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ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ

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International Networks of Women's Activism and Mobility in East Central Europe and South Eastern Europe, 1848–1945

Dóra Fedeles-Czeferner
Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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International Networks of Women's Activism and Mobility in East Central Europe and South Eastern Europe, 1848–1945

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Until the new millennium, historical scholarship focused primarily on women and women's movements within national frameworks. Even in 2017, Francisca de Haan argued that “many feminist historians today continue to work within the national paradigm.”¹ As she observed in 2013, however, historians have started to explore inter/transnational dimensions of the history of feminism and women's movements, due in no small part to the rise of post-colonial and transnational perspectives in historiography since the 1980s and 1990s.² A growing number of scholars agree with her entirely on the necessity of the inter/transnational perspectives, as feminism and women's movements did not operate in isolation within national borders. What is indisputable is that women's history and gender studies have undoubtedly become one of the fastest growing domains of contemporary cultural and social research, especially in Western Europe and in North America.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, more and more transnational links were formed between individual women and different types of women's associations.³ As Francisca de Haan again observes, the inter/transnational dimensions of the women's movements were of key importance since this time. This internationalization can be explained partly with the congresses and other formal and informal meetings of transnational women's associations, such as the International Council of Women (1888–, Washington, D.C.), the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (1904–, Berlin, since 1926 the International Alliance

1 Haan, “Writing Inter/Transnational History.” Rupp, “Constructing Internationalism.”

2 Haan et al, *Women's Activism*, 2. Papers in this volume examine “how women in a variety of contexts and at different levels since the 1890s have challenged oppressive systems and worked for social justice.” They also focus on women in movements and associations.

3 Haan, “Writing Inter/Transnational History.” As de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis and Krassimira Daskalova highlight in the introduction of their edited volume, “‘women’ are not a unitary category, and [...] their national and transnational activism has both challenged and reproduced existing power structures and institutions.” Haan et al, *Women's Activism*, 2.

of Women), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1915–, The Hague). These meetings provided not only information but also inspiration and support for the national women's associations that took part.⁴

Leila J. Rupp asks the following questions in her 2010 paper, in which she examines the construction of the aforementioned international organizations and seeks the prospects and limits of internationalism: "What drew women together across the borders of nationality? Who fell within the circle of we? What did it mean to profess ties across national, ethnic, and other identities?"⁵ As de Haan notes, membership in this kind of international community gave activists self-assurance in their attempts to face challenges in their own countries, and it also created conditions within which it was possible for them to take their cases to international forums, as is made plainly evidence in the articles in this special issue. This way of thinking is also mirrored in the structure of the international organizations, as each had national organizations with additional local auxiliaries. In this context, de Haan also points out that these "national building blocks [...] may even have strengthened the nationalization of women's movements by encouraging women to form national organizations."⁶

This special issue aims to explore women's activism in East Central Europe (along with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its successor states) and South Eastern Europe between 1848 and 1990. It investigates the history and (inter)national networks of contacts of these regions' women's associations and studies the activism of their leaders through the second half of the nineteenth century until the end of the 1940s and over the rise and fall of various political regimes. The contributions transgress state borders which historically separated different activists and activisms. They adopt an interdisciplinary approach, examining the relationships among the local, national, and transnational/international dynamics of women's activism.

Many people inaccurately still believe that feminism never existed in East Central Europe or South Eastern Europe. Consequently, a large part of writings on women's movements and feminism focus only on the period after 1989 without examining their roots at the turn of the twentieth century. In a 2008 article, de Haan examined the historical and political factors that might explain why the study of women's history, particularly the history of women's movements, has been underdeveloped in this region of Europe. She also

4 Haan, "Writing Inter-/Transnational History."

5 Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism."

6 Haan, "Writing Inter-/Transnational History."

elaborated on the negative effects of this lack of attention and proposed ways to remedy the situation. Her central point was that a “lack of knowledge about past women’s movements and feminists cannot inspire and empower contemporary women and men; the complete misconception and caricatures of past and present feminists in the media and in popular discourse cannot be effectively challenged, which in turn means that these caricatures continue to be effective weapons against contemporary feminists.”⁷

To this day, very few sustained efforts have been made to address this lacuna in the secondary literature. The 2006 project at the CEU Gender Studies Department is unique. As a result of this project, a lexicon was published that included biographies of 150 women activists from 22 countries. The articles included sources and bibliographies. At the time of its publication, its editors were motivated by books appearing in the early 2000s the titles of which had promised overviews of the history of European women but which in point of fact passed over the Central and Eastern Europe (almost) entirely.⁸ The next groundbreaking volume was published at the end of 2024. It was edited by Zsófia Lóránd, Adela Hincu, Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, and Katarzyna Stańczak-Wislicz. This volume contains 100 sources, which are preceded by an introduction and short biographies of the authors of these writings. It also offers a selection of the most representative texts on feminism and women’s rights in East Central Europe during the interwar period and the Cold War era.⁹ Thirdly, *Aspasia*, one of the most significant peer-reviewed journal in this field since 2007, focuses on the women’s and gender history of Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe. Over the course of the roughly two decades that have elapsed since its founding, it has served as a crucial platform for scholars from this region to share their work, offering discussions of diverse topics, historical periods, methodologies, and approaches. These very important initiatives are clearly not enough, however, to compensate for the persistent gaps in the secondary literature on the subject in this region. This special issue makes a significant contribution and helps to fill these gaps.

The first contribution, “Women’s History in Greece through *The Ladies’ Journal* of Kallirhoe Siganoú-Parren: Class, National Identity, and Reformist Activism in the Formation of Women’s Associations (1887–1917)” by Marina Bantiou, analyzes how a Greek journal cultivated a gendered historical

7 Haan, “On retrieving.”

8 Haan et al, *A Biographical Dictionary*.

9 Lóránd et al, *Texts and Contexts*.

consciousness. By giving attention and discursive space to historical female figures, the journal sought to legitimize women's public roles within the framework of patriotic maternalism. This clearly demonstrates how activism can be rooted in nationalist ideology while also reflecting transnational influences. The second article, "Austro-Hungarian Women's Activism from the Southern 'Periphery' Across Ethnic Lines" by Agatha Schwartz, examines the complex local, regional, and trans-regional aspects of women's organizing in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Through the lives of four activists from different ethnic groups, it demonstrates how women's public work contributed to the improvement of their status, even when they were not directly involved in the struggle for political rights.

In the third article, "Phantom Borders and Nostalgia: German Women's Associations in the Second Polish Republic after 1918," Paula Lange explores German women's associations in the Second Polish Republic. Lange reveals how these groups, which had become part of a national minority, adapted to new political realities, showing how women's activities occurred in ever-changing social and imagined spaces. The contribution by Zsuzsa Bokor, titled "Adrift on the Periphery: The Alternative Development of Hungarian Women's Organizations in Interwar Transylvania," examines Hungarian women's organizations in interwar Transylvania, revealing how these organizations developed hybrid models of emancipation. Her discussion highlights the complex interplay of gender, ethnicity, and politics in the post-Treaty of Trianon context.

In her paper "'Terror against Women': The Struggle of 'Red' Women at the Beginning of the Nazi Era: Between Invisibility and Solidarity," Anna Veronica Pobbe focuses on the resistance efforts of "red" women at the beginning of the Nazi era. She sheds light on the often invisible solidarity among and bravery of communist women who were seen as a threat to the state. Her discussion highlights a form of activism that was not about organized political rights but about a more fundamental struggle for existence and community protection. In the last contribution, titled "The Journalistic Activity of Rosika Schwimmer from the 1890s until Her Death in a Transnational Perspective," Dóra Fedeles-Czeferner offers an examination from a transnational perspective of the career of a prominent Hungarian feminist activist and pacifist. She examines the ways in which Schwimmer used journalism as a tool for activism and self-promotion, despite the challenges and political isolation she faced. This article highlights the importance of the press as a platform for women's voices and the personal costs of such public work.

The six texts are interconnected in their shared focus on how women's activism was shaped by and responded to the tumultuous political and social landscapes of East Central Europe and Southern Eastern Europe. They all move beyond a narrow (national/political) focus on suffrage to reveal a broader spectrum of women's engagement, from journalism and social welfare to ethnic self-defense and anti-fascist resistance. Furthermore, several of the articles, particularly those by Bokor, Lange, and Schwartz, explore the critical impact of "phantom borders" and shifting national identities on women's organizing, showing how ethnicity and nationalism were not just backdrops but integral components of the struggles for recognition and agency.

The discussions in this special issue further a more nuanced understanding of women's activism in East Central Europe and Southern Eastern Europe. They also shed light on the ties between women's movements and nation building projects in the often multiethnic settings of the region. This issue further suggests, as de Haan has done with her research, the importance of "decentralizing" the scholarship on the history of women's movements and women's activism.¹⁰ It thus seeks to encourage the more vigorous and intensive inclusion of East Central European and South Eastern European regions in this scholarship as an essential complement to the continued focus on the countries of the West. It thereby echoes the urgings made almost two decades ago by Deborah Simonton, who explained that, although post-colonial and transnational approaches took root in the 1990s, experts on the subject of women's activism continue to wrestle with fact that the European/global perspective does not mean simply the study of shifts and events in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. In 2006, Simonton warned that more intense inclusion of research on Northern Europe and Central Eastern Europe should be delayed no further.¹¹ As I have noted in this introduction, progress has unquestionably been made in this area over the course of the past two decades, but historians still have a lot of work to do to make women's history of this region internationally visible. This special issue is an important contribution to this effort. We are aware, however, that further contributions require not only sedulous research and a strong knowledge of several languages, but also the support of foreign publishers and a significant amount of funding.

10 Haan, "On retrieving," 65–78.

11 Simonton, *The Routledge History*, 1–14.

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Women's History in Greece through *The Ladies' Journal* of Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren: Class, National Identity, and Reformist Activism in the Formation of Women's Associations (1887–1917)

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This paper investigates how *The Ladies' Journal* (*Efimeris ton Kyrion*), edited by Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren between 1887 and 1917, constructed a gendered historical consciousness and mobilized national history as a vehicle for women's civic inclusion in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece. Through a qualitative content and discourse analysis of selected articles from the journal's complete digitized archive, the study examines how Parren strategically invoked historical female figures, from classical Antiquity to the Greek War of Independence and the Byzantine era, to legitimize women's public roles within a framework of patriotic maternalism and bourgeois respectability. These representations restored women to history and actively recast historical memory as a tool for moral instruction, civic pedagogy, and reformist activism. While rooted in nationalist ideology, the journal's narratives also reflected transnational influences through Parren's engagement with international feminist networks and suffrage congresses. The article argues that this hybrid mode of popular historiography simultaneously enabled middle-class women's symbolic integration into the nation and reinforced prevailing class and gender hierarchies. Ultimately, it situates *The Ladies' Journal* as a formative site for the articulation of women's associative practices and reformist discourse, while also critically assessing its role in shaping the terms and limits of female civic identity.

Keywords: women's history in Greece, Kallirhoe Parren, *Ephimeris ton Kyrion*, feminist historiography, Greek women's associations, maternalism, Greek feminist movement

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, the rise of the middle class and Greece's irredentist ambitions led to a redefinition of womanhood. Emphasis was placed on women's domestic and maternal responsibilities as key to nurturing virtuous citizens, while this shift, driven by the nationalistic "Great Idea" (*Megáli Idéa*) extended women's roles into the public sphere, where they became instrumental in supporting the state's mission through activities such as fundraising and

collaborating with international women's organizations.¹ Among them, Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren (1861–1940) played a catalytic role in shaping the discursive and organizational foundations of women's reformist activism.² Through *The Ladies' Journal* (*Ephimeris ton Kyrion*), the first Greek periodical edited by and for women, Parren advanced a vision of civic motherhood and gendered patriotism that sought to reconcile female emancipation with dominant national ideologies. While scholars such as Angelika Psarra and Eleni Varika have examined Parren's nationalist maternalism and her reformist approach to women's roles,³ this article extends the discussion by analyzing how women's historical narratives functioned as ideological instruments within her editorial strategy.

Rather than reasserting Parren's ideological framework as such, this study offers a systematic content and discourse analysis of *The Ladies' Journal*, with a focus on how its historical representations constructed a usable past that legitimated women's participation in public life. Drawing on the complete digitized archive of the journal (1887–1917), I examine the selection, rhetoric, and thematic organization of articles published by Parren and her collaborators on historical female figures, national heroines, intellectuals, and empresses. These representations served not only to restore women to the national narrative but also to define a specific, class-bound model of female citizenship that reinforced gender hierarchies even as it proposed incremental reforms.

By contextualizing these representations within the broader social and political transformations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece, this article analyzes how *The Ladies' Journal* operated as a platform of reformist activism rooted in women's networks, educational philanthropy, and international feminist exchange. Particular attention is given to the interplay between history-writing and associational culture: how the journal's narratives about women's pasts shaped the founding ethos of institutions such as the Union for Women's Emancipation (Ένωση υπέρ της Χειραφετήσεως των Γυναικών) (1893), the Union of Greek Women (Ένωση των Ελληνίδων) (1896), and the Lyceum of Greek Women (Λύκειο Ελληνίδων) (1911). The goal is to reassess Parren's contribution

1 Avdela and Psarra, "Engendering 'Greekness,'" 69–79.

2 While the terms feminism and activism are used throughout this article, they are understood in their historically specific context. During the period under discussion, these concepts were not fully developed or uniformly applied. Parren herself rarely used the term feminist before the twentieth century, and her reformist vision was often framed in terms of civic motherhood, philanthropy, and moral uplift rather than explicit political rights. Therefore, the use of these terms in this article denotes emerging discourses of women's public engagement, rather than fully formed political ideologies.

3 See e.g. Varika, "La révolte des dames"; Psarra, "Few Women Have History."

to Greek women's history and illuminate the ways in which historiographical practices themselves were mobilized as instruments of activism. In this regard, the article also contributes to the broader historiography of women's movements in Europe by situating the Greek case within the transnational networks of the period. It argues that Parren's engagement with international congresses and suffrage alliances helped shape a model of activism that was both embedded in national narratives and transnationally informed. Yet, this model remained restricted by class, education, and cultural capital, raising critical questions about the inclusivity of early women's organizations and the boundaries of what we define as activism.

Historical and Ideological Background

In Greece at the turn of the twentieth century, the terms "feminism" and "emancipation" carried specific meanings. "Feminism" had not yet been firmly associated with women's rights and was often used in male philogynic discourse, while "emancipation" referred to women's demands for economic independence through work and, to a lesser extent, political rights.⁴ Parren articulated a distinctly Greek version of emancipation, focusing not on women's political enfranchisement but on their empowerment through access to education and paid employment.⁵

The development of gender consciousness and the literary endeavors of women in nineteenth-century Greece constituted essential channels for the expression of aspirations concerning women's emancipation and challenges to patriarchal structures, especially among educated women in the educational sector, where their writings confronted the intricacies of social relations and offered a means to assert an independent female identity.⁶ Educated middle-class women began to articulate a shared gender identity and common interests, leading to the emergence of feminist consciousness.⁷ Nationalist discourse linked gender and nation, positioning women as essential to the civilizing mission of Hellenism, and women's education became critical in forming future citizens

4 See Giannati, "Εφημερίδες των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαραστάσεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί," 35, citing Psarra, "Το μυθιστόρημα της χειραφέτησης ή η 'συνετή' ουτοπία της Καλλιμρόης Παρρέν," and eadem, "Μητέρα ή πολίτις."

5 Ibid.

6 Varika, "Μια δημοσιογραφία στην υπηρεσία της γυναικείας φυλής," 6–7.

7 Varika, "La révolte des dames."

and teaching Hellenic virtues to “unredeemed” territories.⁸ To understand this linkage, it is essential to recognize a concurrent shift in the dominant educational and scientific discourses: women were no longer viewed solely through the lens of theological inferiority but rather as naturally distinct but equal to men, endowed with allegedly differentiated capabilities suited to specific social functions.

This emerging ideology, described by Varika and others as “equality in difference,” became a cornerstone of nationalist thinking.⁹ The doctrine of “equality in difference” framed women as biologically and emotionally distinct from men, confining them to the private sphere while assigning them a crucial yet subordinate role in nurturing male citizens to serve the nationalist aims of the Greek irredentist vision.¹⁰ Parren’s advocacy for women’s rights through *The Ladies’ Journal* remained embedded in this essentialist discourse, emphasizing education, work, and moral upliftment within strictly defined maternal and patriotic boundaries. Her vision did not challenge prevailing gender hierarchies but sought rather to reconfigure women’s roles to align more closely with the perceived needs of the nation.

In the late nineteenth century, although it seemed unimaginable that women’s history would become a serious scholarly pursuit in academic circles, first-wave feminists like Jenny P. d’Héricourt, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton asserted women’s claims to rights by writing historical accounts about women. Their work inspired Parren, who regularly attended international women’s congresses. Influenced by these pioneers, she ambitiously sought to write the “History of Woman from the Beginning of the World to Today” in 1889, a project that aimed to span various global civilizations and reflect on women’s historical roles.¹¹ Parren endeavored to integrate Greek women into the national historical narrative. To establish a feminist discourse in Greece, Parren and her collaborators engaged in a critical reexamination of history, particularly the portrayal of women in Greek myths and historical narratives.¹² They challenged the male-dominated construction of these stories, emphasizing the historical presence of strong female figures as both a source of pride for women and a vital tool for legitimizing Greek feminism within the national context.¹³

8 Avdela and Psarra, “Engendering ‘Greekness,’” 70.

9 Varika, “La révolte des dames.”

10 Papadogiannis, “Gender in modern Greek historiography,” 81.

11 Des Jardins, “Women’s and Gender History,” 138.

12 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

13 Ibid.

First-wave Greek feminists, while emphasizing their “Greekness” as a way of asserting their belonging within a distinct national community and positioning themselves as part of Greek history, maintained connections with Western feminism.¹⁴ Their involvement in national crises, especially during the 1897 Greek-Turkish war, was framed within an essentialist discourse linking women's political participation to their alleged bio-social roles, particularly motherhood, which was redefined as a patriotic duty that justified the gradual easing of their social exclusion.¹⁵ Psarra argues that Parren's work represented a pioneering attempt to construct a coherent women's history in Greece, utilizing the legitimizing discourse of history to empower the modern women's movement by framing Greek women as distinct historical agents capable of claiming their own collective identity and rights.¹⁶

By emphasizing women's roles and contributions, the journal sought to advance a discourse on women's rights¹⁷ and also to reframe dominant conceptions of national identity to include female experiences and perspectives. This intervention challenged prevailing historical narratives, which had long marginalized women's contributions. Parren strategically employed historical narratives to legitimize women's demands for social inclusion, presenting them as an integral part of the nation's civilizational and patriotic struggles. More specifically, she used history to legitimize the women's movement by positioning women as distinct historical agents who made their own contributions to civilization and national struggles, allowing them to demand inclusion in the national narrative and challenge traditional views of women's immobility, thereby empowering them to fight for their rights from a stronger position.¹⁸

However, as Psarra noted, this discourse primarily addressed women of Parren's own bourgeois class, or in other words educated, urban women whose social standing and educational capital enabled them to participate in the limited public sphere envisioned by the nationalist and reformist discourses of the era.¹⁹ Her historical representations thus did not seek to dismantle class or gender hierarchies but rather to insert a select group of women into the

14 Psarra, “A Gift from the New World,” 151–52.

15 Ibid.

16 Psarra, “Few Women Have History.”

17 For more on feminist discourse and national identity in Greece during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Lalagianni, “Conscience Féministe et Identité Nationale”; Lalagianni, “Les Origines du Discours Féministe en Grèce”; Anastasopoulou, “Feminist Discourse and Literary Representation.”

18 Psarra, “A Gift from the New World,” 151.

19 Psarra, “Μητέρα ή πολίτις;”

national narrative by appealing to maternalist and patriotic ideals.²⁰ In this way, women were “empowered” to act from within existing structures rather than radically to transform them. Even in her later interventions, such as during the First National Women’s Conference of 1921, Parren’s appeals to women’s civic roles remained couched in essentialist and conservative terms. Moreover, her alignment with institutions such as the Lyceum of Greek Women in the interwar period further reinforced a maternalist vision of women’s contributions to the nation, one rooted in idealized motherhood and middle-class domestic virtues rather than political or social radicalism. Her approach, though pioneering in form, ultimately reinscribed gender and class hierarchies under the guise of patriotic uplift. This ideological moderation should be understood in relation to broader political shifts in Greece. The Balkan Wars (1912–1913), the National Schism (1915–1917), and the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922) fundamentally transformed the national imaginary and created new tensions around the role of women in the civic sphere. While Parren’s 1880s–1890s activism emphasized reformist engagement rooted in education and philanthropy, by the 1920s, her alignment with the monarchy and her efforts to distance herself and her ideas from liberal and socialist feminist voices signaled a retreat into more conservative positions that prioritized cultural nationalism over political rights. Women’s rights advocates at the turn of the century, viewing political equality as a premature demand, argued that the granting of political rights should follow the securing of civil and social rights and thus refrained from explicitly articulating a claim for full political emancipation.²¹

To better situate Parren’s historical interventions within the broader trajectory of gender historiography in Greece, it is instructive briefly to consider the development of the field itself. In Greece, the study of “Women’s History” initially emerged in close connection with the post-1974 movement for women’s rights, which sought to reconstruct the collective memory of women’s struggles by tracing historical continuities of dissent and exploring the changing forms of gendered oppression within bourgeois society, particularly in the realms of family, education, labor, and politics.²² While early scholarship often emphasized these themes through the lens of ideological discourse and lived social realities,²³ subsequent decades witnessed a significant expansion of the field. The

20 Ibid.

21 Samiou, “Τα πολιτικά δικαιώματα των Ελληνίδων,” 167.

22 Avdela, “Η «ιστορία των γυναικών» στην Ελλάδα,” 171–73.

23 Ibid.

establishment of undergraduate and postgraduate programs focused on gender history in Greek universities has facilitated the diffusion of new methodological and theoretical approaches.²⁴ A key milestone in this evolution was the founding in 2007 of the *Historians for Research in the History of Women and Gender*, the Greek Committee of the International Federation for Research in Women's History (IFRWH).²⁵ This evolving scholarly context has reshaped the ways in which figures like Parren are interpreted, not only as national reformers but also as early agents in the construction of gendered historical consciousness.

Kallirhoe Siganou Parren and 'The Ladies' Journal

Born in Crete in 1861 and later acquiring a strong educational background, Parren served as the Director of girls' schools in Adrianople and Odessa before returning to Athens, where she married Ioannis Parren, a journalist and the founder of the Athens News Agency. This marriage immersed her in the social, political, and literary dynamics of her era, profoundly shaping her active involvement in journalism.²⁶

The inaugural issue of this magazine was released in Athens on March 8, 1887, priced at ten cents of the drachma and with an annual subscription fee of five drachmas for domestic readers. Over time, the journal cultivated a consistent group of approximately 18 female contributors, predominantly educators, and achieved a significant readership. Parren managed to establish a successful network of international collaboration and recognition among women, compensating for the lack of domestic acknowledgment of Greek feminists. With contributions by various intellectuals, feminists, and Greek women from the Diaspora, particularly from the United States and France, the paper gained prestige and fostered an important transnational exchange within the feminist movement.²⁷

The journal enjoyed extensive geographical distribution, drawing female subscribers from across the independent Greek state as well as from areas within the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, and the Aegean islands.²⁸ According to Varika,

24 Livaditi, "Initiatives on Gender History in Greece."

25 Ibid.

26 Giannati, "Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαράστασεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί," 30–31; Varika, "Μια δημοσιογραφία στην υπηρεσία της γυναικείας φυλής," 8.

27 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

28 Giannati, "Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαράστασεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί," 32.

statistics from the Ministry of Interior reveal that within the first six months of 1892, *The Ladies' Journal* ranked second in circulation among weekly publications, with 5,000 copies.²⁹ The journal included several unsigned articles authored by Parren.³⁰ For its first two decades, it was issued weekly, transitioning to a biweekly format after 1908, and ultimately going out of circulation in November 1917, after a total of 1,106 issues had gone to press.

