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Lessons from the Past: The Right to Abortion in Three Pictures

One of the many titles of newspaper articles from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which we are still living, is “Prohibition of abortion because of the pandemic” (Deutsche Welle, 18.04.2020; Blajker, 2020; cf. *Coronavirus: Texas says abortions ‘non-essential’ amid pandemic*, 2020). It is the title of an article reporting on the situation in Texas (USA), where the COVID-19 pandemic was (ab)used to stop the termination of pregnancy under the pretext of saving medical equipment (gloves and protective masks). Texas is an American state where women nominally have the right to abortion, but practically, even in regular circumstances, it is very hard for them to access this intervention due to the high cost of surgery, the small number of clinics that perform the procedure, etc. This is why it is not surprising that the Texas authorities used the emergency situation to make abortion almost impossible. The stated reason (saving medical equipment) seems more

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like a motive from some dystopian film or sketch. Public opinion research shows that American society is highly polarized when it comes to abortion: it is estimated that 46% of Americans are *pro-life* oriented, 47% have a *pro-choice* attitude, while only 37% are satisfied with the legal norms regarding abortion (Saad, 2014). This example from Texas represents a warning because it demonstrates how crises could be used to suspend human, and in this specific case, women's rights. With an ongoing pandemic, we are facing the suspension of various already won rights and freedoms: from freedom of movement to the right to continuing education. This example from Texas is even more disturbing because it reminds us that, like all similar initiatives, prohibition of abortion is a consequence of a much wider spectrum of socio-political changes. It is only one small piece of the puzzle in the processes of the traditionalization of state policies of European and American countries, the most radical versions of which are suspending historically won rights and freedoms.

The most radical European case of the suspension of the existing right to abortion during the pandemic happened in Poland. After the decision of the Constitutional Court, the parliament of Poland changed the legal regulations related to abortion, which led to mass street protests (*Black Monday*, 2016; *Poljska i abortus*, 2021). According to the new regulations, Polish women are allowed to have abortions in only three cases: 1) when the woman's life is in danger, 2) when there is a risk of serious and irreversible damage to the fetus, and 3) when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, which must be confirmed by a prosecutor. In combination with state policy, the very strong influence of the Catholic Church deprived Polish women of the right to decide about their own bodies and life. Unlike Poland and USA, Argentina changed its legislation at the end of 2020 to permit abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy (*Argentina, žene i trudnoća*, 2020). As important as this news is, it is also disturbing because it reminds us that all South American countries have a complete or partial ban on abortion in the 21st century.

Thus, in one part of the world, previously won rights and freedoms are being suspended, while in another they were never won. From this perspective, the struggle of Yugoslav women for the right to abortion in the early 20th century under conservative state policies, dictatorship, political and economic crises, (post)war trauma and the low education level of the population seems like an avant-garde heroic act but also a good lesson for the present.

The legislation of abortion in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

During the interwar period (1918–1941) in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,¹ according to applicable laws, abortion was prohibited, except in exceptional cases decided by a medical commission. The legislation prohibited the investigation of fatherhood, and the *Kazneni zakonik* [Criminal Code]² active in that period prescribed a strict penal policy for performing an abortion. Because of that, women who were pregnant out of wedlock or those who had unwanted pregnancies in marriage were in very difficult positions. In the case that the father did not want to recognize the child, which was a very common case, a woman was left to give birth and then take care of herself and the child, and neither she nor the child had any rights or socio-economic assistance (Todorić Milićević, 2021, pp. 280–285). Besides all of this, one must not ignore the social stigma to which women and their children were exposed in that situation. The issue of the permission or prohibition of abortion was directly related to the status of children born out of wedlock and to the position of women who decided to practice motherhood outside marriage. Precisely because of that, in parallel with criticism of the criminal legal norm that punished abortion, an appeal was made to equalize the positions of children born in and out of wedlock. The regulations regarding parental rights and obligations testified to how unfair this legislation was:

in the case of divorce or separated lives, male children over the age of four and female children over the age of seven were always assigned to the father, thus depriving the woman of her motherhood role. In the case of children born out of wedlock, the situation was the opposite: only the mother had parental authority over her illegitimate children, which further aggravated the economic situation of women who, for whatever reason, decided or were forced to give birth out of wedlock. (Vučetić, 2007, p. 133)

Two laws were therefore crucial for the status and rights of women in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Those were *Građanski zakonik* [Civil Code] and the Criminal Code.³ The Civil Code regulated most of women's rights and

¹ The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed after First World War, and in 1929 it officially changed its name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia existed until 1945, when its name was changed to the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

² All translations are mine.

³ About this law regulation, see also Todorić Milićević, 2021.

decisively influenced women's position in society. On the other hand, the criminal code prescribed penal policy. For the position of women, the decisive part of this code was the one concerning birth control and the punishability of abortion. In addition, other provisions that primarily concerned the lives of women, such as those regulating prostitution, were very important. There were public debates regarding both codes in the interwar period because amendments to the Criminal Code were passed in the late 1920s, and a draft of a new Civil Code was in the process of being written in the 1930s (see *Ženski pokret* [Women's Movement] 1930, no 11/12, p. 4).

