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## YUGOSLAV FEMINISTS IN SOCIALISM: DISRUPTING THE MAINSTREAM NARRATIVES<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT** Our impulse to probe the concept of women's heritage of the socialist past in the former Yugoslavia comes from the concern for enriching both theoretical and activist endeavors of contemporary feminists with a novel perspective and knowledge of the past. Starting from discussing epistemological questions related to the concepts of heritage, time, and memory, we briefly outline main problems of the historiography of women's experience during socialism in Yugoslavia, including the emergence of feminist theory and activism, and proposing some theoretical tools for further debate. These theoretical tools could help to account for multiplicity and complex temporalities of feminist paths, interplay between Marxist and feminist agency in socialist Yugoslavia, and, finally, they could reposition the debate on the feminist and socialist past in the complex reality of the post-Yugoslav space/time.

**Key words:** heritage, time, memory, Yugoslavia, socialism, feminism, epistemology, space, timescape

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCERNS: HERITAGE, TIME, MEMORY

**A**t first glance, any attempt to deal with women's heritage of the socialist period already opens up a range of serious epistemological dilemmas and questions. These concern the knowledge of the past and history as a field

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of competing discursive practices, power of memory/remembrance, cycles of forgetting, the issue of historical time and its (dis)continuity, to mention just a few. There are also more specific questions to be discussed, such as historicity of socialism and rupture inherent in it, significance of women's heritage for feminist positioning nowadays, the issue of perspective and geopolitical situatedness. When discussing the topic of women's historical experience in the socialist period, another historiographical approach would be to research and highlight the emancipatory steps and successes of socialist modernity<sup>4</sup> in the dramatic change of women's lives in Yugoslavia, but also the resistance of the patriarchal order that could reconcile both the ideology of the Left and the liberal tendencies in order to preserve the gender *status quo*. In the context of women's history research, one of the key issues is the rupture in the collective memory in post-socialist countries (Novikova 2011), including forgetting the history of women's organizing and other breakthroughs of socialist modernization. This marginalization of socialist heritage in memorial timescapes<sup>5</sup> has an effect on the constitution of an autonomous female subject in contemporary societies, especially at the time of the neo-liberal backlash.

It is more than clear that the downfall of the socialist/communist<sup>6</sup> regimes in Eastern Europe, more particularly in what was once Yugoslavia, and

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4 Some feminist sociologists from Yugoslavia such as Inga Tomić Koludrović (Tomić Koludrović and Kunac 2000) following Ulrich Beck's viewpoint, advocate the term "unfinished modernity". Contrary to this, Madina Tlostanova, decolonial theorist from Russia, uses another expression, namely "mimicking modernity". Analyzing the situation in the Soviet Union, she argues that

"the concrete strategies of building the Russian/Soviet modernity had to be attuned to the Western one as it has always been a dependent and mimicking modernity including its mimicking imperialism and here Russia chose a doomed way of catching up with Europe and proving that it out-wested the West" (Tlostanova 2013, 55).

5 Timescape is a conceptual approach proposed by Barbara Adam in 1998: embracing the complexity of time, and its inseparability from space, enables us to understand the processes of the events, dynamics of relationships, interdependencies, and embeddedness in social contexts (cf. Adam 1998). See more later in the text.

6 We are aware of theoretical disputes around naming the regimes in Eastern European countries belonging to the so-called Eastern Bloc. Contrary to the regimes within the Soviet Bloc, which qualified themselves

disruption of its collective narratives interwoven with specific ideological meanings and political imaginary, provided both disorientation and uneasiness, but also, after some time, gained an appeal for a fresh epistemological inquiry that would be possible only under the conditions of critical self-reflection as well as those of intellectual and ethical rigor. Part of the problem in this field of analysis is connected with the overlapping contexts within which the public visibility of socialism has recently come into being through both global and local cultural commodification via neoliberal market procedure through inventive consumerist “packages”, namely through “trendy” identity (Kašić 2004). It may appear that by losing its contextual and specific historical perspective, socialism is to be exposed to misinterpretations and misreading like other commodified terms used largely for “industry” of academic overproduction, similarly as it happened to post-colonialism a decade ago (Huggan 2001, 1). It happens simultaneously with the absence of socialism both from local intellectual circles, and from the international ones. This has been clearly marked since the 1990s by cutting off its historical “time” as a signifying procedure for the disappearance of its order, system, political agenda, or theoretical inputs, that looks as an almost teleological, or globally desirable demand.

