marcel van der Linden, eds, *Handbook: The Global History of Work* (Berlin etc: Walter de Gruyter Publishers, 2018): 217–235, 329–344.

⁸⁹⁵ D., "Seljanka kao saradnik u poljoprivredi," 5.

Lacković could hardly persuade peasant women's mothers that part of a housewife's job was to go to the market on her own to buy what she needed. In *Seljanka*, Lacković and her associates even went a step further, arguing that an educated peasant woman should:

be left to conduct these small [agricultural] branches entirely autonomously, because that would have a double benefit: a material benefit, and her moral development as an independent person, the development of her personality. With this, she gets certain serious independent duties, but with them also rights, and in this way, she becomes conscious of her own role in this free peasant economy.⁸⁹⁶

This was, *Seljanka* argued, the only way to transform a peasant woman from “a slave in the house” to a “free peasant woman, aware of her duties, a coworker, a workmate and an assistant to her husband.”⁸⁹⁷ She then added:

I would even go a step further and say that the destiny of our peasant nation is, in good part, in the hands of our peasant woman. What kind of nation we will have, in both a moral and a physical aspect, depends on her, as well as the economic progress of our villages, as we will see further.⁸⁹⁸

In this way, the feminist demands for equal work opportunities and equal pay translated into arguing that women's agricultural and household work in a peasant economy was as important as, if not even more important than, that of their male counterparts.

Rather than arguing for peasant women's paid employment, then, the conservative feminist political language present in *Seljanka* insisted on the economic value of peasant women's labor and stated that the economic progress of the village depended mainly on peasant women. Arguably, there was an empowering element to this approach, because it considered peasant women's work, producing commodities for the market and subsistence work, as productive; in terms of the household economy, saving money was as important as earning money. On the other hand, however, this discourse strengthened the gendered division of labor

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

by insisting on the traditional work of a peasant woman as a housewife, wife, and mother, only attaching extra value to it.

5.2. Slovenian national liberal feminism and peasant women: The case of NCWY *Dravska* section and Minka Govekar

Unlike the Belgrade *ŽP*, Ljubljana *ŽP* had no separate section for peasant women, so instead I decided to focus on the NCWY *Dravska* section and its president, the national liberal feminist Minka Govekar (1874–1950). The analysis will show that the Slovenian liberal feminists were significantly less concerned with the position of peasant women per se, regarding their status as part of the bigger issue of the position of housewives in Slovenian society.

As discussed earlier (1.2), the NCW was formed in 1919. Whereas initially Serbian charitable organizations took the lead role in it, the leadership shifted in 1925 and Yugoslav feminists from the Alliance took over the NCW. In the 1920s the Council was a centralized organization with the triadic name of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and with the main aim of national unification. In 1933, it transformed into a nominally Yugoslav, yet decentralized organization with nine sections, corresponding to the nine Yugoslav banovinas, and its main goal was to coordinate women's organization and their relationship with the state.⁸⁹⁹

The NCW's decentralization worked well for the newly founded *Dravska* section of the Yugoslav Women's Council, not least because it gathered mainly Slovenian women. According to Irena Selišnik's recent research, in the 1930s the *Dravska* section focused on social questions. It managed to establish a holiday respite home for mothers and shelters for children, and it cooperated with various institutions and associations working in the field of child protection. In 1933, the *Dravska* section organized public demonstrations demanding the

⁸⁹⁹ Grubački and Selišnik, "National Women's Alliance," 246.

right to abortion for all women for social reasons, as well as public demonstrations against high prices. As women were disproportionately losing their public service jobs in early 1930s Yugoslavia, the *Dravska* section organized demonstrations against this in 1934, as well as demonstrations to demand equal pay for equal work. They also protested against the announced discontinuation of the Female Gymnasium, as well as the new Finance law. This law was intended to solve the issue of teachers' unemployment by declaring that a woman working as a teacher can be married only to a teacher.⁹⁰⁰

The *Dravska* section did not have special activities dedicated to peasant women, but an analysis of the writings of its president, Minka Govekar, can enhance our understanding of the position of peasant women among Slovenian liberal feminists, as well as the limits of these discourses. In 1935, Minka Govekar self-identified as a feminist “in the positive meaning of this term,”⁹⁰¹ and was one of the most important Slovenian feminist activists from the early twentieth century up to WWII.⁹⁰² She was born in 1874 to a physician father and housewife mother. She worked as a teacher and, after learning Slavic languages, she translated from Russian, Polish, German, and Serbo-Croatian to Slovenian. She met her future husband, Fran Govekar, while she was still in high school, and remained in contact with him during his medical studies in Vienna. This situation positively impacted her informal education greatly, as he sent her journals, books, and various publications from Vienna, including works by August Bebel, the pioneering Russian female mathematician Sofya Kovalevskaya, and the German socialist feminist Lily Braun. Govekar wrote about women's rights from an early age, and in 1901 she was a co-founder of the first Slovenian women's organization in Ljubljana, SŽD (General Women's Society, see 1.1); she was the group's secretary for the next twenty-

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 252–253. See also: See: Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije*, 271–274; Ograjšek Gorenjak, “Yugoslav Women's Movement.”

⁹⁰¹ Šelih, et. al, *Pozabljena polovica*, 137. See also: Mateja Jeraj, “Minka Govekar: “duša” Splošnega ženskega društva,” in *Splošno žensko društvo*, 144–154.

⁹⁰² Šelih, et. al, *Pozabljena polovica*, 134–138.

seven years.⁹⁰³ In 1907 she got married and lost her position as a teacher in a public school, but continued her activism. She also published widely, mostly in Slovenian journals and



5.3. Grabjec, Fran (191?). Minka Govekar (roj. 1874). URN:NBN:SI:IMG-G9OVLX7P from <http://www.dlib.si>

⁹⁰³ Ibid., 134–135.

newspapers. However, she never published in *Ženski pokret*, she was not active in the Alliance, and despite her prominent role in the NCWY, she was predominantly active in the Slovenian, rather than broader-Yugoslav, public sphere. Minka Govekar was far more involved with the work of the NCW than Darinka Lacković; she was one of the Yugoslav delegates at the 1930 ICW congress in Vienna and at the 1936 ICW congress in Dubrovnik. As Govekar described in a 1935 interview in *Žena in dom* (Woman and Home), she was happiest when women travelled abroad on their own (*v svet*): “we felt best when there were no men around and we could chat and laugh as we pleased.”⁹⁰⁴

In comparison to Belgrade *ŽP*, which had activities oriented towards peasant women, in the Slovenian context there were no activities. Furthermore, in comparison to Lacković, who drew a very clear distinction between peasant women and city women, Govekar discussed their labor through the more general term of “housework,” which was one of the central concepts of her feminist political thought, besides women’s education, equal pay for equal work, and equal professional opportunities.⁹⁰⁵ The discourse seems to have been the same for peasant women, middle-class women, and domestic servants. For all of them, their main prescribed role was that of household work and social reproduction, and the “peasant woman question” was considered part of this broader approach. Govekar wrote about this in her 1908 book *Dobra gospodinja* (Good Housewife) in 1908, in the Slovenian journal *Ženski svet* (Women’s World), and in her journal *Gospodinja* (Housewife, 1932–1942). At both aforementioned ICW congresses, in 1930 and in 1936, Slovenian women discussed household work. As in the case of Lacković, there was also a strong continuity here with the pre-WWI period. In her 1908 publication *Good Housewife*, Govekar explained:

⁹⁰⁴ Ivo Peruzzi, “Minka Govekarjeva: ob 60. letnici rojstva” [Minka Govekar: On the Occasion of her Sixtieth Birthday], *Žena in dom* 6, no. 1 (1935): 16–17.

⁹⁰⁵ Peruzzi Ivo, “Minka Govekarjeva: ob 60letnici rojstva”, *Žena in dom* 6, no. 1 (1935): 16–17.

It seemed neither possible nor necessary for me to write separately for the town women on the one hand, and for the simpler women's circles on the other. There are too few of us Slovenes to divide, and finally the truth is that the duties of all housewives and mothers are basically the same, or at least very similar. The purpose of my book is therefore primarily practical: that is, I wanted to say what is enforceable and achievable for all Slovenian women, without forgetting to point out the peak of education of the women of other, larger and richer nations.⁹⁰⁶

So, for different groups of women—peasant women, middle-class women, domestic servants—their main prescribed role was that of household work and social reproduction. Like in the case of the aforementioned journals *Žena* (Woman, in Ana Kolarić's analysis) before WWI and *Seljanka* in the 1930s, Govekar in 1908 also framed her argument for women's right to education by putting an emphasis on women's contribution to the nation through their biological and cultural reproductive labor. As she argued, "The most important, the most distinguished class is that of the mothers and the housewives, and only a nation of good mothers and great housewives can advance in their education and in their well-being."⁹⁰⁷

The central point of Govekar's argumentation, however, was that women had to prepare for their work as mothers and housewives, because this kind of knowledge did not come naturally to women. As she highlighted, "only an enlightened woman can become truly her husband's equal."⁹⁰⁸ Young women of the day, she thought, should find time to read useful books and periodicals, and she noted that the same was true for peasant women.⁹⁰⁹ Although there was one "common textbook"⁹¹⁰ for all Slovenian women, there were different sections for "mothers and housewives in the countryside," city women, and domestic servants. What were, in Govekar's view, the differences between urban and rural women? Women in towns, she explained, had different institutions, such as libraries, courses, and kindergartens available