As noted by Varika, *The Ladies' Journal* played a pivotal role in shaping Greek feminist consciousness and advancing the cause of women's emancipation.³¹ It fostered collective awareness of gender equality issues and disseminated ideas in support of women's rights, laying the foundations for the feminist movement in Greece. However, it carefully avoided demands for political rights, advocating a “moderate” form of emancipation that respected biological and social differences and emphasized women's roles in the national and familial spheres, with Parren calling for reforms in women's societal contributions based on a notion of patriotic motherhood.³²

Parren's contributions to the formation and expansion of women's associations in Greece were pioneering and reflect the multifaceted approach she adopted in advancing women's rights. In 1889, she established the first “Sunday School” (Σχολή της Κυριακής, απόρων γυναικών και κορασίδων) to address illiteracy among impoverished girls, followed by the founding of the Asylum of Saint Catherine (Άσυλο της Αγίας Αικατερίνης) in 1892, which provided shelter for young women migrating to Athens for work, and the Asylum for the Incurable in 1896.³³ After attending international feminist congresses in Chicago (1893) and Paris (1896), she founded the Union for Women's Emancipation (Ένωση υπέρ της Χειραφετήσεως των Γυναικών) and later the Union of Greek Women (Ένωση των Ελληνίδων), which played a critical role during the Greco-Turkish War.³⁴ In 1911, she established the Lyceum of Greek Women (Λύκειο Ελληνίδων).³⁵

Over the years, however, her engagement with the women's question became more aligned with conservative and nationalist frameworks, reflecting a gradual

29 Varika, *Η εξέγερση των Κοριών*, 279–88.

30 For more on Kallirhoe Parren's life and work see Psarra and Fournaraki “Callirhoe Parren”; Anastasopoulou, *Η συνετή απόστολος της γυναικείας χειραφεσίας*.

31 Ibid.

32 Avdela, “Between Duties and Rights,” 122–23.

33 Giannati, “Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαραστάσεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί,” 39–42.

34 Ibid.

35 Avdela, *Το Λύκειο των Ελληνίδων: 100 χρόνια*.

moderation of her earlier positions.³⁶ During World War I, Parren's anti-war stance, fueled by the unprecedented violence and her royalist sympathies, led her to align with Queen Sophia's pacifist efforts and reject the liberal Venizelist party.³⁷ Parren's support for the monarchy during the National Schism and her criticism of the war effort led to her exile in 1917.³⁸ This development, however, stemmed more from her political allegiances than from the impact of her activities, and it should not be conflated with her broader social influence or with the reception of her ideas among different segments of Greek society. Nevertheless, her prolonged absence from public life had a notable impact on the continuity of *The Ladies' Journal*, which was closely tied to her efforts as editor and her personal networks. The journal eventually ceased publication.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodological framework to analyze the ways in which *The Ladies' Journal* constructed and deployed narratives of women's history as tools for ideological and reformist activism. The research centers on articles authored or curated by Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren between 1887 and 1917, focusing specifically on narrative depictions of historical women, national heroines, empresses, and intellectuals. The study does not treat these depictions as objective historical reconstructions but rather as discursive interventions shaped by the ideological imperatives of gender, class, and nationalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece. The analysis is grounded in three interrelated methods: qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis. Content analysis enables a systematic examination of recurring subjects and figures within the corpus of *The Ladies' Journal*, identifying the frequency, selection, and narrative positioning of historical female protagonists. Thematic analysis is used to trace broader ideological patterns, such as civic maternalism, moral exemplarity, and patriotic motherhood that structure the journal's historical narratives. Articles were also coded for historical period (ancient, Byzantine, modern), figure type (war heroine, intellectual, empress, philanthropist), and narrative function (commemoration, exhortation, comparison with contemporary women). Discourse analysis complements these approaches by focusing on the rhetorical strategies and linguistic framing through

36 Psarra, "Μητέρα ή πολιτίς."

37 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

38 Ibid.

which Parren and her contributors shaped meaning, legitimacy, and audience reception. This combination of methods facilitates an interpretive reading of the journal's historiographical project as both a reflection of contemporary reformist thought and an instrument of cultural politics. The empirical base of the study is the complete digitized archive of *The Ladies' Journal*, which is held in Lekythos, the Institutional Repository of the University of Cyprus. The journal is housed within the digital collection "Greek Press and Diaries of the 19th and 20th Century," compiled and digitized by the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive. This corpus provides a continuous and comprehensive source of primary material over the journal's 30-year run, allowing for a longitudinal analysis of shifts in tone, content, and emphasis. The study also engages with Parren's wider activist work in women's associations as a means of contextualizing her editorial strategy. In this regard, the analysis traces how historical narratives in the journal were directly connected to the legitimization and mobilization of associative practices. The approach taken here is thus not only historical and textual but also socio-political, attentive to the intersections between editorial production, activist discourse, and national ideology. While Parren did not write as a professional historian, her work can be read as a form of popular historiography, characterized by a moralizing tone, selective biographies, and national romanticism. Rather than dismissing this work as non-scholarly, the article situates it as a gendered and classed mode of historical production, one that sought to insert women, particularly middle-class, educated women, into the symbolic fabric of the nation.

Women's Historical Representations and the Construction of Female Civic Identity

From its inception in 1887, *The Ladies' Journal* consistently featured articles, biographical sketches, and essays on prominent female figures drawn from Greek Antiquity, the Byzantine period, and the modern era. These portrayals were not only commemorative but also served a broader ideological function: to establish a civic genealogy of exemplary women whose lives could inspire contemporary readers and validate women's participation in public life. Drawing on both official historical sources and oral traditions, Parren articulated a historical continuum in which women were presented as agents of national service, moral fortitude, and intellectual capacity. Through this lens, the journal contributed to the construction of female civic identity by framing women's

historical contributions as foundational to the moral and cultural development of the Greek nation.

Parren sought to integrate Greek women into the narrative of the nation's history by highlighting the stories of significant historical female figures in the journal, employing the legitimizing discourse of history to foreground modern women's claims and rights.³⁹ Her portrayals emphasized traits such as patriotism, self-sacrifice, and moral leadership, aligning with contemporary ideals of "patriotic motherhood." This didactic use of history, shaped by the conventions of popular historical writing, provided a sense of historical continuity for women's claims to civic recognition. Importantly, her approach did not seek to dismantle existing gender norms but to reframe them. Parren asserted that traditional maternal and educational roles had intrinsic civic value and were indispensable for national regeneration. This position allowed her to advocate for women's inclusion in civic and political life while maintaining alignment with dominant nationalist narratives.

A recurrent theme in her historical writing was the valorization of female figures from the Greek War of Independence,⁴⁰ particularly the Souliot women.⁴¹ These women, who had defended their homeland against Ottoman forces in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, became a focal point in *The Ladies' Journal*. In an article from March 27, 1888, Parren commemorated their courage and sacrifice, portraying them as moral exemplars for modern Greek mothers.⁴² By invoking the image of women such as Moscho Tzavella⁴³ and Despo Botsi,⁴⁴ who were said to have resisted Ottoman forces heroically and even to have embraced martyrdom to avoid dishonor, Parren constructed a national-historical archetype rooted in maternal virtue and patriotic sacrifice. These figures were not framed as exceptional anomalies but as proof that women had long fulfilled vital roles in moments of national crisis. Haido, another such figure, was praised not only for her bravery and skill in arms but also for the tenderness and care she showed for wounded fighters, reinforcing the dual image of the woman as both warrior and nurturer.⁴⁵

39 Psarra, "Ο χορός του Ζαλόγγου"; Psarra, "Few Women Have History."

40 Parren, "Άγνωστοι Ηρωίδες του 21: Σταυριάνα, Μοδένα και Μεσολογγίτιδες"; Parren, "Λασκαρίνα Μπουμπουλίνα"; Parren, "Μαργιώρα Ν. Μαυρογένους Α'"; Parren, "Μαργιώρα Ν. Μαυρογένους Β'."

41 Parren, "Αι Σουλιώτιδες εις το Κιούγι."

42 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

43 Parren, "Μόσχω Τζαβέλλα."; Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

44 Parren, "Δέσπω Μπότση."

45 Parren, "Η Χάιδω."

As Giannati has noted, Parren's representation of such figures constructed a soteriological vision of the female hero. The heroic woman was depicted not merely a combatant but also as a "rear guard of the army" safeguarding moral continuity and collective identity.⁴⁶ Parren's disappointment at the omission of female fighters from official historiography was explicit. "Those who wrote the history of the new Greece," she noted, "mention scattered and carelessly some of the names of the heroines of the Greek War of Independence."⁴⁷ Through her articles, she worked to correct this omission.

The didactic purpose of these representations was further underscored by Parren's frequent critiques of contemporary Greek women for failing to live up to these historical ideals. In the wake of the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, she lamented the perceived apathy of modern women, contrasting their disengagement with the fortitude of their predecessors.⁴⁸ This rhetorical strategy functioned as both a call to action and a form of moral instruction. It encouraged readers to reclaim their civic responsibilities by emulating the patriotic virtues of historical heroines.

Beyond revolutionary heroines, *The Ladies' Journal* also showcased female intellectuals and philanthropists. A notable example was the publication of the *Album of Distinguished Greek Women* (Λεύκωμα Εξόχων Ελληνίδων) in Athens in 1893 in Greek. This was launched by a transnational network of Greek women from the diaspora, primarily from Romania and Russia, who financed the project collectively.⁴⁹ Although the exact editorial board remains unclear, the album was widely circulated. It commemorated and promoted the contributions of prominent Greek women in the fields of education, charity, and national service. It marked a shift toward more sustained biographical engagement. Parren endorsed the album enthusiastically, integrating it into the journal's content and encouraging contributions from readers. She described it as a significant "trophy of honor" and a unifying gesture among Greek women across borders.⁵⁰ Thus, the biographical project became a participatory venture that sought to democratize access to historical memory and expand the pantheon of national heroines.

46 Giannati, "Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Όψεις και Διαπραγματεύσεις της Γυναικείας Ταυτότητας," 151–52.

47 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

48 Parren, "Αι Ηρωίδες Μητέρες."

49 Parren, "Λεύκωμα Εξόχων Ελληνίδων."

50 Ibid.

The more systematic publication of women's biographies in *The Ladies' Journal* commenced in the same period, driven in large part by contributors such as Sotiria Alimperi, a Greek educator who began her career in the Ottoman Empire.⁵¹ These biographies prominently featured women who emerged from families of fighters in the Greek War of Independence or from distinguished intellectual and political lineages. They highlighted their significant contributions to social and charitable efforts, which were central to the progress of Greek society. Each portrayal highlighted these women's moral integrity and intellectual clarity and also their unwavering patriotic spirit, a recurring theme that aligned with the broader ideology of patriotic motherhood, which sought to legitimize women's civic participation by framing their contributions in terms of national service.⁵² For example, the biographies of Kyriakoula Kriezi and Maria Petrettini, published in *The Ladies' Journal* by Sotiria Alimperi, emphasized their noble lineage, charitable work, and educational efforts, casting them as maternal figures whose public engagement strengthened the moral fabric of the Greek nation.⁵³ Kyriakoula Kriezi (abt. 1805–1876), the granddaughter of Admiral Antonios Kriezis (a hero of the Greek War of Independence and later Prime Minister), was portrayed as a woman who had inherited the patriotic virtues of her family, dedicating herself to philanthropic initiatives and the moral education of young girls. Similarly, Maria Petrettini (abt. 1774–1851), a Greek-Venetian aristocrat, was known for her involvement in women's education and benevolent institutions in Athens, where she advocated for the intellectual development of women within a framework of Christian and national values. Both figures were presented not only as exemplars of female virtue but as embodiments of the ideal of patriotic motherhood, serving the nation through moral leadership and socially sanctioned public roles.

The emphasis on biographical recovery extended to female figures from Antiquity and Byzantium, often through a romantic-nationalist lens. Sappho

51 For more on Sotiria Alimperi, see Kanner, *Έμφυλες κοινωνικές διεκδικήσεις από την Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία στην Ελλάδα και στην Τουρκία*.

52 Giannati, “Εφημερίδες των Κυριών (1887–1917): Όψεις και Διαπραγματεύσεις της Γυναικείας Ταυτότητας,” 153. E.g. see Alimperi, “Φωτεινή Μαυρομιχάλη Α’”; Αλιμπέρτη, “Φωτεινή Μαυρομιχάλη Β’”; Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Α’”; Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Β’”; Alimperi, “Μαργαρίτα Αλβάνα Μηλιάτη”; Alimperi, “Μαρία Πετρετίνη”; Alexandridou, “Μαρία Γ. Υψηλάντου Α’”; Alexandridou, “Μαρία Γ. Υψηλάντου Β’”; Parren, “Ελένη Βάσσου”; Parren, “Φωτεινή Γενναίου Κολοκοτρώνη”; Parren, “Καλλιόπη Παπαλεξοπούλου.”

53 Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Α’”; Alimperi, “Μαρία Πετρετίνη”; Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Β’.”

was portrayed not only as “the greatest lyrical poetess” but also as a symbol of creative and emotional intelligence.⁵⁴ Parren emphasized Sappho’s originality and poetic genius as a means of strengthening her argument that women had historically contributed to intellectual life. Through her emphasis on Sappho’s “simplicity and grace,” alongside the “strong expression of passion,” Parren constructed a narrative that acknowledged women’s emotional and intellectual contributions, reinforcing the idea that women have always played pivotal roles in the cultural and social fabric of society.⁵⁵ The article ends with the following conclusion: “The woman is equal to the man. She has no need to imitate him, because she has the same gift of originality, invention, discovery. Entering the public sphere, she will not always follow the man, but she will precede him. She will even discover new ways of salvation, which he does not even suspect.”⁵⁶ This passage reflects Parren’s vision of women not merely as participants in public life but as agents of moral and intellectual renewal, a notion closely tied to the idea of women as a “civilizing force,” a theme extensively discussed by Psarra in her analysis of gendered national discourse and maternalist feminism in modern Greece.⁵⁷

Aspasia, likewise, was reframed as a political and intellectual force, “the first minister of the world,” whose influence on Pericles and Athens demonstrated the capacity of women for civic leadership.⁵⁸ In another passage, Parren refuted the charge against Aspasia of being a *hetaira*, attributing it to political hostility and misogyny, and celebrated her as a visionary who helped raise Athens to cultural preeminence.⁵⁹

Parren further explored the contributions of women from the Byzantine world, with particular attention to Empresses Irene, Theodora, Athinai, and Poulcheria.⁶⁰ She presented these women as moral and political leaders who shaped religious life, governed justly, and exemplified the compatibility of

54 Parren, “Σαπφώ η Λεσβία”; Parren, “Και πάλιν η Σαπφώ”; Mavrogordatos, “Σαπφώ.”

55 Parren, “Και πάλιν η Σαπφώ.”

56 Ibid.

57 Psarra, “Μητέρα ή πολίτις.”

58 Parren, “Η Ασπασία”; Plioroulou, “Ασπασία.”

59 Parren, “Η Ασπασία.”

60 Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Ειρήνη”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Θεοδώρα: Α”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Θεοδώρα: Β”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Θεοδώρα: Γ”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Δ”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Αθηνάϊς και Πουλχερία”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκράτειραι του Βυζαντίου: Α”; Parren, “Αι αρχόντισσαι του Βυζαντίου.”

female virtue and authority. Through her writings, Parren emphasized their administrative acumen and moral strength, using them to counter the dominant perception of women's historical passivity. These portrayals extended the journal's civic pedagogy by asserting a *longue durée* of female leadership in the Greek historical imagination.

Eleni Georgiadou, another contributor, also examined the emancipatory roles of women in religious life, particularly abbesses and nuns who wielded significant authority within their communities.⁶¹ Georgiadou's articles contrasted the relative freedom of women in monastic contexts with the restrictions imposed on married women, offering an implicit critique of contemporary gender norms.

At times, Parren's portrayals adopted a mythologizing tone, particularly in her treatment of the Souliot women and the legend of the Dance of Zalongo. While she was aware of the limitations of historical documentation, she deliberately used folk memory and national myth as tools for civic instruction. Her invocation of women as "Amazons" or "guardians of the homeland" focused less on historical precision and more on symbolic resonance. In crafting these narratives, she created a form of "usable past" that linked the moral and emotional capacities of women to the health and progress of the nation.

Throughout these narrative depictions, Parren advanced a gendered civic pedagogy rooted in patriotic maternalism. Rather than advocating for abstract political equality, she argued for women's public inclusion on the basis of their historical and moral contributions. Her historical writings functioned as a means of cultivating civic identity, transmitting national values, and legitimizing women's social action. These efforts were not framed in opposition to national ideology but in strategic alignment with it, allowing for a gradual expansion of women's public roles within a culturally acceptable framework.

This section thus demonstrates how Parren's historical narratives in *The Ladies' Journal* functioned not only as acts of memory restoration but also as ideological interventions. By constructing a coherent lineage of female virtue, sacrifice, and public engagement, she positioned women as rightful participants in the moral and civic life of the nation. These representations laid the groundwork for broader reformist efforts and helped shape the collective identity of Greek women as agents of social and national renewal.

61 Georgiadou, "Η χειραφέτησις των γυναικῶν κατὰ τον μεσσίωνα."

History as Instrument: Sources, Narratives, and Ideological Uses in Parren's Writings

Kallirhoe Parren's representations of historical female figures in *The Ladies' Journal*, notably beginning with the fourth issue (March 29, 1887), which featured a biographical tribute to Laskarina Bouboulina,⁶² played a formative role in shaping early women's emancipation discourse in Greece by using national history as a means of legitimizing women's social participation. These articles commemorated individual women but also actively sought to reinscribe them into the collective memory of the Greek nation. Parren's editorial emphasis on patriotic sacrifice, moral virtue, and civic engagement, as seen in her later portrayals of Greek heroines, established a framework of historical continuity that connected modern women's demands to a national legacy of female courage and contribution. As Psarra and Varika have noted, Parren's strategic use of biographical recovery was foundational to the articulation of a Greek women's history that challenged the invisibility of women within dominant historiography while remaining aligned with nationalist ideals.⁶³

While the primary aim of *The Ladies' Journal* was to improve women's social position by advocating for their right to education and work, especially for unmarried women or those without male protection, and by affirming their importance as mothers of the nation, Parren also used the platform to promote a broader cultural agenda. In an 1892 article, she described the journal's ambition to engage with historical narratives by "searching through entire libraries" to uncover evidence of women's contributions to national history, which had often been neglected in favor of male achievements.⁶⁴ This editorial mission was not confined to passive recovery but constituted an active intervention in historiographical production, designed to reframe history itself as a space accessible to women's voices. Through this strategy, she encouraged contemporary Greek women to recognize distinguished female figures of the past as role models, thereby reinforcing their civic identity and moral legitimacy within the nation's evolving public sphere.

However, Parren's historical methodology deserves a closer examination if we seek to determine the extent to which her portrayals were based on rigorous scholarship and grounded in primary sources or leaned more toward anecdotal

62 Parren, "Λασκαρίνα Μπουμπουλίνα."

63 Psarra, "Few Women Have History"; Varika, *Η Εξέγερση των Κοριτών*.

64 Parren, "Εκτον Έτος."

retellings shaped by popular narratives. Her editorial strategy combined the authority of historical writing with the accessibility of journalistic storytelling, thus constructing a hybrid mode of popular historiography. Parren's treatment of history in her writings exemplifies the intersection of the national and woman questions, using maternalist rhetoric to highlight women's role in the nation.⁶⁵ She presents women as central to the preservation of historical continuity, emphasizing their duty as wives, mothers, and daughters to transmit Greek language, values, and traditions to future generations. This formulation links the civilizing mission of women with the nation's progress, all framed within a patriotic, nationalist discourse.

Parren advocated for women's inclusion in politics. She emphasized that the nation mirrors the family, thereby encouraged women to move from the private to the public sphere. She also urged women to engage with history, suggesting that every household should have historical books on its shelves to nurture in the women of the house a sense of civic responsibility and engagement in public life.⁶⁶ In this framework, the historical education of women was not just beneficial, but necessary for the wellbeing of the national polity. Parren viewed history as the most suitable reading material for women, considering it an essential tool for educating and empowering the female gender.⁶⁷ She emphasized that history, particularly the history of women, was a gift for women of all ages, accessible to women of any financial means, and essential if women sought to develop intellectual and moral strength.⁶⁸

Parren used both traditional historical sources, such as official histories and archival biographies, and popular narratives, including folk songs, oral traditions, and mythologized accounts, to construct a lineage of exemplary female figures whose lives could inspire and legitimize public participation among women of her time. For instance, in her portrayals of Souliot heroines, she combined historical facts with elements drawn from popular memory and patriotic lore to emphasize their bravery, maternal sacrifice, and civic virtue. Similarly, her reimagining of Aspasia and Sappho drew on both classical references and cultural myth to present them as paragons of intellectual and moral excellence, whose legacies affirmed the capacity of women to contribute meaningfully to national culture and civic life. Through these composite narratives, Parren reframed women's

65 Coavoux, "Women authors and the writing of history in nineteenth-century Greece," 226–27.

66 Ibid.

67 Parren. "Τὶ ἀναγιγνώσκουμεν αἱ Ἑλληνίδες."

68 Ibid.

historical roles not as marginal or incidental, but as central to the ethical and cultural development of the Greek nation.

Parren was well aware of the importance of grounding her narrative depictions of historical women in credible sources to lend legitimacy to her feminist arguments. She often referenced established historical works and archives to provide factual details about the women she praised. When writing about figures from the Greek War of Independence, Parren based her narratives on widely recognized historical records but also critically noted the gaps and omissions that left women's contributions underrepresented. She drew on traditional historical texts, such as biographies and revolutionary archives, and she supplemented them with oral traditions, folk poetry, and collective memory. In doing so, she exposed the limitations of male-dominated historiography and asserted alternative forms of historical evidence. For instance, her articles on the Souliot heroines, such as Moscho Tzavella and Despo Botsi, were based on a combination of archival and oral material, songs, ballads, and local legends, highlighting the bravery and patriotism of these women even in the absence of institutional documentation.⁶⁹

Parren also romanticized certain aspects of these women's lives, casting them as symbols of patriotism and self-sacrifice. This romanticization can be seen, for example, in her vivid account of Moscho urging women to fight alongside men. Parren uses the account to attribute military leadership and tactical initiative to female figures.⁷⁰ These portrayals framed historical women as idealized figures of courage, often linked to notions of maternal sacrifice and national duty. This rhetorical strategy, while powerful in mobilizing public sentiment, risked flattening historical complexity in favor of archetypal heroism.

Parren's articles on Despo Botsi are especially illustrative of this approach.⁷¹ Marked by dramatic language and moral exemplarity, Despo is portrayed setting fire to a tower to avoid surrender, choosing death for herself and her daughters over dishonor. While this event is grounded in collective memory, Parren's account elevated it to a parable of moral superiority. Her narrative strategy thus reflected a dual aim: to restore women to history and to construct history as a civic lesson for contemporary readers. This tendency must be understood within the broader context of nineteenth-century Greek historiography, which

69 Parren, "Μόσχω Τζαβέλλα"; Parren, "Δέσπω Μπότση."

70 Ibid. Parren, "Η Χάιδω"; Parren, "Αι Ηρωίδες Μητέρες"; Parren, "Αι Σουλιώτιδες εις το Κιούργι"; Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

71 Parren, "Δέσπω Μπότση."

was closely tied to the ideological imperatives of nation-building and historical continuity.⁷²

One of the most distinctive features of Parren's historical methodology was her use of mythologized accounts to support her feminist narrative. Her portrayal of the Souliot women, for example, often elevated them to near-mythical status, comparing them to the Amazons. In several articles, Parren referred to the Souliot women as Amazons, emphasizing their martial valor and willingness to die for freedom.⁷³ These classical references served not only to ennoble the acts of these women but also to legitimize women's civic aspirations by grounding them in timeless archetypes.

In her 1888 commemorative article on the Souliot women, Parren explicitly criticized male historians for marginalizing women's role in the national narrative: "Those who wrote the history of modern Greece mention the heroines of 1821 only in passing, as if in a footnote, while entire volumes could be filled with the deeds of those immortal women's patriotism and bravery."⁷⁴ Parren contrasted this omission with her own aim of documenting women's active agency, portraying them not as passive victims but as conscious patriots. Her historical women were depicted as both nurturing and militant, guardians of the homeland and moral educators of the next generation.

She further celebrated scenes of female heroism, such as Moscho distributing cartridges "like an experienced general"⁷⁵ or Despo choosing martyrdom over enslavement.⁷⁶ These portrayals culminated in moral appeals to her readers: "Let modern Greek mothers remember, at least on this sacred day, how dearly those heroines paid for the freedom we later-born make such use of." By constructing such vivid portraits, Parren redefined patriotism in gendered terms, linking women's civic identity to their capacity for sacrifice.

Parren's use of cultural memory is also evident in her treatment of the Dance of Zalongo. Although the historical accuracy of the Zalongo episode is no longer debated and the story is now widely recognized as a nationalist myth, Parren portrays the Dance of Zalongo as the ultimate expression of maternal

72 Plantzos, "Time and the Antique"; Gazi, "*Scientific*" *National History*.

73 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

74 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

self-sacrifice.⁷⁷ Her invocation of Zalongo exemplifies how memory, myth, and ideology converged in her writing to shape historical consciousness.