The position from where we could answer those questions is the contemporary context which is problematic and paradoxical, especially in the realm of the politics of memory. The current practices show either ideological attempts to forget certain historical events or aspects in order to stabilize a particular pattern of newly constructed “official” memory of the socialist/communist period, or similarly ideological attempts to cut off the socialist/communist past in order to build narratives on its total historical absence. The power of memory, which includes processes that have gone through varying degrees of consciousness and resistance, as well as ideological self-censorship that is differently marked, coded and inscribed, goes parallel with the politics of remembrance based on “frozen” times, gaps in memory or intentional forgetfulness of one’s own past. However, both through the ignorance of historical events, and by signifying the rupture of historical narratives, they

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as communist, in Yugoslavia the system was self-proclaimed as socialist. We have kept this ideological distinction in order not to obfuscate this differentiation, and refrain from discussing it in this text.

seem to create a peculiar configuration of the stories as a web of potential tensions between presence and absence. This enables the presence of new entries into the official narratives, as well as heterotemporality. “Facing the past is a basic precondition for establishing peace and democratic development” in post-war societies and countries in transition is how Vesna Kesić<sup>7</sup> explained the need for (re)collecting memory on socialism (Kesić 2003, 11). She also pointed out: “If significant parts of our past are suppressed or excluded from collective memory, this could reinstate the ‘old power relations’ of socialist and nationalist authoritarian regimes” (ibid.).

On the other hand, the concern that was expressed by Arjun Appadurai, when she was posing the question whether the economy of forgetting is even more striking here than the economy of remembering (Bell 1999, 25). This might be looked at differently in terms of how (in)visible the post-socialist/post-communist “East” seems. In this regard, it is interesting to see the ways in which “particular histories” have been modified and how they disappeared within certain ideologically verified discursive strategies in contemporary Europe. This refers most of all to that “rest of Europe” from which the *gene of socialism*<sup>8</sup> needs to be uprooted so that Europe could be constituted anew on the well-known postulates. This would be the basic precondition for enabling the procedure of “inventing Eastern Europe” to the extent where “provincializing Europe”, in Chakrabarty’s sense (Chakrabarty 2000) would be enabling a constant production of “Eastern Europe” as Europe’s incompatible place, its periphery or semi-periphery. Even though Marina Gržinić rightly posits that the history of socialism cannot be evacuated from the Eastern European heritage, or that the “process of swallowing the history of Eastern Europe” (Gržinić 2004) is simply not possible, this tendency needs to be taken into consideration when speaking about both geopolitical and feminist situatedness. What sharpens the ways of approaching our problems in a more responsible and less reductive manner is adding Madina Tlostanova’s argument of how, taking the ex-Soviet world as an example, the socialist world has become “a

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7 Vesna Kesić is a Croatian feminist and peace activist. She is one of the initiators of a rare project in Croatia, a project to collect and affirm women’s memory.

8 Prominent Slovenian philosopher and artist Marina Gržinić’s critical reference to Gianni Vattimo’s syntagm (Gržinić 2004, 114).

new invisible and disabled agent” (Tlostanova 2013, 51), and is perceived “in a Western typical understanding of the post-Soviet as time, not as space” (ibid.). How do we deal with the contradictions and the historical gaps? How can we avoid a narrow view when looking at the socialist legacy? Which are the accurate models of approaching diverse moments of this *epoch*? How do we ensure a theoretical framework for a complex multi-positionality? How do we liberate ourselves from a canonical discourse of historiography and enable a critical approach? How to involve this present moment in the articulation of the forbidden, “forgotten”, censored, “removed” from the analytical scope, or sublimed heritage? At the same time, how to avoid an objectification of heritage and its position as a set of fixed meanings that would not allow any re-entering, or critical interrogation of this problem?

The work that is facing us at present is certainly a need to articulate our women’s heritage as a feminist legacy of the socialist period. Through which exclusionary practices and political or ideological amnesia has it been articulated? Also, there is a question whether and to what extent is it possible to conceive of a socialist heritage as our women’s heritage. However, first of all, how should we define women’s heritage?