⁹⁰⁶ Govekar, *Dobra gospodinja*, 2.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

to them; in other words, the context was far more inclined towards women's education than in the countryside. By contrast, "a peasant woman depends only on herself, she relies on her own cleverness, on her own heart and habits," yet "no one warns her about the errors of these habits and the many educational messages, which are outdated, and sometimes harmful or unsuccessful."⁹¹¹ More generally, Govekar's view on the peasantry was not positive; she described peasants as dirty, untidy, with unpleasant children; unprepared to send children to school; and often illiterate. The countryside, she claimed, was in decay, with many social problems such as alcoholism. Her advice was that city women should "go into the peasant houses" and "assist peasant women with advice and instructions" about cooking, about health, laundry, and so forth. In the end, it is interesting that her advice was more oriented towards middle-class women than to peasant women: "you should be supporters of Slovenian peasant mothers!"⁹¹²

Giving advice and instructions is exactly what Govekar herself did in her many texts during the interwar period, as well as in her radio lectures.⁹¹³ The titles of her lectures were "Order and Strength," "Hygiene in the House," "Alcohol and Women," "Housewives and Domestic Servants," and "The Duties and Rights of Domestic Servants." She commonly gave advice on subjects including the necessity of keeping order in the house; the importance of ventilating houses; along with the need for women to bathe their children, and to help them do their homework.⁹¹⁴ However, not much was ultimately said about peasant women specifically, except in a negative sense. In a lecture about hygiene, she criticized the way of life in the

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 14.

⁹¹² Ibid., 17.

⁹¹³ These lectures are preserved in a written form in the Slovenian National Archives, in SI AS 1666, Fond Minka Govekar.

⁹¹⁴ SI AS 1666, p.e. 100, Minka Govekar, "Red in snaga", radio lecture May 18, 1933; SI AS 1666, p.e. 103, Minka Govekar, "Higijena stanovanja", radio lecture October 18, 1933.

countryside, where she claimed people sometimes shared their houses with domestic animals.⁹¹⁵

What was new in Govekar's ideas in comparison to the pre-WWI period is that she argued for the professionalization of housework, including making it a paid profession. In the 1933 radio lecture "Housework—Profession," of which only a part is preserved, she argued that the professionalization of housework and the "protection of women's household labor" was vital, and explained that this was a demand of many other women's organizations internationally.⁹¹⁶ In a 1935 radio lecture titled "The Value of Housework," Govekar argued that there were three main women's roles for the nation and for the state (in comparison to the pre-WWI period, when only the nation was mentioned): those of "wife, mother, housewife." In this lecture, she argued that household work should become a profession, and that housewives should be protected by law. She argued against men's prevailing opinion that housework was easy, and that housework was not work; as she observed, "every day we listen to ignorant men, who keep telling women: 'You are without a worry! You just sit at home the whole day, and we bring the money home.'"⁹¹⁷ She then demanded legal recognition of housework as a profession, as well as practical and theoretical courses in all female schools, which would teach women the details of this work.⁹¹⁸

5.3. Left feminist approaches to peasant women: between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Croatian Peasant Party

By contrast, left feminist approaches to peasant women's work were quite different than those of the liberal feminists, as my analysis below of approaches to peasant women in the Popular

⁹¹⁵ SI AS 1666, p.e. 103, Minka Govekar, "Higijena stanovanja", radio lecture October 18, 1933.

⁹¹⁶ SI AS 1666, p.e. 102, Minka Govekar, "Gospodinjstvo—poklic", radio lecture June 6, 1933.

⁹¹⁷ SI AS 1666, p.e. 110, Minka Govekar, "Vrednotenje gospodarskega dela," radio lecture, December 27, 1935.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

Front left feminist journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* will demonstrate. In this section, I will first analyze the articles about peasant women in these two journals. Moreover, I will show that Croatian peasant women, and more broadly the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), had a special place in both journals. In one of the rare scholarly publications about Croatian peasant women in the interwar period, historian Mary E. Reed wrote exactly about the approaches of the KPJ and the HSS to peasant women. According to her, the Croatian Peasant Party “failed to define and articulate the deeper needs of women to find stability and protection in the modern world,” because it “cajoled women to stay within the traditional mold of the mother figure of the Croatian nation.”⁹¹⁹ On the other hand, Reed argued that the KPJ “did not have a specific plan for transforming peasant life, much less one for transforming the lives of peasant women.”⁹²⁰ As the analysis of *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* will show, the overlap and cooperation between these two parties was bigger than Reed suggested. If we turn to the journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*, it becomes clear that there was a fusion of communist feminist and agrarian feminist political languages in the journal; relied significantly on the Croatian peasant movement when it came to their texts about peasant women; this indicates, on the one hand, the limits to communist political thought about the peasantry, and on the other, the fusion between communist and peasantist feminist political thought in Yugoslavia during the 1930s. This section, then, first discusses the Croatian Peasant Party’s relationship to women, and then turns to *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*.

The HSS was founded in 1904 by the brothers Stjepan and Antun Radić. Before WWI, it was neither a big nor an influential party; however, after WWI it became the biggest opposition party, advocating for (con)federalism and republicanism.⁹²¹ Whereas before WWI

⁹¹⁹ Reed, “Croatian Peasant Women,” 103.

⁹²⁰ Ibid., 104.

⁹²¹ Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, The Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 2000); Banac, *National Question*, 231.

Stjepan Radić was a proponent of the idea of Yugoslav national unity, after 1918 he abandoned the Yugoslav position because of his opposition to the centralist and monarchical state,⁹²² much like Marija Jurić Zagorka did due to her dissatisfaction with Serbian women's nationalism at the NCW founding congress in 1919 (1.3). As a consequence of his opposition, Radić, as well as his family and other party members, was jailed several times in 1919 and during the 1920s.⁹²³ As discussed earlier (1.4), in 1928, Radić and four of his party members were shot in the parliament, and Radić died several months after. Following Radić's death, Vladko Maček (1879–1964) became the new leader of the HSS. In the post-dictatorship period, the key issue for the HSS was the solution of the "Croatian national question," and the party position was that this was only possible in a separate Croatian autonomous unit within a federalist Yugoslav state. On the occasion of the 1938 national elections, the United Opposition and the Croatian Peasant Party formed a coalition, yet the former prime minister Milan Stojadinović of the right-wing Yugoslav Radical Union (Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica) won a narrow victory and formed a government again. Stojadinović's government fell in February 1939, and the new prime minister, Dragiša Cvetković, who would formally align Yugoslavia with the Axis powers on March 25, 1941, began negotiations with Vladko Maček. On August 26, 1939, a separate Croatian banovina was formed out of the former Sava and Littoral banovinas.⁹²⁴

The Croatian Peasant Party, as historians have shown, has been rather important in terms of its support to women's political participation. As historian Branka Boban wrote, Radić argued for the importance of women's education as early as the 1900s, stating that this was needed for the sake of their children's education, but also their public and professional education, which he considered useful for the nation. Basing his discussion about women on maternalist ideas, he argued in the 1910s for women's active and passive suffrage rights, and

⁹²² Banac, *National Question*, 231.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁹²⁴ Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*, 36.

together with his wife Marija Radić advocated for equality between men and women.⁹²⁵ The Croatian Peasant Party's work with women was particularly effective through cultural and economic cooperatives and organizations, including Seljačka sloga (Peasant Harmony), a cultural cooperative founded in 1925 in Zagreb which then extended to many other places in Croatia. Within Seljačka sloga, women gathered and produced clothing, linens, and other decorative materials, but also encouraged women's emancipation. There were some peasant women quite active in the party organizations, among them Mara Matočec, Pavla Balenović, and Barica Miletić; some of them, like Balenović, warned against women's alienation from their "natural duties," whereas others, like Miletić, fiercely argued for women's suffrage.⁹²⁶ Mara Matočec, whom I will mention later as well, was a political follower of Stjepan Radić and saw women's role primarily as mothers and housewives, but she also highlighted the need for peasant women's participation in "public life" as well as advocating for women's rights.⁹²⁷

The historiography has largely considered the Croatian Peasant Party and the peasant movement around it as completely separate from the Communist Party. Nonetheless, the articles published in the journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* can give us a glimpse of the cooperation and overlaps that have emerged from below, between communists feminists and peasantist feminists. The *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* articles can also help us understand better who these actors "on the ground" were, what their activities were, and how these activities have been useful for women.

⁹²⁵ Branka Boban, "'Materinsko carstvo': Zalaganje Stjepana radića za žensko pravo glasa i ravnopravan položaj u društvu" ['Maternal Empire': Stjepan Radić's Devotion to Women's Right to Vote and Women's Equal Position in Society], in *Žene u Hrvatskoj*, ed. Andrea Feldman (Zagreb: Institut Vlado Gotovac, Ženska infoteka, 2004, 191–209.

⁹²⁶ Reed, "Croatian Peasant Women," 107.

⁹²⁷ Mira Kolar Dimitrijević, "Podravka Mara Matočec, prva seljačka književnica i političarka u hrvatskom seljačkom pokretu (1918.-1940.)" [Mara Matočec from Podravina Region, the First Peasant Writer and Politician in the Croatian peasant movement], *Podravina: časopis za geografska i povijesna multidisciplinarna istraživanja* 6, no. 12 (2007): 5–25.