In 1893, following the publication of the aforementioned *Album of Distinguished Greek Women*, Parren announced a new initiative to gather biographies from her readers.⁷⁸ This participatory method reflected her belief that history was a communal undertaking, not the monopoly of elite scholars. By inviting women across Greece and the diaspora to contribute, Parren constructed a decentralized archive of memory that drew on plural voices and perspectives. This collective project challenged the exclusivity of professional historiography and positioned women not only as subjects of history but also as its authors and curators.

In conclusion, Parren's historical writings in *The Ladies' Journal* employed a multifaceted strategy that combined documented history with cultural myth, scholarly research with popular tradition, and editorial authority with participatory authorship. Her approach constituted a parallel mode of historical production, one that restored women to the national narrative while reimagining the role of history itself as a vehicle for civic pedagogy and moral uplift. Her ideological use of the past did not aim at academic neutrality but at strategic alignment with broader goals of national renewal and gendered civic engagement. This instrumental vision of history, deeply rooted in didacticism, remains a defining characteristic of her contribution to Greek public memory and cultural heritage.

Networks, Associations, and International Engagement: Women's Social Action and National Reform

Women's associations in nineteenth-century Greece played a crucial role in shaping national identity and promoting women's civic inclusion. These organizations emerged alongside the establishment of girls' schools and women's journals, promoting education and professional opportunities for women.⁷⁹ In the nineteenth century, Greek women, especially from the middle and upper classes, sought to improve their social standing through education. Yet despite the 1834 royal decree mandating primary education for both genders, female education advanced slowly, with only a small percentage of girls and women enrolled in educational institutions, as societal views valued education as a means of upward

77 Psarra, "Ο χορός του Ζαλόγγου."

78 Parren, "Λεύκωμα Εξόχων Ελληνίδων."

79 Foukas, "Women teachers' education."

mobility for men but confined to social consumption for women. However, women began to use education to challenge their prescribed roles, assert their societal worth, and elevate their position.⁸⁰ In the 1860s, female education began to function as an increasingly important foundation for collective social reform and philanthropy in Greece, for instance through the work of influential figures like Calliopi Kehaya and Sotiria Aliberti, whose efforts transformed philanthropic activities from an elite pursuit into a collective movement among middle-class women.⁸¹ Parren built on these educational and philanthropic networks to gather collaborators for her initiatives fostering women's associations across the country, which enabled women to engage in social and cultural issues while cultivating a shared identity of collective female action against patriarchal constraints.⁸²

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of transnational networks of women's reform, with which Parren sought to align. These feminist networks were international in scope, with women across Europe and North America forming a shared ideology and communities. This facilitated the exchange of ideas and support.⁸³ The movement's international dimension is evident in organizations like the International Council of Women and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.⁸⁴ Although the Greek case developed within a distinct national context, Parren's strategic participation in these forums highlights the interplay between international feminist mobilization and national reformist agendas.

The ability of certain activists to afford regular travel was crucial, since travel facilitated direct engagement with international feminist networks, allowing activists to exchange ideas, strategies, and best practices. This interaction was essential for fostering solidarity among women from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, helping to unify the movement and amplify their collective voice. Activists like Parren, who could attend international women's congresses, were able to bring valuable insights and inspiration back to their local contexts, enriching the discourse around women's rights in Greece. By participating in these global gatherings, she engaged with leading feminists from across Europe and the United States. Through her speeches and interactions, Parren sought to challenge prevailing stereotypes, highlighting both the historical

80 Varika, "Subjectivité et identité de genre," 32–35.

81 Ibid., 49–50.

82 Ibid.

83 McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy*.

84 Sneider, "The New Suffrage History."

and contemporary roles of Greek women and positioning them as dynamic contributors to both national and international feminist movements.

Through these engagements, Parren used international legitimacy to strengthen the credibility of her domestic campaigns, presenting the advancement of Greek women as aligned with European civilizational standards. Parren's attendance at the 1889 International Congress of the Rights of Women in Paris allowed her to engage with global feminist discourse, countering Western perceptions of Greek women as oppressed "Orientales"⁸⁵ and providing a platform to assert the modernity and civic potential of Greek women.⁸⁶ In her speech, she highlighted the significant historical contributions of Greek women, from the ancient era to the War of Independence, celebrating their role in preserving Greek identity and patriotism.⁸⁷ She emphasized the active participation of women in the War of Independence, portraying figures like Moscho and the Souliot women as embodiments of strength and sacrifice.⁸⁸ Parren concluded by contrasting the bravery of these historical figures with the more conventional image of Greek women, asserting their ongoing potential for progress and education.⁸⁹

At the time, public education for girls in Greece was limited to the primary level, while secondary education remained the domain of private institutions, thereby excluding most girls from lower-income families. In response to these structural inequalities, Parren used the platform of the First Congress of Women's Works and Institutions in Paris in 1889 to announce her intention to submit a proposal to the Greek Parliament.⁹⁰ Her demands included equal educational opportunities for Greek women, the establishment of girls' schools equivalent to boys' high schools, and the founding of a Home Economics and Vocational School in Athens to support the professional training of girls, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.⁹¹

In 1921, Parren organized the first Panhellenic Congress of Greek Women.⁹² Inspired by her participation in international conferences where pressing issues such as, civil and political rights, and fair labor practices were discussed, Parren

85 Parren, "Τι ἰδέαν εἶχον οἱ ξένοι περὶ των Ἑλληνίδων."

86 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

87 Parren, "Ἡ ἑλληνίς γυνή του 19ου αἰῶνος."

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Parren, "Ἡ ἑλληνίς γυνή του 19ου αἰῶνος,"; Ignatiadou, "Ὁ Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren," 23.

91 Ibid.

92 Anastasopoulou, *Ἡ συνετή απόστολος της γυναικείας χειραφεσίας*, 260–62.

was motivated to address similar societal challenges in Greece.⁹³ The innovative philanthropic institutions she encountered during her visit to France, particularly the agricultural schools for girls, inspired her to establish similar programs in Greece, ultimately resulting in the creation of institutions like the aforementioned “Sunday School”⁹⁴ and “Asylum of Saint Catherine,” which aimed to empower Greek women through education and social welfare.⁹⁵

In the journal, Parren wrote on the contrast between French and Greek women of the upper class in the nineteenth century. While both groups enjoyed the privileges afforded by their social standing, Parren argued that the French women exhibited a far deeper commitment to philanthropy and social reform.⁹⁶ She highlighted the extensive network of charitable organizations established and supported by French aristocrats, who actively engaged with the needs of the less fortunate. In contrast, Parren contended that Greek women of the same class lacked a similar sense of social responsibility. She criticized their superficial engagement with philanthropy, their indifference towards their national heritage, and their preference for foreign cultures. By critiquing the Hellenic elite's detachment, Parren called for a reinvigoration of national duty among women of privilege, emphasizing their moral obligation to serve society.

In May of 1893, Parren attended the World's Congress of Representative Women, where she was hailed as the “Aspasia of modern Greece” and the “leading figure in the Greek women's movement.”⁹⁷ In her speeches, Parren celebrated the accomplishments of Greek women throughout history and called for global support for women's empowerment. Through her articles in *The Ladies' Journal*, she shared her admiration for American society and advocated for Greece to adopt similar progressive reforms, particularly in terms of women's education and social roles. In another speech as a delegate to the Congress, she emphasized the role of women's associations in Greece in addressing social issues and promoting education, for instance through initiatives like the “Sunday School” and the “Asylum of Saint Catherine.”⁹⁸ Following the Congress, Parren was hosted by Lydia Avery Coonley for twelve days, allowing her to observe firsthand the social organization of the United States, characterized by progressive

93 Ignatiadou, “Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren,” 24.

94 Parren, “Η σχολή της Κυριακής.”

95 Ibid.

96 Parren, “Αι Παρισιναί αριστοκράτιδες.”

97 Parren, “Εκ Σινάγου.”

98 Parren, “Τα εν Ελλάδι σωματεία.”

education for children, respect for human rights, and a strong work ethic.⁹⁹ From May 30, 1893 to November 27, 1894, Parren published a travelogue titled “From Athens to Chicago: Diary of a Greek Traveler” in *The Ladies’ Journal*. In this, she chronicled her experiences at the Congress, where through her interactions with prominent American feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Parren gained valuable insights into women’s rights movements and developed a vision for a more equitable society for Greek women.¹⁰⁰

After returning to Greece, Parren attempted to establish a national women’s association affiliated with the International Council of Women. However, she faced significant challenges. Greek society at the time was highly conservative, including its political, intellectual, and professional elites, and the broader social climate was unreceptive to organized feminist activism. Moreover, there were few women with whom Parren could collaborate or who might have supported affiliation with the more radical international feminist movement.¹⁰¹ It was only during the interwar period that distinct ideological currents, organizational pluralism, and sustained public discourse on women’s rights began to take shape in Greece.

Therefore, in 1896, Parren established the Union of Greek Women, which played a central role in mobilizing women during the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, with approximately 300 women actively participating in various wartime efforts, such as fundraising, caring for refugees, sewing uniforms, training nurses, and collaborating with foreign organizations.¹⁰² These efforts enabled women to broaden their social networks, develop new skills, and apply their existing knowledge in public service, while also fulfilling their patriotic duties within a national context.¹⁰³

Parren utilized the 1897 Greco-Turkish War to promote women’s integration into the nation, formulating a discourse that legitimized women as active citizens.¹⁰⁴ The Union also cooperated with international women’s organizations during the 1897 war, particularly engaging with English nurses who arrived in Greece.¹⁰⁵ This collaboration exemplified the Union’s commitment to philhellenism, as

99 Anastasopoulou, *Η συνετή απόστολος της γυναικείας χειραφέτιας*, 180–83; Ignatiadou, “Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren,” 25.

100 Ignatiadou, “Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren,” 25.

101 Ibid., 26.

102 Avdela and Psarra, “Engendering ‘Greekness,’” 71.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

they worked together to support wartime efforts, including the establishment of mobile hospitals and medical units. This cross-border cooperation demonstrated the global solidarity of women in support of Greece's national cause. By linking women's public activism to national emergencies, Parren strategically highlighted women's indispensability to the civic body. The establishment of the Union of Greek Women not only benefited the nation but also laid the foundations for later organizations focused on charity, vocational training for working-class women, and the mobilization of middle and upper-class women in national uprisings, with the Union's organizational structure, nationalistic language, and emphasis on the reformation of the Greek family and nation establishing it as the archetype of women's collectivity in Greece, a model that remained influential over time.¹⁰⁶

The activities of the Union were often framed in terms of national duty, echoing Parren's portrayal of historical women as patriots. This rhetorical strategy enabled the association to appeal to a broad spectrum of Greek society by aligning women's public roles with dominant nationalist ideals. While the association did not explicitly identify as feminist, its efforts to expand women's education and professional opportunities reflect a broader agenda of women's advancement within a national framework. The focus on education and social welfare, in particular, reflected Parren's belief that women's advancement was essential to the nation's progress, first and foremost because women were viewed as the primary educators of future citizens. The argument was often advanced that mothers needed education to raise their children properly, especially their boys, who would grow up to become the nation's soldiers and civic actors. This maternalist logic allowed for the redefinition of civic engagement in gendered terms, legitimizing women's participation without challenging patriarchal hierarchies.

The Union's activities influenced later women's organizations, such as the Lyceum of Greek Women, which focused on preserving Greek cultural traditions.¹⁰⁷ The Lyceum of Greek Women organized exhibitions and festivals that showcased women's handicrafts and traditional dances, activities which contributed to the cultural construction of Greek national identity.¹⁰⁸ However, in the interwar period, the Lyceum evolved into a highly conservative women's association, promoting a vision of womanhood rooted in tradition and national

106 Ibid, 72.

107 Avdela, *To Λύκειο των Ελληνίδων: 100 χρόνια*.

108 Ibid; Bounia, "Exhibiting Women's Handicrafts."

folklore. This stance contrasted with the broader interwar feminist movement, which was notably diverse and dynamic, encompassing multiple organizations, journals, and ideological viewpoints that extended beyond cultural nationalism.

The historical narratives promoted by Parren in *The Ladies' Journal* often paralleled her broader activism, including her efforts to establish women's associations that advocated for improved access to education, employment, and political participation. While a direct causal link is difficult to establish, these narratives reflected and reinforced the ideological foundations of her reformist agenda. By constructing a historical lineage of female leadership and activism, Parren provided her readers and fellow activists with a sense of legitimacy and purpose. Her narrative depictions were not only about restoring memory but also about motivating contemporary women to act. By aligning modern women's engagement with national history and public life, Parren framed their participation as both legitimate and necessary.

However, this strategy must be understood within a broader socio-political context that shifted significantly in the early twentieth century. The Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922, followed by political upheaval and social transformation, contributed to the weakening of traditional nationalist narratives and allowed for the emergence of more pluralistic feminist currents. In the interwar years, the Greek women's movement diversified, with the rise of multiple organizations and journals representing a range of ideological perspectives, from liberal reformism to more socially radical positions, thus complicating any singular alignment between nationalism and women's rights advocacy.

Conclusions

The Ladies' Journal, under the editorial vision of Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren, functioned as more than a vehicle for women's literary expression or social commentary. It became an instrument for the construction of a "usable past" as part of efforts to assert women's rights and women's value in the civic sphere.¹⁰⁹ Through carefully curated narratives of historical episodes and figures, the journal sought to reinscribe women into the national narrative by commemorating select female figures, heroines, intellectuals, empresses, and philanthropists as paragons of patriotic virtue, moral leadership, and maternal

109 Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past."

sacrifice. These portrayals legitimized women's claims to civic participation and anchored their public visibility within essentialist and nationalist frameworks.

This selective historicization was not ideologically neutral. It validated certain forms of female agency, namely, those aligned with domestic virtue, philanthropy, cultural refinement, and national service, while excluding others, particularly women from working-class, rural, or marginalized backgrounds whose experiences did not conform to the moral and social expectations of the urban bourgeoisie. In this sense, *The Ladies' Journal* articulated a vision of gendered citizenship that was simultaneously empowering and constraining. Women were invited to see themselves as heirs to a noble lineage of civic motherhood and patriotic self-sacrifice but only insofar as their aspirations aligned with the class-bound and ideologically acceptable norms of respectable femininity.

Parren's historical project thus reveals the ambivalence of early feminist interventions in public memory. On the one hand, it offered an important corrective to the symbolic omission of women from the official historiography, affirming that women had always contributed to national life. On the other, it deployed history as a tool of cultural regulation, shaping the terms according to which women could be remembered and by extension, could act. Discourse analysis reveals that historical women were often described through dichotomies, for instance courageous yet tender, strong yet modest, influential yet invisible, reflecting an effort to reconcile agency with notions of proper femininity. These rhetorical choices legitimized women's civic engagement while preserving normative ideals of womanhood rooted in morality, domesticity, and patriotic service. The "usable past" constructed in *The Ladies' Journal* was thus not only inspirational but disciplinary, encoding gendered expectations even as it advocated reform.

Parren's historiography was activist in the sense that it challenged gendered omissions and erasures, inserted women into the symbolic fabric of the nation, and mobilized the past to inspire civic engagement. Yet it also reinscribed boundaries, excluded subaltern voices, and reinforced class hierarchies. This duality complicates the legacy of *The Ladies' Journal* and calls for a more layered understanding of what constitutes feminist cultural activism in contexts marked by nationalism, respectability politics, and ideological constraint.

Crucially, Parren's historiographical strategy blurred the boundaries between journalism, biography, myth, and civic pedagogy. It embraced a hybrid mode of popular historiography that democratized historical knowledge while maintaining a gatekeeping function over who and what could be commemorated. This

approach prefigured later debates in feminist historiography over the politics of recovery and the risks of idealization. By foregrounding moral exemplarity and national service as the criteria for historical inclusion, Parren constructed a narrative that inspired collective identity but limited its transformative potential. Parren's work demonstrates that the past is never only remembered. It is actively shaped, filtered, and instrumentalized in response to the needs of the present. Parren's vision of women's history was a pioneering act of cultural production, but also one shaped by the ideological contours of its time. The challenge for contemporary scholarship lies in recognizing both its contributions and its exclusions and in interrogating how the construction of a "usable past" continues to influence debates over gender, memory, and civic belonging.

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Austro-Hungarian Women's Activism from the Southern "Periphery" Across Ethnic Lines

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Through the examples of Adél Nemessányi, Milica Tomić, Jelica Belović-Bernadžikowska, and Nafija Sarajlić, four women activists, public workers, and writers from the southern "peripheries" of Austria-Hungary who belonged to different ethnic groups, this paper examines the complex local, regional, and trans-regional aspects of women's awakening and organizing in the Dual Monarchy. While none of these four women belonged to any associations that demanded political rights for women, their public work and activism, which took multiple forms, greatly contributed to the improvement of women's public image, education, and social status in their own time, leaving an imprint on future generations. Through both the personal and professional lives of these remarkable women, we can discern connections that transgress ethnic, regional, and national boundaries and also reflect international developments in the fight for women's rights. This ethnically varied sample of exceptionally educated women pioneers from parts of the Dual Monarchy that would later become Yugoslavia demonstrates what women were able to accomplish despite an overall conservative social environment.

Keywords: women's rights, regional and trans-regional developments, feminism from the "periphery"

Introduction

Women's activism in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a complex phenomenon. While this activism has been relatively well studied in relation to the main centers, with by now iconic figures such as Rosa Mayreder in Vienna or Rózsa Schwimmer in Budapest, the efforts and lives of women from the "peripheries" remain lesser known, although in recent years there has been an uptake in research in this direction. Through the examples of Adél Nemessányi, Milica Tomić, Jelica Belović-Bernadžikowska, and Nafija Sarajlić, four women activists, public workers, and writers, this article argues that the definition of activism—particularly for this generation of women who lived around the time of the international First Women's Movement and labored toward improvements in women's social position, education, and public presence in their respective communities—must go beyond political activism understood in the narrow

sense of forming political associations and demanding political rights. The contributions of women like Nemessányi, Tomić, Belović-Bernadžikowska, and Sarajlić offer a more complex picture that helps us understand the local, regional, and trans-regional facets of women's awakening and organizing in the Dual Monarchy.

All four women were born and/or worked in the southern parts of the Monarchy which after World War I would become the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929), and they belonged to different ethnic groups. Adél Nemessányi (1857–1933), an ethnic Hungarian, and Milica Tomić (1859–1944), an ethnic Serb, were both educated in various cities of the Monarchy, and they both lived and worked in Novi Sad/Újvidék¹ in Vojvodina (then part of Southern Hungary). Jelica Belović-Bernadžikowska (1870–1946), an ethnic hybrid, was educated internationally and active across various regions of the Monarchy, including Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and eventually Novi Sad. Only Nafija Sarajlić (1893–1970) was both educated and lived all her life in her native Sarajevo. Tomić and Belović-Bernadžikowska were the most connected across ethnic and national lines, both through their literary work and political activism. They were multilingual, and although they collaborated and/or corresponded with feminists and intellectuals of other nationalities and internationally, they embraced a Serbian nationalist position.² Nemessányi and Sarajlić stayed out of the strictly defined arena of political activism. However, they both contributed in their respective locations to women's emancipation through their work as educators and writers.

Novi Sad's Multiethnic Early Feminist History

In a 2007 article published in the Novi Sad-based Hungarian-language periodical *Létünk* (Our Existence), local historian Ágnes Ózer approvingly notes the rise of an interest in studying women's history in her city. However, she bemoans the fact that until recently, this interest had focused on Serbian women only: "Such research [Novi Sad women's history] never delved into this question from the point of view of Novi Sad's multiethnic, pluri-religious, and multicultural reality."³ Thanks to Ózer's and other feminist-minded researchers' pioneering

1 Novi Sad is the Serbo-Croat name of the city, Újvidék the Hungarian. Both are still used officially today in Vojvodina.

2 She is included in the Croatian encyclopedia under "Belović-Bernadzikowska, Jelica."

3 Ózer, "Adalék," 40. All translations from non-English sources are by me.

work in this field, the approach to women's history in Novi Sad and in Vojvodina more generally began to shift, most notably with the publication of the 2006 volume *Vajdasági magyar nők élettörténetei* (Life stories of Vojvodina Hungarian Women), edited by Svenka Savić and Veronika Mitro.⁴ In her foreword, Gordana Stojaković acknowledges the work of mostly middle-class and some aristocratic women whose contributions to women's emancipation in Vojvodina she deems as important as the work of organized women's associations. "Adél Nemessányi⁵ was one such woman," she writes, "the first principal of the Novi Sad Public High School for Girls and the founder of the Maria Dorothea association."⁶ Since this publication, there has been a revival of research interest in the life and work of this important Hungarian Novi Sad-based early feminist.

While Nemessányi's most important achievements regarding the advancement of women's education are linked to Novi Sad, where she was laid to rest at the age of 76 in the tomb she shares with her parents in the Protestant section of the Futog Street cemetery,⁷ she was born and subsequently studied in cities further north in the then Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy. Nemessányi was born in 1857, in Liptószentmiklós in Upper Hungary (today Liptovský Mikuláš in Slovakia). She received her education in the town of her birth and later continued studies in Pozsony (Bratislava) and Budapest. After passing her teacher's exam in Budapest in 1876, Nemessányi moved to Székesfehérvár, to the south of Budapest, where she taught at the Girls' School. A certificate issued about her achievements in Székesfehérvár in 1884 highly praises her work and knowledge. She is said to have been greatly respected both by her pupils and their parents, as well as the larger community, for teaching German and for founding the Youth Library.⁸ That very same year, then 27-year-old Nemessányi was named principal of the Novi Sad Public High School for Girls (Újvidéki Állami Polgári Leány Iskola), and she moved to the southern periphery of Hungary, where she would spend the rest of her life. According to Ózer, this Hungarian-language high school became Nemessányi's "life achievement."⁹ She was held in high esteem as principal, and the school's reputation grew, attracting more and more girls.

4 An earlier version of this publication came out in Serbo-Croatian in 2001.

5 While different spellings of the name (Nemassányi, Nemešeni) can be encountered in various publications, the correct form can be deduced from the birth certificate published online in Stojaković, "Adel Nemešeni": Adela Nevena Nemessányi. I therefore use this spelling throughout this article.

6 Stojaković, "Tények," 12.

7 Stojaković, "Adel Nemešeni."

8 Ibid. Stojaković wrongly calculates her age in 1933 at 96.

9 Ózer, "Az újvidéki."

While in 1883–84 there were 63 pupils, by 1901–1902 their number more than tripled, reaching 221.¹⁰

Nemessányi's skills as an educator and administrator were noted already during her lifetime by Menyhért Érdujhelyi in his monograph *Újvidék története* (History of Novi Sad), published in 1894 (reprinted in 2002). Érdujhelyi mentions the multiethnic student body at Nemessányi's school, which was attended not only by Hungarian but also by a significant number of ethnic German and Serbian girls.¹¹ He attributes the school's popularity and success to its excellent administration. Érdujhelyi's assessment of Nemessányi's skills as an educator and administrator are corroborated by Vasa Stajić in his 1951 study *Građa za kulturnu istoriju Novog Sada* (Materials for a cultural history of Novi Sad), in which he mentions two secondary schools for girls in Novi Sad: the one run by Nemessányi and the secondary school for Serbian girls. Stajić notes that Nemessányi's school attracted more interest. Her school functioned with only two female teachers and one class, whereas the Serbian high school had three classes, four male teachers, one female teacher, one adjunct male teacher for music, and one adjunct female teacher for French. Nevertheless, Nemessányi's school had nearly twice the number of pupils (61 compared to 38).¹² Thus, despite the higher staffing and more classes offered, the Serbian secondary school still did not attract as many pupils, likely due to the better reputation of Nemessányi's school.

The other successful area of Nemessányi's activities was the founding of the Novi Sad branch of the Mária Dorothea Egyesület (Maria Dorothea Association) in 1891.¹³ According to Érdujhelyi, the "association's soul and president is Adél Nemessányi,"¹⁴ and it operated within her school.¹⁵ Érdujhelyi describes the goals of the association as furthering ideas pertaining to women's education, including women's self-education, and raising a general interest in girls' education through lectures and reunions. He gives 101 as the total number

10 Stojaković, "Adel Nemešenji."

11 Érdujhelyi, *Újvidék története*, 360.

12 Stajić, *Građa*, 165. The numbers refer to a report from 1877 quoted by the author.

13 On the national level, the founder of the Hungarian Maria Dorothea Association was Mrs. Gyula Sebestyén (née Ilona Stetina, 1855–1932) in 1885. According to Attila Nóbik, it became "one of the most important cultural organizations representing women's interests." Nóbik, "Feminization," 8.

14 Érdujhelyi, *Újvidék története*, 329.