To acknowledge the complexities inherent in an analysis of women’s history means dealing with women’s heritage as a discourse of ambiguity, rather than a notion that presumes to guarantee the meaning of a valuable feminist legacy. On the one hand, discussing women’s heritage means to pose ourselves the questions of (dis)continuity, history and “origin”. On the other hand, re-writing/re-reading women’s heritage always assumes a set of discursive practices that are in dialogue with this problematic notion (or, with what constitutes its content); and, finally, it also means how we might value its “accuracy” by engaging critically with its aspects and shifting meanings.

Certainly, arguing for multipositionality in approaching this field of research, we need a new epistemological shift. Before entering this, we should try to reconsider one of the key questions that constitute a matrix of tensions in approaching and assessing women’s heritage.

In short, is women's heritage perceived as a sort of "ontological accumulation", as a symbolic capital that enables and regulates present and future relationship to women's own past, creating a basis for feminist positioning nowadays in an identity-politics manner and situatedness? Or is it seen as an open concept that would always be a place of questioning, of dialogue and dispute, being a crossroad of various "materials", narrations and time(s), without a direct trace of the historical generational memory?

On the other level of this debate, as Robyn Wiegman pointed out, there is the issue of teleological history and its historical temporality, as well as of feminist teleology. Apart from the question whether there is any rightful political time for feminism which could create a specific historical temporality (in this case, the past) as a verified embedded mark for feminist situatedness that "contained vision as a whole" (Wiegman, 2000, 813), what Wiegman criticized are the implications of such a narrative for "the feminism's futures". Designating this narrative as "the apocalyptic", she was concerned that the "mimetic interpretation of the life trajectories of its own authors as the truth of feminism's recent history and it requires that such trajectories become the paradigm of subjective formations that mechanically 'copies' feminism's past into its future time" (ibid.). Through this interpretation she posited the question of how to narrate feminism(s) including both life-writing and its/their political articulations within the mainstream narrative(s), as one of the most intriguing dilemmas regarding feminist legacy. In other words, if there are no linear and unidirectional connections among "materials" of women's heritage accumulating in time, and if historically and generationally continued feminist consciousness (which might lead us to the narrative wholeness) is questionable, then the issue of feminist legacy has to have a different venue. We are arguing that feminist legacy, created on the "heritage" and disputes around the "heritage", relies on multiplicity, discontinuity in terms, and on simultaneous feminist histories and paths (feminist histories are "*in the plural*" (Stanford Friedman 1995, 41)). It also relies on contingency and contradictions and this ensures various interpretations of feminist contributions or feminist traces in the past.

How to intervene into the dominant structure of historical narrative(s)? How to process these discussions? What about the unknown stories, what

about an appeal that women should be the subjects of their own narratives and that through the subject-formation they arrive at the “ontological” drive? How to maintain a distance from self-serving romantic mythologies of the exceptional, namely “authentic” feminist positioning within Yugoslavia? How to negotiate the meanings of all these elements that women’s heritage offers? There are more and more questions which becomes quite evident when we approach the issue of women’s socialist heritage. Women’s heritage is not, as Renata Jambrešić Kirin rightly emphasized, “an inherited property, but an inherited possibility, potential and freedom for (self)definition of historical lags in which we would like to be inscribed, that is to use our ‘lien’ for the benefit of future generations of women” (Jambrešić Kirin 2011, 27). A possible point of departure for the analysis of women’s heritage as a kind of feminist legacy from the socialist period might be Renata Jambrešić Kirin’s definition of women’s heritage as an “imaginary order” of sets of “heterogeneous, unsystematic, and regularly slighted women’s efforts, deeds, volitions, narratives, identitary projections and utopian endeavors” (ibid.) potentially inscribed into it.

## PARADOXES OF DIS/APPEARANCE

If there is continuity in the waves of feminist and women’s organizing in Yugoslavia and its successor countries, then it is the detection of discontinuities in women’s history, as well as in women’s history writing. Position of the latter is still on the margins in relation to mainstream cultural practices and their communication codes and channels, so the memory of women’s struggle is always under threat of being lost, and plunged into the underworld of historical oblivion, after which it would take a conscious effort to be drawn out by a new generation of authors.