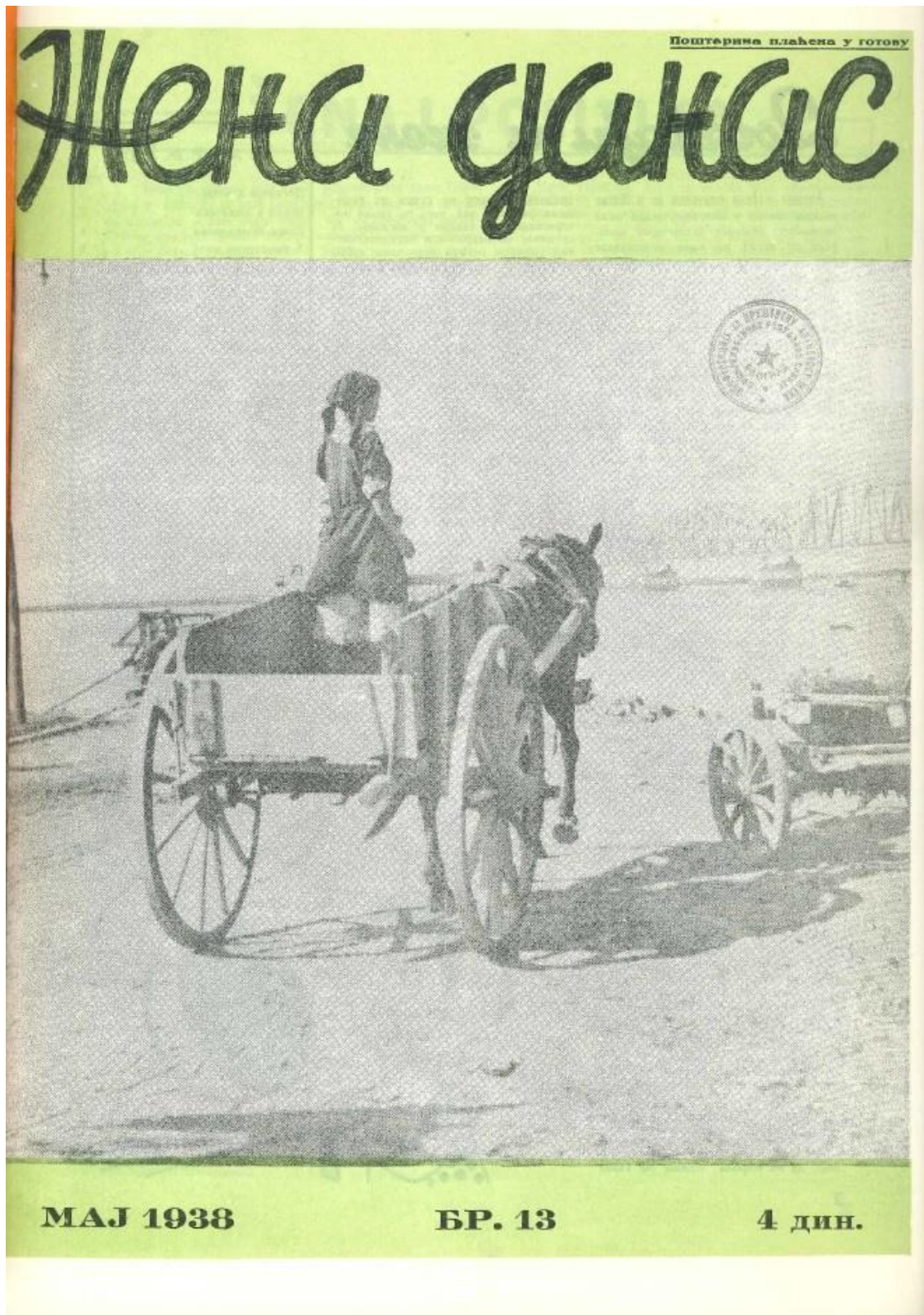
Žena danas, despite being a Belgrade-based journal, published many texts by or about Croatian peasants, and the names which appear in the journal can be associated with a group of peasants active in the second half of the 1930s. A 1936 article in the Croatian nationalist journal *Hrvatska njiva* (Croatian Field) accused this group of being Marxists who were secretly “digging the ground” (*tajno rovarili*) in the Croatian countryside.⁹²⁸ According to historian Mladen Iveković, these activists began gathering around the Croatian Marxist journal *Hrvatsko selo* (Croatian Countryside, 1934–1935), which was established as part of the struggle against fascism. Other networking spaces included the Peasant University (*Seljačko sveučilište*), an informal school within the framework of the Hygienic Institute in Zagreb, and the peasant writers’ group *Selo govori* (The Village Speaks).⁹²⁹

The *Selo govori* group had their own publications, the editor of which was Ivan Sabolić from Peteranec in Podravina. This group, as will become clear later, was particularly important for *Žena danas*. The publications included a collection of poems, *Zbornik hrvatskih seljaka* (An Anthology of [Poems of] Croatian Peasants), which preserves short auto-biographical notes about the members of the group. Sabolić began to write when he was sixteen, and some of his works were published in the periodicals *Narodni napredak* and *Hrvatsko selo*. He attended the School of Public Health in Zagreb (1933/1934) before going back to the village. Another member of this group was Ivan Čaće, who wrote a well-known poem of the time, *Seljakinji* (To Peasant Woman). He was born in 1903 in Vodice (Dalmatia) and began writing more seriously around the age of thirty; he also mentioned being in a prison in Šibenik. Another member was Franjo Vučinović, who wrote that he was born in 1915, worked with his parents, and started writing around 1934. He attended *Seljačko sveučilište* in 1934/1935.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁸ “Tajno rovarenje marksista u Hrvatskoj,” *Hrvatska njiva* 3–4 (1936): 3.

⁹²⁹ Iveković, *Hrvatska lijeva inteligencija*.

⁹³⁰ *Zbornik hrvatskih seljaka* [An Anthology of [Poems of] Croatian Peasants] (Zagreb: Knjižnica *Selo govori*, 1936–1938).



5.4. *Žena danas*, cover of the 13th issue from May, 1938. My photograph.

Before turning to the analysis of the ways the HSS and KPJ's approaches to peasant women converged in this period, it is essential to first discuss more broadly the articles about peasant women in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*. First, because of the high illiteracy rates among peasant women in Yugoslavia, most articles were not directly *for* peasant women, but addressed potential activists in rural areas instead, aiming to inform them about the work to be done in the countryside. As one of the contributors to *Žena danas* wrote in 1936 regarding the high illiteracy among peasant women in the Littoral banovina: "You must look this gloomy truth boldly in the eye. The days of phrasal patriotism are over, what is needed today is constructive work. The youth are publishing their newspaper, they want to use it for the broad strata of their people, but 80% of them can't read at all."⁹³¹ The women in the journals, then, often discussed how peasant women could be approached by privileged, educated women. The Slovenian feminist and communist Angela Vode reported that Slovenian female students organized camps in Slovenian rural areas with the aim of overcoming the gap between themselves and peasant women; these were the camps organized by the Slovenian female student organization Dom visokošolk (Female Graduates Dorm).⁹³² Learning how rural women lived was considered the first step towards helping them. Similarly, *Žena danas* reported that Nikica Blagojević, the head nurse of the Association of Health Cooperatives (Savez zdravstvenih zadruga), held a lecture at the association for the improvement of villages and agriculture, Agrarna misao (Agrarian thought, established in 1936). Blagojević explained that it was very important to approach peasant women near the places they worked, and then talk to them and answer their questions.⁹³³

⁹³¹ "Brojni odnos nepismenosti seljačke žene u Primorskoj banovini" [Illiteracy among Peasant Women in Littoral Banovina], *Žena danas* 5–6 (1937): 21.

⁹³² "Kako slovenačka studentkinja pokušava da se približi seljačkoj ženi" [How a Slovenian Female Students Tries to Approach a Peasant Woman], *Žena danas* 8 (1937): 9.

⁹³³ Nikica Blagojević, "Naša seljačka žena" [Our Peasant Woman], *Žena danas* 5–6 (1937): 18.

Through articles about peasant women's work, moreover, *Žena danas* underscored peasant women's double subjection: in terms of gender, i.e., subjection to their husbands, and in terms of class. In representing peasant women, the texts emphasized the incredible amount of work peasant women performed without breaks every day and compared women to slaves. A good example is the article titled "How a Peasant Woman Spends Her Summer,"⁹³⁴ in which a peasant woman's summer was contrasted to that of women who had the privilege of thinking about where they would spend their summer holidays: on the mountains or at the seaside? The article contrasted peasant men's work with that of peasant women by stressing how the latter *never* had free time to rest, which was mostly because women always worked in the field with men, whereas men never "helped" women with the housework; women were also busy working with the cattle, preserving food, and sewing clothes for the whole household, rinsing laundry in the coldest possible weather, and so forth. A peasant woman was described as a worker without any rest or defined working hours; she was compared with a servant or a slave (of her husband, the family, or the *zadruga*).⁹³⁵

Apart from work, the issues of hygiene, pregnancy, and birth were often brought up, as well as violence against women. One example, regarding peasant women's lack of knowledge regarding giving birth, gives us a glimpse of women's voice through a quote: "We, the wretched women, don't know anything, no one teaches us nor shows us, nor we can read, nor have we seen anything, but we live, God forgive, as simple cattle." Regarding violence, a text from 1938 stated that men often spent entire days in the local inn (*kafana*), and when they would come back from drinking a woman had to "serve him, take his dirty shoes off, and for the smallest mistake his heavy, manly fist could be burdened on her weak shoulders. Village

⁹³⁴ O.V., "Kako žena na selu provodi leto" [How Rural Women Spend Their Summers], *Žena danas* 16 (1938): 29.

