Socialist-Era New Yugoslav Feminism between “Mainstreaming” and “Disengagement”: The Possibilities for Resistance, Critical Opposition and Dissent

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Through a focus on early publications by feminist intellectuals in Yugoslavia during the 1970s, this paper aims to demonstrate methods of feminist critique of the theory and practice of women’s emancipation in the context of a state socialist (in this case self-managing socialist) country in East Central Europe. After a brief overview of feminist organizing in Yugoslavia until the late 1980s, this paper looks at conferences and journal publications, which also provides the opportunity to better understand the workings of the Yugoslav public space and publishing processes. The text, written with a conceptual and intellectual historical focus, analyzes the discursive interventions and reformulations of matters related to women’s emancipation. The new Yugoslav feminist approaches rethought and reformulated the “women’s question.” Reading the prevailing currents of feminism in North America and Western Europe, feminists in Yugoslavia searched for ways to reframe this question into a critique that was constructive as well as innovative in its own context.

Keywords: Feminism, dissent, socialism, women’s question, Marxism, sisterhood.

“Criticism of the family and marriage […] is already the criticism of the state itself,” wrote Rada Iveković in 1981. This sentence reveals the essential role of feminism in post-Second World War East European socialist states, which, however, was an underrepresented discourse amid the variety of dissent, dissidence and countercultural criticism. The close reading of the work of feminists during the 1970s and 1980s in Yugoslavia, where feminism reappeared in a semi-organized form and with a wide range of activities—from intellectual discussion through artwork to explicit political activism—tells us a lot about the


potential critiques of state-socialist women’s emancipation in general and thus it is relevant for the region of state-socialist Eastern Europe, while it also allows us to understand the specificities of self-managing Yugoslavia. In this paper, I focus on the early, mostly academic, publications by feminists in Yugoslavia in order to show some of the possibilities and actual meanings of feminist opposition in the context of a socialist state. I argue that their activity is somewhere in between the two ends of the scale that Linda Briskin calls “mainstreaming” and “disengagement,” between trying to negotiate their agenda into the official policies and self-organizing critical, external discourses and actions.3

My approach comes from intellectual and conceptual history. While conceptual history focuses on the meanings of the texts through a contextual reading, for feminist historiography, there is always an explicit political stake in recovering events of the past. In my reading, the two support each other in the sense that it is in the interest of feminist historiography to have meanings of concepts central to certain recovered ideologies, while the contextualism of intellectual history implicitly and often even explicitly subscribes to the importance of the personal within the political. The strategies behind feminist movements always necessarily involve an intervention with language and a struggle for meanings, the reconstruction of which is the primary aim of conceptual and intellectual history—which at the very same time respects the importance of the role of the personal and the individual as well.

The interpretative techniques I employ here focus on written sources, published (articles in newspapers, magazines, journals, as well as books) and unpublished (primarily archival documentation of activist work), artworks and videos, and also oral history interviews with the participants of the feminist groups. I base my analysis on the work and discourse of the members of feminist groups called Žena i društvo [Woman and Society] and their allies. I call the phenomenon in focus new Yugoslav feminism. Some publications and some members of the Žena i društvo use the term “neofeminizam,” that is “new feminism”—a name that not all participants, however, acknowledged. “New feminism” is also a general name widely used to describe that version of feminism, which in its diversity emerges in the 1960s in Western Europe and North America. This is what is

3 Briskin, “Feminist Practice.” The political scientists Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, delineate the concepts of “ethical civil society” and “political society.” In that framework, which was applied to Central European dissent by Alan Renwick, new Yugoslav feminism would be closer to political society in which the dissenting group still chooses to engage the state in some form of dialogue. Linz and Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition; Renwick, “Anti-Political or Just Anti-Communist?,” 287.
mostly known today as the “second wave,” another problematic term I will try to avoid using, because it blends an at least 100-year-long complex history of feminist movements and discourses into one “wave.”\(^4\) However, for the Yugoslav feminists of the 1970s, the designation “new” refers to the pre-Second World War feminist history of the country, and this conscious admittance of continuity is important to highlight. The women and few men active in and around the Žena i društvo groups in Belgrade, Ljubljana and Zagreb were not a fixed and coherent group throughout the almost 20 years in focus in this paper. The individual stakes and life trajectories, the different intellectual approaches, the inherent differences within the local scenes intellectually and in the actual infrastructures make this a loose network, connected, however, by the shared fascination of a feminist critique of socialism in Yugoslavia.

The Return of Feminism

The story begins in the early 1970s: at this time, what we find in the open is journal publications and what we find backstage is a handful of young women and a few university professors. As we can see from the interviews and from their biographies, these women came from a rather homogeneous social background and, with two exceptions, were from the same generation. This generation was born after the Second World War to mothers who had a first-hand war experience and were themselves very often active participants of the partisan movement. Unlike their mothers, they were puzzled by the contradiction between the promise of the regime and their own experience of their own emancipation. They were also critical of the idea that their mothers had equality with men: the way they saw it, these women were far from having equal rights and status.\(^5\) Academia seemed to be a relatively safe space for the first tentative publications about “what is happening to American women.”\(^6\) The interest, of course, was not only in women in the United States: Europe and the “Third World” were on the radar too, especially Italy, England, France, Germany and India.


\(^5\) Cf. Sharon Zukin about Praxis: “For several older members of this group, the collective odyssey in dissent began in an unlikely way, in teenage heroism with the Partisans during World War II. […] They were still party members and, unlike Đilas, remained in the party until the late 1960s.” Zukin, “Sources of Dissent and Nondissent in Yugoslavia,” 131.