The following statements are repeated with the same tenacity: the history of local feminisms is still unwritten (although it would be more accurate to say unsystematized and unread). Without institutional support provided by textbooks, manuals, school and university programs, archives, departments, and institutes, records seem scattered, analyses isolated, a synthesis is missing. Politics of collective memory involve the whole cultural machinery around collecting, researching, interpreting traces of the past, and communicating

signifiers thus created, so that phallogentrism still inherent in the current cultural system, especially in the elite and state-sponsored culture (education, research), prevents women's perspective and women's history from establishing themselves as valid and recognized scientific approaches. The importance of mentorship cannot be overestimated, so a loss of one established scholar who did crucial breakthroughs in several disciplines (such as Lydia Sklevicky, a prematurely deceased Croatian historian and anthropologist), or the inexistence of chairs for women's history can seriously impede the development of the subdiscipline within academic framework. The situation fortunately improved over the last decade with the growth of gender studies or interdisciplinary programs (in Ljubljana, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Skopje) and research projects, also thanks to the impulses from the activist groups, which enabled some important research to be done in women's and feminist history at the academic level (Jalušič 2002; Bonfiglioli 2008; Petrović 2009; Pantelić 2011; unpublished research by Marijana Mitrović and Ana Miškovska Kajevska, among others, not all of them coming from the local academe). It is evident that the most fruitful results of the research about the past are still coming from anthropology and literary studies, with a record of openness and interdisciplinary approach to problems.

The main prerequisites for socialism - as well as feminism in times of socialism - to be properly researched, understood and organized are documentation as well as active production of archives so as not to make women's heritage a simplified myth of gender equality achieved in socialism. These are still insufficient; therefore new feminist archives have become a necessity. The reason is a growing awareness of how the archives produce events by selecting and concentrating historical record, but also hiding it from the view under bureaucratically organized structures which do not necessarily conform to women's social and private experiences.

Oral history projects were one of the most important practices of socialist and feminist archives production, started in former Yugoslavia under the impetus of international projects (such as Women's Memories<sup>9</sup>, collecting of oral histories of women under communism/socialism, started in 1998 at

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9 Cf. Women's Memories 2003.



the Gender Studies center in Prague, resulting in more than a dozen books and a couple of documentary films produced by women's studies centers and groups in Novi Sad, Zagreb, and Kotor), and they certainly have to be further developed, although what is mostly needed are considerable funds and institutional support.

The impression of a lack of comprehensive overview, or even synthesis, of the history of both feminism and socialism in Yugoslavia - and/or in predecessor and successor countries/societies - is enhanced when one takes into account the decomposition of elements which would enable the synthesis: polycentricity, framing, perspective, focus, the problem of constructing continuities and detecting interruptions, connections and disconnections, blind alleys, unexpected resurgences, deviations, local developments and the mainstream ones, construction and deconstruction of subjects of our historical interest – the list can only grow. Historical rupture established with the disappearance of Yugoslavia and the radical dissolution of the framework and structure of the joint socialist state (with the war, rise of nationalism in economies and cultures, the so-called transition) provides also an opportunity for different analytical views. On the one hand, the tectonic changes of public discourses imposed the idea of radical otherness of the socialist socio-political context on us. On the other hand, the continuity of feminist practices and personal memories are still holding strong ties with the past and allow the transfer of basic myths of Yugoslav feminism (Bonfiglioli 2009). The recent revival of interest in Marxism in the region is once again disturbing historical layers, giving a new impetus to the discursive spiral. Mainstream historiographies with national overtones in most of the successor countries of Yugoslavia are still lagging behind, while the complexity of socialist past imposes the need for a transnational approach. Similarly, women's history, and especially the history of feminism as fields of research, also require going beyond the frames of national historiographies, which impose the hegemonic concept of national history.

## **FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS: RE-VISITING SOCIALISM**

Facing, re-visiting, and negotiating with “time, memory, and history” related to fifty years of life under socialism, in order to explain the meaning of heritage

important for feminists, requires careful avenues of exploration. There is a need to examine what are the benefits of the socialist system for the status of women or, what women could invoke as their “socialist treasure” (voting rights, right to work, social security, access to education, “comrade” equality etc.), but also a potency of “the woman question” as a Marxist paradigm in its concrete fields of realization. Its utopian or transgressive overlaps need to be analyzed, both transhistorically and within the Yugoslav context in particular. In this aspect theoretical enterprise should turn back towards its historical context in order to explain these issues and controversies. How do we approach such a complex domain what tools are available, with which feminist “eyes” might we look or reflect upon, which criteria are applicable for the explanation of the issues of socialist legacy that have been absent from the public scene since the 1990s (academic, political, Marxist, historiographical)?