⁹³⁵ Ibid.

men who do not beat their wives are rare.”⁹³⁶ A 1938 article signed by “female Gymnasium students” was about women’s position in Macedonia, and complained that “among the Macedonian women, it was difficult to spread the idea of women’s equality, because those who deserve this equality the most, women from the masses [*žene iz naroda*], peasant women, are mostly illiterate.” They wrote that most men beat their wives, that the birth of a female child was considered shameful, and that women who could not give birth were detested, because “a woman’s worth is measured by how much she works and how many children she births.”⁹³⁷

While the representation of women’s work was similar in all these cases, what differed was that special attention was given to specifying which regions different women came from. The peasant woman was, therefore, in this case not an abstract concept representing all Yugoslav peasant women, as in the case of Lacković, but the represented peasant women came from different places in Yugoslavia. For example, *Žena danas* published articles by the Montenegro-born KPJ member Milovan Djilas and Montenegrin writer Janko Džonović, who wrote about the unequal position of women in Montenegro in general, and in the Montenegrin village Crmnica specifically.⁹³⁸ Another article was about Bosnian peasant women, indicating that they were often “sold” and “bought” in order to perform cheap labor in the households that they had been “married into,” because it was cheaper to get a girl than to pay a wage earner.⁹³⁹ Moreover, someone called R. Pajović wrote about women in Sandžak (Southwestern Serbia), describing them as slaves bound to the house.⁹⁴⁰ All these texts, therefore, addressed the inequality between men and women in the countryside, and the particularly difficult position peasant women were in, not in general but in specific villages, thus making the texts more

⁹³⁶ “Život Bosanske seljanke” [Life of a Bosnian Peasant Woman], *Žena danas* 11–12 (1938): 20.

⁹³⁷ “Žena u Makedoniji” [Woman in Macedonia], *Žena danas* 11–12 (1938): 21.

⁹³⁸ M. Dj., “Žena u Crnoj Gori” [Woman in Montenegro] *Žena danas* 7 (1937): 8; Janko Džonović, “Crmnicka žena se budi” [Woman from Crmnica Awakens], *Žena danas* 8 (1937): 3.

⁹³⁹ “Život bosanske seljanke,” 20.

⁹⁴⁰ R. Pajović, “Žena i kuća u Sandžaku” [Woman and House in Sandžak], *Žena danas* 11–12 (1938): 21.

relatable. Moreover, all the texts concluded with a “moral of the story,” which was either the claim that a peasant woman, “even though neglected, unenlightened, backward, should be valued and appreciated as a woman, as a mother, and as a worker who does not know of rest nor of working hours,”⁹⁴¹ or about the conditions for creating “a conscious movement of women,” as Djilas did in his article: “Inevitably, it must happen in Montenegro that women’s right to love, to motherhood, to education, to equality in social life become a part of a creative program of women for the progress of society, for the free and joyful life of the people.”⁹⁴²

I draw two main conclusions from these examples. First, they confirm that the KPJ’s approach to the peasant question *and* to the national question changed during the Popular Front period. Secondly, the KPJ’s discourse about peasant women was somewhat limited, as it mainly relied on discussions about peasant women’s difficult work, and the idea of women’s “awakening” in the countryside. These limitations, however, were overcome by the inclusion of the HSS into the journals, and this was so until August 1939, when the HSS president Vladko Maček signed an agreement with the right-wing prime minister Dragiša Cvetković. During the Popular Front period, *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* indicate that the programs of the KPJ and the HSS became more similar, and that cooperation between the two parties was more feasible.

Žena danas and *Ženski svijet* relied on the HSS when its program was aligned with that of the two left feminist journals. For instance, they published Ivan Čaće’s poem *Seljankinji* (To Peasant Woman) in 1938, a poem which addressed peasant women as women, workers, beggars, and slaves, and placed an emphasis on violence against women, describing how sometimes a woman ended up with “spit on [her] face from the reeking mouth of her vile husband.”⁹⁴³ Moreover, a critique of Franjo Vučinović’s book *Seljačka žena* [Peasant Woman] was published in *Žena danas*, and the author described it as “critical of those who always wrote

⁹⁴¹ “Život bosanske seljanke,” 20.

⁹⁴² M. Dj., “Žena u Crnoj Gori,” 8.

⁹⁴³ Ivan Čaće, “Seljakinji” [To Peasant Woman], *Žena danas* 14 (1938): 7.

pleasantly about the countryside.”⁹⁴⁴ *Žena danas* also conducted an interview with Mihovil Miškina, who emphasized that the Croatian peasant movement was asking that women become equal members of the family and society, and that *no one* should have any privileges in a peasant country, except for the mothers. He explained that the peasant man was a slave, whereas a peasant woman was “a slave and of a slave,” and added that it was difficult for women to gain rights in a context where even men were put in the position of animals. Furthermore, he insisted that women had to fight for their equality themselves.⁹⁴⁵

In *Žena danas*, however, most Croatian peasant voices were those of men who were interested in the position of peasant women. More female peasant voices could be found in *Ženski svijet*. For example, they reported on the assembly against illiteracy which Seljačka sloga organized in January 1939 in Zagreb, where the peasant writer and activist Mara Matočec spoke of the “tough backwardness of the village and throughout Dalmatia” and about the common belief among the peasants that female children should not go to school because “not all of them would become teachers.” Matočec then, reportedly, repeated the old maternalist argument that all women would be teachers of their own children, and then invited everyone, “especially intellectuals, to join this big people’s movement, to which the cry of an abandoned village calls us, the cry of thousands and thousands of mothers, the cry of the Croatian homeland. We must respond to this invitation. We must stand against the great monster: illiteracy.”⁹⁴⁶ Another voice was that of a peasant woman from Dalmatia, Marija Žmirić, who on the same occasion talked about her own experiences of growing up in her small village of Braćanić, where, she said, people could not even imagine that women could read or write.

⁹⁴⁴ “*Seljačka žena*—Franja Vučinović” [Peasant Woman—Franja Vučićević], *Žena danas* 7 (1937): 17.

⁹⁴⁵ N.J., “Hrvatski seljački pisac M. Miškina za ravnopravnost žena” [Croatian Peasant Writer M. Miškina for Women’s Equality], *Žena danas* 21 (1939): 8; “Miškina nam piše” [Miškina Writes to Us], *Žena danas* 22 (1939): 19.

⁹⁴⁶ “Seljanke, radnice i građanke manifestiraju pravo žene na pismenost” [Peasant Women, Workers, and Middle-Class Women Protest for Women’s Right to Vote], *Ženski svijet* 1 (1939): 11–12.

There was no school in her village, and there were no literate women, she explained, as this was considered shameful. Yet, she admitted having secretly taught herself to read, and later taught some other women. The moral of this story was that Marija, step by step, “destroyed the prejudice against women’s literacy in her village.”⁹⁴⁷ The second *Ženski svijet* issue of 1939 contained a poem by Marija Žmirić which encouraged women to learn how to read and write.⁹⁴⁸

Žena danas and *Ženski svijet* offer a glimpse into women’s organizing. In 1939, *Žena danas* published a text by Jana Ilijanić (date of birth unknown–1944) from Croatia, who wrote about another HSS organization Seljačko kolo (Peasant Circle). She argued that the only way to improve social conditions was to include women in the work of economic and educational reforms, and furthermore that the only way for peasant women to understand their rights and duties in society was to “awaken their consciousness.” Ilijanić then noted that this was not only the role of women’s associations, but should be a goal of all organizations, including Seljačko kolo. In this context, she reported that some female students and other “progressive women” from Zagreb had joined the Women’s Section of the Seljačko kolo in 1938, and then in 1939 they began more intensive work in educating peasant women. She concluded that “today, both Croatian and Serbian women find themselves on the same task of their own liberation.”⁹⁴⁹

Finally, *Ženski svijet* reveals one example of the work of *Ženski pokret* from the Croatian town of Slavonski Brod with peasant women, which points to a bigger cooperation than we have been aware of so far between feminists from the cities, the HSS activists, and the two left feminist journals. Again, the role of Mara Matočec is important here, as she reportedly suggested to the ŽP members that they should organize theater plays in the villages, but the kind of theater that could be interesting and understandable for peasant women. Consequently,

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁸ Marija Žmirić, “Pisma Ženskom Svijetu” [Letters to *Ženski svijet*] *Ženski svijet* 2 (1939): 10.