15 Stojaković, "Tények," 11.

of members.¹⁶ The association further helped organize female teachers.¹⁷ Although not a political women's association, it can certainly be considered a forerunner of the latter, along with other early women's associations in Hungary that promoted women's employment and fought for their professional and educational rights.¹⁸ For all these efforts to develop girls' education and raise women's social status through four decades of pedagogical work, in 1913 at a public ceremony in Újvidék, Nemessányi was awarded the Emperor's Gold Cross of Merit, the highest recognition bestowed upon a public sector worker in the Monarchy. In his laudation, the mayor underlined that Nemessányi chose the "most difficult and bumpy career," but that as her life's goal she had followed "the highest calling ... the care for the nation's most precious treasure and hope," namely, the "education of the Hungarian youth." In her response, Nemessányi emphasized her modest and quiet ways in approaching her teaching career while extending the merit of the award to her colleagues who labored in the field of girls' education.¹⁹

What transpires from the above exchange at Nemessányi's award ceremony is the dominant discourse surrounding acceptable and desirable female behavior and roles in society. The link between women's work as educators for the sake of the nation is made clear. As a matter of fact, nineteenth-century and, in some cases, already eighteenth-century feminism in Hungary and in other parts of East Central Europe often used the argument of the necessity of furthering women's education for the benefit of the nation.²⁰ In the case of Nemessányi, the distinguished award to honor her work in this direction is an obvious proof of appreciation and approval by the highest authorities. Nemessányi's response corroborates the ideal of womanhood at the time: modesty and a quiet demeanor. We can assume, however, that her work and professional success required other, more "masculine" qualities as well, such as persistence and assertiveness, and that her work as an educator of girls in itself was a break with traditional feminine roles. She chose to live an independent life and became a highly successful professional in her field at a time when school principals were mostly men.

16 Ibid., 330.

17 Ózer, "Az újvidéki."

18 Schwartz, *Shifting Voices*, 20–21.

19 Ibid.

20 See Schwartz, *Shifting Voices*, 36–37; Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire*.

If we look at Nemessányi's pedagogical articles, we find further evidence that she was far from simply accepting and fitting into the dominant social norms and expectations placed on a woman and a female teacher. The fact alone that she was, according to Attila Nóbik, one of the only two female teachers to publish in the Hungarian periodical *Család és iskola* (Family and School) already speaks volumes.²¹ Nóbik attributes this fact to her status as principal, which bestowed a relative level of power upon her. In her article published in *Család és iskola* in 1889, Nemessányi praises the advantages of public over private education with the argument that public education often has to correct what home education and upbringing fail to accomplish. At the same time, Nemessányi criticizes the shortcomings of public education and argues for better private education for children of both sexes.²²

In her article “Néhány szó a tanítónő munkájáról s díjazásáról” (A few words about the work and remuneration of female teachers), which was published a year later in the periodical *Felső Nép- és Polgári Iskolai Közlöny* (Higher Elementary Schools' Bulletin), Nemessányi specifically discusses the position of female teachers. She refutes some arguments put forth in an earlier article by a certain János Vécsey. The latter defended lower pay for female teachers, basing his arguments on commonly held contemporaneous stereotypes regarding female teachers' and women's work in general, namely, that such work was allegedly easier and that more money in a woman's pocket would only lead to her choosing a more vain and luxurious lifestyle. In her skillfully formulated counter-arguments, Nemessányi convincingly demonstrates the exact opposite. Not only does a woman teacher spend as much time and effort on her work as her male counterpart but she also spends as much if not more time on her professional development. Being excluded from the male clubs and casinos, where male teachers can exchange ideas, female teachers have to acquire the same information and knowledge from multiple sources (which is not only more costly but also more time-consuming), such as membership in diverse professional organizations and subscriptions to various professional journals. Regarding Vécsey's argument about the “double-dipping” of married female

21 Nóbik, *A pedagógiai szakajtó*, 58. Nóbik further notes that no church or state-run pedagogical magazines featured any woman authors. The only notable exception among those he examined was *Nemzeti Nőnevelés* (National Women's Education). It was not only the sole pedagogical periodical run by a woman editor (Gyuláné Sebestyén Ilona Stetina) but it also featured a high number of female authors, reaching 40 percent by 1891 (57).

22 Nemessányi, “A magántanítás előnye” quoted in Nóbik, *Gyermekek*, 18.

teachers, Nemessányi convincingly demonstrates the opposite, stating that married women in the profession are few and far between (she herself remained single). The point on which she agrees with Vécsey is that female teachers with children of their own should leave the profession, as they would not be able to respond successfully to the demands of this double burden.

Nemessányi's attack on the gender double standards of her time becomes particularly obvious when she defends the necessity for female teachers and women more broadly to dress fashionably while still keeping necessary decorum. Striking a humorous tone, she contends that while there may be some vain younger women in the teaching profession, vanity is by no means limited to the female sex: "there are plenty of dandies among our male colleagues who pay meticulous attention to ensure that each and every piece of their clothing follow the latest fashion."²³ She goes one step further in her thinly veiled attack on the gender double standard when she dismantles the stereotype of the old-fashioned (commonly referred to as the "old maid") female teacher who is ridiculed for her unfashionable clothes. With a touch of irony, Nemessányi acutely pinpoints that, unlike what society preaches as the desirable "modest" female behavior, in reality, the well-dressed girls attract all the attention: "the well brought-up, demure young girl may wish to ponder how much the highly praised theory diverges from practice."²⁴

Nóbik rightly comments that such tone in a pedagogical article by a female teacher was rather unusual for the time. The Hungarian pedagogical journals under his scrutiny lacked any sign of a struggle for the equality of female teachers. The dominant tone was one of adapting and fitting in, not one of fight. Thus Nemessányi, while leading a lifestyle that on the surface fit the mold of the appropriate behavior for a woman and female teacher, distinguished herself not only with her extraordinary accomplishments in a traditional, still very patriarchal society but also with the tone of her articles. For these reasons, Nemessányi can be called an early feminist in the overall rather conservative society of Southern Hungary in which she lived and worked for many decades.

During the same period, women of other ethnicities were also active in Novi Sad. Milica Tomić, Nemessányi's coeval, was born in Novi Sad/Újvidék in 1859 and died there at the age of 85 in 1944. Her name is relatively well known today

23 Nemessányi, "Néhány szó, 284, quoted in Nóbik, *A pedagógiai szakcsajtó*, 60.

24 Ibid.

in the history of early Serbian feminism,²⁵ although she still has not received her due recognition. She came from a prominent Serbian family originally from Croatia. Her father was Svetozar Miletić, a respected Serbian politician and intellectual who served as mayor of Novi Sad on two occasions. Svetozar Miletić is recognized as one of the leading figures in the Serbian nationalist fight in the Habsburg Monarchy.²⁶ Milica thus grew up in a family where she was sensitized to the burning issues of her time, “in an atmosphere of national and political strife.”²⁷ As the daughter of an enlightened family, she received her education in Novi Sad, Pest, and Vienna and was fluent in several languages. She became politically involved already at the age of 18 due to her father’s arrest. She was even granted an audience with Emperor Francis Joseph and facilitated her father’s release. In 1844, she married another Serbian nationalist, Jaša (Jakov) Tomić, who became the founder of the Narodna slobodoumna stranka (People’s Freethinker Party), which would later become the Radikalna stranka (Radical Party).²⁸ He was imprisoned for six years in 1890 for a “crime of honor,” i.e. killing an earlier love interest of his wife.²⁹ He became editor of the journal *Zastava* (Flag), the “most influential daily within the Serbian community in Austria-Hungary,”³⁰ in which Milica also published some early political writings. Both Milica’s father and husband were progressive men when it came to women’s rights, and they supported women’s education and emancipation.

Tomić’s activism in relation to women’s political rights, however, took off only at the beginning of the twentieth century. While Nemessányi’s work centered around women’s education and the raising of their social status, Tomić, likely due to her early sensitization to the Serbian national question and her involvement in Serbian nationalist circles, was more focused on women’s political rights. In 1905, she founded the circle Poselo Srpkinja (Social gathering

25 In 2018, a little-noticed monograph about Tomić was published under the title *Milica Miletić Tomić – Pouke i polemike*, edited by Vera Kopić (Savez feminističkih organizacija (re)konekcija, 2017). It contains a selection of Tomić’s writings published in various periodicals.

26 In 1939, the city of Novi Sad erected a monument to Svetozar Miletić on the main square in front of City Hall. The monument is the work of famous Croatian-Yugoslav-American sculptor Ivan Meštrović. *Grad Novi Sad*, April 6, 2009. <https://novisad.rs/lat/spomenik-svetozaru-mileticu>.

27 Dojčinović and Pantelić, “Early Modern Women,” 129.

28 Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire*, 72.

29 Noizz, “Ljudi ne prestaju” states that the murder was the result of a shooting incident. According to Pantelić, Milinković, and Škodrić, it was death by stabbing. *Dvadeset žena*, 19.

30 Dojčinović and Pantelić, “Early Modern Women,” 129.

of Serbian women), later renamed Posestrima.³¹ This circle was closed to men. Only women could attend, which in itself was a feminist statement, namely, the creation of a "safe space" and a reading room for women. While the members performed some traditionally female activities, such as knitting, they also discussed many pertinent questions. In 1910, they had 96 members, a number that tripled to 300 by 1919 (the activities stopped during World War I). Politics was very much a part of these discussions. Posestrima put together a library that collected books and periodicals. This circle thus became an important driving force behind Serbian women's emancipation and modernization in Vojvodina.³² Moreover, it also maintained a fund for charitable donations for the poor and the sick.³³ Its profile was thus emancipatory, political, and charitable at the same time.

Tomić closely followed the fight for women's rights in Hungary and other countries, and she became an ardent supporter of female suffrage. In 1911, she founded the progressive women's magazine *Žena* (Woman) and served as its editor, becoming the first Serbian woman in such a role.³⁴ The magazine existed until 1921 with a pause during World War I. Initially, the topics discussed concerned women's education and their social position in Serbian society to give more and more space to discussions of women's suffrage and political rights. In 1911, Tomić published a major article in reaction to what she called a step back rather than a step forward regarding Serbian women's education in Vojvodina, namely the majority vote passed by the Serbian National Church Assembly (Srpski narodno-crkveni sabor)³⁵ to cancel their financial support for Serbian girls' secondary schools.³⁶ This decision took immediate effect for the secondary schools in Sombor (Zombor) and Pančevo (Pancsova), but implementation was postponed for another two years for the school in Novi Sad following a petition signed by 5,000 Serbian women and presented by the Dobrotvorna Zadruga Srpkinja Novosatkinja (Novi Sad Serbian Women's Philanthropic Association).

31 A term difficult to render in English, it is sometimes translated as "blood sister." In Serbian culture, people can select a close friend who is not a blood relation as an elected brother or sister ("pobratim" and "posestrima").

32 Dojčinović and Pantelić, "Early Modern Women," 130.

33 Pantelić et al., *Dvadeset žena*, 20–21.

34 Ibid.

35 These assemblies were held regularly in Karlovac near Novi Sad, and were the most important political institution of Serbs living in the Monarchy.

36 Tomić(a), Milica Jaše, "Naše više devojačke škole," 374. The form of Tomić's name used is that of the genitive case of a woman's family name based on her husband's first and last name, in this case Jaša Tomić, which becomes Jaše Tomića in the genitive. This is a reflection of a deep-seated patriarchal gender structure in which the woman's name essentially states that she is the property of her husband.

In her criticism of this decision, Tomić lists the progress and efforts made in the past 40 years to further women's education (citing, among other prominent promoters of such rights, her father, Svetozar Miletić), and she outlines the dominant arguments in this process that linked the necessity of women's education to the Serbian national cause. "The question of higher education for the female youth is a question of cultural and hence also political survival and evolution of the Serbian nation."³⁷ With Miletić's words, she insists on the importance of these schools to allow for the education of Serbian girls in their home country rather than sending them abroad so as to preserve their national feelings and educate them to become good Serbian patriots and defenders of their national traditions that they would pass down as mothers to their children. Despite her patriotic feelings and engagement, in other publications, Tomić was critical of the backward position of Serbian women in Hungary. She attributed this backwardness to Serbian patriarchal culture, poor hygiene in the lower classes, superstition, and other factors which, taken together, led to high mortality rates within Serbian families.³⁸ Ultimately, however, she stayed true to Serbian national values and cautioned against a takeover by "foreign, particularly western, customs," which would have led to a "neglect of one's own folk tradition ... one's own nation."³⁹ At the same time, she was equally critical of the impact of the long Ottoman occupation on the Serbian nation, and she recommended striking a balance between these foreign influences with the ultimate goal of refining but not neglecting one's own culture and customs.⁴⁰

The magazine *Žena* reported regularly on women's activism in other countries and in other parts of the Dual Monarchy in particular. By 1912, the focus became women's suffrage. Thus the April 1, 1912 issue contained a number of short reports over several pages: one on the fight for women's suffrage in Austria;⁴¹ one summing up the arguments in favor of women's suffrage by Countess Teleki (known also by her pen name, Szikra) in Budapest;⁴² another one about women's fight for suffrage in Russia;⁴³ one about Sweden;⁴⁴ another

37 Ibid., 371.

38 Stojaković, *Znamenite žene*, 52.

39 Dojčinović and Pantelić, "Early Modern Women," 132.

40 Ibid.

41 "Pobornice za žensko pravo glasa u Austriji," 247.

42 "Grofica Teleki o ženskom pravu glasa," 247–48.

43 "Biračko pravo ruskom ženskinju," 248.

44 "Žensko pravo glasa u Švedskoj," 248.

one about England;⁴⁵ and even one about China, where women had just acquired the right to vote.⁴⁶ The report about Countess Teleki includes information about countries where this right had already been granted, citing Norway, Finland, several US states, and Australia. The same text announces the 7th Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, which would be held the following year (1913) in Budapest.⁴⁷ We can see that Tomić and her editorial team were very much interested in promoting information regarding women's voting rights in their own country, which at the time was still Hungary, as well as in other states worldwide, with an emphasis on those that had already granted such rights or were about to (such as Sweden). This focus reflects Tomić's political ideas beyond the Serbian national cause, and can be considered a shift to a more radical feminism in Vojvodina, even if the tone in which these feminist ideas would be formulated in future articles of the journal was at times tempered so as to please a wider readership.

Two more issues of the magazine also published in 1912 (June and September) featured major articles on women's suffrage. While the September issue praises the work of Hungarian women's organizations, in particular the activism of the Budapest-based Feministák Egyesülete (Feminist Association), the June issue, in an article titled "On Women's Right to Vote," reports extensively on the visit by prominent Budapest-based feminist and leader of the Feminist Association, Rózsa (Rosa or Rosika) Schwimmer to Novi Sad as part of a large assembly organized jointly by the Serbian Radical Party, the Social-Democratic Party, and the Hungarian Independence Party.⁴⁸ The meeting was held bilingually in Hungarian and Serbian. Tomić, who corresponded with Schwimmer, notes that while both the Serbian Radical Party and the Social-Democratic Party included women's suffrage in their program, the Hungarian Independence Party failed to do so. She comments that, in this respect, the Novi Sad Serbs were more advanced than the Hungarians. The article closes with the following conclusion: "The question of women's right to vote has become part of the agenda in every way and nothing will take it off the agenda anymore. The fact that in many countries this right has been adopted is a testimony to the direction humanity has taken."⁴⁹ This sense of enthusiasm, kindled by the hope that women in

45 "Biračko pravo ženskinja u Engleskoj," 248–49.

46 "Pobornice ženskog prava glasa u Kini," 249–50.

47 "Grofica Teleki o ženskom pravu glasa," 247. On the Congress, see Schwartz, *Shifting Voices*, 55–56.

48 This article was translated into English in Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire*, 279–84.

49 Ibid., 284.

Hungary, at least some women, may soon gain the right to vote, would give way to a major disappointment a few years later. On July 16, 1918, *Žena* reported that the Hungarian Parliament (the last one to convene in Austria-Hungary), with a vote of 161 to 65, had struck down the proposal to extend the right to vote to a limited number of women. The tone of the article is clearly one of disillusionment.⁵⁰

The end of World War I soon brought about major shifts regarding women's political rights. With the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary lost many of its territories to the south, and Vojvodina became part of the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This decision had been initiated in Novi Sad on November 25, 1918 at the Great National Assembly of Serbs and other Slavs living in the Bácska, Banat, and Baranya regions of Southern Hungary. Milica Tomić was one of six women deputies to take part in this Assembly.⁵¹ However, whereas in truncated post-Trianon Hungary women were finally given the right to vote in 1920 (albeit with certain limits), the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes did not extend this right to its female population. Women in Yugoslavia would only gain the right to vote in 1945. We can thus see that while women's educational rights in the Dual Monarchy had made some progress by the early twentieth century, when it comes to political rights before and after World War I, despite women's activism across ethnic, regional, and national boundaries, decisions in this area were made as part of much larger political agendas.

While in recent years, Novi Sad has given some official recognition to Adél Nemessányi by naming a small street after her in the district of Veternik as Ulica Adel Nemešnji, Milica Tomić has yet to be granted such recognition. To date, the only mention of this great daughter of her city is a small commemorative plaque on the house where she lived.⁵² The online article that presents the monograph on Tomić published in 2018 states that the lack of public recognition (except in small academic and feminist circles) and the still prevailing perception that she stood in the shadow and worked under the influence of two famous men, may be due “to a certain skepticism, an incredulity that back in that time and culture, such a high degree of female individuality, such a brilliant polemical spirit and courage were at all possible.”⁵³

50 “Žensko pravo glasa,” 369.

51 Pantelić et al., *Dradeset žena*, 20.

52 Noizz, “Ljudi ne prestaju.”

53 Admin, “Monografija.”

Crossing Borders within the Dual Monarchy

Jelica Belović-Bernadžikovska⁵⁴ was about a decade younger than Nemessányi and Tomić. Her life and work have been much more studied and recognized, with biographies and bibliographies published already during her lifetime as well as in recent years.⁵⁵ She was born in 1870 in Osijek (Croatia-Slavonia) and died in 1946 in Novi Sad. Like Tomić, she too was educated in several European cities, including Zagreb, Vienna, and even Paris. Thanks to her multiethnic family background (her mother was an ethnic German and her father of Montenegrin background), she grew up speaking several languages. Both her parents were teachers, and her mother began tutoring children following her husband's untimely death in 1875 when Jelica was only five. According to an article published in 1925, Belović-Bernadžikovska was fluent in nine languages. The same article presents her as an "embroiderer and ethnographer, an exceptionally educated lady."⁵⁶ She was a very prolific writer. In addition to 800 articles in German pertaining to feminism and women's education, she published more than thirty books in several languages. Some of these publications appeared under pseudonyms.⁵⁷ During her lifetime, she was recognized internationally as an outstanding researcher, in particular for her tireless work on collecting and preserving women's embroidery techniques unique to the lands of the South Slavs, with an emphasis on Serbian women. Her most important publication in this area was the almanac *Srpkinja: Njezin život i rad, njezin kulturni razvitak i njezina narodna umjetnost do danas* (The Serbian woman: her life and work, her cultural development, and her folk art to date), published in 1913 in Sarajevo. Her reputation spread across Europe, and she received numerous accolades from professors and other intellectuals beyond Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, i.e. Germany, France, and Italy (she was even invited to work in Rome).⁵⁸ She is deemed to have "contributed a great deal to the education and cultural life of women in Bosnia Herzegovina,"⁵⁹ where she moved in 1895 after

54 Bernadžikovska, Bernadzikowska, and Bernadžikowski are also spellings of her name used in different sources.

55 In 2023, her memoirs were published in Sarajevo, *Memoari Jelice Belović Bernadžikowski*, edited by Enes S. Omerović and Tomas Jacek Lis and supported by Bosnian and Polish funds.

56 Zrnić, "Jelica Belović-Bernadžikovska," 9.

57 Hawkesworth, *Voices*, 138.

58 Jelkić, *Četrdeset godina*, 28.

59 Hawkesworth, *Voices*, 138.

having been active as a teacher in other towns of the Monarchy, i.e. Zagreb and Osijek in Croatia and Ruma in Vojvodina.⁶⁰

At the time, Bosnia-Herzegovina had been under Austro-Hungarian occupation since 1878. Jelica Belović worked in Mostar, where she married Janko Bernadžikovski, an Austro-Hungarian civil servant of Polish background with whom she had two children. In Mostar she also became involved in the circle around the literary magazine *Zora* (Dawn), in which she published, among other works, some important articles on women's emancipation. From Mostar she went to Sarajevo and then to Banja Luka, where she became principal of the girls' secondary school. Belović-Bernadžikowska very much embraced the idea of Yugoslavism, i.e. the unity of Serbs and Croats. She was also friends with the Bosnian Muslims. For displaying pro-Serbian feelings, she was chastised by the Austrian authorities and forced to retire from teaching in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 (another source cites 1902).⁶¹ This was one of the reasons why she sometimes used pseudonyms in her publications. The family moved to Sarajevo and later to Zagreb. In 1910, Belović-Bernadžikowska participated in the pan-Slavist congress in Prague with an exhibition of women's embroidery from Bosnia-Herzegovina. After World War I, she moved to Novi Sad, where she taught at a co-ed school until her retirement in 1936.⁶² She remained in Novi Sad until her death ten years later. Among her many contacts with famous people all over Europe, she knew and/or corresponded with other early feminists from the South Slavic world, such as Slovenian-Yugoslav writer, editor, and activist Zofka Kveder; the forgotten Croatian feminist Franjka Pakšec; and Novi Sad-based Savka Subotić, one of the leading members of the Dobrotvorna zadruga Srpkinja Novosatkinja (Novi Sad Serbian Women's Philanthropic Association).⁶³ Her reputation as a researcher, writer, and feminist led to an invitation, in 1922, by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to attend their assembly in The Hague in December of that year. Apparently, she was denied permission to travel.⁶⁴

Her ideas regarding women's emancipation, judging by the articles she published on these questions, can be qualified as coming from a position of

60 Zdero, "Belovic-Bernadzikowska," 51; Jelkić, *Četrdeset godina*, 4.

61 Jelkić, *Četrdeset godina*, 5; Reynolds Cordileone, "Reinventions."

62 Zdero, "Belovic-Bernadzikowska, Jelica" 53.

63 In 1911, Rózsa Schwimmer invited Savka Subotić to give a lecture in Budapest, but we have no information as to whether Subotić followed up on this invitation (Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire*, 72–73).

64 Jelkić, *Četrdeset godina*, 22.

cultural feminism fused, not unlike Tomić's more radical feminism, with nationalism. Two articles stand out in this respect, both published in the Mostar-based periodical (edited by Serbian poet Jovan Dučić) *Zora* in 1899, "Moderne žene" (Modern Women) and "Žena budućnosti" (The Woman of the Future).⁶⁵ Both articles thematize similar issues, first and foremost the need to improve women's education and their personal development. Women are seen as different from men but in a positive and empowering light, which was a position typical for contemporaneous cultural feminism. In "The Woman of the Future," Belović-Bernadžikovska conveys her wish to see women become stronger and more enlightened in order to be able to face life's battles, but ultimately mainly for the sake of offering their husbands a wiser, more educated and interesting wife who can understand matters of the world beyond her household duties. "Life is so much more different next to a woman with an educated mind and heart [...] who is also interested in the bigger questions of the human race, in the public matters of the homeland, but first and foremost in the spiritual life of her nation."⁶⁶ She expresses ideas often found in the writings of feminists from the Slavic (here Serbian) nations of the Monarchy, with their aspirations for national independence (also seen in Tomić), namely, defining women and the need for their education for the sake of family and nation. Belović-Bernadžikovska also demonstrates her familiarity with developments regarding the international women's movement when she refers to American women as "the leaders in the modern fight for women's rights."⁶⁷ In her praise of American women as beacons who show the rest of the world "what woman can [do],"⁶⁸ she selects from among all women's associations the "mothers' clubs," where American "mothers meet and they deliberate on the happiness and salvation of their loved ones, of their homes, of their children."⁶⁹ Thus, in demonstrating familiarity with feminist developments in the West, Belović-Bernadžikovska is careful not to overstep the boundaries of her general position concerning women's place in the Serbian and Bosnian society of her time as first and foremost in the service of their husbands, families, and nation.⁷⁰

65 See Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire*, 88.

66 Belović-Bernadžikovska, "Žena budućnosti," 292.

67 Belović-Bernadžikovska, "Modern Women," 145.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Belović-Bernadžikovska's embracing of Serbian nationalism (despite her own hybrid ethnic heritage) is also evident from some of her later, post-Monarchy writings. In her book *Bijelo roblje* (White slavery), published in 1923 (thus already in Yugoslavia, and when she lived in Novi Sad), one that was inspired in part

An Early Feminist Writer from Austrian Occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina

Of the four examples of early feminists from various regions across the southern periphery of the Dual Monarchy, Nafija Sarajlić (born Hadžikarić, 1893–1970) came from the most socially conservative background. As a young Muslim woman in Habsburg-occupied Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina, she was an exception in that her father, a Sarajevo-based tailor who made uniforms for the Habsburg officials, allowed his daughters to be educated, an act for which he was attacked by the townspeople (his shop was stoned).⁷¹ Sarajlić attended the Sarajevo Muslim Female School established by the Habsburg authorities in 1897. This school and others fostered the education of Muslim girls “in a province where more than eighty percent of the population was still completely illiterate”⁷² and where opposition to girls’ education beyond religious schools was still very strong among the Muslim elites.⁷³ Against such public opposition, both Nafija and her four sisters graduated from the Girls’ Teacher Training School.⁷⁴ Nafija Hadžikarić married the writer Šemsudin Sarajlić, who was much more conservative than her father and pressured his wife to abandon the teaching profession after only three years. For a short while, Nafija Sarajlić remained active in public life as a writer and published about 20 short stories in the Muslim newspaper *Zeman* and later in *Biser*, where her husband was also a contributor.⁷⁵ However, after their eldest daughter died, she withdrew from a writing career as well. She gave in to patriarchal pressure to devote herself entirely to her family.⁷⁶ She maintained one creative public outlet, however, in the privacy of her home by teaching illiterate female neighbors and tutoring children.⁷⁷ Today, she is praised by critics as “a precursor of modern short prose”⁷⁸ and as the “first

by Freud’s theories on human sexuality, she expresses negative and highly stereotypical views on Hungarian women, for example. She deems them of light morals, and because of their “hot” temperament expressed in their “passionate dancing” and in “promiscuous Hungarian operettas and songs,” she considers Serbian women’s contacts with Hungarian women in Vojvodina detrimental for the Serbian girls’ (allegedly higher) morality (50).