“Re-writing” of history is an important strategy for feminists and it might be valuable for feminists from post-socialist/post-communist countries. It is a strategy of re-appropriating their own history as “heritage” that was “stolen” from the feminists from this region over the last two decades in order to make the dialogue with the past productive and lively; there is also a need to make the political contestation of the socialist political regime in relations to the status of women, or “the woman question”, visible. There are some distinctive methods we may find useful, especially if we have in mind all the layers of the problems which appear both when discussing the politics of memory including the interplay with historical practices such as socialism itself, censorship, as well as the (dis)appearance of the respective historical period, and the politics of long-term disregard for women’s heritage within socialism.

For example, the method that was applied by the postcolonial theorists, known as interpolation, can be useful in dealing with women’s “heritage” from the socialist period. Interpolation, as Ashcroft reminds us, “is not so much ‘re-writing’ ... inserting the marginal histories that have been excluded (although this is an important tactic), but ‘writing back’” (Ashcroft 2001, 102). Interpolation as “writing back” is of different order, not only to make women’s or socialist “heritage” visible, or to give another point of view, or hear contesting voices from women: it is a discourse that, while speaking to the experience of a subjugated or marginal communities, making visible “untold stories” and

critical moments in confrontations, is “engaged in transformation of history ... showing the process of historical re-visioning at work” (ibid., 103). In that sense interpolation into the “material” that women’s “heritage” presents (or is constructed of) is a kind of feminist intervention that Renata Jambrešić Kirin argues for: “In any case, there is no relevant approach to the past without feminist intervention into research, institutional and representation politics” (Jambrešić Kirin 2011, 27). It is a historical re-visioning that would not only transform women’s locus of viewing at their situatedness historically, but could also transform the codes of historical “textuality”. This can be achieved through struggles over the meaning of cultural/theoretical/political power. By creating a space for other modes of interpretation, writing back “*produces* realities as well as reflects them” (Pennycook 1994, 267).

To create a space for other modes of interpretation while dealing with neglected and unresearched areas of women’s history is certainly not an easy inquiry. It requires theoretical agency and an “intervention of transformative perspective” (Ashcroft 2001, 55). Entering the discourse of “heritage” represents not only a critical intervention into the (socialist) past, but also into the wide range of re-emerging practices and “inventing” temporalities that come through contemporary signs of official narratives, time-lags, canons of archiving, codes of “silent” resistance, cultural constructions, reality “effects”, emancipatory desires, ideological *clichés*, “imaginative capital”, among others. Therefore a notion of “timescape” created by Barbara Adam (cf. Adam 1998) that signifies a complex temporality, (including aspects of multiple times and their *simultaneous* existence, their tempo, changes and their contingencies, conjugating both the visible and the invisible, presence and absence, as well as intersections of various dimensions of interactions and transpositions, such as stories, myths, time memories), might bring us to a more complex insight into the field. In this regard, instead of following a single feminist linear continuity, it may enable us to understand how various feminist paths intertwine and exist in parallel structures, or how transtemporal/transhistorical approach can be very productive in dealing with women’s heritage. Furthermore, it may enable us to look at feminist engagement beyond linear or causal links between, for example, the first and the second phase of feminism(s), in order to perceive multiple dimensions of connectedness across the time and effects of feminist engagements, including their various entries, paradoxical moments and

contingencies, as well as to perceive different modes of the “same” feminist or socialist stories. In short, “timescape” is a kind of conceptual approach to understanding the processes, a way of seeing spatial features of the past and present of the social phenomena and events, in their complexities: “Through timescapes, contextual temporal practices become tangible” (ibid., 11).

To illustrate how “timescape” might be appropriate for exploring women’s as well as socialist “heritage” in their complexities, we will show it through three examples: the history of Yugoslav feminism(s), the discussion on leftism and woman’s question in Yugoslavia, and the uncertainties around the entry of feminism, or admissibility of feminism into the “official” socialist matrix.

1. (Re)opening the history of feminism(s) within the Yugoslav contexts means that there are no historically closed cycles that follow each other in a chronological “order”, nor the sets of assumed norms that would lead to its “teleological” goals or historical intentions.