⁹⁴⁹ Jana Ilijanić, “Zašto je osnovana ženska sekcija *Seljačkog kola*” [Why the Women’s Section of Seljačko Kolo was Established], *Žena danas* 22 (1939): 18.

in August 1939, the ŽP members organized an event in the village of Bukovlje, reportedly attended by around sixty women and twenty men. According to the authors of the article, peasant women were quite distrustful towards the city women. The event had several parts: first, the ŽP members presented their organization; then, they recited the aforementioned poem by Ivan Čáče, previously published in *Žena danas*; third, they played a scene from the Czech writer Karel Čapek's pacifist play *Matka* (The Mother, 1938), also published in *Žena danas* and reviewed previously in *Ženski svijet*;⁹⁵⁰ and finally, they sang a song called "Women's Hymn."⁹⁵¹ The authors described that the women were very happy with the event, whereas the men liked Čapek's play, but were not fond of the descriptions of violence against women in Čáče's poem. Finally, the ŽP members suggested that the peasant women organize themselves within a Seljačka sloga section in their own village.

The examples of writing about the peasantry in *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* show that the focus was mostly on the difficult work of peasant women, their illiteracy, and violence against women. Moreover, the analysis demonstrated that there was a certain diversification in terms of where the women came from, as the authors wrote about peasant women from Montenegro, Sandžak, Macedonia, and other regions of the country, and they all suggested that women were "awakening." This should be understood in the context of the KPJ's shift towards the peasant and national questions during the Popular Front, which brought the programs of the KPJ and the HSS closer to each other. However, after August 1939, when the leader of the HSS Vladko Maček signed an agreement with the new prime minister Cvetković which saw the autonomous banovina of Croatia established, the KPJ stopped their cooperation with the Peasant Party and, consequently, the number of articles about peasant women in both *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* plummeted. Therefore, while the analysis shows many attempts to work

⁹⁵⁰ Čapek, "Mati," 6–7; Terek, "Tri majke," 4–5.

⁹⁵¹ Članice ŽP Slavonski Brod, "Iz Ženskog pokreta" [From ŽP], *Ženski svijet* 7–9 (1939): 20.

with peasant women, it also indicates the limitations of left feminist and communist political thought in Yugoslavia regarding peasant women.

5.4. Milka Žicina's contribution to left feminism

The limitations of communist political thought regarding peasant women were overcome, as discussed in the previous section, through cooperation with the Croatian Peasant Party, yet this was not the only way. Another method was through representations of peasant women's experiences; I showed this partially through an analysis of some articles which addressed peasant women's work. Building on these examples, here I will analyze two interwar novels of the worker, political activist, and writer Milka Žicina (1902–1984).⁹⁵² In the 1930s, she was a member of the Belgrade ŽP Youth section and of the editorial board of *Žena danas*, where she published her short stories. Her two novels, *Kajin put* (Kaja's Path, 1934) and *Devojka za sve* (A Maid-of-All-Work, 1940) were widely read at the time, and the latter was reviewed with excerpts published in both *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*.⁹⁵³ *Kajin put* tells the coming-of-age story of Kaja, a young peasant woman born in a poor Yugoslav village to a working mother of many children and a violent alcoholic father. In *Devojka za sve*, Kaja leaves her home village and begins her difficult journey as a domestic servant; the readers follow Kaja's experiences in this work, mostly in Belgrade. Even though the second novel is not set in the countryside, it

⁹⁵² The research of this section was partially published in: Isidora Grubački, "Kaja's Path and Milka Žicina's Path: The Uses of Literary Works for Labour and Intellectual History, in ZARAH Blog Series IV: Through the Lens of Women's Work and Activism: ZARAH Guest Blog Series, ed. Selin Çağatay and Jelena Tešija, <https://zarah-ceu.org/kajas-path-and-milka-zicinas-path-the-uses-of-literary-works-for-labour-and-intellectual-history/>, accessed June 15, 2023.

⁹⁵³ Published in the 1930s, these two Žicina's novels were the only ones written by a Yugoslav author which got published by the renowned publishing house Nolit, founded by publisher and translator (and KPJ member) Pavle Bihali (1889–1941), side by side with the works of authors such as Maxim Gorky, Erich Maria Remarque, Agnes Smedley, Lewis Sinclair, and many others. According to the available secondary sources, *Kajin put* was among the most widely read Yugoslav novels in the interwar period, translated also to French, German, Czech, and Bulgarian. Jovan Deretić, "Milka Žicina i novorealistički roman" [Milka Žicina and the new realist novel], in *Devojka za sve*, Milka Žicina (Beograd: Nolit, 1982), 355–364. "Beleška o Milki Žicinoju" [A Note about Milka Žicina], in *Kajin put* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga Alfa, 2006), 241.

does show the types of jobs peasant women coming to the city in search of work could hope for, as well as the structural limitations they faced.⁹⁵⁴ I consider these two novels the most interesting examples of peasant women's "awakening" and their possible path from difficult, never-ending work to something better, as well as examples of how peasant women's experience could contribute to thinking about peasant women, and overcome the limitations of Marxist thought in this regard.

Diverging from exploring Žicina's work merely from a literary perspective,⁹⁵⁵ literary scholar Stanislava Barać has recently begun to examine Žicina's literary works in the context of what she, building on Sartre's idea of "littérature engagée" (literature of commitment), conceptualized as "engaged women's prose." She argued that Žicina (as well as some other female authors, including the president of the Belgrade ŽP Youth section, Mitra Mitrović) wrote about women's experiences, "creating heroines and *situations* which had previously not existed in Serbian and Yugoslav prose, thus making visible women's experiences until then seen as taboo."⁹⁵⁶ What is particularly interesting is that Žicina drew from her own experiences of growing up in the countryside and later working as a domestic servant. In discussing Žicina's novels, I suggest that they can be read as an expression of her feminist and communist political thought, which in a way contributed to overcoming the limitations of both regarding peasant women. As the radical, i.e., revolutionary transformation of society was at the core of left feminist thinking (see chapter 4), I argue that Žicina's novels can be read as her own contribution about what would be needed for a successful (political and social) revolution.

What we know about Milka Žicina comes mostly from conversations that the literary scholar Marko Nedić conducted with Žicina in the winter of 1973, and published in 2002 as an

⁹⁵⁴ Milka Žicina, *Devojka za sve* (Beograd: ["grafika"], 1940).

⁹⁵⁵ See, for example: Slavica Garonja Radovanac, *Žena u srpskoj književnosti* [Woman in Serbian Literature] (Novi Sad: Dnevnik, 2010): 229–290.

⁹⁵⁶ Stanislava Barać, "Angažovana ženska proza," *Književna istorija* 51, no. 168 (2019): 229.

afterword to her posthumously published novel *Sve, sve, sve* (Everything, Everything, Everything); I will focus here on some aspects of her interwar activism.⁹⁵⁷ Žicina's childhood and youth were not unusual for women living in the poverty-stricken countryside. Her life began in 1902 in a small Slavonian village near the town of Nova Gradiška, one of nine children born to, in her description, a railway worker and a peasant woman (names not specified).⁹⁵⁸ She finished formal education in Nova Gradiška and in Novi Sad in 1918. In 1919 she moved to Belgrade, where she began learning dactylography and subsequently began to work as a typewriter, but soon became dissatisfied and decided to leave Belgrade. She described this as follows: "I felt socially suffocated. I regretted endlessly that I had not continued schooling. I felt that the life we led was not what I wanted, it wasn't it. I read whatever I could reach, but that did not help either. Then I went abroad, on my own."⁹⁵⁹ This was the beginning of her many travels between 1920 and 1931, when she returned to Belgrade, and I will mention only some of them here. First, with very little money and no knowledge of the German language, in 1920 she went to Vienna for a year, where she worked first as a domestic servant, and then as a *bedinerka* (a domestic servant who works only some of the day) daily until four o'clock in the afternoon. She spent her free time interacting with Yugoslav students in Vienna who met in a café, studied German, and generally tried to learn as much as possible: "Among the students, I chose good people, and every young man or woman I would turn into my teachers."⁹⁶⁰ After that, she spent some time back in her village, and then in 1923 or 1924 she went to Hamburg with the intention of going to the US. However, as she did not manage this, she began a trip to Paris on foot, which according to her testimony was not an unusual choice: "It was the time when hundreds of thousands of unemployed German workers circled the roads

⁹⁵⁷ Marko Nedić, "Razgovori sa Milkom Žicinom" [Conversations with Milka Žicina] *Sve sve sve* (Zagreb: 2002), 282–322.

⁹⁵⁸ Nedić, "Razgovori," 283.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., 285.

of Germany. I joined them on my way to Paris.”⁹⁶¹ On her way, she slept at various workers’ lodgings, which she explained had to offer passing workers an overnight stay and one meal, at railway stations, or even outside.⁹⁶² Eventually, she got to the French village La Croix, then Metz, where she worked and intensively studied French, before eventually making it to Paris in the spring of 1925, where she worked at a music store, a candy and chocolate manufacturer, and then a shoe manufacturer.⁹⁶³

In Paris, Žicina became more familiarized with communist ideas, but also with the Yugoslav émigrés living there, including the well-known Yugoslav communist Veselin Masleša.⁹⁶⁴ She was a member of a communist trade union she referred to as “Société Générale de Travail Unitaire,” where she was in the “Yugoslav language group.” According to Žicina, “all the Yugoslav revolutionaries who were in Paris went through this group.”⁹⁶⁵ Žicina’s main role in the group was to go to the outskirts of Paris, look for Yugoslav workers, and agitate for strikes; in her memory, there were around 500 Yugoslav workers, and they were far less interested in striking than workers from Hungary, Poland, or Spain.⁹⁶⁶ She referred to her experience as a woman, as once a Montenegrin worker shouted at her that he would not listen to what a “skirt” has to say; Žicina remembered shouting back to him: “And who gave birth to you, a woman or someone else! Tell me!”⁹⁶⁷ On August 1, 1929, one day before the big demonstrations the Communist Party of France had planned for August 2, Žicina was— together with her husband Ilija Šakić, whom she had met in Paris in 1927 and married in 1928— deported to Belgium and then Luxembourg.⁹⁶⁸ They both worked in Luxembourg, with Žicina

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., 286.