71 Omeragić, “The Muslim Women’s Question,” 95.

72 Giomi, “Daughters of Two Empires,” 5.

73 Omeragić, “The Muslim Women’s Question,” 95.

74 Ibid.

75 Giomi, “Daughters of Two Empires,” 8.

76 Omeragić, “The Muslim Women’s Question,” 103.

77 Ibid., 104.

78 Schwartz and Thorson, *Shaking the Empire*, 89.

woman prose writer in the Muslim community,"⁷⁹ and she is claimed by both the literary and national history in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Sarajlić's short pieces are not only innovative in form. In her short prose, she broached topics such as women's education, modernization, her own triple burden as a mother, wife, and aspiring writer, religion, and ethnic relations. Her first piece, entitled "Rastanak" (The farewell), and published when she was only 19 years old, was inspired by her experience as a teacher who tried to offer, in her spare time, additional content for her more advanced female pupils, such as ethics and reading, only to be met with reprimand by the Muslim authorities, "in front of the children."⁸⁰ In fact, what she describes in this short piece is her last day at the school, a tearful departure that, in her own words, "had been the most difficult one in my entire life."⁸¹ What she does not say out loud to her pupils but puts down on paper is a powerful statement that can be read as an allegory for women's fight for a more advanced education and emancipation against strong patriarchal opposition: "We are much too idealistic and the contact with the dark world defeats us. But if we are strong and if we want to serve our profession, we have to fight against the difficulties, trusting in success no matter how strong and difficult the resistance may be!"⁸²

In another short prose from the series "Themes," she presents an autobiographically inspired situation from the space of the home where an aspiring writer struggles to satisfy the demands of her household duties while also finding time to devote to writing, all the while seeking her writer husband's approval. The first-person narrator manifests a remarkable assertiveness in the face of the husband's arrogance as he rebukes her initial attempts to draw his attention to her sketches: "One can write but only when it is justified, in a professional, not a primitive way using the same old patterns like everyone else."⁸³ Eventually, she breaks through his wall of sexist prejudice and he reads her pieces while adding some critical comments encouraging her to continue. With one obstacle out of the way (her husband's approval), the narrator still ends the piece on a tone of despondency, aware of the fact that not only does she lack a room of her own so necessary for the completion of creative tasks but also receives only verbal support from her husband: "I have strung together

79 Isaković quoted in Hawkesworth, *Voices*, 256.

80 Sarajlić, "The Farewell," 246.

81 *Ibid.*, 247.

82 *Ibid.*

83 Sarajlić, "Themes," 248.

a few themes that could be expanded if I only had more leisure time, but right now, that is unattainable for me.”⁸⁴ It is remarkable that Sarajlić’s words have lost nothing of their relevance for women in the twenty-first century, who, regardless of their background, still very often have to fight the same battles between double and triple burden.

Despite the difficulties and societal constraints that Sarajlić faced as an educator and aspiring writer, she succeeded in contributing to a shift in women’s education outside of a narrowly confined space set by rigid religious, cultural, and gender standards. She left behind an albeit small but significant body of writing through which she further paved the way for the emerging new Muslim woman in this geographic space.

Conclusion

The above analysis of the lives and work of four women from the southern peripheries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy allows us to draw some conclusions regarding the development of women’s social activism and creative output in this region. Despite their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they were united by their exceptional education and their presence as a public voice, be it via teaching, publishing, or editorial activities. Nemessányi’s path gradually took her from further north in Hungary to the south, where she became a pathbreaker as the first female principal of a Hungarian language girls’ secondary school in Novi Sad/Újvidék and the founder of the local branch of the Maria Dorothea Association. Today, her life and work are studied as that of a pioneer of women’s secondary education in Vojvodina. Milica Tomić’s educational path initially took her from the south to the north to both big centers of the Monarchy, from where she returned to her native Novi Sad to advance both women’s and the Serbian national cause as the first female editor of a women’s journal in this region. Jelica Belović-Bernadžikovska went the furthest north and west in her quest for knowledge, and she was the most internationally recognized, published, and connected, as well as the most nomadic early feminist, living between various towns along the southern periphery of the Monarchy, all the while embracing the Serbian national cause. Because of her work across borders, however, today Belović-Bernadžikovska is claimed by Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian feminist history. Nafija Sarajlić remained geographically confined to her native Sarajevo

84 Ibid., 250.

but still exhibited a remarkable level of modernity and emancipatory awareness which, while recognized today within the context of Bosnian Muslim history, is relevant far beyond cultural and geographic boundaries.

Through the personal and professional lives of these remarkable women we can discern connections in their feminist activism that transgress ethnic, regional, and national borders. The role of magazines and women's articles in spreading ideas regarding their educational and political rights, influenced by international developments, needs to be emphasized as well. Finally, women's literary output and its role in furthering ideas of women's emancipation cannot be left out of the picture. In the overall conservative social environment across this geographic area, which shaped what women were (and were not) able to do, no women's associations with the explicit goal of demanding political rights existed at the time. Nevertheless, this ethnically varied sample of women pioneers from the parts of the Dual Monarchy that later became Yugoslavia demonstrates that a feminist awareness regarding developments in women's advancement in East Central Europe and beyond was very much present, and that these and other women from this multiethnic and culturally complex region greatly contributed to the improvement of women's image, education, and social status, leaving an imprint on and an important legacy for future generations.

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Phantom Borders and Nostalgia: German Women's Associations in the Second Polish Republic after 1918*

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Transformations associated with the end of World War I had an immense impact on the population of the former Prussian partition area, most of which became, in the wake of the war, the Second Polish Republic. Members of the German women's associations, which had existed before 1918, found themselves in a new situation. As members of a national minority in the newly established Polish state, they were confronted with a reversed balance of power. Meanwhile, women's suffrage had been introduced, opening up new political spaces of action for women. This article examines gender-related spaces of action for German women in this region after 1918 and explores the strategies and points of reference used by these women. The two examples on which it focuses, the Vaterländischer Frauenverein in Graudenz/Grudziądz and the work of feminist activist Martha Schnee in Bromberg/Bydgoszcz, are examined using the concepts of phantom borders and nostalgia.

Keywords: Second Polish Republic, German women's associations, phantom borders, nostalgia, interwar period

Introduction

Women's activism in Central and Eastern Europe was strongly influenced by World War I and, in particular, the regime changes that came at the close of the war, with the emergence of new states after 1918. Women's associations, many of which now belonged to the national minorities in the new states (such as the Germans in the Second Polish Republic), occupied a special position in this context. On the one hand, German women's associations¹ found themselves in a reversed position of power, since they had belonged to the national majority in most regions of the Prussian partition area of the German Empire until its collapse. On the other hand, the founding of the Second Polish Republic, the introduction of women's suffrage in 1918, and the establishment of democratic

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1 An overview of the associations can be found at *Statistik der Frauenorganisationen*, 20–36, as well as Wyder, "Wielkopolskie działaczki," 48–72.

structures opened up new political, institutional, and imagined spaces of action for them. While the position of the German minority in the Second Polish Republic has been rigorously studied,² little attention has been paid to German women's associations, their networks, and their spheres of influence after 1918.³ As this paper will show, broadening the perspective by including the category of gender in the study of national minorities (in addition to, for example, denomination or class) offers new insights into women's agency in the interwar period and sheds light on the hitherto unstudied activities of women's organizations and their networks.

In the new political, institutional, and imagined spaces of action that emerged after 1918, women's organizations adopted strategies and types of activism that resembled prewar aspirations and efforts (e.g., organizing supra-regional network meetings), and they remained linked to their previous points of reference (e.g., the German Empire). These continuities in women's activism in a completely new political situation will be demonstrated with two examples: the Vaterländischer Frauenverein des Roten Kreuzes (VF – Patriotic Women's Association of the Red Cross) in Graudenz/Grudziądz and the efforts of feminist activist Martha Schnee in Bromberg/Bydgoszcz. The source material used consists mainly of records of the respective associations, as well as police files and court records. Two concepts will be used to explain the action strategies of Vaterländischer Frauenverein and Martha Schnee: the theoretical frame of phantom borders⁴ and the concept of nostalgia, drawing on the definitions offered by Svetlana Boym.⁵

The collected volume *Fragmentierte Republik? Das politische Erbe der Teilungszeit in Polen 1918–1939* edited by Michael G. Müller and Kai Struve, deals with the question of how experiences in the various partitioned areas as 'phantom borders' affected the actions of the political elites after 1918 and how this also contributed to the political fragmentation of the Second Polish Republic. A contribution to this discussion that explicitly considers the category of gender, however, is missing. Phantom borders can be described as "former mostly political borders or territorial divisions that continue to structure space

2 See for example Barełkowski and Schutte, *Neuer Staat*; Chu, *German minority*; Sakson, *Polska*.

3 Süchting-Hänger, "Politisch oder vaterländisch" (However, there are only a few geographical references to the area under study here); Harvey, "Pilgrimages"; Schaser, "Engagement."

4 Hirschhausen et. al., *Phantomgrenzen*. The book is the first volume in a series published by the research network "Phantom Borders in East Central Europe," which was active between 2011 and 2017.

5 Boym, "Nostalgia," 7–18.

after they have been institutionally abolished.”⁶ Phantom borders leave behind “tangible traces of the no longer existing political body and its external borders” over different periods of time. In our case, these are the phantom borders of the German Empire respectively the Prussian partition area in the Second Polish Republic, which was founded in 1918. The concept of phantom borders enables us to highlight the features of historical regions without essentializing them or reifying their physical borders. It reminds us that what had once existed as a very real political space can persist as an imagined space, and these imagined spaces can be incorporated into a historical analysis without perpetuating imperial narratives or lending persuasive force to revisionist claims.⁷ This is particularly important in the case of what had been, before the war, the eastern part of the German Empire, which remained the subject of nationalist and revisionist fantasies and a highly controversial political issue after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s triad of space,⁸ three dimensions of phantom borders can be characterized: The *Raumimagination* (imagining of space), the *Raumerfahrung* (experience of space), and the *Raumgestaltung* (formation of space).⁹ The relevance of phantoms borders in the creation, interpretation, and lived experience of spaces is clearly visible in the activities of the women’s associations.

The members of the Vaterländischer Frauenverein in Grudziądz maintained symbolic ties to the defunct German Empire in order to situate themselves in space and to give meaning and consistency to their situation and existence (*Raumimagination*).¹⁰ Their value orientations and practices, which had emerged from their experiences of successes under the German Empire, continued to function as routines under changed circumstances in the Second Polish Republic as they continued their association’s work (*Raumerfahrung*).¹¹ Phantom borders, however, are not simply metaphors for the ways in which spaces are imagined or experienced. They also shape the spaces in which they exist, for example through old and new institutional orders. Surviving legal traditions, for instance, contribute to the meaningful formation of space (*Raumgestaltung*).¹² The German

6 Hirschhausen et. al., *Phantomgrenzen*, 18. All translations are mine.

7 Ibid., 19–20.

8 Lefebvre, “La production.”

9 Hirschhausen et. al., *Phantomgrenzen*, 39.

10 Ibid. 42.

11 Müller et al., “Introduction,” 10–11.

12 Hirschhausen et. al., *Phantomgrenzen*, 50.

law on associations, for example, which was adopted into the new Polish legal system and only replaced in 1933, played a major role in the fate of the Vaterländischer Frauenverein.

In their “academic positioning on phantom borders in Eastern Europe,” Hannes Grandits, Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Claudia Kraft, Dietmar Müller, and Thomas Serrier point out that the three ways in which phantom borders can be understood as part of Lefebvre’s triad of space overlap.¹³ As Marko Zajc states, the “conceptual openness of the ‘phantom border’ concept bears the potential of its productive application.” Referring to examples in which the notion of phantom borders has been used as a fruitful theoretical concept, Zajc asks the following question: “Is this about ‘phantom borders’, or rather ‘phantom spaces’?”¹⁴

This paper explores this question by adding Svetlana Boym’s concept of nostalgia to the analysis. Boym defines nostalgia as a “longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.”¹⁵ She draws a distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia: “Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately.” The notion of restorative nostalgia, which emphasizes *nostos* (home) and “attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,”¹⁶ seems very useful as a perspective from which to study the activities of the German women’s associations in the aftermath of World War I. Boym describes the creation of a “phantom homeland” as an “extreme case of nostalgia.”¹⁷ After a brief historical overview, the two examples mentioned are discussed from the perspective of the concept of phantom borders. Women’s activism in the region before and during World War I is also described to offer context and some grasp of the reference points that were used by women in their work after 1918. Finally, I link the findings of this discussion to the concept of nostalgia.

13 Ibid., 50.

14 Zajc, “Contemporary Borders,” 302.

15 Boym, “Nolstalgia,” 7.

16 Ibid., 13.

17 Ibid., 9–10.

The End of World War I and the Negotiations Concerning the Borders of the New Polish State

With the collapse of the German, Habsburg, and Russian Empires and the end of World War I, new states emerged. These states saw themselves as homogeneous nation states despite the presence of considerable linguistic and confessional minorities. In 1918, 123 years after the Third Partition of Poland, which divided the land of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth among the Prussian, Habsburg, and Russian Empires, the Second Polish Republic came into being. But the proclamation of the Second Polish Republic in November 1918 did not determine the final borders of the new state. For another three years, military conflicts, armed uprisings and referendums shaped the nation-building and state-building processes of the region, which was still suffering from the consequences of the war. Industry and agriculture had collapsed, infrastructure was largely destroyed, food shortages and diseases were a common part of everyday life, and populations were dwindling because of resettlement, deportation, and civilian and military war casualties.¹⁸

The incorporation into the new Polish state of the formerly Prussian territories (the Province of Posen) and large parts of West Prussia was decided by the Treaty of Versailles. From then on, East Prussia was separated from the Weimar Republic by parts of the newly established Second Polish Republic, as the treaty guaranteed Poland access to the Baltic Sea. Danzig was placed under the supervision of the League of Nations as a Free City. In addition, referendums were to be held in parts of East Prussia and Upper Silesia, which, as an industrial region, was of great interest to both countries. The population here was able to vote as to whether to remain with the Weimar Republic or to be incorporated into the new Polish state.¹⁹ The first plebiscite in East Prussia took place on July 11, 1920, in the shadow of the Polish-Soviet war. 96.5 percent of the population voted to remain in the Weimar Republic. Only eight villages were made part of the Second Polish Republic.²⁰

18 Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens*, 98–99.

19 Ibid., 109.

20 Kossert, *Preußen*, 143–57.

New political spaces of action

Women's associations participated in the preparations for the plebiscites. In February 1921, for example, the main office of the Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund (DEF – German Protestant Women's Association)²¹ sent a letter to local Silesian groups with instructions on how to prepare for the upcoming plebiscite in Silesia. The main office asked the local groups of the association in the voting areas for increased commitment. According to the letter, the members of the DEF were

obliged to be faithful to the program of the association and to promote moral-religious, German Protestant thoughts and principles [...] among the population, to stand up for German nature and German character, to strengthen national feelings and, ultimately, also to point out the responsibility of women to do their duty in the election.²²

In particular, the groups in Silesia were encouraged to mobilize women to vote in favor of remaining in the Weimar Republic. To this end, members were to travel to various areas to prepare group meetings and give lectures. Although the activities of the women in the DEF were voluntary and unpaid, the speakers were to receive honoraria for their talks. This offers a clear illustration of how urgent the matter seemed to the main office.²³

The statement concerning “the responsibility of women to do their duty in the election” should not be misunderstood to suggest that the DEF supported the introduction of women's suffrage. On the contrary, the DEF continued to oppose women's suffrage, which was introduced in the Weimar Republic and the Second Polish Republic in 1918. In 1919, women exercised universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage for the first time in the first elections to the National Assembly. A woman's “duty” to exercise the right to vote derived, in the mentality of the DEF, from an obligation to the homeland (not to a democratic system) and loyalty to the fatherland, which transcended politics and parties.²⁴

21 The DEF was founded in 1899 at the Protestant Women's Day in Kassel and was one of the three large German confessional women's associations, along with the Katholischer Frauenbund (Catholic Women's Association) and the Jüdischer Frauenbund (Jewish Women's Association). It saw itself as a link between the Protestant Church and the middle-class women's movement. Its members were mainly involved in charitable work and in the field of education for women. They founded numerous children's homes, girls' homes, recreation homes, workers' homes, and later also homes for the elderly. Gerhard, *Unerbört*, 203–5.

22 AddF, NL-K-16; J-96.

23 Ibid.

24 AddF, NL-K-16; B-30.

As Andrea Süchting-Hänger has observed, the commitment to “Germanness” was presented as a “retreat into a politics-free space, which, however, was often linked to concrete nationalist demands and ideas.”²⁵

The activities of DEF women in the run-up to the plebiscite offer a clear example of how women's associations participated in (new) political spaces of action after 1918. It is worth noting that the DEF did not use a parliamentary space as a political space but continued to operate within the framework of the association's previous activities (such as lectures, trips, etc.) in its efforts to influence the upcoming plebiscite. In this way, political activism could continue to take place in a context that the DEF defined as apolitical, since it did not refer to democracy and elections as a means of political participation but continued to use the fatherland as a point of reference. At the same time, it becomes clear that the fatherland referred to by the association no longer existed as a political state and thus constituted an imagined space.

The outcome of the plebiscite in Upper Silesia was more ambiguous than the outcome in East Prussia. On March 18, 1921, almost 60 percent of the Upper Silesian population voted to remain in the Weimar Republic. While the League of Nations, which had the final decision on the future of the area affected by the vote, was discussing the partition of Upper Silesia, the third Silesian uprising broke out on May 3, 1921. Polish insurgents pursued the annexation of Upper Silesia to the Second Polish Republic. The civil war only ended at the end of June in an armistice and influenced the final decision of the League of Nations. In October 1921, Upper Silesia was divided. The result of the vote notwithstanding, the Polish demands, which were based on economic justifications, were granted. Both the Polish and the German parts of Upper Silesia had large national minorities. The rights of both groups were affirmed, at least on paper, in the Geneva Upper Silesian Convention in May 1922.²⁶

The emergence of the Second Polish Republic meant drastic changes for the peoples of the entire region, especially the German-speaking populations that found themselves within the political borders of the new state. They had to redefine their identity as Germans and adapt to their place as a national minority. This led to the founding of new parties and organizations to represent the interests of the Germans in the Second Polish Republic,²⁷ but it also meant fundamental changes for the organizations which had existed before 1918. The various

25 Süchting-Hänger, “Politisch oder vaterländisch?,” 76.

26 Boysen, “Zivil-militärische Beziehungen,” 179–81.

27 Lakeberg, “Das politische Leben,” 351–52.

organizations reacted in strikingly different ways. For example, the association *Frauenwohl* (Women's Welfare) in Thorn/Toruń focused on informing women about their civil rights after the introduction of women's suffrage, which had been one of the main goals of the association. The members of the association also discussed whether the associated legal aid office should also be opened to Polish citizens after the city's incorporation into the Second Polish Republic in 1920. Ultimately, however, the deliberations about the future of the association and the legal aid office came to nothing, because the association dissolved in September 1920, as more and more of its members simply left the city.²⁸ In the discussion below, I offer two examples of how other associations reacted to the new situation in the immediate postwar period.

The Vaterländischer Frauenverein in Graudenz/Grudziądz

Graudenz was a town of some 30,000 inhabitants in West Prussia with a large German population. There were numerous women's associations, including a local group of the *Vaterländischer Frauenverein*. The founding of the *Vaterländischer Frauenverein* (Patriotic Women's Association) in 1866 was essentially based on the voluntary work of women during the Coalition Wars between 1792 and 1815. The VF was one of the first interconfessional women's associations, the charitable work of which was primarily based on the patriotic motivations of its members.²⁹ The association's main tasks included nursing the wounded and sick in times of war and preparing for war in peacetime. It undertook these efforts in close cooperation with the Ministry of War. An amendment to the statutes in 1869 also brought the training of nurses in hospitals and infant homes into the focus of the association. In the event of war, the VF had to subordinate itself to the Central Committee of the German Red Cross Associations. The charitable activities of the association were financed by membership fees and donations, which often came from the state.³⁰ Local groups with their own executive boards were subordinate to the main board as branch associations, which in turn were organized into provincial and district associations. In 1900, the thousandth branch association was founded, and according to statistics from 1909, the VF had 395,054 members.³¹

28 AP Toruń, 69/291/0/-/5.

29 Süchting-Hänger, *Das Gewissen der Nation*, 26–36.

30 AP Olsztyn, 42/1555/0/1/1.

31 *Statistik der Frauenorganisationen*, 48–52.

By joining the VF, women shifted their traditional domestic activities into a more public sphere in which membership in an association had been seen as an integral part of bourgeois social life in the German Empire. Training as a nurse enabled women to pursue gainful employment, but this profession, furthermore, also corresponded to the ideal of femininity and did not constitute a threat to men working in this field. In principle, the association saw its activities as “women’s work.”³² According to Gabriella Hauch, the activities and foundations of these “women’s associations, which were not considered political, took place in the interplay of a heteronomous and self-determined definition based on their female gender” and “seemed to be embedded in the constructed ‘nature of women’.”³³ In addition to the specific opportunities it offered its members, both in terms of association activities and in the context of gainful employment, the association aimed to improve the living and working conditions of women and girls through special social facilities.

The VF viewed its activities in an apolitical context and was committed to political party neutrality. This self-image is evident from various letters and statements. In the spring of 1920, for example, the main board cancelled its participation in a protest against the occupation of the Rhineland by Black French soldiers. The protest had been launched by the Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenverein, and it had met with the support of a broad alliance of various women’s associations. In its justification, the board stated that, “as this issue was a political one, we regret that we had to refuse to participate for fundamental reasons.” It nevertheless wished the organization “every success.”³⁴ Contrary to the official position of the VF in this matter, eight branch associations, together with 63 other German, Dutch, Swedish and Austrian women’s associations, signed a letter of protest to the League of Nations against the occupation of the Rhineland by French forces, which was described in the letter as “schwarze Schmach” (black disgrace).³⁵

32 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/137.