\(^6\) Mežnarić, “Što se događa s američkom ženom?”
The new feminists in Yugoslavia could explore the possibilities of a feminist critique of state socialism in the space between the official and the unofficial. They started with meetings in each other’s homes, which later moved to the student centers and research institutes until they formed their own semi-institutions with the foundation of the SOS helplines and the shelters. There is a difference between the activities in the three major cities in which the Žena i društvo groups were organized. University seminars or talks took place mostly in Ljubljana and Zagreb, where the groups called Žena i društvo were part of post-secondary sociology departments. In Ljubljana, the ŠKUC, i.e., the Študentski kulturno-umetniški center [Students’ Cultural and Art Center], was an equally important venue at which the feminists shared the space with other countercultural and political groups, such the punk and green movements. The most important feature of the Ljubljana group was that lesbian women and straight or still closeted lesbian women worked together in the same group from the beginning. In the mid-1980s, the lesbian members played an increasingly defining role in Belgrade too. In Belgrade, the most important stronghold of new feminism was the SKC, the Students’ Cultural Center, where the director of the Gallery of the SKC, later the director of the whole institution, was Dunja Blažević. Under the auspices of the SKC, the first international feminist conference in Yugoslavia took place in 1978. Many women joined the feminist circles after attending this conference called Drug-ca žena: Novi pristup [Comrade-woman: a New Approach].

This famous and canonical conference, however, was preceded by many publications (already in 1972) and a lot of brainstorming, even feminist presentations at the conferences organized by the state women’s organization, the Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena [Conference for the Social Participation of Women], that is, KDAŽ, first in 1976 in Portorož. In Belgrade, the SKC offered a series of discussions, the tribine. The conferences (the 1978 international one

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7 Even though most literature does not refer to Yugoslav self-managing socialism as “state socialism,” I use the term to differentiate the political regimes in post-Second World War Eastern Europe from socialist ideas, diverse as they are, and to strengthen my argument that the feminist critique in Yugoslavia may be relevant for the entire region.

8 Mežnarić, “Što se događa s američkom ženom?”

9 The other events and conferences regarding the “women’s question” also necessarily opened up a space for feminist or proto-feminist discussions, though these were not related to the work of the new Yugoslav feminists. For example, as early as 1976 there was a summer school about the “women’s question” at the Inter-University Center in Dubrovnik. Mitrović, “Genealogy of the Conferences on Women’s Writing,” 167. Also cf. Bonfiglioli, “Revolutionary Networks,” and Dobos, “The Women’s Movement in Yugoslavia.”
in Belgrade, and then the Yugoslav feminist conferences in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990) and the summer schools at the Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik beginning in 1987 were attracting the largest audiences and opened up to women who would otherwise not have attended the feminist meetings. After 1985, the small group meetings returned: these were a space in which personal experiences were emphasized (very similar to the consciousness-raising groups elsewhere) and the training groups for the SOS helplines for abused women and victims of domestic violence required the closed format. At the same time, because of the SOS helpline and the activities around it, the feminists reached a much wider audience, which could have even served as a basis for a wider grassroots movement had the war not broken out. The women and few men in the three cities cooperated very closely in the creation of these helplines, sharing knowledge and experience.

During the early phase that is the focus of this paper, journal publications were of crucial importance. Because of the influence of some professors and the openness of some women officials in the KDAŽ, some of the young women and men could participate in the conferences and editorial work of the journal Žena [Woman]. As we shall see and as research shows, some of the women indeed were dedicated to the betterment of women’s position in society, to such an extent that they were willing to give space to the feminist ideas of young women—ideas with which they themselves did not agree. This makes Žena an interesting case study of inter-generational and inter-ideological encounters.

Meanwhile, the array of journals accepting feminist articles was extended relatively quickly. From 1975 on, it included social science and humanities journals such as Pitanja [Questions], Naše teme [Our topics], Argumenti [Arguments], Ideje [Ideas], Socijalizam u svetu [Socialism in the World], Republika [Republic], etc., and in the 1980s Problemi [Problems] in Slovenia. The student journals Mladina in Ljubljana and Student and Vidici [Views] in Belgrade also provided important forums for new feminist discussions, which is not by accident: the youth organizations enjoyed relative freedom from state control in their activities.10 With time, the feminist articles reached a wider audience through newspapers and weeklies, such as Danas [Today] and Start, as well as women’s magazines, such as Bazar published in Belgrade, Svijet [World] in Zagreb and Jana in Ljubljana.11 Naša

10 The reasons and explanations behind this widely repeated statement are explored in detail in the work of Zubak, “The Yugoslav Youth Press (1968–1980).”
11 In the period under study, the five women’s magazines in Serbo-Croatian with the highest circulation were: Svijet (published in Zagreb from 1953 to 1992); Praktična žena (Belgrade, 1956 to 1993); Bazar

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žena [Our women], another print medium in Ljubljana, was a magazine situated on the spectrum between the more serious Žena, which still followed the party lines regarding the women’s question, and the popular women’s magazines (some of which, such as Bazar and Svijet, occasionally did publish feminist articles). The full picture of the feminist discussions, however, includes art, literature, as well as literary and art theory, besides the academic discussions and the activist work. Because of the curators at the SKC, art and literature were extensively present in the feminist programs, including the flourishing artists from Zagreb such as Sanja Iveković. Possibilities for feminist writing were presented and discussed through the work of Irena Vrkjlan, Dubravka Ugrešić and Biljana Jovanović, among others.

The history of the new Yugoslav feminism has its own periodization, while it was running parallel with the new or second wave feminisms in the “West” after the beginnings in the early 1970s, which was characterised by private (kitchen table) conversations and academic publishing, there was a turn around the years 1985–86, called a “second wave” by many, when group members wanted a change in the work of the groups that would serve to focus more on activism and consciousness-raising in small, women-only groups. The next phase in their story started around 1990, when more and more new and much more diverse groups were born out of the Žena i društvo circles and went in different directions. These directions ranged from political and anti-war activism through a more spelled-out LGBTQ activism to anti-violence activism and institutionalization of feminist knowledge through the creation of women’s studies or gender studies centers and departments at universities or parallel to them.12

The type of critique the feminists in Yugoslavia articulated towards the system is hard to compare to any other form of opposition in the region at the time. While there is a temptation to attribute the phenomenon to the exceptionality of Yugoslav self-managing socialism,13 the situation is more complex than that. Due to the organization of the state, the KDAŽ, the student centers as well as the journals and magazines (those in various constellations) were working under the umbrella of the SSRNJ [Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije –

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12 With regard to wartime, cf. eg.: Mladjenovic and Hughes, “Feminist Resistance to War and Violence in Serbia”; Žarkov, The Body of War; Bilić, If We Were Gasping for Air; Bilić and Janković, eds., Resisting the Evil; Helms, Innocence and Victimhood; Miškovska-Kajevska, Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Changes.