⁹⁶² Ibid., 286–287.

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 291–293.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., 291. For a biography about Veselin Masleša, see Mitra Mitrović, *Veselin Masleša* (Nolit: Beograd, 1964). For a more recent text, see Aleksandar Matković, “Veselin Masleša: A Yugoslav in the Frankfurt School?” *Historical Materialism*, <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/node/1866> (Accessed June 3, 2023).

⁹⁶⁵ Nedić, “Razgovori,” 296.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid. 296.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 296–297.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid., 297.

additionally helping the Yugoslav community there by translating in various situations (marriages, institutional affairs, even confessions to a priest). However, she lost her job in 1931 due to the economic crisis, and decided to dedicate her time to studying from books used in Gymnasiums in Yugoslavia. She also reminisced about reading Lenin in French with a dictionary.

In 1931, Žicina and her husband decided to go back to Yugoslavia (first to her village, then to Belgrade), and soon after, her literary career began. In Belgrade, she got a job as a chambermaid at a hostel belonging to a cooperative, and it was there that she began writing her first novel, *Kajin put*.⁹⁶⁹ She created the character of Kaja after her own experiences: “I haven’t even noticed how the realistic Kaja began to lose her traits, and that through her I increasingly began to remember my own childhood, running through the dust, and my own father.”⁹⁷⁰ When she finished the novel, she brought it to the well-known publisher Velibor Grigorić, who agreed to read her manuscript when he learned she was a maid; he offered to publish her novel in the above-mentioned leftist publishing house Nolit, and duly did in 1934. And thus, Žicina’s literary career began. *Kajin put* was widely reviewed and read across the country, and Žicina claimed that the novel was also read in the Mitrovica prison by the imprisoned communists, including Oskar Davičo, Moša Pijade, and others.⁹⁷¹ She would become a member of the KPJ only after the war, in May 1948 according to her recollection.⁹⁷²

Her writing career, then, was closely entangled with her activism, especially if we have in mind her previous experience of activism across Europe, her—as much it is possible to conclude—communist turn in Paris, and her activism in the 1930s. In the conversations with Nedić, Žicina described writers as activists: “We, the left-oriented writers of the time, lived

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., 302.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid. 304.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid., 308–39.

⁹⁷² Ibid., 319.

then in a combative atmosphere... everything that one did, they did it for the liberation of man and all the working-class people and for the destruction of the bourgeois society.”⁹⁷³ In Belgrade, moreover, Žicina mentioned having been friends with Mitra Mitrović, Milica Šuvaković, and Bosa Cvetić.⁹⁷⁴ She did not describe how she became involved with the left feminists, but in the second half of the 1930s she was a member of the ŽP Youth section in Belgrade, as well as a member of the editorial board of *Žena danas*, where she published many of her short stories.⁹⁷⁵ With this group of “progressive women” (*napredne žene*), as she called them, Žicina recalled organizing and advocating for women’s rights and suffrage.⁹⁷⁶

In *Kajin put*, Žicina thematized issues such as violence against women and the lack of education (which I mentioned earlier), but also abortion, in a similar way as they were mentioned in *Žena danas*. The novel begins with a view of Kaja’s early childhood, the time before she goes to school. From her early age, Kaja sees herself as the one responsible for managing her father’s anger, picking him up from a nearby inn where he spends his day drinking. When her father would get home drunk, together with her sisters, she would hug and kiss him “trembling with fear,” pulling him in order to keep him from “breaking into the room to [their] mother,” until the mother managed to escape out of the window.⁹⁷⁷ After learning about her violent father and her many responsibilities in the house, we witness Kaja’s excitement about her first year in elementary school, in a class strictly divided between better-off girls and those growing up in poverty like her. In the section about the school, Žicina thematized the class and the urban-rural divide, thus emphasizing how big this divide already was in elementary school. After her mother dies as a consequence of a self-induced abortion, Kaja and her sisters are forced to leave their house and their drunken father, who cannot and

⁹⁷³ Ibid., 309.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁹⁷⁵ Barać, “Angažovana ženska proza,” 221–242.

⁹⁷⁶ Nedić, “Razgovori,” 312.

⁹⁷⁷ Žicina, *Kajin put*, 17.

would not provide for them. Žicina discussed abortion in a similar way as *Žena danas* did, where for instance nurse Nikica Blagojević wrote that the consequence of banning abortion, punishing doctors who gave them and women who sought them, would be that “women are thrown out of doctors’ offices into stables, to perform an abortion on their own.”⁹⁷⁸

Having little education and not even the simplest clothes, Kaja then faces the harsh realities of seeking a job. Her first and only option is to work as a domestic servant in a better-off house. There, Kaja meets a boy, Marko, who is in a similar position to herself. First looking at her from a position of superiority because of their sex and age difference (Marko is several years older than Kaja), they become friends as Kaja teaches him how to read. The novel ends with Kaja leaving (with Marko) the first of many places where she is exploited. In the second novel, *Devojka za sve*, the readers follow fourteen-year-old Kaja’s laboring journey; she leaves her village and works first at a farm, then at an inn, then as a domestic servant at a merchant’s house. After these three experiences, Kaja goes to Belgrade. The readers see through Kaja’s eyes the Belgrade market for domestic servants, where “the ladies” look for girls to employ them. She then works as a domestic servant in different places, and although each place is better than the last, Kaja still hates the work and feels humiliated. Žicina described this feeling in her conversations with Nedić; the problem was not that the work was hard, but what mattered, according to her, were the relations between her and the employers, because she depended on her employer’s mood.⁹⁷⁹ In chapter 9, we find Kaja in a new kitchen, where her job is to take care of the child of a teacher in a Gymnasium and her husband, a public servant. After a fight with the Gymnasium teacher because Kaja took the free Sunday that she was entitled to, Kaja decides she will never again work as a domestic servant. She works then in the kitchen of a restaurant. At the end, she reconnects with Marko, whom she had run into again in Belgrade.

⁹⁷⁸ Blagojević, “Naša seljačka žena,” 18.

⁹⁷⁹ Nedić, “Razgovori,” 284–285.

The novel finishes with Kaja and Marko discussing the future, making clear that even though the future still looks grim, they can at least approach it together.⁹⁸⁰

Kaja, then, is a young woman from the countryside, who comes to a big city looking for work. She is not an activist, and she is not a political thinker; she spends her days working hard, has very little free time, and is paid very little, if at all, for her hard work. Žicina's character, then, is not someone who has time or the capacity to participate in or talk about politics. However, the novels—particularly the second one—are not without references to communism, and we see how Kaja responds to it. Communist ideas enter the novel through Kaja's *male* friends, whom she occasionally meets. Kaja sees these men as “knowing a lot,” and herself as someone with lived experience of hard work. The man who “knows a lot” is Kosta, a young man who lives in the same building in Belgrade where Kaja works at one point. Kosta and Kaja talk about a mutual female acquaintance, who is unhappy in her marriage because she is doing all the work, while her husband is not helping at all. Kosta's explanation is that marriage is not a solution for the difficult situation they are in.⁹⁸¹ Reflecting on Kosta's words and her own position, Kaja starts thinking about the position of domestic servants: “We work all the time, but we are not workers. A worker goes home from the factory, and she is free...”⁹⁸² Kosta talks about a domestic worker's position like this: “See, it is not about whether your lady is good or not. What is difficult for you is not whether one employer is like this, and the other one like that, but what you find difficult is the relationship: master-servant.”⁹⁸³ He then compares a domestic worker with a factory worker: “A factory worker eats worse food than you do, and she sleeps in a worse bed, and she has a lot of various problems, but at least she feels free when she returns home in the evening.”⁹⁸⁴ This example suggests that the only

⁹⁸⁰ Žicina, *Devojka za sve*, 350–351.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 242–243.

possible way out of the dependent position, as *Žena danas* articles also argued, was paid employment outside of the domestic sphere.