The status and rights of women in Serbia⁴ in the period between two worlds wars were regulated by the Civil code from 1844 (Seepantelić, 2011).⁵ According to this document, regulations related to the position of women, especially in the field of family and inheritance law, were discriminatory. Upon marriage, women lost their earning ability, they did not have the right to inherit, and they had practically the same rights as minors and persons with disabilities.

Feminists and activists who advocated the improvement of women's rights at the very beginning of the 20th century made demands regarding the promotion of women's rights. Thus, the Zadruga Srpkinja [Cooperative of Serbian Women] in Bosnia passed a resolution in 1912 that required changes in legal solutions that would lead to equal rights for men and women. This resolution mentions the rights of single mothers and illegitimate children (Kecman, 1978, p. 9).

⁴ Following unification after the First World War and the formation of the monarchy, the legislation was not uniform in all parts of the new country. For example, parts of the kingdom which were under Austrian rule before unification had a different legislation than parts which were ruled by other political systems and regulations.

⁵ The Serbian Civil Code was applied until 1946, when its application was abolished by Zakon o nevažnosti pravnih propisa donetih pre 6. aprila 1941. godine i za vreme neprijateljske okupacije (sa Građanskim zakonikom za Knjaževstvo Srbiju) [*Law of the invalidity of legal regulations adopted before April 6, 1941 and during the enemy occupation (with the Civil Code for the Principality of Serbia)*]. This Law was signed by Ivan Ribar and entered into force on November 2, 1946. However, the Civil Code was still valid in cases in which the new legal system did not (yet) regulate a certain area or situation, i.e., the old legal solutions could "be applied to relations that are not regulated by applicable regulations, and only if they are not in conflict with the Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, constitutions of people's republics, laws and other valid regulations adopted by the competent authorities of the new state, as well as principles of constitutional order of Yugoslavia and its republics" (Zakon o nevažnosti pravnih propisa donetih pre 6. aprila 1941. godine i za vreme neprijateljske okupacije, 1946).

The struggle to improve the position of women become more intense and continued during the 1920s and 1930s. The polemics between feminists and legislators lasted until the beginning of the Second World War and became more intense in the late 1930s, when the draft of the new civil code was being worked on. On that occasion, feminists articulated demands through their associations. From the list of demands that the Alijansa ženskih pokreta [Alliance of Women's Movements]⁶ sent to the Minister, one could be convinced of how deeply disenfranchised women were. These demands included full capacity for legal action for all women, whether married or not; equality of spouses in marriage and family; equality of women and men in inheritance rights in urban and rural areas; unrestricted disposal of married property by spouses; recognition of women's work in the household as a profession; material security after divorce. A special group of requests concerned illegitimate children. Feminists demanded full protection of illegitimate children by allowing determination of paternity, the obligation of both parents to perform their parental duties for illegitimate children, and equalization of the inheritance rights of illegitimate children with those of children born in marriage (Kecman, 1978, pp. 298–299).

The general discriminatory position of women was continuously pointed out throughout the interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with an emphasis on the struggle for women's suffrage and many other rights. Full concentration and articulation of demands for the improvement of legal solutions in the field of civil law occurred in the late 1930s during a public debate on the new legislation. In parallel with this regulation, the abortion controversy was very topical at the end of the 1920s, and it was additionally encouraged by changes in criminal law, which also changed the regulations related to abortion to some extent (see *Ženski pokret* 1926, no 6, pp. 185–187 and 1927, no 16, pp. 3–4). Unlike the Civil code, which was not changed until the 1950s, the new Criminal code entered into force on January 1, 1930 (see *Ženski pokret* 1930, no 11/12, pp. 4). These legal solutions were in force until new legislation was passed after the Second World War (Dobrivojević

⁶ The Feminist Alliance, i.e., the Alliance of Women's Movements, was the umbrella feminist organization in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Following the example of the International Alliance for Women's Law, the Alliance was founded in 1923 by the feminist organizations *Ženski pokret* [Women's Movement] (Belgrade and Sarajevo), *Udruženje jugoslovenskih žena* [Association of Yugoslav Women] (Zagreb) and *Splošno žensko društvo* [General Women's Society] (Ljubljana) (see Kecman, 1978, p. 178 et seq).

Tomić, 2019, p. 118). The new penal provisions did not significantly improve the position of women: abortion was possible only if the woman's health was endangered, which was something that an expert commission needed to decide. A woman who had an abortion could be sentenced to prison for three years, and a doctor or a midwife who performed an abortion could be sentenced for five years. One of the key objections of feminist organizations was that, in decisions regarding abortion, the law took into account only medical reasons, while socio-economic reasons were not recognized as a factor that could influence the decision to terminate a pregnancy. Feminists insisted that the legalization of abortion was linked to the economic conditions and poverty in which most of the population lived, and also to the low education level regarding sexual issues. Feminists tried to point out the necessity of legalizing abortion, and they advocated better education on methods of birth control.