13 From the abundant literature on Yugoslav self-management, cf. Pavlowitch, Yugoslavia (esp. from p. 175); Allcock, Explaining Yugoslavia; Mezei, et al. Samoupravni socijalizam.
Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia].\textsuperscript{14} This, as I explain later in this paper was, however, far from a complete freedom of the press, but there were just enough cracks in the wall that a wide selection ideas, including feminist ones, could reach the public. In addition to the legal and infrastructural circumstances, there is a crucial source of historical inspiration that is also part of the explanation: the large numbers of women involved in the partisan movement,\textsuperscript{15} their active participation in the National Liberation Struggle and the basis this gave to the extensive emancipation of women after the Second World War, which indeed did entail substantial societal change.\textsuperscript{16} (Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, there is important current research on the state violence exerted against women in Yugoslavia in addition to the literature on women’s emancipation.)\textsuperscript{17} Besides these two factors, I would emphasize the importance of contingency: that these women in the Žena i društvo groups met, decided to like each other, decided to focus on feminism, decided to organize the women-only discussion forums and made smaller- and larger-scale decisions that subsequently defined their path. It was the path to feminism, instead of liberalism, deconstruction, Marxist revisionism, nationalism, to mention a few schools that did flourish at the time in the other socialist countries in the region despite the prevailing censorship, despite the lack of a partisan tradition and despite the closed borders.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Dissent, Resistance, Mainstreaming and Disengagement}

The new Yugoslav feminists held a position vis-à-vis the state that was between opposition and inner critique. The entire post-socialist master narrative deserves a more refined approach in order that they not “implicitly and explicitly reproduce binary categories of the Cold War and the opposition between ‘first world’ and ‘second world,’” thus ignoring the ethical and aesthetic complexities

\textsuperscript{14} Thompson, \textit{Forging War}, 13.
\textsuperscript{17} Jambrešić Kirin, “Komunističko totalitarno nasilje; idem, “Žene u formativnom socijalizmu”; idem, \textit{Dom i svijet}.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. e.g., Kopeček and Weislik, eds., \textit{Political Thought and Falk, The Dilemmas of Dissidence}.
of socialist life.\textsuperscript{19} For various reasons, new Yugoslav feminism is a case par excellence of the productive encounter of discourses. Engaging in a dialogue with the state, building on its promise of gender equality, the new Yugoslav feminists do not directly oppose the Yugoslav state, but see the place of women there as constant opposition. The disappointment of this new generation of young women is similar to the experience of the feminists in the United States and Western Europe and this aspect should be constantly kept in mind when we discuss the difference between the so-called East and the so-called West. Despite the differences in the economic and political systems, the new feminist movement and ideology was born out of a disappointment with the promises of left politics, that is, with the socialist regime in Yugoslavia and the new left, the civil rights movements and the anti-war movements in Western Europe and North America.\textsuperscript{20}

The new Yugoslav feminists learned about the situation of women in the West and the criticism of existing democracies through the inner, feminist dissidence,\textsuperscript{21} thus they were inspired and critical of Western capitalist democracies at the same time, unlike, for example, the liberal dissident groups in Central Europe. The new Yugoslav feminism, as we shall see, voiced strict criticism through pointing out the systemic nature of the oppression of women, thematizing women’s sexuality and, most importantly, being the first to thematize the violence that women endure without the intervention of the system. Their claim is that the state did not change the \textit{status quo}, one of their conclusions being that once the regime was built on patriarchy it became ideologically impossible for women to achieve real equality.

I call the new feminist discourse in Yugoslavia a critical one, more similar in its attempt to engage the state in a dialogue than refusing it per se as most dissidence does. In the meantime, it makes sense to look at this new feminism in light of dissenting discourses because of the dissenting status of feminism elsewhere and because of the windows the dissidents themselves offer for this.\textsuperscript{22} The new feminists in Yugoslavia did not publish in samizdat nor were they imprisoned for their writings. However, they were in search of critical

\textsuperscript{19} Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever}, 9.
\textsuperscript{20} Cf. e.g., Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” and Sargent, ed., \textit{Women and Revolution}. Hartmann’s text was published in Yugoslavia as well: Hartmann, “Nesrećni brak marksizma i feminizma.”
\textsuperscript{22} The political scientist Tihomir Cipek and the historian Katarina Spehnjak provide a list of all the non-researched possible forms of “opposition,” “dissent,” “antipolitics” and “resistance” in the former
or oppositional positions within the state’s mainstream. They created a micro
space in which nonconformist ideas could be discussed and critical thoughts
disseminated outside the official classroom space and in which new research was
done despite the resistance of the institutions.

Sharon Zukin, looking at “possibilities of dissent” in Yugoslavia, argues
that “[i]n states that claim to operate on the basis of a Marxist ideology, there
is an enormous vulnerability to dissent because of the gap between theory and
practice. In capitalist states, dissent arises in more limited institutional contexts,
notably over the excesses of administrative agencies or the dishonesty of
executive authorities.”23 Zukin claims that due to the framework, the activity of
Đilas or the Praxis group is closer to “whistle-blowing” in the United States than
to East European dissidence. In the meantime, she also debates the “liberalism”
of the Yugoslav state, suggesting rather discussing different strategies of control,
such as creating a controlled space within the state: “neither self-management
nor market socialism is as central to Yugoslav development as the relatively
non-coercive strategies of labor mobilization and capital accumulation that the
leadership established in response to internal and external pressures beginning
in 1947 and 1948. And it is wrong to characterize these strategies as liberalism.”24
Even for critical intellectual positions, a publication in a scholarly journal or
in the form of poetry could entail severe consequences.25 Editors of journals
could also be dismissed by the “publisher” of the journal, i.e., the associations,
companies, social, political, educational and other specialized professional
institutions26 that were working under the umbrella of the SSRNJ.27