Another example of a conversation between Kaja and Kosta suggests that Žicina considered some of the communist theory about work limiting because it did not sufficiently take into account women's experiences. On one occasion in the novel, Kaja speaks to Kosta about her work in the restaurant, and Kosta just interrupts her to begin talking about his own views on work. However, as the narrator of the novel described it: "He talked to her about work in general, he mentioned the smell of a forge, but he did not talk about himself, nor about her personally. While looking at the black foam on her hands, Kaja felt the need to talk about *how exactly she personally felt* [my emphasis]." Contrasting this with Kaja's relationship to her friend and later partner Marko, the narrator said that Marko would "listen to her, wave his hand, and give her a sign that her experiences were familiar to him, and would remind her of an event from their past; they would together compare this or that place of work, and they would seek words to express their thoughts. By contrast, these personal feelings decreased in front of Kosta: he rose above her, serious, elderly in experience, and he would talk to her and look at her as a calm teacher would look at their pupil."⁹⁸⁵ Step by step, Kaja began to spread the word too, but only once she worked at the restaurant. "This kind of work is a burden," she said to a fellow worker, "but it does not have to be. Work for the community will be a joy. You will then be a human being who works, and not a servant, a dishwasher."⁹⁸⁶ The hope was in the future: "Don't cry. Our tears will not touch them. But our strength will," concluded Kaja.⁹⁸⁷

Both these examples are in line with the texts in *Žena danas*, where the predominant idea of marriage was fiercely criticized, and it was suggested that marriage should not be regarded as a solution to women's problems. This is most visible in the questionnaires through

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid., 278.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid., 303.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., 344.

which these journals invited women to share their experiences: “What are your wishes, your dreams, your disappointments?”, “Why aren’t you married yet? Are you happy in marriage?”, and “Will I always be single?” in *Žena danas*, and in *Ženski svijet*, “Marriage with children or marriage without children?” According to literary scholar Ana Kolarić’s research, in *Žena danas* personal experience was used as an educational tool in political struggle, through which the young communist women built a community and solidarity among themselves. The topics covered by these shared experiences included those related to marriage, to work and economic independence, and finally to the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters. By giving numerous examples, Kolarić demonstrated that these shared experiences proved there were plenty of alternatives to an unhappy marriage (i.e., marriage out of interest or some sort of security), and that they included employment, women’s solidarity and common work in the framework of women’s associations, and, of course, also marriage out of love, with a partner of the same ideological persuasion.⁹⁸⁸ Thus, like in the case of Žicina’s writing, *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet* connected Marxist ideology with their lived experiences (see also 4.4).

These examples show, then, the journey of a peasant woman who had to leave her village to seek work. In my reading, she offered what she saw as the only possible way out of her difficult situation. This differed greatly from what was offered by liberal feminists, but was also more complex than the existing communist theory, which Žicina “enriched” with her discussion of women’s experiences. With Žicina’s political background in mind, I read these novels as her contribution to the feminist political thought of the time. By putting the focus on Kaja, a young peasant woman, Žicina did not only *represent* and *problematize* the position of young women born in rural areas, but through her discussion of the lived experience of her

⁹⁸⁸ Ana Kolarić, “Pisma čitateljki u časopisu *Žena danas* (1936–1940): ‘lično iskustvo’ / zajednički forum”, [Correspondence in the magazine *Žena danas* (Woman today) 1936–1940: ‘personal experience’ / common debate], in *Časopis Žena danas (1936–1940): Prosvećivanje za revoluciju*, ed. Stanislava Barać (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2022), 235–252; see also brief analysis in Grubački, “Communism, Left Feminism and Generations in the 1930,” 55–57.

character—women’s double burden, the right to abortion, the exploitation of young women as workers, and so on—she also indicated which problems had to be addressed for the social and political revolution to be successful.

Conclusions

Following the four chapters on Yugoslav feminisms and their functioning in urban settings, this chapter explored the ways different feminisms approached peasant women. This question is particularly important because over three quarters of the Yugoslav population were peasants. My analysis was led by two main questions: the first was whether or not feminists were concerned about the position of peasant women in Yugoslavia; and the second concerned the most important issues which were raised by peasant women. More broadly, my interest was to examine whether the analysis of these issues can enhance our understanding of liberal feminism and left feminism, as discussed in the rest of the thesis. The four case studies were chosen with the logic of the previous chapters in mind, and they include: ŽP Belgrade and Darinka Lacković, the head of the section for the education of peasant women in this central Belgrade feminist organization; the NCWY *Dravska* section and Minka Govekar; the left feminist journals *Žena danas* and *Ženski svijet*, which I used as an “entry point” to examine the overlaps between the programs of the KPJ and HSS in the second half of the 1930s; and the novels of Milka Žicina, who was one of the editors and contributors to *Ženski svijet*.

The first argument of this chapter is that the Yugoslav feminists were more concerned with the position of peasant women in Yugoslav society than historiography has suggested thus far. This is particularly the case with ŽP Belgrade, which, as I have shown, had a separate section for the education of peasant women, and which organized domestic schools for peasant women during the 1920s, supported by the King’s Fund. The coordinator of these schools was Darinka Lacković, who in the 1930s began working for the King’s Fund directly, yet still

remained a member of the Belgrade ŽP. Her case illustrates ŽP interest in peasant women, but at the same time the separation of issues concerning peasant women from all other questions important for urban feminists. In Slovenia, as shown, there was far less interest in peasant women per se, and their work was discussed as a part of the broader issue of housework. With regard to left feminists, I have shown that their interest in peasant women was significantly higher than in the first case.

Secondly, I argued in this chapter that two aspects were crucial for both liberal feminist and left feminist approaches to peasant women: women's work and the national question. The way these feminists conceptualized and thought about women's work and the national question not only helps us better understand liberal feminism and left feminism, as analyzed in previous chapters, but it also significantly enhances our understanding of the political transformation feminisms underwent in the interwar period in Yugoslavia.

On the one hand, liberal feminist approaches focused primarily on the improvement of peasant women's position within the existing framework of the patriarchal family, mainly through the professionalization of women's agricultural and/or household work. The cases of both Darinka Lacković and Minka Govekar show a clear continuity with the pre-WWI dominant discourses on the importance of women's education for what sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis called the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation. However, in the 1930s, the focus was more on women's subsistence agricultural work and household work as productive; therefore, the feminist demand for women's paid employment in the peasant context was translated into the need to professionalize agricultural and household work and, in Govekar's views, even receive a salary for it. The nation, and after WWI the state, remained the important points of reference, because it was argued that peasant women, through their productive work, contributed to the wellbeing of the nation. While Darinka Lacković conceived of the "integral Yugoslav" nation with a strong Serbian nationalist element, Minka Govekar saw a discrete

Slovenian nation as a part of a larger, Yugoslav nation. By contrast, left feminist approaches to peasant women must be contextualized within the transformation towards the peasant and the national questions in the KPJ during the Popular Front. As the analysis showed, the approaches to peasant women in these two journals reveal an intersection of Marxist thinking about peasant women's work with the KPJ's approaches to the peasant and national questions during the Popular Front. However, this kind of approach had its limits, which were overcome through cooperation with the Croatian Peasant Party, alongside discussion about peasant women's lived experiences.

Overall, the case studies illustrate how different the approaches to peasant women were in different parts of the country, in these examples Belgrade and Ljubljana, despite the Yugoslav unity regarding other feminist questions, as discussed in previous chapters. In some respects, like their relation to peasant women, the Yugoslav feminist movement was far more fragmented. Yet, the significant difference between the two approaches indicates a broader political transformation of interwar feminisms, from a hierarchical, conservative, and traditionalist—if sometimes empowering—approach, to one that envisioned the emancipation of rural women on a much wider basis.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the changes and transformations that Yugoslav feminism underwent during the interwar period, a period that many refer to as a period of “crisis,” because it was characterized by political instability, the Great Depression, the so-called “crisis of liberal democracy,” and the rise of ultranationalism and fascism. My research was guided by two main questions: First, how did feminists in Yugoslavia organize themselves in the interwar period and how did the domestic and international political contexts shape their feminist activism and organizations? Secondly, what were the main ideas and concepts of Yugoslav feminists’ political thought in the interwar period, how did they use the concept of feminism, and how did these ideas change in the period under research? To answer these questions, my main sources consisted of archival materials (women’s movement, student movement, King’s Fund, and other) from archives in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Prague, Paris, interwar feminist periodicals from Yugoslavia, and various published booklets and reports.

My research has resulted in three main findings. The first is that interwar feminisms *were* deeply shaped by the domestic and international political context of the time. These events included the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918) followed by a period of great political instability (1918-1929), the royal dictatorship (1929-1934), the Great Depression, and the rise of ultra-nationalism and fascism, and, on the other hand, the rise of anti-regime and antifascist leftist movements (1930s). Hence, analyzing interwar feminisms without a proper political contextualization conceals much of the rich history of the ways feminisms evolved and transformed in the interwar period. Secondly, it was in and against the aforementioned complex political context that interwar Yugoslav feminists built their movement and developed their ideas. They reacted and responded to it by forging different kinds of cooperations: across ethnic divides, as women from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and other places in the country worked together; across political divides, as women of different

political orientations—including, but not limited to, civic and communist feminists—cooperated in the 1920s and in the 1930s; and internationally, through international women’s organizations, including the Little Entente of Women in the 1920s and the Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme in the 1930s.

The third finding of the thesis is that the interwar period was not a period of “crisis” or demise of feminism, but rather a period of considerable continuity and change. I conceptualize transformation through generational change, conceptualizing two feminist political generations in the interwar period—the liberal feminist generation of women whose political formation was before WWI, and the left feminist generation of women who grew up in the volatile context of the 1920s Yugoslavia. Three main aspects of continuity and change were foregrounded in the analysis. Regarding the continuity, this applies first of all to the Alliance of Women’s Movements, the key organization for both generations of feminists in Yugoslavia. Secondly, the feminist agenda was the same in the 1920s and in the 1930s; it encompassed, but was not limited to, women’s suffrage rights, women’s right to paid employment, equal professional opportunities, and more broadly social justice, peace, and democracy. The main continuity was in their understanding of feminism as part of a bigger, social question, that of how to build a more equal and just society. Finally, there was continuity in the use of the term “feminism,” which, contrary to what historians have suggested so far, some communist women also embraced in the 1930s.