Although the second wave of Yugoslav feminism, that will be outlined only briefly here, appeared at the end of the 1970s, there is no precise way to articulate the feminist paths which we, from this particular region, have faced through the socialist period and that we are supposed to “belong to”. The new approach was announced at the most notable event, the conference held in 1978 in Belgrade’s Student Center under the name *Drug-ca žena: žensko pitanje – novi pristup* (*Comrad-ess woman: woman’s question – a new approach*). The event and the program were conceptualized by Dunja Blažević and Žarana Papić, it had more than one follow-up and allowed for different feminist entry points. It was the start of the public debate on the women’s question, sexual difference, early feminist activism, as well as the beginning of an important dialogue with Western feminists (see Bonfiglioli 2008). This was followed in the same year by establishing the Women and Society section of the Croatian Sociological Association along with the similar groups in Belgrade and Ljubljana. A large number of theorists, scholars, activists and politicians joined these groups; many of them are still involved in feminism and/or gender equality in their professional lives today.

In the 1980s, the first lesbian feminist initiatives were part of the democratic/civil movement in Yugoslavia (Jalušič 2002), with three Yugoslav feminist meetings (Dobnikar and Pamuković 2009) held in Ljubljana (1987), Zagreb (1989) and Belgrade (1991), generating the emergence of first shelters and SOS hot-lines for women victims of male violence, as well as the first political demands that have continued to develop in the new successor states. Finally, three conferences on women's literature held at the Inter-University Center in Dubrovnik (in 1986, 1988 and 1990) were important events for the development of feminist theory in a new round of dialogue with feminists from the West.

It should be noted that Yugoslav feminists organized a heterogeneous movement with different theoretical and ideological "entries" into feminism (from leftist, Marxist, liberal-democratic, pacifist, and ecological positions), as well as with various spaces in which feminist themes were developed and disseminated. Instead of linear continuity of the strict paths of feminisms (liberal, Marxist, radical or post-modernist) as a sort of expected linear/temporal process of historical and theoretical appropriation by the Yugoslav feminists, there was a parallel existence of their ideas embedded in some outstanding feminist carriers/figures, or within the distinctive feminist circles.

For example, at the beginning of the 1980s there were three issues around which feminist circles in Croatia focused their discussion simultaneously in order to affirm their theoretical and activist position, namely "woman's question", *écriture féminine* and violence against women. In terms of feminist ideas, perspectives and standpoints, they discussed the ideas of Marxist, postmodern and radical feminism(s) relying mostly on German and Russian Marxist tradition, French postmodern thought and post-structuralism, as well as fresh Anglo-Saxon inputs on violence, pornography and sexuality. Several bibliographies (Popov 1981; Dojčinović Nešić 1996; Pešut 1998) provide insight into that diverse and dynamic field of feminist and women-oriented writing, and indicate that it is a complex phenomenon that has yet to be thoroughly explored and interpreted.

Among those "permeable" spaces, where feminist texts started to appear with odd regularity and frequency, were Marxist and official social studies

journals, such as *Marksizam u svetu* (*Marxism in the World*), *Marksistička misao* (*Marxist Thought*), *Naše teme* (*Our Topics*), *Pitanja* (*Questions*), *Žena* (*Woman*), among others. The fact that even through a discursive signs of their titles we could notice a strategic political orientation of their profiles did not preclude their openness for the oppositional stands. Rather it showed a kind of ambivalence or in some cases an intentional double-strategy.

To give an example, the journal *Žena* (*Žena 1967–1990*)<sup>10</sup> is a clear case of this kind of paradox, revealing the complex interplay between official, state policies towards women, and autonomous feminist thinking. The latter cannot be fully understood without the analysis of the socialist state's approach to gender issues, feminist concerns and contemporary Marxist debate of the time. This is the context in which feminist themes were opened, and where it was possible (due to, or in spite of socialism?) to start writing, in a highly articulate way, about the relationship between the class and the woman question, the sexism in the media, or women's studies. At least since the 1930s, and the infiltration of the Communist youth into Yugoslav feminist organizations, there is a dynamic, often competitive, relationship between the communist and the feminist social action oriented towards women's emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, historiographical evaluation of the socialist period from the standpoint of changes in gender relations and women's emancipation needs to include the question of woman's agency and to explore debates about two concepts of women's emancipation – the feminist one(s), and the Marxist one. Questions present in the progressive movement from the beginning were: how

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10 *Woman* was the successor of the wartime magazine *Žena u borbi* (*Woman in Struggle* 1943–1957), published monthly, and later six times a year, by the Antifascist Women's Front of Croatia and its successor organizations. The journal's subtitle also changed, demonstrating shifts in its orientation: from "the magazine for family and household" in 1958, to "the journal for social problems of the woman and the family" in 1967, to "the journal for scientific and social issues on the position of the woman and the family in society" in 1973. The list of subtitles is not exhaustive.