Besides the organizational aspect, according to the data provided by
Pedro (Sabrina) Ramet, 80 per cent of journalists were party members and the
information published about politics and the economy was acquired mostly via
governmental channels. Robinson confirms Ramet’s thesis: based on research
regarding “freedom of criticism in various Yugoslav elites,” journalists tend to

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23  Zukin, “Sources of Dissent and Nondissent,” 119.
24  Ibid., 120.
25  Cf. the dismissal of the Praxis professors, and in 1971, during the era of the so-called liberalization,
the cases of Ignjatović, Gojko Đogo and Janez Janša. Dragović-Soso, Saviours of the Nation; Miller, The
Nonconformists; and Gállos, Szlovéniai változások.
26  Zukin, “Sources of Dissent and Nondissent,” 122.
27  Thompson, Forging War, 13.
be less critical than other groups of the Yugoslav decision-making élite. Part of the explanation for this tendency lies in the highly political process of their selection. Furthermore, there were annual reviews of the media products and the supervising body, like the publisher’s councils under the authority of the SSRNJ, which could issue warnings, impose penalties on editors, or even dismiss them and the journalists who wrote articles the council found unacceptable. In some cases, issues of journals or newspapers could be banned or confiscated. In the case of those newspapers, journals or magazines that were funded by the SKJ or the SSRNJ, the end of funding meant the end of the medium as well, the most famous example being the journal *Praxis*.

The new Yugoslav feminists, therefore, did not face the same level of persecution that the dissidents of Central European countries or the Soviet Union did. On the other hand, there is barely any talk about the situation of women in the work of dissidence in Central Europe and the Soviet Union: they overlook the shortcomings of state socialism in this regard, which largely defines the possibilities of thinking about feminism in their discourse after 1989. The difficulties of developing a feminist movement in the new democracies in East Central Europe have been raised by many authors. In countries that offer a rich and compelling discussion of human rights, freedom of speech and social justice, the violation of women in the private sphere and exclusion of women from the public gets little attention, an issue that, with few exceptions, has not been examined by existing scholarship until very recently. The new Yugoslav feminist criticism of the state, although it was not a dissident group per se, but something between cooperation and dissidence, helps us to understand what would have been the opportunities in other East European countries to develop a feminist dissidence. The case of new Yugoslav feminism explains to us how the ambivalent emancipation offered by the state socialist regimes made it impossible for dissidents who by the 1980s almost entirely gave up on Marxism

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31 See Harms, “Destined or Doomed?” and about the case the Polish Solidarity: Long, *We All Fought for Freedom* and Penn, *Solidarity’s Secret*. 
to relate to a feminism that had to at least partly acknowledge some of the improvements in the situation of women in socialist countries.\textsuperscript{32}

Investigating Possibilities of a Feminist Critique of Marxian Thought and Yugoslav Socialism

Through their textual interventions, the new Yugoslav feminists not only opposed the state, they also stretched the boundaries of the ways academia thinks of itself and the ways the state presents the position of women in Yugoslavia. Through the reading of new feminist texts from the United States and Western Europe as well as critical Marxist texts from different schools of thought and sometimes even through philosophy from India, the new feminist discourse in Yugoslavia attributes new meanings to the concept of feminism itself. Their political action in academic discussions is rather a discursive one: balancing between disengagement and mainstreaming,\textsuperscript{33} they try to create a new language to talk about women’s emancipation and the relations between men and women. This involves not only redefining what \textit{feminism} means, but also the reconceptualization of \textit{consciousness}, \textit{women’s universal experience}, \textit{patriarchy}, \textit{family}, \textit{work}, “\textit{homosexuality},”\textsuperscript{34} the relationship between the \textit{private} and the \textit{public} as well as the introduction of the concept of \textit{gender}.

The theme of the relations between the communists and the women’s movement is paradigmatic for the focus of the discourse, inasmuch that leftist, Marxist and socialist feminisms from all over the world prevail in the new Yugoslav feminist intertexts. This always linked the feminist discussions to the broader frame of Yugoslav state socialist ideology. Both the context and the audience, i.e., the community of the text’s implied readers (including the fellow authors in this very issue of the journal \textit{Dometi} [Throw], mostly from


\textsuperscript{33} Briskin, “Feminist Practice,” 26, 29.

\textsuperscript{34} Since it is a development of the last decade, the acronym LGBTQ is unused in the texts that I analyze. Probably no one even dreamed that the movement of people with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender or queer identity would reach a level at which they would have the power to choose their own name. In the research material, the most advanced texts make mention of \textit{gej} [gay] and \textit{lezbejka} [lesbian] people, although the most common is \textit{homoseksualci} [homosexuals]. Since the current position of the movements fighting for the equal rights of LGBTQ people find the term “homosexual” to be offensive, one pathologizing and stigmatizing LGBTQ people, I will refrain from its use unless in quotations and will only use LGBT or LGBTQ in my own discourse.
the Žena i društvo group), support this interpretation. There is a debate about a new approach (novi pristup) to the women’s question (žensko pitanje) in Yugoslavia, which for the protagonists of my text is more or less explicitly the new feminism, neofeminizam. In several introductions of journal special issues, the editors openly admit that their quest aims to learn from the feminists elsewhere—the difference is in the scale of how many positive elements they find and to what extent is it the negative examples that teach about paths not to be taken. Therefore, it is not only Žarana Papić in the more independent youth journal Student in 1976 (cf. below), but also several articles in Žena and other journals, such as Argumenti (publishing a documentation of the legendary 1978 Drug-ca žena conference) that give voice to the opinion framed by Mirjana Oklobdžija in Dometi “that even today, in all societies to a smaller or greater extent, women are ‘second rate citizens.’”