However, as we will see, initiatives and public debates on the issue of the legalization of abortion were intense, and Yugoslav women did not manage to win this right in the interwar period. Abortion was legalized only after the Second World War in socialist Yugoslavia, and the legal regulations that were prescribed then are still valid today, with minor corrections, in the countries that were part of the SFRY (see Dobrivojević, 2016).

Abortion in the feminist magazine *Ženski pokret* (1920–1938)

After the First World War, various feminist organizations were founded in the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia, from Slovenia in the north to Serbia and Macedonia in the south of the country. Feminist ideas and policies had a significant impact among the Yugoslav public. Due to that, the emancipatory-oriented policy of women's organizations of the humanitarian-enlightenment type which operated at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century received a new ideological and political basis. The central feminist organization, which had departments in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo, was Društvo za prosvetljenje žene i zaštitu njenih prava [Society for the Enlightenment of Women and the Protection of Her Rights]. Thanks to the formal organizing of the feminists, women's activism and political acting

were becoming stronger. Magazines gave special strength to the feminist movement. One of the most important feminist magazines in Yugoslavia was *Women's Movement*, which was founded and edited by the aforementioned Society. It was the first strictly declared feminist magazine in Yugoslavia.⁷ Thanks to the existence of magazines that became a space for polemics and for articulating feminist demands, the main women's topics and demands of the interwar period stood out: general women's suffrage and changes in the field of civil and family law.

Abortion is a specific women's experience, therefore it is logical that controversies related to its legal regulation were present in feminist magazines, primarily in the aforementioned *Women's Movement*. In that magazine, authors discussed many important topics related to the position of women in society; one of the most important ones, one with polemic potential, was the topic of abortion, i.e., birth control. The legal norm related to the issue of abortion has a decisive impact on the everyday life of women and represents one of the most important women's rights. Consequently, this topic was present on the pages of the magazine during the entire time of its publishing.

As soon as in the first year of this magazine's existence, its associates very concretely and very brutally dealt with the topics of extramarital pregnancy, women's inequality, non-recognition of paternity, and consequent suicide due to tragic events in women's immediate environment. Ruža Stojanović (1891–1920), an associate and one of the founders of *Women's Movement*, an activist in the fight for women's rights, a mathematician, and a feminist, committed suicide because her partner, with whom she became pregnant, did not want to accept responsibility for the pregnancy or admit the child was his. The October 1920 issue of the magazine was completely dedicated to Ruža Stojanović and her suicide. Ruža Stojanović was in a relationship with Mladen Berić, who was an assistant professor of the mathematics department at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. Mladen Berić left Ruža Stojanović just before their wedding and ran away from Belgrade, leaving her completely alone (and pregnant). They were a well-known couple in Serbian public life and, because of that, the whole case, which received its epilog with the suicide of Ruža Stojanović, resonated loudly in the press at the time. News about it was published in daily newspapers and weekly magazines. Some of these texts were written seriously and responsibly, but others were sensationalistic

⁷ The magazine has been digitized and is available in its entirety at www.zenskipokret.org

(*Politika* [Politics], *Beogradski dnevnik* [Belgrade Daily], *Republika* [Republic], *Balkan* [Balkan], *Epoha* [Epoch]). The feminist public was particularly disturbed. Katarina Bogdanović, Zorka Kasnar, Paulina Lebl Albala and Isidora Sekulić, among others, wrote articles in the issue of *Women's Movement* that was dedicated to Ruža Stojanović. These texts analyzed public morality, the position of women, extramarital parenthood, and love. Ružica Stojanović was also written about in the next issue of the magazine, and Sima Marković and Delfa Ivanić published articles about her. In their writing about this event, the authors of *Women's Movement*, as Stanislava Barać argues in a careful and detailed analysis of this issue, showed that there was no unanimous opinion even among feminists about the morality of active sexual life before marriage. This analysis showed that even among them there was no lack of principled, subconscious condemnation of a woman “who brings herself” into such a (hopeless) situation (Barać, 2015, pp. 141–149).

An unwanted pregnancy in an extramarital relationship in which establishing paternity was not possible brought a woman into a situation in which she was completely alone and rejected. The case of Ruža Stojanović, in which the participants were educated and well-situated adult people, shows the hopelessness of the situation in which a woman finds herself due to extramarital pregnancy in a society where abortion is not an option. The law protected men, whereas women remained legally unprotected but also disgraced in the social community, and many were often rejected by their families. In that case, a woman 1) could give birth to a child and raise it independently, thus risking social stigma; 2) she could undergo an illegal abortion, risking her health, life, or prison sentence; or 3) she could commit suicide. In addition to the general opening of topics related to sexual life, the interwar period was marked by an increase in prostitution, the number of illegitimate children and illegal abortions on one hand, and strict legal regulation on the other. Due to the general position of women in society and in the law, extramarital sex, pregnancy, children, and abortion became the central topics of feminist debates, which were very intense on the pages of the interwar magazines (Stefanović, 2000, pp. 168–183).