11 A telling example of those competing tensions is demonstrated in the communist Vida Tomšič's speech at the Fifth Conference of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia held in November 1940 in Zagreb about "the work with women". See Božinović 1996.

to solve the so-called woman question, do the causes of the oppression lie in gender or in class hierarchy, and how can this be resolved?

Lydia Sklevicky in her famous study (Sklevicky 1996) – which is also part of the second wave and the result of theoretical debates on women's studies and the introduction of gender as an analytical category – showed that the Women's Antifascist Front (AFŽ, in her typology a heteronomous type of women's organizing), in the first year of its existence developed as an independent organization, but then became subordinated to local committees of national liberation and placed under the control of the Communist Party (see Božinović 1996). Sklevicky concludes that in the postwar years, AFŽ and its successor – the Conference for the Social Activity of Women – were “given the role of the state agency responsible for women”. Thus, the “woman question” in socialism (in Marxism, a “scientific and theoretical basis of the Communists' practical activities”) certainly became politically marginal, but also systematically financed, bureaucratically organized niche of the socialist government and academe alike.

Two years before the Belgrade feminist conference in 1978, the first public discussion about feminism was held in 1976 in Portorož, at the round table organized after the International Women's Year (1975) by the Marxist centers from Slovenia and Croatia. Having in mind that the Marxist centers were units directly connected and financed by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, and practically functioned as the educational centers for the communist party members, it confirms once more that this paradoxical position needs to be carefully explored.

2) What makes the timescape of the feminists from the socialist countries so challenging and provocative is the discussion on the Left and within leftism. At the same time what makes the conversation about it so tense is the relation towards the past and its burden. The impacts of the “past” socialist order and, in a wider sense, the fact named as “death of communism” led to the current disorientation and discomfort related to the assessment of emancipatory breakthroughs during socialism. Following the discussion on the existence and character of feminist movements and feminist politics in communist and socialist countries, as well as in countries with strong leftist movements in

the 1960s and the 1970s, such as Greece or Italy, it may be concluded that the Yugoslav case in many instances shares a similar structural relationship towards the nexus of woman question/class struggle, as well as the similar generational dynamics (cf. Poulos 2007). This makes the geopolitical situatedness of Yugoslavia and its feminisms more complex. Also, it clearly shows that there are no simple analogies or expected similarities within all the countries of the socialist/communist bloc, and it requires a distinctive analysis, a difference in approaches, which would look for the historical nuances in exploring the status of the feminisms within those worlds.

Another point, which is not a subject of this analysis, but is very relevant for the Yugoslav feminist timescape, is how the discussion regarding woman question vs. *bourgeois* feminism opened up at that time, motivated by the impulse of utopian hopes for the future. Some authors such as Blaženka Despot, Rada Iveković, Gordana Bosanac, Nada Ler Sofronić, Tanja Renner, to mention some of them, took part in it by providing contextual meaning to a wider concept of utopian thinking, and the controversies around Left Melancholia which is of importance for contemporary feminism(s) (cf. Brown 1999).

Recent documentary projects, such as the European project *Fragen* (2013), clearly show Yugoslav “exceptionalism” among the former communist/socialist countries. This is reflected in the existence of a specific feminist movement of the second wave in the late 1970s. It developed following the advancement of the feminist movement and theory in the West, but also in dialogue and negotiation with the carriers of official politics, as well as with what we would call today gender politics in the socialist system, offering an alternative theory, creating a local feminist practice and increasingly vocal political demands.