Instead of the state-offered discourse on the women’s question (žensko pitanje), investigations of the ideas of the new feminism bring along a conceptual replacement of the former with the latter. Texts started to emerge only in the early 1970s: reports on the new feminist movement in the United States and various countries of Western Europe, from time to time even South America and Asia, were also published. In reflection on the proclaimed success of women’s emancipation in Yugoslavia, there are at least two parallel stories about feminisms “elsewhere” with emphasis on the “new feminism.” Telling the story of new feminisms in the world involves evaluation and therefore reveals the opinion of the authors, in the manner of which these can be read as manifestos on behalf of the authors. Especially in case of those Yugoslav new feminists who, either as young scholars, like Rada Iveković or Žarana Papić, or as established professors, like Blaženka Despot or Gordana Bosanac, were attempting to introduce a new, competing ideology for which the innocent-looking informative introductions to the currents of “new feminism” in other countries proved to be a good strategy.

In exploring the different strategies aimed at gaining a place in the discourse for new feminism through transfers and translations, I read Rada Iveković’s review on Italian feminism as an implicit programmatic text for the new feminism in Yugoslavia. The article was published almost ten years after the first endeavors to understand the new feminist phenomena, the time being mature enough for making explicit claims of themes and concepts. In Iveković’s article,

36 Iveković, “Talijanski komunisti i ženski pokret,” 34. Further citations to this work are given in the text.
feminism is presented through the history of the Italian communists, which bears many similarities to the history of Yugoslav communists. What makes the text programmatic is the way the author makes an attempt to reconcile the relationship between the women’s movement and the communists – in Italy. The story Iveković presents can be read as an implicit parabolic tale for how the relationship of feminism and the communist party should take shape in Yugoslavia. It does tell the story without explicitly pointing out the similarities, though these similarities nevertheless stand out.

The article begins with the emphasis on the proletarian roots of the women’s movement, which outweigh the traditions of the civil-rights-based bourgeois roots. Iveković discusses in detail the situation and its consequences when the more radical and revolutionary women at the fin-de-siècle joined the Socialist Party of Italy (SPI), which in 1911 severed the ties with the bourgeois women’s groups that were demanding franchise for women. This meant the “liquidation of the women’s question,” with the elimination of the claim for suffrage, which was otherwise also supported by the revolutionary feminists. The SPI’s argument was that this issue did not concern either the class struggle or the working class and thus the paths of the communists and the women’s movement parted for a lengthy period of time. According to Iveković, the interwar period brought along the recognition that there was need for a separate proletarian women’s movement, because the working class is ruled by conservative prejudice against women. However, not much changed in the interwar period, when the major issue was the struggle against fascism and women’s emancipation was present only as a remnant from the previous century (“instead of the swing of the revolutionary flame”).

After the overview of the changes after the Second World War, including the guarantee of the franchise for women, Iveković summarizes the conclusion for the new Italian feminists: despite the normative questions being solved and the laws having been changed “in bourgeois society,” the patriarchal mentality prevailed, proving to be the main barrier to women’s liberation (37). This conclusion is followed by a positive evaluation of the appearance of *neofeminizam* in Italy in the years 1968–69, which stemmed from the new left movements and student protests, from the experience that even within the student movement women face the same marginalization and discrimination. Feminism in Italy, Iveković concludes, is “without doubt an oppositional movement in relation to the existing social order” as “masses of women, mostly young ones, cannot identify with a single existing political party, not even in the left” (39, emphasis mine).
Besides this left-wing feminism, Iveković mentions “that other feminism,” “bourgeois and sexist, which identifies men as the enemy.” This idea comes up in other texts I analyze below, addressing the juxtaposition of “good” and “bad” feminisms.

The importance and specificity of neofeminizam in Italy lay in highlighting various topics, which repeatedly return as central concepts of the new Yugoslav feminist discourse: women’s creativity in the arts and the humanities, the debates about sexuality (in Italy mostly with regard to the right to contraception and abortion), consciousness-raising – and through this, the relations between the public and the private, domestic violence and sexual violence. The article ends with the optimistic conclusion: “It is encouraging [to see] that all women with a leftist orientation in Italy are in accord in their struggle, regardless of whether they belong or do not belong to regular parties. Because they all belong to the women’s movement in a broad sense. This way, today even communist women proudly announce that they are also feminists.” The story Iveković tells, with the closure about the success of the feminists, makes the reader think of this as a path to follow.

The implied conclusions for the new Yugoslav feminism are manifold. The argument that the roots of the women’s movement, both in the late nineteenth century—fin-de-siècle (first wave) and in the 1960s (second wave), are deeper in the worker’s movement and the in the political left in general addresses both the state establishment and those who want to join the new groups and share the ideas. Further elements of the analysis, which can be directly translated into the current Yugoslav context, are those of the relations between the SPI and the women’s movements in the interwar period and during the Second World War, highlighting the parallel between the NOB (Narodna oslobodilačka borba – People’s Liberation Struggle) and the Alijansa ženskih pokreta [Alliance of the Women’s Movements] and the feminist examination of the reasons for which women’s equality had not been achieved despite the new post-Second World War legislation meant to ensure equality. The ambiguous relationship between the SPI and the women’s movement as allies and rivals of each other is clarified when Iveković points out the oppositional nature of the movement.

The closure of the article is of major significance from a terminological perspective: whereas Iveković does not differentiate between the use of the terms women’s movement and feminism throughout the article, here she makes a distinction. To her, the two concepts are synonymous—women’s movements are based on feminist ideology—and it is a significant development in the Italian
context that communist women support feminism. In the meantime, Iveković clarifies the agenda and therefore the meaning of new feminism, which is defined along themes and concepts that are recurrently present in the Yugoslav case as well.

The recognition of different women’s movements and, therefore, feminisms leads to the description of the different currents of feminism through opposing pairs in the early Yugoslav publications. These texts categorize feminism according to the distinction between radical revolutionary women’s movements (Marxist) and bourgeois movements, on the one hand, and extremist (radical, hyper-feminist) movements as opposed to the moderate (socialist, Marxist) movements on the other hand. The two oppositions are clearly contradict one another and represent a certain socialist conservatism when it comes to self-expression.