The authors of *Women's Movement* magazine wrote intensively about the right to abortion and the position of illegitimate children in society. In connection with these topics, there was also the issue of prostitution, which was another constant topic in this magazine. The laws regarding these issues in other European countries were followed with special atten-

tion. Writing about legalizing abortion was especially intense in the late 1920s, when a new penal code was passed. At that time, a meeting of three women's associations (Women's Movement, Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena [Association of University-Educated Women], and Sindikat radničkih žena [Working Women's Union] was held in Ljubljana, at which a resolution was passed on correcting the law on the issue of abortion. This resolution permitted abortion in specific circumstances, especially in cases of economic misery.

Among the texts dealing with these topics, those of Julka Hlapec Djordjević (1882–1969)⁸ stand out due to their uncompromising attitude toward birth control. Svetlana Stefanović states that of the interwar feminists, only Julka Hlapec Djordjević “advocated the rationalization of childbirth through contraception since she considered the restriction of childbirth a precondition for women's emancipation” (Stefanović, 2000, p. 183).⁹

One of the first texts on this topic in *Women's Movement* magazine is an essay by Julka Hlapec Djordjević, “O problemu ljudskog plodenja” [“On the Problem of Human Reproduction”] (Hlapec Đorđević, 1922), which was published in 1922 as the first text in issue 11/12.¹⁰ The reason for writing this text was the initiative of Laudova, a socialist member of the Czech parliament, to abolish the punishment of abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. An even more concrete reason for the text was the strong public resistance to this initiative. Julka Hlapec Djordjević connects three important topics in this text: the position of illegitimate children, prostitution, and abortion. Although the text is written from the point of view of eugenic theories, which are at least problematic from a modern perspective, it is significant because it uncompromisingly advocates placing the issue of birth control and legalization of abortion at the center of the feminist movement. Julka Hlapec Djordjević continued to write about this issue in a series of texts, and she continued to explain the arguments for legalizing abortion, most often linking the issue of the termination of pregnancy with

⁸ Julka Hlapec Djordjević was a writer and a feminist. About Julka Hlapec Djordjević and her feminism, see Milinković, 2012.

⁹ Svetlana Stefanović also points out that, unlike most feminists, Julka Hlapec Đorđević assessed the phenomenon of sexual dimorphism as a misconception on the basis of which the division of labor in the family and society must not be based (Stefanović, 2000, p. 183).

¹⁰ It is important to note that this is the issue in which the book *Nova žena* [The New Woman] by Alexandra Kollontai is reviewed.

the position of illegitimate children, the socio-economic condition of families with many children, and the socio-economic condition of young girls who become pregnant out of wedlock. One of her texts which caused controversy on the pages of *Women's Movement* was published in 1927 in issue 16. This text, entitled “Borba protiv kazne za odbacivanje ploda” [“Struggle against punishment for rejecting the fetus”] (Hlapec Đorđević, 1927), was written as a review of a book by Helene Stöcker, a German feminist who advocated for legislation changes in Germany. The most important point that Julka Hlapec Djordjević singled out from the demands of German feminists, considering that it was of exceptional importance for Yugoslav society, was the economic aspect. She argued that women are not driven to abortion because of their recklessness or corruption, but by necessity and force majeure; she effectively concluded that “no one, neither the state nor an individual, has the right to force women to give birth until she and her child are provided with a fair name and a carefree and happy life” (Hlapec Đorđević, 1927, p. 4). She also pointed out that the public mainly learns about abortion cases that end with the mother's death, which is still a small percentage of the total number of illegal abortions, and she emphasized that poor women are particularly affected.

Julka Hlapec Djordjević returned to these topics devotedly during the entire interwar period. For example, in her essay “Reforma seksualne etike i ravnopravnost žene” [The Reform of Sexual Ethics and Women's Equality], published in the book *Studije i eseji o feminizmu* [Studies and Essays about Feminism] from 1935, she wrote:

The newspapers bring daily news about the suicide of young women, infanticide, fatal abortions. Although it is generally known that in eighty percent of cases, the catastrophe occurs due to the negligence of the man in question – the evasion of the obligations which are the consequences of a man's act (...). In many nations, nothing is being done to disable this brutality or, at least, to reduce it to a minimum by legal measures. (Hlapec Đorđević, 1935, pp. 115–116)

After that, she continues on the fate of illegitimate children: “The history of illegitimate children is very sad and disgusting. The martyrdom of an illegitimate mother does not serve the honor of humanity” (Hlapec Đorđević, 1935, p. 116). As one of the key points that enable and maintain this situation, Julka Hlapec Djordjević recognizes the legal regulations that enable male supremacy based on biological superiority, about which she wrote:

Legal orders affect our opinions, feelings and will; their purpose is not only to punish and to regulate, but also to educate. Since there is no social compulsion for a man to acknowledge his child, it means that he has, objectively speaking, no moral obligations, only economic obligations in certain cases. However, it would be worth emphasizing exactly the social and ethical significance of the paternity of an illegitimate child, in terms of not only obligations but also rights. (Hlapec Đorđević, 1935, p. 116)

Julka Hlapec Djordjevic, therefore, believed that a change in legislation was necessary to bring about any change in the solutions to these problems. New legal regulations, despite all these forms of struggle, would come only decades later after the Second World War and the communist-socialist revolution, and after the change of the government and state system in Yugoslavia.