3) Going back to the previous thesis concerning the insight into the Yugoslav feminism(s), we will argue that emergence of academic feminism was therefore possible because of the already established space for discussion and exchange of theoretical and professional reflections on women’s issues within socialist structures, which can be traced to the pages of the journal *Žena*. It is paradoxical that what was called neofeminism was accused of being *bourgeois*, and a Western import. However, at the same time it was allowed and it gave



rise to important theoretical studies about women's question and Marxism which culminated in works of Blaženka Despot (cf. Despot 1987; 1988). Bibliography of *Žena*, the journal of the Croatian Conference for the Social Activity of Women with its thematic range indicates the scope of women's policy of the socialist state. Some of the topics regularly written about were: socio-economic position of employed women in the country and the world, socio-economic and theoretical aspects of the position and role of women and families in the country and the world, the role of women in the development of the system of social self-management, socio-economic relations in rural areas and the position and role of women, the theory and practice on family and marriage in the country and the world, motherhood, child protection, women and education, the role of women in progressive workers' movement and the revolution, the position of women and the UN, the views and opinions of artists (literature, film, and art) and scholars about women and family, among others.<sup>12</sup> There certainly was a number of empty ideological texts; however, there were also series of sociological and statistical studies on the structure of female employment, educational and family circumstances, political representation, on the number of kindergartens and dairy meals, from the level of industrial regions to the small Bosnian municipalities. Although the oral testimonies indicate resistance and an internal struggle over the journal's editorial policy, which also needs further exploring, the space was open for circulation of ideas from the West, from the Soviet Union and the so-called Third World. Apart from the interview with Simone de Beauvoir during her visit to Yugoslavia (Janeković 1968),<sup>13</sup> and the first translation of Betty Friedan penned by the chief editor, communist Marija Šoljan, it is noticeable how young sociologists (Mežnarić, Cerjan Letica, Pusić) submit the first reports on the women's movement and women's studies in the U.S. and Western European countries. In time those reports and explorations lost prefixes such as "the so-called", "modern", the "new" or "neofeminism", and there was a

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12 The abovementioned themes are all headings of journal's sections, demonstrating the scope of its regular theoretical output. We have particularly researched the journal content in the period from 1968 to 1976, tracing the emergence of contemporary, Western-style feminist self-positioning.

13 De Beauvoir visited Yugoslavia for the third time in 1968, when she visited Dubrovnik with Sartre.

gradual transition from Marxist terminology to the sociological one; also in other humanities periodicals there was a transition from the language of ideology to that of theory (Iveković, Čačinović).

To conclude: the path was open for the authentic articulation of feminist theoretical and activist positions that expressed local knowledge and theoretical positioning, as well as a potential for the constitution of a female political subject. As Rada Iveković wrote: “In a couple of years, all of that enabled us to build, in the unambiguous resistance, one uncontested small group identity and political opinion” (Iveković 1998, 36).

An interpretation can be offered as to how and why the older generation of communist women from the socialist mainstream institutions allowed feminism to happen. Was it a silent rebellion against patriarchy sustained in the socialist state, or a kind of tacit alliance with feminists of a younger generation? They certainly had to censure their public allegiance and identification with the new feminist ideas, but they still established the space for dialogue with young feminist scholars. Or, was the whole ideological and political context in Yugoslavia from the middle of 1970s so porous as to allow the emergence of “creative Marxism”, Praxis, and other alternative discussions? This is one of the key fields of research that has to be undertaken, and it has to be incorporated into mainstream historiography of the Yugoslav past. This has yet to happen.

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## Jugoslovenske feministkinje u socijalizmu: remećenje dominantnih narativa

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**BILJANA KAŠIĆ**

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**Sažetak:** Podsticaj za istraživanje pojma ženskog nasleđa iz perioda socijalističke prošlosti bivše Jugoslavije u radu potiče iz potrebe za obogaćivanjem, kako teoretskih, tako i aktivističkih nastojanja savremenih feministkinja, novom perspektivom i znanjem o prošlosti. Polazeći od rasprave o epistemološkim pitanjima vezanim za pojam nasleđa, vremena i sećanja, u radu su sažeto prikazani glavni problemi historiografije ženskog iskustva tokom socijalizma u Jugoslaviji, uključujući i pojavu feminističke teorije i aktivizma, kao i predlog pojedinih teorijskih sredstava za dalju raspravu. Ova teorijska sredstva bi mogla da pomognu u objašnjavanju mnoštva i kompleksnih temporalnosti feminističkih puteva, međuigru između marksističkog i feminističkog delovanja u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji i, na kraju, mogla bi repositionirati debate o feminističkoj i socijalističkoj prošlosti unutar složene realnosti post-Jugoslovenskog vremena/prostora.

**Ključne reči:** nasleđe, vreme, prostor, sećanje, Jugoslavija, socijalizam, feminizam, epistemologija