Silva Mežnarić, a sociologist and editor of the journal Žena who lived both in Zagreb and Ljubljana and was a member of the KDAŽ Croatia in 1972 and joined the feminist group Žena i društvo, initiated a series of articles introducing American feminism. The “series” ended after two articles and feminism as a topic returns on the pages of Žena only in 1975 with the United Nations’ “Year of Women” in 1975, which was followed by the “Decade of Women”, lasting until 1985. Mežnarić’s first article in 1972 bears the investigative title “What is Happening to the American Woman?”37 Her claim is that she wants to demystify the way this “socially-ideationally relevant phenomenon” (57) had been presented in the media up to then. She emphasizes that new feminism is not only relevant in the society in which it originates, alluding to the Yugoslav situation, and adds that her aim is not to judge, rather to represent based on the work of other researchers. Using analyses from economics and sociology, the author shows the economic and social problems American women face, including employment and reproduction. Mežnarić’s conclusion is that the situation of women in both communist and capitalist modernized societies legitimizes feminist claims.

A few years later, in 1976 in Portorož, at the first official conference about women in which the new Yugoslav feminists participated, Gordana Cerjan-Letica mentioned the problem of the lack of knowledge of and limited access to information about new feminism in Yugoslavia. To her, this is the reason for “so many non-objective and scholarly non-justifiable criticism by us against the

37 Mežnarić, “Što se događa s američkom ženom?” Further citations to this work are given in the text.
feminist movement.”38 In this other publication from the same year, Cerjan-Letica prepared an overview of feminism that discussed the issues of radicalism in feminism.39 Summarizing the past ten years of American new feminism, she noticed that radical feminists “in the track of the sensibility of the New Left” politicize “the most human and most hidden spheres of human life—such as the family, marriage, sexuality”(8).

Other authors approached American radical feminists with much more caution. A selection of texts by the members of the Žena i društvo group was published in a 1978 issue of Pitanja entitled “Women, or about Freedom.” The issue claims to be about the žensko pitanje and not feminism, while most of the inspiring and quoted texts and the questions posed are those of new feminism. The Sarajevo-based social scientist, Nada Ler-Sofronić, provided a thought-provoking new theoretical-methodological framework based on a critical reading of new feminist theory from the West for dealing with women’s inequality in Yugoslavia. The selection of authors is colorful and while she is dismissive of Shulamith Firestone for her “extremeness,” “overvaluation of women’s characteristics” and for overemphasizing “women’s nature,”40 she is appreciative of Betty Friedan. Whereas Friedan is often criticized by left-wing feminists both in the United States and elsewhere for her bourgeois lens of analysis, Ler-Sofronić realises that Friedan criticizes bourgeois values when speaking of the lives of bourgeois women. She finds the idealization of women by the radical feminist Firestone more problematic: authors like Firestone are “mistakenly” called “radical,” reclaiming “radicalism” as a synonym for “revolutionary” (21).

Jasna Tkalec also welcomed “radical legislative change,” in this case in France. She embraced the French “new feminism” born in the aftermath of May 1968, which had a radical agenda with “the radical demands for the equality of sexual morals for men and women, loudly seeking rehabilitation from a Freudian position of women’s erotica, the sexuality of children and adolescents and even of homosexuality.”41 This text, inspired by Edgar Morin’s essay in the volume La Femme majeure42 interprets the new French feminism as a human-rights movement (1162), whereas it realizes that, despite the similarities between the feminist discourse and those of Marxism and “decolonialism,” women cannot be treated

41 Tkalec, “Dolazak i događaj feminizma,” 1161. Further citations to this work are given in the text.
42 Lapierre, Morin and Paillard, eds., La Femme majeure.
either as a class or as an ethnic group. Tkalec suggests looking at women as a “bio-social class” and valorizes the potential of the radical demands within the women's movement (i.e., new feminism), which introduces a specific culture of revolution to the West (1167). The radical demand of the new feminism involves “a reanalysis of the entire social system with regard to the past and future as well. This research raises and actualizes fundamental social and scientific problems and rephrases them in a completely new way” (1167).

A colorful image of feminism unfolds from this range of highly different texts. Revolution in feminism has the appreciation of the authors, while radicalism is already ambiguous. The attributed meanings vary from positive, for example in the sense of “revolutionary,” to problematic as much as it is “bourgeois.” Bourgeois feminism is unanimously criticized by all authors. Another characteristic of the early steps the new feminists in Yugoslavia took is the strategy of suggesting that at the new manifestations of feminism be regarded as relevant due to the “universal experience” of women from the perspective of the ideas presented and from the perspective of “our still patriarchal environment.”

Universality is useful not only as a “disguise” of the dissenting ideas, but as a category countering the idea that the solution to the class questions is a solution to the women’s question as well.

One of the early examples appears in an issue of Student, edited by Žarana Papić and Ivan Vejvoda in 1976 (a rare case in which only foreign material is presented in translation). It includes texts from Robin Morgan’s edited volume Sisterhood is Powerful by Zoe Moss and Pat Mainardi (from the Redstockings group, which belongs to the above-mentioned “radical” Women’s Liberation groups), an interview with Luce Irigaray by Cathérine Clément that appeared originally in La Nouvelle Critique, one text by Marie-Thérèse Baudrillard from Politique Hebdo and an excerpt from Shulamith Firestone’s The Dialectic of Sex. What they state in the introduction may not look extremely complicated:

It is interesting to get acquainted with insights of the new thinking of the “problem” of women, her speech (govor), agency (delanje) and living (življenje), and this through a mosaic of broad elements, from analytical-theoretical approaches to personal statements. Though here it is seemingly only about “foreign experience,” a lot of this experience of women is universal.  