Abortion in literature

In parallel with the strong feminist movement, during the first half of the 20th century, and especially in the period between the two world wars, a large number of women writers and artists in general were active on the literary and art scenes. The strong feminist movement influenced women's creativity both quantitatively and qualitatively. Social issues were very often the themes of literary works. As has already been said, the central "problematic issues" in public, i.e., in the press, included birth control, issues related to the status of illegitimate children, sexual relations before marriage, legal regulations concerning the investigation and acknowledgment of paternity, prostitution, as well as the legal termination of pregnancy, i.e., abortion. However, despite the presence of these issues in the feminist press, topics related to women's sex lives were generally taboo, and in the 1920s and 1930s there was only a gradual liberation when it came to their literary and artistic treatment in general. Thus, even though these topics were primarily represented in the feminist press, according to research by historians of everyday life, sexuality, and especially premarital and extramarital sex in the interwar period, was "quite a taboo" (Marković, 2007, p. 112). Women were also mostly uneducated about sexual and hygienic habits. It was only in the early 1940s that Yugoslav society got its first sexologist, Aleksandar Kostić, and domes-

tic and translated books that scientifically and popularly thematized sexual issues and topics appeared in bookstores.¹¹

As much as writing about abortion was represented in the feminist press, it is very surprising that we have only a few literary texts about this topic. So, literary treatments of the topic of abortion are very important. According to the research conducted so far, the only short story from the corpus of women's prose of the interwar period which has abortion as its central theme (illegal, at home) is "Aneta" ["Aneta"] by Andjelija Lazarević. There are other short stories and especially novels (for example, *Vera Novakova* [*Vera Novakova*] by Marica Vujković, *Kajin put* [*Kaya's Way*] by Milka Žicina, *Otmica muškarca* [*The Abduction of The Man*] by Milica Jakovljević Mir Jam) in which abortion is mentioned and addressed to some extent, but "Aneta" is the only work in which abortion is in the center of the narrative as the main event.

Andjelija Lazarević (1885–1926)¹² was a painter, writer, and daughter of the famous Serbian writer and psychiatrist Laza Lazarević. Her body of work is quantitatively small but qualitatively uniform and significant. During her life, she published exclusively in magazines, and the vast majority of her articles were published in the literary magazine *Misao* [*Thought*].¹³ Her first book *Palanka u planini i Lutanja* [*Small Town in the Mountain and Wander-*

¹¹ During the 1930s, the Serbian society got its first sexologist, Dr. Aleksandar Kostić, who supported emancipatory practice in public, speaking openly about the topics of sex, physiology of the sexual organs and reproductive health. Also, a large number of books and articles in the press show that sexuality had become a topic. "The preface to the third edition of *Polni život čoveka* [*The Sexual Life of Man*] testifies that sexuality has become a topic which is read and discussed. This preface lists 42 titles of books published in our country in the period from 1919 to 1935 that referred to the problems of sexuality, marriage and free love. As early as 1925, the book *Ljubav u braku* [*Love in Marriage*] by Marie Stopes was translated into Serbian, which, among other things, gave very detailed advice and instructions on how to improve the sexual life of spouses. Napredak Bookstore printed a special edition of 'Seksualna biblioteka' ['Sexual Library'], in which twenty-six titles were advertised in 1935, including the books *Iz seksualnog vaspitanja*, *Ljubavne veštine*, *O polnom prohtevu*, *Prostitucija*, *Kako će se žena sačuvati od začeca i trudnoće*, *Zašto žena postaje neverna* [*From Sex Education, Love Skills, About Sexual Desire, Prostitution, How a Woman Will Be Saved from Conception and Pregnancy, Why does a Woman Become Unfaithful*]..." (Vučetić, 2007, p. 142).

¹² About Andjelija Lazarević, see *Anđelija Lazarević*, n.d.

¹³ *Thought* magazine was one of the leading literary magazines in the period between the two world wars in the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes / Yugoslavia. It was edited for a long time by famous writers Sima Pandurović and Velimir Živojinović.

ings] (1926) was published only posthumously, with a foreword by Belgrade University professor, literary critic, and historian Pavle Popović.