33 Hauch, “Politische Wohltätigkeit,” 202.

34 AddF, NL-K-16; H-421.

35 Ibid. See also Banks, “Mary Church Terrell.”

The Vaterländischer Frauenverein in Graudenz during the war: The “Army of the Empress”

When the German Empire entered World War I on August 1, 1914, the VF fulfilled its original purpose for the first time since 1871: to care for wounded and sick soldiers. At the request of the Ministry of War, the branch association founded in 1868 in Graudenz set up dining facilities for soldiers passing through, opened soldiers’ homes,³⁶ and treated soldiers in military hospitals.³⁷ VF nurses also worked in the artillery depot in the town of Graudenz.³⁸ The VF also advertised war bonds, which were used to help finance the war.³⁹ The VF itself benefited from financial support from the Ministry of War, the War Office, and the War Replacement and Labor Department, as it was given funds from the so-called “Kaiser Spende” (Emperor’s donation).⁴⁰ In a circular letter to all branch associations, the board appealed to each individual member to financially support a foundation affiliated with the association, and it emphasized that the “greatness of the Vaterländischer Frauenverein, which can call itself the ‘Army of the Empress’ with justifiable pride, rests on the joint work of all associations, branch associations, and association members.”⁴¹

During the war, cooperation with other women’s associations also intensified. Relationships among these associations had at times been tense due to competition in the same “areas of work” and also, for example, due to confessional differences.⁴² Although the association officially positioned itself as interconfessional, its members were predominantly protestants. The exceptional situation during the war and the increased demands on the various women’s associations prompted the main board of the VF to urge its branch associations to foster better relations and more intense cooperation in certain areas of work with the Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenverein,⁴³ the Katholischer Frauenbund (Catholic German Women’s Association),⁴⁴ and the Jüdischer Frauenbund

36 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/137.

37 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/152.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 AP Olsztyn 42/565/0/14/120.

43 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/137.

44 Ibid.

(Jewish Women's Association),⁴⁵ all of which were also represented by local groups in the Prussian partition area. This intensified networking was thus a result of the war situation. The acute situation prompted the associations to set aside their differences, at least to some extent.

The period of transformation after World War I

The Vaterländische Frauenverein had to grapple with various upheavals and changes at the end of the war. These changes included the introduction of women's suffrage. The monarchy, which had served as a strong reference and identification factor, no longer existed due to the founding of the Weimar Republic, as well as the border shifts and referendums in the former Prussian partition area, which called into question the existence of the branch associations in the affected areas.

The introduction of women's suffrage put the VF in a complicated position, as the association rejected women's suffrage in accordance with its statutes. The association pursued the goal of integrating women into the existing system through its charitable activities and its commitments in the event of war, and not through democratic participation in the form of women's suffrage. From the perspective of the VF, women's suffrage endangered the prevailing order.⁴⁶ For the VF and the DEF, by exercising the right to vote, a woman was meeting a civic duty to the fatherland and not an obligation to the democratic system. The fatherland was to take precedence over politics and political parties. This meant that the association could continue to present itself as apolitical and not officially declare any party affiliation, even if it was clear from the association's principles that members could or at least should only vote for German nationalist parties.⁴⁷

After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the main board of the VF informed its members in July 1919 that the branch associations in the ceded territories would have to leave the organization of the Vaterländischer Frauenverein due to the treaties, which no longer permitted cross-border cooperation between branch associations. The main board expressed the hope that the members of the association would "continue to prevent and combat economic and moral hardship in their association's territory in the spirit of the Vaterländischer Frauenverein." To this end, the branch associations had to

45 Ibid.

46 Süchting-Hänger, "Gleichgroße mut'ge Helferinnen," 136.

47 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/137.

rename themselves and separate themselves from the main association. The newly founded association could keep the association's assets if it pursued the "same or similar goals of the Vaterländischer Frauenverein." These orders were passed with "bleeding hearts," and the main board expressed its "heartfelt thanks for everything they had done for the fatherland as the Vaterländischer Frauenverein."⁴⁸

The Polish constitution granted its minorities comprehensive rights and equality before the law, and the German minority was assured that it could run its own educational and cultural institutions with permission of the use of the German language.⁴⁹ After the incorporation of Graudenz (and the change of the name of the city to Grudziądz) into the Second Polish Republic in 1920, the branch association of the VF was renamed *Deutscher Frauenverein für Armen- und Krankenpflege mit dem Sitz in Graudenz* (DFVAK – German Women's Association for Care of the Poor and Sick with its headquarters in Graudenz).⁵⁰ The association also changed its statutes and from then on defined its purpose as the "elimination and prevention of economic and moral hardship" and the provision of "children's schools and care for the poor and sick." While the previous statutes had not contained any explicit requirements concerning the nationality of the members of the association, according to the new guidelines, membership was reserved for "women of German nationality of good repute."⁵¹ The association continued to be chaired by Amanda Polski, whose husband was mayor of the town until 1920. The DFVAK was also a member of the *Verband der Deutschen Frauenvereine Danzigs* (Union of German Women's Associations in Danzig), which coordinated cooperation among the individual German women's associations.⁵² In this case, cross-border cooperation under one umbrella organization seemed possible. After the German associations had been compelled to cut their affiliation with their umbrella organization in the German Reich, a kind of interstice opened up with the organizations that were active in the Free City of Danzig, which was located neither in the Second Polish Republic nor in the Weimar Republic. In order to strengthen the supra-regional connection to other German associations, the DFVAK also became a member

48 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/139.

49 Rumianuk, "Oblicze polityczne," 189.

50 Most of the other branch associations changed their name to *Hilfsverein Deutscher Frauen*. One of the aims of this change of names was to prevent Polish women from becoming members, AP Bydgoszcz, 6/4/0/2.1.3.4/2885.

51 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/4/0/2.1.3.4/2885.

52 Ibid.

of the *Deutscher Wohlfahrtsbund* (German Welfare Association in Poland). The *Deutscher Wohlfahrtsbund* also saw itself as interdenominational and apolitical, and it endeavored to support the affiliated associations “while fully preserving their independence through mutual communication and exchange of ideas and experiences, as well as to represent the common interests with authorities, legislative bodies, and in public.”⁵³ The DFVAK hoped that its affiliation with the *Deutscher Wohlfahrtsbund* would primarily help it secure financial support,⁵⁴ because the organization was one of the main administrators of the funds sent to Poland from the Weimar Republic.⁵⁵ This financial support was also a tool used by the Berlin government to exert political influence on the German minority in Poland.⁵⁶ Apparently, the positive network experience from World War I continued to have an effect here, and even in this (renewed) crisis situation, the focus was set increasingly on cooperation rather than competition.

In spite of the fact that, as of 1920, Grudziądz was part of the Second Polish Republic, the DFVAK attempted to continue its prewar undertakings, even though its main purpose (preparing for war and providing support in the event of war) had lost all relevance and the empress no longer served as the patron saint of the association following the deposition of the German imperial couple. The continued existence of the association preserved an area of activity for German women in theory, but this became less and less relevant, as the vast majority of the German speakers of the city (some 80 percent) began to leave the city in 1920, including active members of the association.⁵⁷

“Revisionist actions” – the DFVAK in court

While the DFVAK regarded itself as apolitical in the tradition of the *Vaterländischer Frauenverein* and continued its charitable activities, the chief of police of the Toruń district, to which Grudziądz belonged, initiated proceedings against the association. In his statement dated October 24, 1921, he accused the association of acting in a “revisionist” manner and continuing to follow the principles of the VF, even though it had changed its name and statutes. He also accused the association of cooperating with other nationalist associations,

53 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/16/-/139.

54 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/4/0/2.1.3.4/2885.

55 Rumianuk, “Oblicze polityczne,” 190.

56 Lakeberg, “Das politische Leben,” 354.

57 Boysen, “Zivil-militärische Beziehungen,” 150.

such as the Deutscher Schutzbund für Grenz- und Auslandsdeutsche (German Association for Border- and Foreign Germans), and thus of pursuing political goals in addition to its “humanist goals, which, however, are not laid down in the association’s statutes.”⁵⁸ Due to alleged violations of §§ 86 and 128 of the Criminal Code, he sought to initiate criminal proceedings against the chairwoman Amanda Polski and to dissolve the association in accordance with § 2 of the Associations Act of April 19, 1908, which stipulated that an association could be dissolved if “its purpose is contrary to criminal law.”⁵⁹ Here, the Prussian government’s Associations Act of 1908, which remained in force until 1933,⁶⁰ was coupled with Polish criminal law.

As evidence in support of the accusations, the chief of police cited several letters and other written testimonies which showed that the association continued to receive financial support from the VF, positioned themselves as irredentists through their cooperation with the Schutzbund and the Deutscher Wohlfahrtsbund,⁶¹ and pursued the “strengthening of Germanness” as its primary purpose. The last point was not in itself an offense, but according to the law on associations, it had to be reported to the Polish authorities.⁶² In December 1922, the Grudziądz police refused to issue Amanda Polski a passport, which she needed to travel to the Weimar Republic.⁶³ The DFVAK filed an appeal against its planned dissolution with the Supreme Administrative Court in Warsaw, but the appeal was rejected, meaning that the association was dissolved following a decision on November 6, 1923.⁶⁴ In a survey taken in March 1924, the Department of Public Security in Toruń confirmed the decisions taken, stating that there was sufficient evidence to show that the association, in addition to its charitable purposes, also pursued goals that were hidden from the state authorities, namely the promotion of so-called Germanness in the western border areas. It allegedly did so in agreement with the leadership of the organizations in the German state

58 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/4/0/2.1.3.4/2885.

59 Ibid.

60 *Prawo o stowarzyszeniach 1932*, in particular Art. 63e.

61 The Wohlfahrtsbund, which can be seen as a proxy organization of the Deutschtumbund zur Wahrung der Minderheitenrechte which was banned by the Polish authorities in mid-1923, was also monitored by the Polish authorities. Hauser, “Mniejszość niemiecka,” 285 and 300.

62 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/4/0/2.1.3.4/2885.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

and thus exerted an influence on political events, even though the statutes of the women's association made no mention of political ambitions or orientation.⁶⁵

In May 1924, the Supreme Administrative Court in Warsaw confirmed that a criminal investigation would be initiated against chairwoman Amanda Polski and other members of the DFVAK's board.⁶⁶ The judges conceded that the women would have been permitted to dedicate themselves to the "promotion of Germanness" if this had been stated as the purpose of the association in the statutes. Thus, contrary to the women's understanding of their rights, they were allowed to represent a political cause. Their strategy of carrying out their national aspirations under the guise of charity in order to be able to use the label "apolitical" must therefore be considered a failure. It remains unclear whether the court really convicted the association of not having provided information about its "real activities" or whether this accusation was merely a pretext. With the dissolution of the association, the German women lost a sphere of action that had been reserved for them as a national minority and in which they had been able to continue their sociopolitical efforts.

Phantom borders and their influence on the DFVAK

The legal proceedings against the DFVAK show that the organization's attempt to present itself as an apolitical association was judged differently by the Polish authorities. The DFVAK's cooperation with other nationalist associations and its commitment to irredentism were judged as explicitly political by the organs of the Polish state. The ways in which phantom borders played roles in the interpretation, experience, and formation of space are all clear in this example. While referring to the German Empire as a point of reference and continuing their association's work as before the war, the leading women in the organization tried to situate themselves in the newly established Second Polish Republic. Their perception of the former German Empire and the "fatherland" gave meaning to their existence despite their new position in the new country as national minority and the reversed power position in which they found themselves (*Raumimagination*). Their experience of this space determined their strategy, which did not change despite the altered political circumstances (*Raumerfahrung*). Phantom borders also played a crucial role in the formation of this space. The

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Polish state's reaction to the association's activities shows the persistence of old political traditions and, thus, borders, since the conviction was based on prewar German legislation that remained in force until 1933 (*Raumgestaltung*). The conviction of the association under Prussian's Associations Act reveals the reverse power dynamic after 1918. Previously, Polish associations in particular (but not exclusively) had been convicted by the Prussian authorities and their activities had been restricted with reference to § 2 of the act.

Martha Schnee's Activism in Bromberg

The city of Bromberg, which was one of the administrative districts of the Province of Posen (and which lies some 70 kilometers from Graudenz), also had a wide range of feminist activists and various associations aimed at improving the living conditions of women and girls. Martha Lina Ottilie Schnee was born on October 18, 1863 in Bromberg. Her father worked in the city's land registry office. After graduating from elementary school, she attended a Protestant teachers' training college and passed her teacher's exam there at the age of 20. She then obtained a certificate to teach at secondary schools for girls. After working as a governess for a short time, she opened a private girls' school in the autumn of 1888. The number of students grew to 80, so Schnee employed additional teachers at her school.⁶⁷ The teachers came to Bromberg from all parts of the German Empire. Many of these young women had already gained work experience in schools in Silesia, Berlin, or even England.⁶⁸ From 1905 on, the so-called "Familienschule" (family school) was also attended by boys. The student body consisted largely of Protestant children, with a few Catholic and Jewish children in each of the seven grades.⁶⁹ The teachers taught subjects such as German, French, history, and Protestant religion.⁷⁰ The school remained in operation until 1918.

In 1901,⁷¹ Martha Schnee became chairwoman of Frauenwohl (Women's Welfare), an association founded in Bromberg in 1897. The association was a member of the Verband der Fortschrittlichen Frauenvereine (Federation of Progressive Women's Associations). It campaigned for the "public

67 Błażejowski et al., *Bydgoski*, 127–28.

68 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/2/0/2.2.2.61/1270.

69 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/2/0/2.2.2.61/1272.

70 Ibid.

71 Or 1903. The various sources offer different information.

representation and promotion of women's demands." The association saw itself as part of the progressive wing of the German women's movement. § 1 of the association's statutes stipulated that the promotion of women's demands should be independent of "any political or religious party." The association sought to achieve its aims in part by listening to and discussing lectures and by working in committees. While any woman could become a full member, men could only obtain associate membership. For an annual subscription of 4.25 Deutsche Mark, the members received the federations' journal *Die Frauenbewegung*.⁷²

The Ostdeutscher Frauentag as a supra-regional networking space

As part of the organizing committee that was established as a cooperative effort between Frauenwohl and Hilfsverein weiblicher Angestellter (Aid Association of Female Employees), Martha Schnee organized the first *Ostdeutscher Frauentag* (East German Women's Day) in Bromberg in October 1903. This is one of the rather rare examples of cross-class cooperation between women's associations, since, in contrast to Frauenwohl, the Hilfsverein weiblicher Angestellter mainly consisted of women who did wage labor. At that time, there was no superior association of east German women's associations, but the associations were, according to Schnee, united by "the bond of belonging together at home." The organizers saw the national and international women's congresses that had taken place previously as a model for the first *Ostdeutscher Frauentag*, but they also hoped to "give the German east a certain counterweight to the west and south." The establishment of a "closed association of East German women's associations" was also under consideration. The focus of the *Ostdeutscher Frauentag* was on humanitarian and economic issues. Among the 180 visitors, representatives of different women's associations from the Province of Posen and East- and West Prussia attended the three-day event. They represented various denominations and political views. In her opening remarks, Schnee expressed her hope that the meeting would further the goal of gender equality.⁷³ On the last day, she emphasized the specific situation of women's organizations in the eastern parts of the German Empire and the duties arising from this situation for women, including organizational efforts among working-class women.⁷⁴ Working-class women, however, were not generally seen as equal. Here, the main focus was

⁷² AP Toruń, 69/291/0/-/3.

⁷³ N.N. "Erster Ostdeutscher Frauentag in Bromberg." *Ostdeutsche Presse*, 1903, no. 239.

⁷⁴ N.N. "Erster Ostdeutscher Frauentag in Bromberg III." *Ostdeutsche Presse*, 1903, no. 241.

on paternalistic notions of “aid.” The idea of gender equality thus referred primarily to the relationship between men and women within a class, and not across classes. After the first congress in 1903, the *Ostdeutscher Frauentag* was held in a different city every two years, including Lissa, Culm, and Danzig. It created an important networking space for the women’s movements in the Prussian partition Area. Due to her progressive stance on various issues, Martha Schnee was considered “very radical” by chairwomen of different associations, who warned against her participation at the *Ostdeutscher Frauentag*.⁷⁵

In February 1904, Frauenwohl established a legal aid office in the same building as Martha Schnee’s school.⁷⁶ The legal aid offices, which usually had been run by an affiliated association, were then united nationally in the *Rechtsschutzverband* (Legal Defense Association). The guiding principles of the association were to avoid legal conflicts and resolve such conflicts out of court on the one hand while also strengthening the legal awareness of women seeking advice, increasing solidarity among women across classes, and collecting evidence through counselling for the need to reform existing legislation. Efforts to resolve disputes out of court resulted above all from the inferior position of women as enshrined in private law.⁷⁷ The legal aid office’s letterhead book shows that Schnee and other members of the association provided free advice to people in need four times a month. These appointments were occasionally attended by men, but mainly by women. In July 1907, for example, a servant contacted the legal aid office because she had not received her wages. The association members then wrote a letter on her behalf to her former employer, demanding that the outstanding wages be sent to the association or directly to the woman concerned. Otherwise, “further steps” would be taken.⁷⁸ On the same day, a female worker, homeless with her nine children at that time, came to seek support. Members of the association contacted the local gas company and asked it to provide accommodation for the woman and her children.⁷⁹ Shortly afterwards, the legal aid office supported a woman whose husband was not paying alimony for their child and urged him to comply with this obligation.⁸⁰

75 AddF, NL-K-16; J-112 3.

76 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/19/-/159.

77 Briatte, *Bevormundete Staatsbürgerinnen*, 126–27.

78 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/19/-/159.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether Polish-speaking people also made use of the counselling services. The statutes of *Frauenwohl* did not preclude this.

While the members of the association (including Schnee) usually came from an educated middle-class background, those seeking advice came from a broader spectrum of classes and were often unable to afford a lawyer and thus dependent on the free advice. The legal aid office supported those seeking advice on an individual level but also collected cases and reported them to the *Rechtsschutzverband*. In doing so, it provided examples of the need for legal reforms on a collective level. As Angelika Schaser notes, "What is certain, however, is that the legal protection movement developed around the turn of the century made an important contribution to political education and to the legal equality of women."⁸¹ The legal protection office was one of the association's spheres of activity in pursuit of its statutory goal of "promoting women's interests." Unfortunately, it is unclear how long the legal aid office remained open, but it probably ceased to operate after the end of World War I.⁸²

"Can we stay here?" The efforts of German Women's Associations after 1918

In May 1919, Schnee founded a new organization in Bromberg, the *Deutscher Frauenbund* (German Women's League), of which she served as chairwoman.⁸³ Schnee was also a political representative of the German minority in Poland and was one of the cofounders and a board member of the *Deutsche Vereinigung für Posen und Pomerellen* (German Association for Poznań and Pomerelia), which had its headquarters in Bydgoszcz.⁸⁴

In an undated speech at the opening of an exhibition on German craftsmanship (presumably in 1921) titled "Can we stay here?", Schnee laid out her thoughts on the future of the German population in Bydgoszcz. The Germans had "the feeling that they had to leave: The insecurity of the legal situation here, the lack of raw materials, the rising cost of clothing, the uncertainty of the political situation are driving them out." While she acknowledged the difficult living conditions of the Germans in Bydgoszcz, she also painted a bleak picture of the Weimar Republic, which "is no longer the Germany of 1914 either."

81 Schaser, "Einführung des Frauenwahlrechts," 103.

82 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/19/-/159.

83 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/474/0/15/490.

84 Błażejowski et al., *Bydgoski*, 127.

The country was economically on its last legs, she said, and emigration was not an option, because one would have to build a life from scratch. Economically, the German urban and rural populations in Poland were better off, so it was important to “hold out” until “Germanness had prevailed again.” After all, she insisted, “Germanness has asserted itself everywhere abroad.” Strengthening “Germanness” abroad was also an important task for German women. Schnee emphasized several times in her speech that “over there, we have no dwellings, no prospects, only the very difficult struggle for survival. Here, despite the difficulties we face, we have a home, we have at least a possibility of work, a place.” She repeatedly spoke of a “difficult transition period” that must be survived “in the duty to the German fatherland.”⁸⁵

The resumption of *Deutscher Frauentag* in Polen

Probably in the summer of 1922, the first new incarnation of the *Ostdeutscher Frauentag*, now renamed the *Deutscher Frauentag in Polen* (German Women’s Day in Poland), was held in Bydgoszcz.⁸⁶ Schnee gave one of the main lectures, in which she shared her thoughts on “German women in present-day Poland: cultural and economic work.”⁸⁷ In her lecture, she referred to the Polish national women’s movement, which German women should take as an example in the context of “cultural work.” She also emphasized several times how important it was, due to the new political situation, to join forces and work together with men in all fields.⁸⁸

Two years later, at the *Landfrauentag* (Rural Women’s Day) in Bydgoszcz, Schnee held a talk on “The German Woman in Poland.” In addition to lectures, the visitors, who had come to the event from all over Poland, were also able to see an exhibition on the subject of “domestic art.” This exhibition took place annually and was an attempt to improve the incomes of homeworkers by giving them an opportunity to sell handmade goods. The event was held as part of the efforts to reestablish a supra-regional *Landfrauenbund* (Rural Women’s Association). This association would be responsible primarily for dealing with economic issues faced by the German female rural population, including the

85 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/474/0/15/490.

86 AddF, NL-K-16; J-98 3.

87 AP Bydgoszcz 6/4/0/2.1.3.4/2903/2.

88 Ibid.

creation of new “employment opportunities, sales opportunities, and sales outlets for domestic crafts.”⁸⁹

In April 1924, the women's organizations active in Bydgoszcz and the surrounding area that were dedicated to charity decided to cooperate more closely. This association of 14 organizations (including Catholic, Protestant, interdenominational and Jewish ones) met monthly from then on to “discuss questions of a cultural nature, especially women's issues, through presentations and debates.”⁹⁰ The model for this was the association of German women's organizations in Poznań, which had been working together closely in various charity efforts for some time.⁹¹

For the city council election in the fall of 1925, the association called on its members to vote for women and to get involved in the elections.⁹² The members of the *Deutscher Frauenbund* were also involved in youth welfare, career counselling, soup kitchens, and other charitable institutions.⁹³ The *Deutscher Frauentag in Polen* continued to take place annually in different cities, in part simply to offer “a meeting place for all those who know that we must stand together firmly to preserve our homeland and our culture.” This shared commitment to “Germanness” led to unprecedented cooperation among the various women's associations, the religious affiliations of which within the women's movement were now eclipsed by the category of nationality. This is also evident in the call for women “living in foreign nations” to “appear as a unified group” at elections. While political elections are recognized as a legitimate democratic interest of the German minorities and women were also encouraged to exercise their right to vote, it was once again clear that the commitment to the “*Deutsches Volkstum*” was the highest priority. Explicit gender-specific interests and the resulting voting preferences were pushed into the background in the name of “Germanness” and its defense.⁹⁴

However, Martha Schnee did not consider the Germans living in Poland to be united enough:

We recognize [...] the absolutely hostile attacking position against Germanness. The goal: the complete annihilation of Germanness in

⁸⁹ AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/22/-/192.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Poland. In the face of this, Germanness is not yet united enough. We women must make it our mission to advocate for the unification of Germanness by all means.⁹⁵

In 1928, Martha Schnee began to run the *Frauenfürsorgestelle* (Women's Welfare Office) in Bydgoszcz. Women of the DEF were impressed by her work, as she provided "valuable suggestions for practical welfare work for women and children of German origin in Poland."⁹⁶ Schnee remained the chairwoman of the Deutscher Frauenbund until 1934, the year she retired from her various offices and memberships at the age of 70. She died in 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II. In an obituary published in *Die Frau*, feminist activist Gertrud Bäumer wrote of the death of the "German women's leader in the east."⁹⁷

Phantom borders and their influence on Martha Schnee

In founding the Deutscher Frauenbund in 1919, Martha Schnee built on the experiences she had gained in her efforts to improve the lives of women and girls through association work. In her speech "Can we stay here?" the importance of phantom borders in the imagining of space becomes clear. The German Empire had fallen, and yet it still served as a reference point. The "place" itself (i.e. the territories of the newly created Second Polish Republic which had been part of the German Empire) was so symbolically charged (as suggested by Schnee's contention that "Here, despite all the difficulties, there is a home") that it seemed better to remain there than to emigrate to the newly founded Weimar Republic. This imagined, symbolically charged place in the Second Polish Republic thus was preferred over the real German state (*Raumimagination*). Parts of Schnee's speech reveal a complete ignorance of the establishment of the Second Polish Republic and the minority protection treaties in force since January 1920, which Schnee regarded as illegitimate, since she denied the very right of the Polish state to exist. In view of the economically precarious situation of the German minority in Bydgoszcz, Schnee's argumentation, which emphasizes the economic advantages, is surprising, especially considering the overall difficult situation of the civilian population in Poland in the immediate postwar period.⁹⁸ She seems

95 AP Bydgoszcz, 6/477/22/-/193.

96 AddF, NL-K-16; J-98 3.

97 Bäumer, "Das Martyrium."

98 Rumianek: Oblicze polityczne, 187–93.

to have presented these arguments to persuade the German population to stay so that it could defend “Germanness abroad,” as she understood it.