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44  Ibid.
The introduction does not identify the selection of texts as feminist, but it also avoids the term žensko pitanje through use of “the ‘problem’ of women,” where the quotation marks distance the authors from identifying with those who consider women a “problem.” The terms agency and speech point toward the language of the new feminism as does the selection from the more avant-garde or radical texts, which, by other authors in the Yugoslav publications, are dismissed for various reasons. The reasons for this can be well organized around the evaluation of and reservation to a stream of feminism as radical, revolutionary or extremist on the one hand, and reactionary-bourgeois on the other hand. The identification or appreciation of these varieties of feminism is rather divergent and needs to be treated in the “revolutionary Yugoslav” context.

The choices of Papić and Vejvoda reflect an appreciation of the radical stream of American feminism as well as of the more theoretical, but rather avant-garde, French wave. The tendency to affiliate oneself with the socialist Western feminists and thus legitimate the introduction of these ideas into the local context prevails in the Yugoslav new feminist context, however, in this case there is also an attempt to reconcile the complex theoretical approach of Irigaray (and elsewhere, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva) with an expectation that writing about society serves the revolutionary change in that very society. The cross-reading of radical feminism with French post-structuralism is an “invention” of the Yugoslav feminists and here is made explicit by the choice of an interview with Irigaray, conducted by Catherine Clément, instead of an excerpt from her Speculum de l’autre femme with regard to which the interview was made. For discussing the social use of theories, writings and artworks, Clément returns to the concept of struggle (borba in Serbo-Croatian and lutte/combat in French). Clément’s choice of the word has a new relevance in the new context of the space defined by the success ideology of the NOB. This was followed by smaller-scale “struggles” for the fulfilment of the aims of self-managing socialism.

Clément contextualizes Irigaray within 1968 as a movement: “Where, what kind of a relation do you think you have with women’s struggle? The question is all the more important since your book was not a book which we would usually

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45 Irigaray, Speculum de l’autre femme.
46 Irigaray’s texts are later also published in translation, in thematic journal issues, accompanied by comments and explanation from the new Yugoslav feminist authors: Irigaray, “Ogledao druge žene”; Idem, “Izlaž iz pećine”; Idem, “I jedna, ne miša bez druge”; and Idem, “Taj pol koji nije jedan.”
call as one designed for struggles? Irigaray explains her position, which she begins with the assertion that to her, all philosophical discussions have political implications:

Maybe we should go that far that we say there is no “politics” of women that does not take shape either in the form of apolitical statements or disavowal of the political, this is already a demand (zhabija) which must be fulfilled. [...] In the meantime, if the starting point of women’s struggle (borba) is simply to get to the steering wheel of power, then women wanted what they don’t [want] to be subordinated to the phallic order. [...] However, we need to be constantly and without mistakes alert. Phallocracy most probably still has not exhausted all its resources. Are we not witnesses to how today men overtake the women’s question (žensko pitanje)? It is important for them to be able to keep the initiative within the[ir] discourse.48

What Irigaray does in her Speculum is political and radical. Her radicalism is read into a Yugoslav context in which radicalism is read as revolutionary struggle. Through this reading in Student, Irigaray is brought into a dialogue with American second-wave radicalism (even though radicalism assumes different meanings in the original contexts of French theory and the U.S. movement) as she identifies the need for radical (down to the roots) change in the discourse conveying power relations. Getting positions in the existing phallic [phallogocentric] order does not change the discourse and the place of women within that discourse. The “women’s question” gets appropriated by male political actors and immersed into the existing order; Irigaray does not spell it out here, however—her train of thought reminds of the dichotomy between the use of the concept of the “women’s question” and the use of the concept “feminism”, with the underlying political and strategic implications. As feminism takes the women’s question out of the patriarchal context, it means taking the initiative and means intervention into the discourse.

47 Clément and Irigaray, “Žena, njen spol i jezik,” 7. All translated texts I quote from the Serbo-Croatian translation, since what I look for is the meanings in that context. Where it seems necessary, I reflect on the change of meanings in translation.
48 This is a translation into English from a translation from French into Serbo-Croatian. I quote the translation because my interest lays in the language (in the sense of discourse) the Yugoslav readers were presented with.
Clément and Irigaray, “Žena, njen spol i jezik,” 7.
Radicalism, and in relation to that, revolution and the revolutionary nature of an ideology or movement, is a recurrent theme in the new Yugoslav feminist writings of the 1970s and early 1980s and is a crucial factor in their self-positioning within the Yugoslav discursive space, simultaneously adjusting to and challenging the status quo. As we have seen above, Iveković, for example, based on Anna Maria Mazzoni’s classification, identifies the revolutionary branch of Italian feminism as progressive and points it out as exemplary; however, she refrains from calling it “radical.” One of the articles in the hereby analyzed issue of Student, from Sisterhood is Powerful by Pat Mainardi, discusses the “politics of housework,” which is not only relevant from the point of the relations between the private and the public, but also for a statement that identifies the “women’s liberation movement” as “revolution.” Here we find a conceptually fascinating distinction between radical revolutionary women’s movements and bourgeois women’s movements, on the one hand, and extremist (radical) ones as opposed to the moderate (socialist) ones on the other.

In Catherine Clément’s previously analyzed interview with Luce Irigaray, Clément and Irigaray agree on the need for a radical change of discourse and then they go even further via Irigaray’s answer to Clément’s question of whether she thinks the “class struggle” would sufficiently describe these power relations. Irigaray points out that this is exactly the reason for which radical change is needed: men “overtake the women’s question.” Irigaray turns the question around and suggests that class be translated into “men and women” and then adds: “Or, we should admit that today’s praxis of Marxism is not willing to acknowledge this difference and this exploitation of women.” This takes us to another crucial question dividing the state discourse and the new feminist discourse, considering whether solving the class question automatically solves gender equality and makes women’s oppression disappear. Irigaray resists this idea by emphasizing that Marxism, at its present stage, is not sufficient. This is in contrast with the claims of the KDAŽ, even with regard to the International Year of Women, when the problems women faced were thematized, or the introductions in books like Đorđević’s Žensko pitanje, which treat the work of Marx, Engels and the early Marxists as not very detailed, but in principle authoritative with regard to the women’s question and which persistently take the Žensko pitanje back to the realization of općeljudske emancipacije.