Andjelija Lazarević's quantitatively small body of work is a complete and homogeneous whole. Her prose is characterized by heroes who are unable to achieve happiness, and the general atmosphere is marked by melancholy, gloomy landscapes, and insufficiently realized lives.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned short story "Aneta", with its central radical theme, stands out not only from the work of this author but also from the work of Yugoslav women's interwar prose in general. This short story was first published in the magazine *Thought* in 1924 (Lazarević, 1924). Its central theme is the fate of a young woman Aneta, who lives in a small coastal town in Dalmatia (an area in Croatia). The main framework of the plot is her relationship with a young man called Pjero, with whom she becomes pregnant. Pjero is portrayed as an almost typical young seducer. The main point of the dramatic conflict is Pjero's decision that he does not want to take responsibility for Aneta's pregnancy, even though he knows that he is the father of the child. As already said, girls in a similar situation as Aneta were left to look after themselves and often experienced public condemnation and humiliation. Extramarital children did not have any rights, nor were women who raised children born out of wedlock secured in any way, thus there was no institutional support, and often support was lacking in the immediate environment. The story, in parallel with the main plot, shows the fate of another girl, Marta Bep, who decided to have children out of wedlock and whose life story illustrates all of the above. This girl, to whom men go when they want sexual intercourse, is portrayed as a person on the edge of insanity, exposed to general ridicule and essentially excluded from society. Because of this, she suffers verbal and physical violence in this small community. Marta's destiny is a mirror in which the title character Aneta sees her future if she decides to give birth to a child without a father. Since she fails to find a solution to her situation, and in fear of public condemnation and exclusion from the community, Aneta tries to commit suicide in complete despair and in a moment of extreme weakness. After an unsuccessful attempt, she undergoes an illegal abortion at home that is performed by her aunt, with whom she lives. Thanks to the affection of her aunt and her neighbor Gluvi Toma [Deaf Toma] (who saved her after the suicide attempt), Aneta escaped a dramatic life situation, seemingly unharmed: the abortion went well, her aunt did not drive her out of the house, and very few people knew about the situation she found herself in, therefore she could

get on with her own life. However, Aneta's psychological trauma is deep, and her relationship with Pjero turns out to be difficult to escape from, even though she is aware of how she is subordinate in this relationship. The story does not resolve the life drama of the main character. At the end of the story, Aneta disappears and chases after Pjero into the night, driven by irrational desire and lust to sexually surrender to him again.

In this story, Andjelija Lazarević thematized two taboo topics: abortion and suicide. Due to her treatment of these topics, the short story about Aneta has a privileged place in her work, and the narrative strategies used by this author, which are not typical of her writing, indicate that this is an unusual prose achievement. Andjelija Lazarević practically sets two precedents: first, this is her only story entitled with a female name; second, this is the only story with a female main character that is completely told in the third person.¹⁴ Other stories whose protagonist is female are told mostly in the first-person singular. The homodiegetic narrator which is focalized through the main characters indicates the biographical basis of the narration, i.e., autofiction, a form extensively used by female authors in the first half of the 20th century. By abandoning the first-person singular, Andjelija Lazarević minimized the possibility of a biographical interpretation of this story, which is very understandable considering the topic. However, another narrative decision – the eponym as the title of the story – strengthened the focus on the female experience, i.e., it indicated that we read the female perspective, the female destiny, because the use of personal names in titles is “an indicator that a character dominates in the work” (Abbott, 2009, p. 211). As the title suggests, the narration will be focused on the heroine Aneta, all the events will be centered around her personality, and all the other characters in the story are there to portray Aneta's life situation as impressively as possible. The behavior of the main heroine is in contrast to this narrative focus: unlike the noisy inhabitants of the seaside town, she is silent almost all the time. Aneta's world is shown, yet she does not talk about it: she only observes it and moves through it. She does not speak for or fight for herself. Her voice was taken away from her and readers only get indirect information that Aneta told Pjero or her aunt about the pregnancy.

¹⁴ *Small town in the Mountain*, a prose work by Andjelija Lazarević, which in terms of genre can be characterized as being between a short story and a short novel, also has an extradiegetic, objective narrator, but in the center of the plot is a man, the main character Vladimir Stanojević.

Her silence may suggest, on one hand, the general passive position that women have in patriarchal society and culture, but it could also represent a real lack of a voice, i.e., a lack of choice, even in a situation that is so dramatic and fatal for the life of a young girl. One of the rare sentences that Aneta utters is “Yes, I’m sick”, and she says it only to confirm a curious female acquaintance’s statement that she “looks unwell”. At that moment, she is not physically ill, but she is in a psychologically difficult condition because she finds herself in a hopeless position, compelled to choose between an illegitimate child, an illegal abortion, or suicide. Aneta is not the only person in the small fishing village who got pregnant out of wedlock, which points to the conclusion that this is a widespread phenomenon. There is a similar example in her environment: the aforementioned Marta Bep and her children remind her again and again of the kind of life she could have if she gives birth to an unrecognized child. Pjero is depicted as a typical seducer, a young fisherman who causes local women to sigh and go down to the docks to see him. The answer that Pjero gives to Aneta is typical of a (irresponsible) seducer: “These are women’s things, try to get rid of it. What can I do now?” (Lazarević, 2011, p. 51). Typical women’s behavior, in that case, is consenting to sexual intercourse to prove her love for her seducer because he kept telling her that he did not know if she loved him. The contempt that Pjero has for Aneta’s condition, as well as the hypocritical satisfaction that can be read on his face after seeing that Aneta’s body has not changed, are very impressively shown with a few words. The whole story is realized by an extremely reduced minimalistic narrative; however, exactly in this reduction, in the silences that occur between sentences, Andjelija Lazarević masterfully builds the atmosphere of anxiety and despair that Aneta feels all the time. The story opens with a picture of a fishing net. This introductory scene is an allusion to Aneta’s entrapment in the network of events that will follow, and if we went even further in interpreting this allusion, we could say that the net from the beginning of the story symbolizes the captivity of women in a system of unjust patriarchy.