Here, too, the experience of space played a major role. The experience of being (or at least of having been) in a position of power had such a strong effect that the actual economic and political situations were completely ignored (*Raumerfahrung*). Schnee sought to maintain the living conditions of the German population and their (formerly) privileged position, particularly in the economic sphere. This (imagined) living space could only survive if Germans were to stop leaving the city. This explains why Schnee was so keen to prevent them from doing so (or at least to encourage them not to do so). In the sense of phantom borders, the reintroduction of the *Ostdeutscher Frauentag* as the *Deutscher Frauentag in Polen* can be seen as an attempt to maintain existing structures of cooperation and a prewar, supra-regional networking space. This continuation is also an expression of a spatial experience that has influenced the actions of the women involved, despite the new circumstances.

Summary

The examples discussed above reveal gender-related spaces of action for the German minority in the newly created Second Polish Republic. The phantom borders of the fallen German Empire and the Prussian partition area continued to have an effect on the minds of Germans and their commitment to the preservation of “Germanness.” This was reflected in the continuing strategies of German women’s activism. We return, then, to Zajc’s question: “Is this about ‘phantom borders’, or rather ‘phantom spaces’?” Svetlana Boym’s concept of nostalgia thereby expands our perspective. Both forms of nostalgia, described by Boym, are relevant in this discussion. While the *Deutscher Frauenverein für Armen- und Krankenpflege mit dem Sitz in Graudenz* referred in its activism to an imagined homeland of the past, Schnee developed an imagined homeland in a(n) (utopian) future.

In the case of the *Deutscher Frauenverein für Armen- und Krankenpflege mit dem Sitz in Graudenz*, the renaming of the association was primarily a formal act. The adaptation of the statute offered an opportunity to create a German space of action and the cooperation with other German associations was a reaction to the changing power dynamics. Overall, however, the work of the association was shaped by a “carry on as before” mentality. The new political reality (a newly founded Polish democratic state and the resulting new

participatory opportunities) was largely ignored or denied. The new borders of the Weimar Republic were rejected and the previous borders remained as a strong point of reference. While these phantom borders (i.e. the borders of the fallen German Empire) remained an important element of understandings of German national and political identity, they were especially significant in areas that were no longer geographically part of the Weimar Republic or were separated from the “fatherland.” Geographical distance from the new German state strengthened the symbolic meaning of these borders and facilitated visions of a non-existent homeland and its borders. Until the dissolution of the association in 1923, its activities had taken place in a “phantom homeland.” Commitment to the fatherland remained in place at all times, regardless of the political system or ruling parties. This phantom homeland seemed more present and “real” than actual political spaces of action, such as the very right to vote in the elections in the Second Polish Republic. In the words of Svetlana Boym, it is a typical case of nostalgia and “a longing for a home that no longer exists.”⁹⁹ By constantly referring to “transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” we see a characteristic case of restorative nostalgia.¹⁰⁰ This kind of nostalgia is primarily backward-looking and functions perhaps first and foremost to legitimize the existence of the association and its actions in the present.

Like the DFVAK, Schnee herself sought to keep up the association work and to create networking spaces for the remaining German women’s associations in the Second Polish Republic. At the beginning of her activist career around 1900, Schnee was radically progressive; however, she had always been radically nationalistic, too. As the power position of the Germans in Bydgoszcz changed, she focused more on her nationalism, distancing herself from her progressive feminism in the meantime. Nevertheless, she remained active in the women’s movement even after 1918. She was able to use her many years of experience as chairwoman of *Frauenwohl*, her position as headmistress, and her commitment to strengthening cross-regional cooperation among women’s associations in the eastern part of the German Empire in her work for the German minority. While she did not leave the field of association work, she was now involved in a much more politically charged area of activity. Furthermore, her comments on the situation in the Weimar Republic and her opinion that this state was no longer “the Germany of 1914” clearly show that Schnee did not see the actual German

99 Boym, “Nostalgia,” 7.

100 Ibid., 13.

state as a point of reference. She referred, rather, to “the German fatherland,” which no longer existed, and also to an imagined homeland in the future. Here, the fantastic side of nostalgia, as described by Boym, becomes clear: “Nostalgia [...] is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.”¹⁰¹ Since Schnee could not accept the new political reality, she seems to have imagined a future homeland where the German population was still in a position of power, even if this envisioned homeland was geographically in Poland. This kind of nostalgia was primarily forward-looking. It sought to legitimize the aspirations of the remaining German minority and also to encourage this minority to remain despite the difficult political and economical situation. In both examples, nostalgia serves the same purpose. It fills the gap between the fallen Empire on the one hand and the Second Polish Republic on the other, which was not seen by Schnee (and many members of the German minority) as legitimate.

The extension of the concept of phantom borders to include “phantom homelands as an extreme case of nostalgia” provides a useful theoretical framework for a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and actions of women living in what was, to them, something of a “phantom space.” Further research is needed to examine how the phantom borders of the Prussian partition area, as described here, also affected Polish women’s activism after 1918.

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Adrift on the Periphery: The Alternative Development of Hungarian Women's Organizations in Interwar Transylvania

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This study explores the interwar history of Hungarian women's organizations in Transylvania, focusing on the complex interplay between gender, ethnicity, and politics in the aftermath of the Treaty of Trianon. It examines the foundation and evolution of the Central Secretariat of the Hungarian Minority Women of Romania (RMKNKT) and its affiliated religious and social associations, analyzing how Transylvanian Hungarian women developed alternative, hybrid models of emancipation that blended traditional gender roles with modern political activism.

Through discussion of archival sources from transnational perspectives, the essay traces how Hungarian women in Romania adapted to exclusion from national and international women's organizations by reconfiguring their activism along ethno-religious lines. It devotes particular attention to so-called "railway mission" programs designed to protect women, who were compelled to move among various locations in the country to pursue work, illustrating how these initiatives became vehicles for ethnic self-defense and identity construction.

The study reveals that Hungarian women's activism in interwar Romania cannot simply be categorized as conservative or progressive. Instead, it operated in a liminal space shaped by the constraints of minority status, the failures of multicultural inclusion, and opportunistic engagement with both international and religious networks. This essay contributes to the redefinition of minority women's political subjectivity and highlights how social work and community care were understood in ethnic frameworks.

Keywords: Transylvanian Hungarian women's organizations, interwar, railway mission

“Let’s not take any leadership position in the MANSZ, and let’s not break our unity.”¹ In the spring of 1942, at a meeting of the Transylvanian Catholic Women’s Association, Countess Paula Bethlen² declared the organization’s intent to maintain its autonomous status, thereby rejecting any affiliation with the National Alliance of Hungarian Women, (Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége or MANSZ)³, the biggest national Hungarian women’s association. This statement is surprising in light of the prevailing sentiment following the Second Vienna Award, in the wake of which one would have expected Transylvanian women’s organizations to align themselves with the biggest conservative Hungarian women’s organization. At this meeting, the Association also explained its choice: “Here, for 20 years, associations of all denominations worked in harmony. Let us stay in the shadow of the Church and continue to work there.” As one participant in the meeting commented, “We don’t want to work together because of resentment. We know that unity is strength.”

What events led these women to make this decision? The present study analyzes Hungarian women’s organizations in Transylvania during the interwar period and the roles of women’s welfare activists in ethnic identity politics. The analysis focuses on the establishment of the Central Secretariat of the Romanian Hungarian Minority Women (Romániai Magyar Kisebbségi Nők Központi Titkársága, RMKNKT), which was the primary umbrella organization of the various women’s associations. It traces the trajectories of the process of emancipation after World War I and the ways in which the women’s organizations of an ethnic minority group were able to function in a context in which they had only sporadic and conditional national and international support. This study explores the formation of the minority identity of Hungarian women, with emphasis on the manner in which the construction of femininity was shaped within the daily lives of the Hungarian ethnic community in Transylvania.

There is very little secondary literature on Hungarian women in Transylvania. While significant advancements have been made in eastern Europe concerning the “potential of gender analysis in the wider historical scholarship,”⁴ both

1 Jegyzőkönyv. Felvétel a Kat. Női Misszió 1942. III. hó 17-én tartott választmányi gyűléséről. Katholikus Női Misszió jegyzőkönyve, Főegyházmegyei Levéltár, Kolozsvári Gyűjtőlevéltár, Kolozsvár, 188–91.

2 Known as Countess Bethlen Györgyné (born as Paula Jósika, 1899–1962).

3 Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége (National Alliance of Hungarian Women or MANSZ) was a nationalistic and conservative women’s organization in Hungary in the interwar period, which supported the government’s nationalistic agenda.

4 Bucur, “An Archipelago of Stories,” 1375.

the Romanian and the Hungarian secondary literature has overlooked the experiences of Transylvanian women who belonged to ethnic groups other than the Romanian majority.⁵

While women's associations in Transylvania in the interwar period are occasionally mentioned in some of the scholarship, the works in which they are discussed often lack a sufficiently broad perspective. In some cases, discussions of religious women's organizations are offered in isolation, with a narrow focus on the given confession and little or no consideration of how these organizations related to or interacted with other groups and bodies or, for that matter, the broader sociopolitical context.⁶ This paper addresses this lacuna in the secondary literature by highlighting an underappreciated dimension of national political history and offering an alternative perspective on the ethnic struggle through a women-centered lens.

While the primary objective of this essay is to present new evidence concerning a series of paradoxical developments in the interwar history of Transylvanian Hungarian women's movements, it has also been informed by the study of networks in which these women's organizations were embedded. In the aftermath of the Treaty of Trianon, minority women's organizations found themselves disconnected from both international women's organizations and the feminist movement and also, to a certain extent, from women's associations in Hungary. However, some ties with international religious women's organizations were still kept, albeit in an informal manner. This study will show also that even Romanian organizations were only superficially open to minority women's groups in the interwar period.

As the analysis of organizational linkages offered in the discussion below reveals, in their efforts to maintain official relationships exclusively with national organizations, women's international organizations marginalized newly formed minority organizations in Romania. This led – among other political and social factors – to a narrowing of perspectives and the ethnicization of regional women's

5 Some rare exceptions can be found among Romanian historians, ex., Cosma, "Asociaționismul feminin maghiar," Cosma, "Aspecte privind constituirea și activitatea Secretariatului Central al Femeilor Minoritare Maghiare," Lőnhárt, "Asociațiile femeilor maghiare din Transilvania."

6 For comprehensive discussion of the activity of the Sisters of Social Service and the work of the Unitarian Women and the Reformed Women, see Lengyel, "Nemzetmentők és nemzetrontók"; Farmati, "Szerzetesnők a keresztény feminizmus – a társadalom szolgálatában"; Murányi, "SSS, Szellemben, irányzatban, szeretetben"; Zsakó, "Az unitárius nőmozgalom kialakulása"; Zsakó, *Hinni és tenni*; Bokor, "A csendes szemlélő"; Blos-Jáni, *Belső képek*; Gaal, "De Gerando Antonina"; Püsök, "To Serve with Words, Letters, and Deeds"; Adorjáni, "A nőszövegség és a belmisszió."

organizations. Consequently, the objectives of the progressive organizational program of the RMKNKT shifted toward an ethnic interpretation of social problems. In the absence of any kind of professional or financial support from the state and from international networks, local organizations were obliged to shift their focus from the development of comprehensive, long-term programs to the management of smaller, short-term social issues. This shift is evidenced by the integration of relationships with larger, primarily religious international organizations into the operations of the local women's organizations. The concept of ethnicization, as I approach it in this study, includes both top-down and bottom-up dynamics. The former pertains to state-led categorization, while the latter involves mobilization among minority groups. In my discussion, however, the focus is placed on ethnicity as a dynamic process, rather than on the assumption that ethnic groups can be seen as stable actors. The case study will demonstrate how political, institutional, and network dynamics contribute to ethnicization and the self-determination (and self-interpretation) of a group.⁷

The second part of the article analyzes how the "railway mission," which was an initiative to prevent the exploitation on the labor market of women and girls who felt compelled to move in search of work, was undertaken by religious women's associations. The discussion offers a revealing example of the interconnectedness of various national and international tendencies, organizations, and discourses. A notable aspect of these social programs and discourses concerned ethnically Hungarian women who found themselves pressured to move to seek work. The category of the peasant or working-class woman who sought employment outside the home and therefore encountered an unfamiliar cultural environment (among predominantly Romanian speakers) served as a potent metaphor for interwar Hungarian femininity. According to this discourse, these women needed care, oversight, and supervision. The categories of ethnicity, class, and gender intersected in the context of women who regularly moved in search of work, and these categories were therefore used in the discourses of the "servant-programs" and the railway-mission projects.

The study demonstrates that Hungarian women's activism and the process of emancipation were characterized by a kind of ambivalent or dual politics which embodied both tradition and modernity. Although the Hungarian women's rights activists in Transylvania were familiar with the conservative trends in

7 The following references were considered to be of particular significance in this study of ethnicity: Wimmer, *Ethnic boundary making*; Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*; Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

the women's movement in Hungary itself, or what Katalin Sárai Szabó has characterized as “norm-following emancipation,”⁸ the approaches they choose in their politics and the position they adopted was hardly a conscious choice of a group of upper-class women. Furthermore, this position was also influenced by significant external factors.

It is also worth noting that the adoption of conservative values and gender roles did not propel these activists to the extreme right, as was the case in Hungary.⁹ In this sense, the classical dichotomy of left-wing and right-wing women's activism is an oversimplification, at least in the case of this discussion.

Combining the Social and the Political

In the wake of World War I, the former activities undertaken by Hungarian women from Transylvania in the social sphere were supplemented by new public roles in the domain of ethnopolitical mobilization, which had economic, political, educational, and cultural dimensions.¹⁰ This shift led to the renegotiation of the position of these women beyond the confines of the philanthropic framework. As Ella Kauntz Engel, a Unitarian women's rights activist, noted in her comments on the importance of gender equality within the Church,

Our goal, of course, is complete equality, but we know that this cannot be achieved overnight. Today, we are not yet sufficiently self-aware and disciplined. In the early stages of our movement, we are essentially just searching for ways to begin moving toward this goal. Our situation is made more difficult by the fact that our so-called work to date has been limited to begging and organizing entertainment. These things are necessary, but we must now prove that we are capable of more than just organizing buffets.¹¹

This was in line with international trends and broader global developments linked to women's employment and professionalization after World War I. In the wake of the war, the political and cultural climate reinforced traditional gender roles, according to which women were the “mothers of the nation,” tasked with ensuring the biological and cultural reproduction of ethnic groups. They were

8 Sárai Szabó, “Normakövető női emancipáció”; Papp and Sipos, *Modern, diplomás nő a Horthy-korban*.

9 See Pető, “The Rhetoric of Weaving and Healing.”

10 Bokor, “Minority femininity at intersections”; Bokor, “A székely Nagyasszony testőrei.”

11 Kauntzné Engel, “A nőmozgalom nálunk,” 208.

also seen as the guardians of morality and the reproductive vessels of “pure” ethnic lineage. This period, however, also came with very strong transnational influences, and powerful women's alliances and leagues emerged which fought for the rights of women.

A close examination of the brief yet profoundly turbulent period reveals substantial transformations in the nature and significance of women's associations in Europe. A global functional shift had occurred in the conceptualizations of social work and social activism, with women emerging as the primary agents of social transformation. As English poet and philosopher Denise Riley has argued, “this new production of ‘the social’ offered a magnificent occasion for the rehabilitation of ‘women’. In its very founding conceptions, it was feminized; in its detail, it provided the chances for some women to enter upon the work of restoring other, more damaged, women to a newly conceived sphere of grace.”¹²

The secondary literature on gender and social reforms in eastern Europe reveals significant changes in women's associations as they evolved to address shifting societal conditions and priorities.¹³ In the prewar period, most of the women's associations focused on charitable works, addressing issues such as poverty, education, and public health. These efforts were often framed as extensions of women's domestic roles. After World War I, many associations shifted from charitable aid to advocacy for systemic change. They began addressing structural inequalities and campaigning for legal reforms, including labor rights, suffrage, and family law. Women's associations became more professional and institutionalized in their structure. As they engaged directly with state governments and international institutions, such as the League of Nations, they influenced policies on issues such as trafficking, education, and gender equality.

Consequently, women were not only the actors but also the objects of these social actions. Voluntary charitable work began to shift. In their social work and reform efforts, women aspired to do more than simply extend their roles and traditional responsibilities in the private intimate space of the home to the public sphere. At the same time, opportunities for professionalization were created. As Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe have argued, “women were expected to take responsibility for healing the wounds of war,” which “could provide opportunities for women to break away from traditional restrictions and

12 Riley, *Am I that name?* 48.

13 Fell and Sharp, *The women's movement in wartime*; Kuhlman, *Reconstructing patriarchy*; Wingfield and Bucur, *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*.

make a significant and meaningful contribution to cultural demobilization in the war's aftermath.”¹⁴

There was a discernible shift in the activities of Transylvanian Hungarian women's organizations following the war and the Treaty of Trianon. This shift was prompted in part by an expansion in membership to encompass women from diverse social classes and an engagement in the ethnic struggles of the newly formed ethnic minority.

Before World War I, the Hungarian women's associations in Transylvania had primarily functioned as local philanthropic organizations. They were small entities engaged in sporadic support activities, occasionally under the auspices of a church or in affiliation with larger Hungarian umbrella organizations, such as the Hungarian Federation of Women's Associations (Magyar Nőegyesületek Szövetsége), the National Association of Women's Welfare Workers (Nőtisztviselők Országos Egyesülete), and the Feminist Association (Feminista Egyesület). This involvement also led to affiliations with prominent international organizations, such as the International Council of Women (ICW) and the International Women Suffrage Alliance (IWSA).¹⁵ There was no common Transylvanian Hungarian ethnic platform, as there was no need for such a platform.

After the Treaty of Trianon, the Hungarian community in Transylvania sought to rebuild its political and institutional framework through the Hungarian Party (Országos Magyar Párt, OMP). Instead of a fully developed institutional background, they relied on key pillars, such as churches, political organizations, and cultural-economic institutions. This broader ethnic program also led to the formation of new Hungarian women's associations, many rooted in prewar charity work. These women's organizations, in addition to their ongoing social and cultural initiatives, underwent a marked politicization in response to the repressive policies of the Romanian state. A key turning point was the 1924 primary education law, which mandated Romanian as the language of instruction, effectively marginalizing Hungarian-language education. The 1925 private education law further limited the use of Hungarian in schools and exams, which left Hungarian students at a disadvantage. The Romanian Civil Code of 1865, furthermore, stripped married women of legal rights, rights that were previously granted under Hungarian law in Transylvania. In response, Hungarian women

14 Sharp and Stibbe, “Introduction,” 20.

15 On Hungarian women's activism and their networks, see Fedeles-Czeferner, *Nőmozgalom, nemzetköziség, önreprézenciáció* and Szapor, *Hungarian Women's Activism in the Wake of the First World War*.

began organizing to challenge these restrictions, marking a shift toward gender-based activism within the minority rights movement.¹⁶ Romanian authorities frequently imposed restrictions on the social activities of Hungarian women, and on multiple occasions, did not authorize their meetings or charitable endeavors.

In order to function more efficiently, smaller local women's religious groups merged into larger, regional, Transylvanian associations. In 1922, the Unitarian Women's Association was re-established. In August 1926, the Transylvanian Catholic Women's Association was founded, followed by the foundation of the Reformed Women's Association in November 1927. After they succeeded in registering as a distinct legal entity, the Hungarian Lutheran women founded the Hungarian Lutheran Women's Association in 1935.

The initial organizational stages were characterized by a pronounced articulation of the objectives of this transformative era and their conception of the shifts in women's public role, women's political significance, and the need to integrate into international organizational frameworks. As Ella Engel,¹⁷ a Unitarian, observed in her comments about the importance of women's rights in the Unitarian Church,

Our movement, at this initial stage, is really just a search for how to begin to move towards this goal. The situation is made more difficult by the fact that our so-called work so far has been exhausted in begging and entertaining. We need these activities too, but we must now prove that we can do more than just organize buffets.¹⁸

Writer Irén P. Gulácsy¹⁹ expressed similar views:

The new home, the new society, and the new state have to be made habitable and have to be made acceptable for men, the family, and the community. It is the woman's job to do this. [...] While we are laboring on this artwork, half of the women's energy is used for society. When the opus will be ready, women will have time again to turn to themselves and their families until a new earthquake comes.²⁰

16 See Bokor, "Minority femininity at intersections."

17 Known as Dr. Kauntz Józsefné, born Ella Engel (1890–1956).

18 Kauntzné Engel, "A nőmozgalom nálunk," 208.

19 Irén P. Gulácsy (1894–1945).

20 Gulácsy, "A nő a politikában," 143.

A general sympathy for emancipation was in the air. Even “conservative” religious women felt that they needed to be present in politics. This was arguably something of a hybrid form of emancipation,²¹ which has been given different terms in the secondary literature, such as “norm-following emancipation”²² or “mother-based feminism.”²³ These terms refer to the efforts and aspirations of a group of women who derived their roles from their status as wives and performed traditionally female tasks yet were actively involved in various social policies and sought to improve the social status of women.

This norm-following emancipatory model served as a paradigm for Transylvanian Unitarian, Reformed, and Catholic women, who emphasized the importance of community service, societal contributions, and the promotion of moral and intellectual education, including women’s education, yet pursued these goals in a different manner. As noted in an earlier study,²⁴ their approach was both opportunistic and realistic. In the interwar period, these women experienced a loss of social, economic, and cultural influence. They underwent a shift from a dominant position to a new minority situation, they experienced forms of state repression.

The mid 1920s represented an important period for Transylvanian women, as it was the first historical moment in which they were able to wield significant influence in the political sphere. Their actions were characterized by a deliberate and strategic approach based on self-organization and policymaking. Beyond issues such as education and the protection of Hungarian language (which had become the language of an ethnic minority in the new Romanian state), women’s activism assumed novel roles, including, for instance, responsibility for the maintenance of the community’s newly delineated boundaries. This shift signified a political commitment rather than a mere personal interest or recreational pursuit.²⁵

21 Studies on the controversies among Hungarian women activists after the war: Pető, *Napasszonyok és holdkisasszonyok*; Szapor, “Who Represents Hungarian Women?”; Szapor, *Hungarian Women’s Activism in the Wake of the First World War*; Pető and Szapor, “Women and ‘the alternative public sphere.’”

22 Sári Szabó, “Normakövető női emancipáció”; Papp and Sipos, *Modern, diplomás nő a Horthy-korban*.

23 Fábri, *A szép tiltott táj felé*, 173–74.

24 Bokor, “Minority Femininity at Intersections.”

25 Ibid.

The Romanian Model and the Role of Alexandrina Cantacuzino in the Processes of Self-Organization

In the aftermath of the war, Romanian women's organizations, which were predominantly charitable and religious associations, underwent a substantial integration into the public municipal welfare apparatus. Women began to assert themselves as experts in the field of social reforms and lay experts on the women's question.²⁶ These organizations had international connections, and in the early 1920s, they began to receive considerable subsidies from the central government. One of the main figures of this period was Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1876–1944), the leader of the National Council of Romanian Women (Consiliul Național al Femeilor Române, CNFR).²⁷ Cantacuzino was also elected Vice President of the ICW in Washington in 1925. The election of Alexandrina Cantacuzino was justified on the grounds that Romanian women made significant contributions to the resolution of conflicts among ethnic groups in southeastern Europe. Notably, at this conference Cantacuzino, was regarded as “the first woman in Europe to be concerned with the problem of minorities.”²⁸ It remains an open question whether the election of Cantacuzino as Vice President of the ICW was a gesture intended by the international organization to promote peace, a strategic step towards the consolidation of the Transylvanian situation, or just a political step taken by an uninformed institution which was not up to date on the circumstances in this region or the complete absence of interaction between minority women in Transylvania on the one hand and women in the rest of Romania on the other. However, letters expressing discontent from women in minority groups in Romania prompted the ICW to request information regarding the situation there. In her response, Cantacuzino delivered a lecture on the Hungarian aristocracy's unjust protests against the nationalization of its estates.²⁹ This evasive response reveals both her nationalistic perspective on the issues and also her limited understanding of the activities of the Hungarians, including women, residing in Transylvania.

In a similar organization known as the Little Entente of Women (a transnational umbrella organization for women's groups in southeastern Europe),

26 Ghiț, “Loving Designs.”

27 See Bucur, “The Little Entente of Women”; Cheșchebec, “The ‘Unholy Marriage’”; Mihăilescu, “Introducere.”

28 See Mihăilescu, “Introducere,” 51.

29 See Cantacuzino, *Conferința asupra călătoriei în America*, Mihăilescu, “Introducere,” 51.

where Cantacuzino also played a significant role as president, it was considered the primary responsibility of women's associations and gatherings to contribute, through their unique methods, to the resolution of conflicts and tensions arising from the question of minorities in the successor states. Delegates to the Athens Conference (1925) denounced the actions of states that remained discontent with the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty, particularly with regard to the alleged "persecution of ethnic minorities" in Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and other states. This issue was a recurrent theme in various international forums and congresses, including those specifically dedicated to women's issues. In alignment with their professed democratic principles, the women of the Little Entente of Women wanted to ensure the intellectual and economic advancement of minority groups, contingent upon their demonstrated allegiance to the state in which they resided.