There were also significant changes, and these allow us to comprehend the novelty of what the 1930s left feminist generation foregrounded in their struggle for the improvement of women’s position in society. Organization-wise, there was an important transformation in the dominant alliances: whereas the main cooperation in the 1920s was between civic, national liberal, and conservative feminists, in the 1930s, civic feminists of the older generation cooperated with the communist feminists of the younger generation. While these two groups

of feminists cooperated in the second half of the 1930s, and had the same agenda, they differed in their horizon of expectation, especially regarding the ways the feminist agenda could be realized. The women of the 1920s liberal feminist generation placed a lot of trust in the state and demanded reforms, whereas the 1930s left feminists, having grown up in times of constant political turmoil and stalemate, opted for a complete transformation of the Yugoslav society, that is, revolution. The left feminists in Yugoslavia also reconceptualized the concept of feminism, proposing a “new feminism” of which the struggle against fascism had to become the core, because they saw fascism as a reactionary force that fundamentally endangered women and women’s rights.

The thesis contributes to the three historiographical strands discussed in the introduction. The first concerns the historiographical binary which makes a strong analytical division between so-called “bourgeois” feminism on the one hand, and the “proletarian women’s movement,” or communism, on the other. With a view of overcoming this binary, which I argue against, I explored the ways the concept of “feminism” was used in interwar Yugoslavia, and how the dominant meaning and the use of the concept changed from the 1920s to the 1930s. This allowed me to bring more nuance to the ways different feminists referred to feminism at different times, as well as to correct some of the existing historiographical claims based on assumptions—rather than on research—of what feminism meant in the interwar period. As a second step, I explored the dynamics of collaboration among feminists with diverse political orientations in interwar Yugoslavia. Here I could show that the cooperation between feminists of different political orientations was much more dynamic than historians have previously suggested. In order to be able to conceptualize these political differences, I proposed to distinguish between two feminist generations – the liberal and the left feminist generation – predominant in the 1920s and in the 1930s, respectively. Moreover, my analysis of different feminist political languages used at the time further allowed me to identify different

“generation units” within each of the generations, more specifically such groups as civic, communist, or conservative feminists. Overall, then, this approach and the analysis allowed me to not only overcome the aforementioned binary division, but to develop new analytical tools for thinking about interwar feminisms, and their deep intertwining with the interwar political context. While my case study was Yugoslavia, through the analysis of the Yugoslav women’s participation in the LEW and the CMF, I suggested that this kind of analytical approach might be useful for analyzing interwar feminisms more broadly as well.

The second strand of historiography that this thesis contributes to is that of the contemporary scholarship on feminism, particularly concerning terminology and periodization. As demonstrated in the introduction, the analytical approaches historians adopt when studying feminism(s) are closely linked to their historical periodization of feminism. Whereas scholars of (liberal) feminism often propose a crisis of feminism in the 1930s and historians of left feminism tend to emphasize the post-1945 era, my focus was on the transformation of feminisms from the 1920s to the 1930s. Drawing from recent historiographical advancements that explicitly or implicitly challenge the traditional *concept* of “feminist waves,” and simultaneously building on the recent historiography that has explicitly or implicitly challenged the still prevalent *periodization* into “feminist waves,” I see my main contribution here in enhancing our understanding of what Dorothy Sue Cobble has called the “missing wave.” Whether we call this a “missing wave” or completely drop the wave metaphor, my conceptualization of the left feminist generation helps to complicate the narrative of the “first feminist wave” which supposedly ended with WWI, and the “second wave” which began in the 1960s. As I showed, the inclusion of communist feminists is pivotal in defining this

“missing wave” of the left feminist generation which, I additionally suggest, began in the 1930s, rather than in 1945.⁹⁸⁹

Finally, the third stream of historiography this thesis contributes to is that of the political history of interwar Yugoslavia, which I discussed in the introduction with a specific focus on the national question. Whereas most of the recent historiography has understood the national in the post-Yugoslav sense (e.g., Croatian, Slovenian, or Serbian), the main contribution of this thesis in this regard is that it studies the history of feminisms in interwar Yugoslavia from a Yugoslav perspective. First, my analysis showed that there was much cooperation between women from Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrade, and that the history of the Alliance of Women’s Movements *is* a history of these cooperations. Second, the analysis showed that both the liberal and the left feminists insisted on and practiced cooperation across ethnic-nationalist divides, a cooperation they understood as a necessary basis for the improvement of women’s position in the Yugoslav society, rather than a goal in itself. More broadly, I consider this relationship between feminisms and Yugoslavism as a crucial characteristic of Yugoslav feminisms. My analysis of Yugoslav women’s participation in the LEW showed that the Yugoslav feminists were more united in their feminist claims than some other feminists from East Central Europe participating in the LEW conferences. I see this as a result of the specificity of the national context in Yugoslavia, and of the Yugoslavist orientation of the Yugoslav feminists who, in order to cooperate, had to overcome the potential ethnic-nationalist divisions. This tendency toward cooperation across potential ethnic-nationalist divides might also explain another specificity of the history of feminisms in Yugoslavia, where, as historians have showed, there was a strong left feminist movement during and after WWII,⁹⁹⁰ as well as the only self-proclaimed feminist movement during late state socialism, which transformed into a feminist

⁹⁸⁹ Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 1–10.

⁹⁹⁰ Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav partisans*; Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Women’s Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia,” *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 1–25.

antiwar and antinationalist movement in the 1990s.⁹⁹¹ Thus, research of the case of Yugoslav feminisms in the interwar period is useful not only for adding another part of a “puzzle” to the histories of feminisms in (East Central) Europe, but also for a further rethinking of the relationship between feminisms and nationalisms.

While producing new insights, my research led me to notice areas where further research would be useful. Firstly, while this dissertation has primarily centered on the civic feminists of the 1920s generation and the communist feminists of the 1930s generation, further exploration of other feminist political languages in Yugoslavia and their transformation from the 1920s to the 1930s might be relevant. Notably, conservative feminism, legal equality feminism, and agrarian feminism are all discussed in the thesis, yet primarily in relation to the two predominant strands. Secondly, my research of the 1930s has put a lot of emphasis on communist feminist political languages and activities, because these were the most dominant in this context. However, there must have been other (feminist) political languages in the 1930s. As historian Celia Donert suggested, the category of left feminism “might inadvertently obscure the political divisions and rivalries that were so crucial to the protagonists of these movements.”⁹⁹² Thus, further research of feminist political languages of the 1930s would bring more nuance to the understanding of the plurality of positions within the left feminist generation. In order to unearth these, more research into the history of the Popular Front, an area that remains insufficiently studied in East Central Europe, would be essential. Indeed, chapters three to five have unveiled new insights on this subject, with the hope of encouraging future explorations in this direction. Moreover, whereas in the thesis I mostly focused on women’s rights, peace was another big theme for interwar feminists, both in Yugoslavia and elsewhere; further research on the pacifist aspects of the Little Entente of Women, but, even

⁹⁹¹ Lóránd, *Feminist Challenge*.

⁹⁹² Donert, “Women’s Rights and Global Socialism,” 10.

more, a comprehensive research of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and its history in East Central Europe, would bring valuable knowledge not only about the WILPF sections in ECE, but also about the history of the WILPF overall. Furthermore, this research has focused intentionally on the intellectual and administrative Yugoslav centers, namely Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, and on the Yugoslav aspect of feminism, because these have been under-researched aspects. In doing so, I hope to have created a foundation for research on women's and feminist activism in other places, such as Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Vojvodina, as well.

Finally, in this research, I have predominantly focused on the interwar period, and put emphasis on the political transformations of feminisms from the 1920s to the 1930s. However, a more *longue durée* perspective would add more nuance to our understanding of the continuities and ruptures in the history of feminisms in Yugoslavia. On the one hand, a more elaborate discussion of the pre-WWI feminist political languages would add more clarity to the origins of the Yugoslav interwar self-identified feminist movement in Yugoslavia. In my view, the existing historiography of the pre-WWI period, which makes a harsh division between charitable women's organizations and social democratic women's organizing, should be reevaluated for this purpose, whereas some recent books—particularly those about pre-WWI social democracies in the Balkans or East Central Europe, such as that of Maria Todorova—would be particularly helpful.⁹⁹³ On the other hand, further research and elaboration on the post-WWII trajectories of individual women whose political thought and trajectories I have researched in this thesis would enrich the historiographical discussions on the position of women in socialist Yugoslavia, the post-WWII women's organizing and their position towards what they understood as feminism at the time, as well as the emergence of the “new feminists”

⁹⁹³ Todorova, *The Lost World of Socialists at Europe's Margins*. Others include the already mentioned PhD thesis of Stefan Gužvica, “Sickle Without a Hammer,” and, for example, Augusta Dimou's *Entangled Paths Towards Modernity. Contextualizing Socialism and Nationalism in the Balkans* (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2009).

in the 1970s who, as Lóránd argued, challenged the Yugoslav state from a perspective inspired by, among other things, critical Marxism. Overall, then, a more *longue durée* perspective would not only additionally question the “bourgeois feminism/proletarian women’s movements” binary, but would demonstrate that writing the history of feminisms in Yugoslavia is also to a large extent a history of various streams of leftist feminist political thought.

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