How unusual the theme of this story is – not only in the work of Andjelija Lazarević but in Yugoslav women’s interwar literature in general – is also evidenced by the assessment that the writer Milica Janković (who was fond of Andjelija Lazarević and was her friend) gives it. She assesses that “Aneta” is weaker than Andjelija Lazarević’s other stories because she writes about something she does not know enough about (Janković, 1926, p. 429), and she concludes that despite the idea that was “discreetly and originally” communicated (Janković, 1926,

p. 429), this topic is “too difficult for such a subtle writer” (Janković, 1926, p. 430). Milica Janković herself also dealt with the topic of extramarital pregnancy and a child in the short story “Derište” [“Brat”] (Janković, 1927). In this story, the female narrator tries to persuade a pregnant young woman to marry quickly so the child would not be born out of wedlock.

Using literary discourse, Andjelija Lazarević dealt in this short story with all the points that the feminist press singled out as the feminist interwar public’s main subjects of discussion about extramarital sex and abortion, which I analyzed in the previous section of this paper in the context of Julka Hlapec Djordjević’s texts. In addition to the exceptional composition of the story and the symbolic details in it, Andjelija Lazarević spoke more about the specific problems of girls in the interwar era than in her other stories. The secondary heroine of this story, Marta, illustrates the exclusion of women who have decided to give birth to an illegitimate child, but she also shows their ignorance and lack of emancipation regarding the possibility of contraception. The narrative concentration on Aneta’s psychological states shows the emotional breakdown of a girl who, feeling pressured by the traditional moral norms that she has adopted as her principles, feels the complete hopelessness of the situation, thus leading her to the suicide attempt. The parallel presentation of the fates of these two women even more emphasizes not only the tragedy of life’s destinies and the hopelessness that results from ignorance and lack of education, but also the unwritten rules of social communities and legal norms.

Conclusion

Despite the significant engagement of Yugoslav feminists in the interwar period to improve the position and rights of women, most rights and freedoms were legally regulated after the Second World War and the socialist revolution. At that time, women had the same legal rights as men, which was primarily concretized by the general voting right (1946). The right to abortion on demand during the first trimester of pregnancy was given to Yugoslav women in the early 1950s (1952) with the introduction of a new set of laws. Although this was the only medical service that was paid for, the legalization of abortion was a major step forward for the position and rights of women in Yugoslavia (see Dobrivojević, 2016).

In countries that were part of Yugoslavia before the civil wars and the disintegration of the country in the 1990s, abortion regulations remained the same as they were in the socialist period. It can be said with certainty that socialist state policy is responsible for the fact that the women of the former Yugoslavia today have the right and the opportunity to terminate an unwanted pregnancy at their request. Nevertheless, every day we witness how difficult it is for this right to be realized in specific cases. Except for Slovenia, it seems that in all other former Yugoslav republics this right is more or less endangered or increasingly difficult to access. As a rule, the more conservative and traditional a state policy is, including the greater influence of the church in society, the harder it is for the right to abortion to be realized. The most common primary obstacles to abortion care are economic (high abortion costs), followed by other disruptive factors.

Examples from Croatia, Northern Macedonia, and Serbia show some of the more or less subtle methods of suspending abortion on demand. In Croatia, there is the institution of “conscientious objection”, which is increasingly used, especially in state hospitals, while in private clinics the prices of gynecological services, including abortion, are growing from year to year. Thus, doctors very often refuse to perform an abortion on request under conscientious objection; indeed, there are hospitals in Croatia where all gynecologists have invoked such objections and have thus practically abolished this procedure in their institutions (Lasić, 2019). North Macedonia is an excellent example that shows how much the right to abortion depends on the ideology and policy of the ruling party. During the rule of the conservative government led by VMRO-DPMNE, the procedure for the realization of abortion was changed (2013). Thus, the regulations from the time of socialism, when abortion was performed without delay at the request of a woman, were changed to make abortion more difficult. The new legal solution has added three new procedures: a woman must request an abortion in written form during a consultation with a doctor which is organized by him/her; the doctor must show her a picture of the fetus and an ultrasound of the heartbeat; and a mandatory period of three days between consultation and abortion has been introduced. In addition, the procedure for proving rape, after which abortion can be conducted, has been made more difficult as a multi-level commission and prosecutors now have to decide on this issue (Evrosimoski, 2016). After the change of government in Northern Macedonia in 2019, amendments to the law were passed which abolished/alleviated some of these procedures and made a woman’s statement sufficient in the case of rape (*Makedonski parlament usvojio niz progresivnih izmjena u zakon o abortusu*, 2019).