49 Mainardi, “Politika domaćeg posla,” 7.
50 Clément and Irigaray, “Žena, njen spol i jezik,” 7.
Whereas in the local feminist mythology the 1976 Portorož conference does not hold the same place as 1978, looking at the documentation of the debate we find most of the most important ideas of the new Yugoslav feminists there. At this time, Gordana Bosanac and Anđelka Milić were members of the editorial board of the journal and Lydia Sklevický, Vesna Pusić, Nadežda Čačinović-Puhovski, Silva Mežnarić and Gordana Cerjan-Letica all participated in the conference. Members of the editorial board apparently had to explain themselves for the appearance of the *feministička grupacija* at the meeting, offering a variety of understandings of what feminism is: “it is important to differentiate between the feminist movement in its basic starting point and of a provocation for a fight against the male sex and the […] progressive movement of women who search for a way for their own action […] for the political, economic, cultural and other forms of development in their own country.” The introduction, however, emphasizes the importance of the Marxist stakes in the issue of women and the family, especially the contributions of Vranicki and Šoljan to the conference. So does the closing speech by Breda Pavlić, with the usual conclusion that, on the one hand, many of the demands of the Western feminists have been provided to women in Yugoslavia and, on the other hand, that if feminists want to achieve their goals, they have to return to Marx. This happens only to a certain extent: there is a left-wing, most often Marxist, inclination in the feminist theories written by the new Yugoslav feminists, but they almost unanimously refuse to subsume women’s equality to the class question.

Despite the editorial board’s gesture to diminish the significance of the feminist participants, they claim the legitimacy of new feminism. Sklevický, in highlighting the importance of the “history of forgotten sisters,” describes the transition from the “old” feminism to the new wave, which realizes that basic rights do not ensure real gender equality, and therefore demands a liberation from gender roles through various actions. The English-language new or second-wave canon was introduced by Gordana Cerjan-Letica, for instance, Firestone; Friedan; Greer; Millett; Margaret Dixon; and Margaret Benston. Cerjan-Letica argued for the alignment of feminism with socialism: “the goal of a non-repressive civilization is there within all heterogeneous left-wing movements,”

51 “Društveni položaj žene.”
52 Redakcija, “Portorož i poslije njega,” 5.
53 Pavlić, “Ciljevi i metode suvremenog feminizma.”
54 Sklevický, “Od borbe za prava do prave borbe.”
while refusing to treat women as a class.\textsuperscript{55} This, in her reading, makes feminism more radical in its demands for equality. Vesna Pusić addresses the anti-, or rather, post-feminist arguments: at first feminism may appear aggressive or explosive—it may even be accused of theoretical incoherence; “however, if we approach it as a manifestation of one broad, global theory, we will much more easily get the dimension of the universality it contains. In other words, even if it is not a theory in itself, it presents a manifestation and is integral part of one broad theory of social change and dialectical development of society.”\textsuperscript{56}

By the time the 1978 conference took place in Belgrade, the new Yugoslav feminists became more and more conscious of radical feminism being closer to their own vision of feminism, revaluation what “radical” and “military” means, with reference to the revolutionary partisan tradition as a source of legitimacy. An effective strategy of Vesna Kesić in the magazine \textit{Start} is to compare the feminist movement to the workers’ movement. The comparison is triggered by Kesić’s annoyance with the “militant” \textit{epitheton ornans} of all feminisms in all times, also present in the state representatives’ discussion of feminism. While it is hard to see what it means, writes Kesić, “this is as if the workers on strike would be advised not to choose such a ‘militant’ way of fighting,” and “fighting” here is a “re-vindication of one’s rights.”\textsuperscript{57} Clearly, a political system supporting the workers in all places to stand up for their rights and heralding the workers being self-managers of their lives in Yugoslavia as well as women’s equality cannot afford labelling women voicing the exact same “militant” demands. In the very same magazine, Slavenka Drakulić reflects at length on the role and challenges of feminism “as a revolutionary movement.”\textsuperscript{58} Nada Ler-Sofronić even reclaims “radical” for those revolutionary leftist ideas she agrees with: due to its essentialism, she suggests that Shulamith Firestone’s \textit{The Dialectic of Sex} from 1970 is incorrectly categorized as “radical” and that it is rather “extreme” feminism.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{55} Cerjan-Letica, “Neki dominantni stavovi suvremenog feminizma,” 104.
\bibitem{56} Pusić, “O nekim aspektima,” 121.
\bibitem{57} Kesić, “Nije li pornografija cinična?,” 74–75.
\bibitem{58} Drakulić-Ilić, “Pornografija u novoj prohibiciji,” 68–70.
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Conclusion

The quest for meanings of feminism and the possibilities to employ feminist ideas for change—slow and transitional or radical change—in the position of women in Yugoslavia lies behind the early intellectual endeavors of the new Yugoslav feminists. Whether looking at Italian feminism in historical perspective or investigating recent feminist theories and movements, the aim is always to see the relevance of these for the Yugoslav case. The theoretical criticisms shed light on the contradictions within the emancipation project promised by the socialist state and its implementation. It is, however, this promise on behalf of the state that makes the relationship with the feminist groups multi-layered and instead of being dissident (which many radical feminist groups become in other countries), the position of the new Yugoslav feminists vis-à-vis the state is critical or dissenting. This position is made easier by the flexibilities within the Yugoslav regime as much as the access to institutions and publication possibilities is concerned. The systematic reading of theories, especially their discussion and their publication, was made possible at least in part by these infrastructures and the discursive practices and linguistic interventions paved the way for activism. They formulated a critique of the socialist regimes that no other opposition group could. Thus they reformulated the relevance of feminism in the region and by challenging the policies and institutions introduced by the socialist governments to achieve the equality of women and men, they offer a different vision of women’s emancipation and gender equality.

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60 Cf. Graycar, Dissenting Opinions; and Echols, Daring to Be Bad.


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