In Serbia, by promoting population policy under the pretext of falling birth rates, “white plague” and “the dying out of the nation”, the right to abortion is increasingly being questioned. A campaign from 2018 became famous when a competition was announced with cash prizes for incentivizing slogans that would promote childbirth. This action was organized by the then-existing Savet za populacionu politiku [Council for Population Policy], and it caused significant controversy among the public. Slogans were judged as part of this competition, among which the most resonant were *Enough words, let it cry, Give birth, don't delay, and Mom – I don't want to be alone, Dad – I want a brother*.¹⁵ On the other hand, one of the most impressive moments in the long-standing controversy on this issue was the action of the “purple apron” feminists on 7/8 March 2019, which caused great controversy in the public: purple aprons with messages-slogans concerning women's rights were hung on the monuments of prominent figures in Serbian history (Tesla, Josif Pančić, Dositej Obradović). On that occasion, a purple apron with the inscription *Abortion is a woman's right* was hung on the monument of Patriarch Pavle. It was this apron that produced the greatest “public disturbance”, so this act was declared by government officials to “desecrate of the character and deeds of the deceased patriarch” (this attribution was formulated by the then and current president of Koordinaciono telo za rodnu ravnopravnost Vlade Republike Srbije [Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Serbia] (sic!)). (*Kecelje na spomenicima*, 2019; Stevanović, 2019) Discussions about abortion in the public discourse in the Serbian media have not stopped, and most often the voices that threaten this right are the most present and strongest. In the meantime, with the last convocation of the Government, the Ministarstvo za demografiju i brigu o porodici [Ministry of Demography and Family Care] was established in the Republic of Serbia, whose leaders, among whom the minister stands out, represent distinctly traditional views on the issue of the family and the role and place of women in society.

All these examples show unfavorable social tendencies regarding the position and rights of women, i.e., the instability of already acquired and legally regulated rights. Like their predecessors and comrades from the first half of the 20th century, contemporary feminists from the countries of the former Yugoslavia are fighting for (preserving) the right to abortion. They warn again of the fact that the new more-restrictive regulations mostly affect those women who are already

¹⁵ In Serbian: *Dosta reči, nek zakmeči, Rađaj, ne odgađaj* and *Mama – neću sama, tata – hoću brata* (*Izabrani slogani protiv 'bele kuge'*, 2018).

disenfranchised in other fields, who are poor, insufficiently educated, already socio-economically vulnerable, or who are victims of domestic violence.

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Lekcja z przeszłości. Prawo do aborcji w trzech obrazach

Punktem wyjścia w artykule jest aktualna sytuacja w kilku krajach dotycząca zakazu lub zezwolenia na aborcję. Równoległe z pandemią, czyli kryzysem COVID-19 w krajach europejskich, następuje również kryzys praw i wolności kobiet. W ramach wywalczonych już praw i wolności oraz w wyniku tradycjonalizacji polityki państwa prawo do aborcji jest najbardziej zagrożone w czasie kryzysów. Aby pokazać, jak mogłaby wyglądać walka o prawa kobiet, posłużono się przykładem z przeszłości dotyczącym walki kobiet jugosłowiańskich o prawo do aborcji w latach 20. i 30. XX wieku. Analizie poddane zostały trzy kwestie: 1) prawne uregulowanie prawa do aborcji, 2) dyskusja na ten temat w czasopiśmie „*Ženski pokret*” [„Ruch kobiet”] (1920–1938), 3) temat aborcji w literaturze.

Słowa kluczowe: pandemia COVID-19, prawo do aborcji, Jugosławia (1918–1941), *Ženski pokret* (1920–1938), Julka Hlapec Djordjević, Andjelija Lazarević

Lessons from the past: The right to abortion in three pictures

The starting point in this paper is the current situation in several countries regarding the prohibition or permission of abortion. In parallel with the pandemic, i.e., the COVID-19 crisis in European countries, there is also a crisis of women’s rights and freedoms. Within the already won rights and freedoms, and as a consequence of the traditionalization of state policies, the right to abortion is most endangered during crises. To show what the struggle for women’s rights might look like, an example from the past is taken: the struggle of Yugoslav women for the right to abortion during the 1920s and 1930s. Three aspects are analyzed: 1) the legal regulation of the right to abortion, 2) the discussion regarding this issue in the *Ženski pokret* [Women’s Movement] (1920–1938) journal, and 3) the topic of abortion in literature.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, right to abortion, Yugoslavia (1918–1941), *Ženski pokret* (1920–1938), Julka Hlapec Djordjević, Andjelija Lazarević

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