Upon returning from Washington, Cantacuzino puts forth a proposal for a rapprochement with minority groups. This proposal can be understood as an act that was intended on her part to give her legitimacy in her new influential international position. In *Universul*, a Romanian newspaper that enjoyed widespread circulation, Cantacuzino articulated her perspective on the state's minority communities. She placed emphasis on the expectation that minority communities are obligated to demonstrate loyalty to the state. She also insisted that the state could not be expected to provide support and services for these communities without such loyalty. The notion of loyalty was a recurring theme in her subsequent speeches and writings on minority issues³⁰.

On October 25, 1925, Cantacuzino organized a special meeting with the "associations of minority women."³¹ A delegation of 75 associations, including Hungarian, Saxon, Jewish, and Ukrainian minority women's associations from Transylvania, Bucovina, and Banat traveled to Bucharest for the meeting.

The associations originating from Hungarian communities, however, did not identify themselves, in their names, as ethnic organizations. Instead, they identified themselves as religious or philanthropic associations. This stands in contrast to the Saxon women's association, which explicitly identified themselves as Saxon associations. It is particularly interesting to note the position of the Jewish women's association at this meeting. Jewish associations from Hungarian-speaking communities identified Hungarian as their mother tongue and requested

30 Cantacuzino, "Drepturile minoritatilor."

31 Activitate politică socială, Alexandrina Cantacuzino. ANR SANIC, fond Familial Cantacuzino, Inv. 1860, dosar 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76.

schooling in Hungarian for their children (e.g., the Jewish Women's Association from Satu-Mare (Szatmár))³² Although some local Jewish organizations were represented by their own deputies at the meeting, in many cases, local Jewish women's associations were represented by Catholic or Protestant delegates. For instance, the women's associations of various denominations in Turda (Torda), such as the Jewish Women's Association, the Jewish Women's Association for Orphans, the Roman Catholic Altar Society, and the "Elizabeth" Women's Benevolent Society, were represented by Mária Bethlen.³³ The same was true of the delegates from Cluj (Kolozsvár). Paula Bethlen, the representative of the Catholic women of Cluj, was also appointed as a delegate for the Jewish Women of Cluj, Țirgu Mureș (Marosvásárhely), and Șimleul Silviei (Szilágysomlyó).³⁴ Following the meeting, however, collaboration in this form came to an end. Several questions arise. What took place at the meeting? How was womanhood as part of a minority community understood by the Romanian majority? What new models of womanhood emerged within the Hungarian, Saxon, Jewish, and other minority communities, and how were these models intertwined with understandings of ethnic and minority identity?

The objectives of the meeting were many and varied. The general and idealistic purpose was to cultivate collaborative ties between majority and minority women's associations and to foster a deeper understanding among ethnic groups. It was also intended as a platform for deliberating matters deemed crucial to the social status of women in Romania. It was further asserted that the Romanian partners would serve as a mediator between the Romanian authorities and minority ethnic women's organizations. For the Romanian hosts, there was a strategic ambition to consolidate their existing network of female constituents. As such, the establishment of a unified multicultural platform could also be perceived as a legitimizing act in the eyes of the international women organizations and the League of Nations (as an indication that the women's organizations in Romania were attentive to minorities), since Cantacuzino was also involved in the discussion of minority rights in the League of Nations and other international feminist organizations. What was the purpose of the participation of the Hungarian and other minority groups at the conference? First and foremost, they hoped that by strengthening ties with the Romanian women's organizations, they could draw some attention to the problems faced by

32 ANR SANIC, fond Familial Cantacuzino, Inv. 1860, dosar 67. 5–7.

33 Proces verbal. ANR SANIC, fond Familial Cantacuzino, Inv. 1860, dosar 71, 9–10.

34 ANR SANIC, fond Familial Cantacuzino, Inv. 1860, dosar 72.

ethnic minority communities and also establish connections with international women's organizations through the Romanian National Council of Women.

In her invitation letter sent to the participants, Cantacuzio mentioned that they would be permitted to speak “only about issues related to the protection of children, social assistance, the protection of mothers, and the problems related to the education of children, because these are the problems women are concerned about.”³⁵ It is clear that some of the major elements of this minority womanhood were defined already here, and the “guardian angels of the home”³⁶ had been empowered to act at higher levels. Through this meeting and through the National Council of Romanian Women, which appeared to function as a neutral, non-state institution, the state itself could reinforce its views of the qualities of womanhood and thus could shape understandings of the foundations of women's allegedly natural or proper responsibilities.

It is obvious also that, on behalf of the national (Romanian) majority, the primary objective of the meeting was to promote awareness regarding the status of minorities and to clarify the hierarchy between the ruling elite and the ethnic and national minorities. The event provided a valuable opportunity for Cantacuzino to articulate her understanding of the minority identity of women of other nationalities and to underscore the distinctions between dominant and subordinate subjects and delineate ethnic boundaries.

The Category of Minority as a Force to Self-Organize: The Formation of the RMKNKT

The positive consequence of the 1925 meeting was the founding of the aforementioned RMKNKT, the largest Hungarian women's organization in Romania. The Secretariat was founded within a few weeks of the conference. The initiative was based on the conviction that “womanhood will save the future.” It was hoped that, through collaborative efforts with a prominent Romanian women's organization, significant advancements would be made. The organization's establishment was clearly predicated on the expectation that it would benefit from the support of the CNFR:

35 Cantacuzino, “Organizarea de întruniri.”

36 Cantacuzino, “Cuvântarea Doamnei Cantacuzino.”

We decided, in accordance with the discussions with the National Council of Romanian Women, to establish a center of Hungarian women's associations in Transylvania and in Romania, with its headquarters in Cluj. The aim of this center is to establish and maintain direct contact with the Romanian National Council of Women. The members of the center are the women whom Countess Bethlen announced at the congress under this title. In addition, members are to be sent by the local centers to be established in each town.³⁷

The idea of establishing a more substantial organization to unite smaller women's organizations, however, had been raised before this event. In January 1922, the "women of Cluj" approached the Hungarian government, seeking support for the Transylvanian welfare institutions that had been neglected by the newly established state.³⁸ This request included the establishment of a "center of charity institutions." However, the Hungarian government deemed it beyond its capacity to engage in this revitalization process.³⁹ This center actually took its final form in 1925, after the Minority Women's Congress.

Following the conference, a clear decision was made to collaborate with other minority women:

A center of women's associations of the various minorities in Transylvania and the whole of Romania will also be established. The establishment of this center will be prepared by a committee to be sent by the center in Cluj. The deadline for sending in the declaration of affiliation of the establishment of the local centers is December 1, 1925.⁴⁰

The initial project was predicated on this imagined community of "loving womanhood," and it regarded the problems faced by all minority women living in Romania as a common issue that needed to be solved. Consequently, a significant collaborative effort was launched by Transylvanian Saxon, Ukrainian, Jewish, and Hungarian women. Later, the formation of the RMKNKT was preceded by a series of negotiations between the representatives of Hungarian women (Polixénia Huszár and Paula Bethlen) and Saxon women (Lotte Binder

37 *Brassói Lapok*, "Tíz perces beszélgetés Bukarestet megjárt hölgyeinkkel."

38 Kolozsvári nők kérése. Társadalmi Szervezetek Központja iratai, MNL OL K 437 1921-1-398.

39 It is not clear whether the Hungarian government helped them or not. Huszár and Bethlen lobbied continuously for financial support for women's organizations in Cluj, and in 1928-1929 the RMKNKT received 15,000 lei from the Hungarian government. See Bárdi, *Ottthon és hazá*, 440.

40 *Brassói Lapok*, "Tíz perces beszélgetés Bukarestet megjárt hölgyeinkkel."

as the federal leader of the Free Saxon Women's Association). Hungarian leaders approached Saxon women at the conference with the idea of creating a minority women platform. This was meant to be a collective/cooperative initiative, rather than an act of isolation or a closing of ranks. The German and Hungarian women's relationship was more or less personal and not professional, but their aim was to work together on all issues affecting their perceived common interests.⁴¹ Although a large minority women's association was never actually founded, there were strong ties between the Saxon and the Hungarian women during this period. The aforementioned Lotte Binder was present at the first congress of the RMKNKT. There was also a joint campaign to reintroduce German and Hungarian as languages at midwifery schools in Sibiu (Nagyszeben) and Cluj and some joint protest actions against the new Law of Religion.⁴²

Transylvanian Saxon women offered a clear model of a functioning minority women's organization. As they had been active as members of minority organizations before World War I, they were able to exemplify not only strategies necessary for survival but also techniques with which to maintain close ties with international organizations.⁴³ The attempt to establish a multiethnic women's association proved unsuccessful. Saxon women expressed a preference for collaborating on specific issues without affiliating themselves with some unified platform. Consequently, the RMKNK was founded and it was a mono-ethnic organization, like the Association of Free Saxon Women.

41 Schiel, *Frei – politisch – sozial*.

42 'Legea pentru regimul general al Cultelor', *Monitorul Oficial*, 89 (22 April 1928), 979–92. From 1928, according to the new Law on Religion, if parents were not of the same religion, the father had the right to determine which religion each child would be. This contradicted the old Transylvanian legal custom, according to which parents agreed on the religion of their children before their marriage. Usually, the boy followed the father's religion and the girl the mother's. This law also stated that in the case of orphans, if there was no indication of their parents' religion, and if the orphanage that housed them was maintained by the state, they must follow the Orthodox religion. Female activists suggested that this law did not support equality between husband and wife. These protests represented a possible way to rethink and reevaluate women's social and civil rights in society.

43 Lotte Binder was a member of the leadership of World Union of Women for International Concord (WUWIC), an organization with a large number of Saxon members. This enthusiasm may be due to the support from the Romanian Helene Romniciano, the secretary of the WUWIC in Geneva, who maintained a fruitful relationship with some Saxon women activists, Ida Servatius and Adele Zay. Also Rominicano helped them take part in the other organization, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The Saxon women's association did not affiliate itself with this latter organization, however, because Adele Zay felt that "the League practices cosmopolitanism, whose principles, especially the philo-Semitic direction, we cannot adopt completely as our own." Saxon women therefore remained individual members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Schiel, *Frei – politisch – sozial*, 384.

The RMKNKT comprised at least one hundred local groups, predominantly from Transylvania and Banat. Participating religious women's associations in Transylvania, predominantly supported by their churches, were formed and gathered strength.

Religious associations and former charity organizations formed the cornerstone of the RMKNKT's organizational structure. They included the Social Mission Society, which later formed its "movement association," the Catholic Women's Association, the Unitarian Women's Association, and several Lutheran and Calvinist women's associations. Although prior to 1925, Jewish women had maintained a significant collaborative relationship with Hungarian women, they did not engage with this ethnic women's umbrella organization. The RMKNKT was created by a group of upper-middle class women, many of them members of the aristocracy, complemented by a significant presence of middle-class intellectuals. The Central Secretariat was led by the Catholic Paula Bethlen, the Reformed Polixénia Huszár, the Unitarian Aranka Mikó, and the Lutheran Margit Mannsberg. In 1928, there was an inaugural congress of the Central Secretariat, where Paula Bethlen underscored the fundamental principle of women's organizations: "All female solidarity has a higher intrinsic value, and the large community that exists among all women, always and under all circumstances, provides a strong foundation. This community is the great love that lives in women's hearts, the sacred harmony of motherhood, and its connecting power."⁴⁴ This concept of love as an essential and defining element of womanhood entailed the notion that women possessed the capacity to redress prevailing societal abnormalities and thereby create novel ethical norms and forms of charity.

The activities of the Central Secretariat encompassed a wide range of social initiatives, including the provision of care for children, orphans, servants, and the sick, the protection of women, and the fight against trafficking in girls. The RMKNKT participated in the railway mission in the larger Romanian cities, organized courses in mother, child, and infant protection, and helped set up medical centers for infant protection. It also supported rural agricultural education lessons (maintaining cottage industries to support Hungarian girls at home and providing various economic training courses), and it launched medical assistant and midwife training in Hungarian. However, the Central Secretariat was also involved in various protests. It held protests, for instance, in support

44 [Bethlen], "Gróf Bethlen Györgyné előadása."

of Hungarian-language schools and against the religious law and the civil code (together with other Romanian and Saxon feminists).

The relationship with the CNFR was neither long-lasting nor particularly deep. It was marked, rather, by a certain superficiality, encompassing only a limited number of issues that it could meaningfully address. Cantacuzino's antagonistic perspectives became particularly pronounced later, in 1937, when she began to use exclusionary rhetoric in Cluj and thus aligned herself with right-wing political ideologies.⁴⁵ This discourse accentuated the concept of "otherness" and the notion of treating members of minority groups as subordinates or second-class citizens. It thus harmonized well with the prevailing priorities of the Romanian majority.⁴⁶ In response to Huszár's accusation that she had made a statement intended to cause harm to Hungarians, Cantacuzino offered an explanation, stating that her remarks were not directed at the Hungarian population. A close reading of the speech, however, reveals an underlying sentiment of fear and xenophobia, which likely contributed to the disappointment experienced by Hungarian women.

Ethnic Politicization

By the mid 1920s and the establishment of the RMKNKT, the roles of women as members of an ethnic or national minority had become openly politicized, as their forms of activism were also reactions to the state's repressive policies towards the given minority community.⁴⁷ The social activities of these women's organizations were constrained by a markedly repressive state and the status of marginalized minority, which was a product of the prevailing political climate.⁴⁸ As a result, concerns that had previously been regarded exclusively as social issues subsequently evolved into matters of ethnic concern, including the wellbeing of Hungarian mothers and infants, the education of Hungarian children, and the rights of Hungarian servants and peasants.

The trend of ethnicization had occurred among other ethnic women's organizations in Transylvania before World War I. Romanian historians

45 On Cantacuzino's nationalism, see Bucur, "The Little Entente of Women."

46 For the printed version of the speech, see Cantacuzino, "Străinii ca factor politic." ANR SANIC, Cantacuzino family documents, dossier 61.

47 A similar tendency has been observed among other ethnic communities in Europe with regard to the participation of women in public life and the goals of their struggles. See Żarnowska, "Women's Political Participation."

48 See Bokor, "Minority Femininity at Intersections."

have observed a similar pattern among Romanian women's organizations in Transylvania before 1919.⁴⁹ According to Oana Sînziana Păltineanu, "The Romanian women's movement in Hungary developed gradually and in close relation to the Romanian nation-building project in the dual monarchy. As such, the growing Romanian women's movement sought to improve women's situation within the conceptual frame of the nation, in opposition to the ruling elite and nation in Hungary."⁵⁰ Saxon women also took part in their community's ethnic survival and their ethnic politics, and they were engaged in a significant amount of emancipatory work and possessed a more complex institutional background in comparison to their Romanian counterparts.⁵¹

The church and political elites also strengthened the role of women in fighting for the rights of their national communities. The Hungarian National Party (Országos Magyar Párt, OMP), which represented the Hungarian community in the Romanian parliament, also supported women's associations. As the new law on the organization of public administration, enacted on August 3, 1929, had granted certain categories of women the right to vote and the right to be elected to the municipal and county councils, the OMP required women's support in the 1930 local elections. Hungarian women were mobilized to participate in the OMP electoral lists, and their participation in public life received more attention than ever before. Something similar occurred among Saxon women. They were mobilized by efforts within their community to represent the Saxons as a national minority, and Saxon women were profoundly implicated in this process. As demonstrated by a speech held by Saxon women's leader Ida Servatius in 1929, there was also a prevailing mistrust of women who belonged to national minorities with regard to the Romanian elections.⁵²

Due to the strong support of the OMP, the mobilization of Hungarian women in Cluj was much more effective than the efforts to mobilize Romanian women:

The Hungarians are making a big propaganda effort to include women in the electoral lists. The Hungarian Party carried out the formalities of enrolment, and by the time 600 to 700 minority women had enrolled, Romanian women were still completely absent. Later, the ruling party

49 Păltineanu, "Converging Suffrage Politics"; Bucur, "The Little Entente of Women"; Szapor, *Hungarian Women's Activism*.

50 Păltineanu, "Converging Suffrage Politics," 57.

51 See Schiel, *Frei – politisch – sozial*.

52 Schiel, "Was haben wir vom Frauenwahlrecht zu erwarten?"

went from house to house, office to office, and enrolled some women voters.⁵³

Notably, the political mobilization of Hungarian women in Transylvania resulted in the assumption of additional roles and responsibilities by these women in the economic, political, educational, and cultural spheres.

This group evidenced a high degree of mobility, making it a social group that was particularly susceptible to mobilization efforts. Indeed, its presence in public life reached an unprecedented level during the period.

In March 1930, at the general meeting of the “electing Hungarian women,” Baroness Huszár,⁵⁴ expounded on the significance of women’s suffrage, urging Hungarian women to exercise their democratic right in a manner that would elevate the standing of the entire Hungarian nation.⁵⁵

Previously, in January she published an article on this subject, explaining the importance of elections for women.

The present and the future demand that we spare no effort and consider it our duty to exercise our rights in the interests of humanity in general and of our Hungarian race in particular. Hungarian women must remember that their votes double the number of Hungarian votes. Our schools, our kindergartens, the cleaning of our streets, the establishment of hospitals, and many other tasks aimed at promoting the wellbeing of our people all await the work of women. [...] Once again, we urge everyone not to fail to apply, but to do their part in the sacred duty that falls upon us Hungarian women.⁵⁶

Women regarded the right to vote as being of paramount importance, not only as an equal right for women but also as a means with which to achieve success on the ethnic stage. Hungarian women understood their involvement in politics within an ethnic context, as evidenced by the actions of the Hungarian women of Sighetul Marmăției (Máramarosziget), who refused to participate in a women’s bloc with other ethnic women to secure the election of women to the city council. Instead, these women supported the OMP.⁵⁷

Huszár’s speech for the 1930 local elections exemplifies the intertwining of conservative and progressive values, thereby elucidating the role of women.

53 “A községi választások esélyei Kolozsváron”; *Universul*, “Alegerile comunale la Cluj.”

54 Known as Huszár Pálné baroness (born as Nemes Polixéna, 1882–1963).

55 *Keleti Újság*, “A kolozsvári választás fontos erőpróbája a román nemzeti-parasztpártnak.”

56 *Keleti Újság*, “Szükséges-e a magyar nőknek a választásokon aktív szerepet vállalni?”

57 *Szamos*, “Az mszigeti nők első politikai megmozdulása.”

In her call to action, she insisted that, "Once again, we urge you not to neglect your civic duty: contribute to the sacred responsibility that falls upon us Hungarian women."⁵⁸

The involvement of women in the international politics of the Hungarian community is also worthy of mention. The United Nations Association of Hungarians from Romania (Romániai Magyar Népliga Egyesület), which was affiliated with the World Federation of United Nations Associations, played an instrumental role in the facilitation of the Hungarian community's involvement with the League of Nations. Established in 1927, the organization was headquartered in Cluj and was under the leadership of Huszár, who served vice president.⁵⁹

The RMKNKT's International Network

With the cessation of hostilities, we Hungarian women, along with the dissolution of our nation, were dealt a devastating blow that overwhelmed us, leaving us no time or inclination to engage with the organizations and activities of women from other nations and the recently established global federations of women.⁶⁰

Huszár made these remarks at the inaugural congress of the RMKNKT, offering a noteworthy perspective on the organization's international relations.

Although initially the RMKNKT's aspirations extended beyond the horizon of mere local and regional connections, the status of Hungarian women as members of a national minority in a country that was nominally a nation state hampered their efforts to build the networks they had envisioned. Delegates and figures at the international level had to be women representing self-governing nation states or federal states in a multinational empire, so women from minority ethnic and national groups had difficulty participating in international organizations.⁶¹

The RMKNKT's 1928 Congress offers a clear illustration of the efforts of the organization to become more active, effective, and visible and also to extend

58 *Keleti Újság*, "Szükséges-e a magyar nőknek a választásokon aktív szerepet vállalni?"

59 See Sulyok, "Az erdélyi magyarság nemzetközi kapcsolatai," 87–89; "A Romániai Magyar Népliga-Egyesület tisztikara és alapszabályai."

60 Huszár Pálné, "A Magyar Nők Központi Titkárságának megalakulása és működése," 21.

61 See Zimmermann, "The Challenge of Multinational Empire"; Grubački and Selišnik, "The National Women's Alliance in interwar Yugoslavia."

its network and foster relations with similar organizations. One key aspect of its strategic vision was to maintain connections with other minority organizations and Romanian women and also to gain access to international organizations that could provide solutions to the problems faced by minority women.⁶² At the 1928 congress, Paula Bethlen delivered an extensive and detailed account of these organizations (the text was published in the journal *Magyar Kisebbség* (Hungarian Minority) but was also featured in the daily press).⁶³ Bethlen also contended that it is almost impossible for a minority organization to participate in international movements:

If we study the statutes of the large women's organizations, we see that they place an extremely high emphasis on national frameworks, to the extent that some of them may even go too far in this area, because they proclaim, comparing nation and state, that they will only accept one organization from a country as their members. The postwar peace treaties created approximately 40 million people in Europe who belong to minority communities, and these people are excluded from some international women's organizations.

The organization's first collaborative effort was undertaken with the International Co-operative Women's Guild (or ICWG), when the Guild started to initiate cooperative programs for Hungarian women. Alice Honora Enfield,⁶⁴ the secretary of the organization, visited Romania, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union in 1928. In Transylvania, she gave a lecture on economics within the Hangya cooperatives.⁶⁵ Although the methods used by the ICWG to facilitate cohesion among women through household activities aligned with some of the perspectives articulated by the RMKNKT, this collaborative endeavor was relatively brief in duration.

There was also a strong urge on behalf of the minority organizations to collaborate with the ICW. The hopes of winning Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair and an internationally prominent advocate of women's rights (known perhaps most succinctly as Lady Aberdeen), over to the minority issue were not fulfilled. Both the Saxon and the Hungarian women's

62 The minority society closely followed international feminist activism (In 1927, *Korunk* published an article by the Hungarian feminist Vilma Glücklich on international women's organizations. Glücklich, "Nemzetközi nőmozgalom a háború után").

63 [Bethlen], "Gróf Bethlen Györgyné előadása"

64 On the activity of ICWG, see Tešija, "Millions of working housewives."

65 Bethlen Györgyné, "A külföldi nagy nőegyesületek."

organizations were persistently trying to become members of the ICW, but they were not even allowed to attend the women's congress.⁶⁶

Hungarian women leaders (including Polixénia Huszár, Mária Bethlen) were present in Bucharest at the reception of the delegation of the ICW, a reception organized by Alexandrina Cantacuzino. The delegation was also present in Braşov (Brassó) when Alexandrina Cantacuzino visited the city with Lady Aberdeen, where Cantacuzino was expected to present also the Saxon and Hungarian women's associations to Aberdeen.⁶⁷ On this occasion, Aberdeen visited the Saxon women's and children's protection institutions in Braşov and also received the greetings of the Hungarian women's associations.⁶⁸ The extent to which the presence of minority women served as a tool for the CNFR and for Cantacuzino for her own professional prestige and international standing remains a topic of speculation. It is also clear that the parade of women's organizations upon Lady Aberdeen's arrival was intended to serve as evidence of a well-functioning, fruitful relationship between the majority and minority women's associations.

In an interview in 1930, Polixénia Huszár summarized the place of the RMKNKT on Romanian and international platforms with less optimism. She also observed that the relationship between the organization and the CNFR was two-faced:

Madame Cantacuzene, pronounces Mrs. Huszár with a French accent, is undoubtedly a pioneer of every international movement, but she is also a great Romanian woman. In Bucharest, she is considered an excellent patriot who stands up for Romanian national interests even in a more international movement. She, on the other hand, knows very well that I am also fighting for the establishment of international relations, and I am 100 percent committed to my own national interests. I stand by my thinking. But that is precisely why we understand and respect each other on this point. In any case, our situation is extremely difficult in terms of participating in an international movement, because in Bucharest they would like us to do it through them if we have grievances that they might want to bring to an international social forum. It is a bizarre situation: those who present grievances against whom the grievance is directed. However, Princess Cantacuzino would like us to have no grievances... But after all, she is only one voice in this still noisy jungle.⁶⁹

66 Schiel, *Frei – politisch – sozial*, 398.

67 *Brassói Lapok*, "Magyar asszonyok munkája."

68 *Brassói Lapok*, "Aberdeen márkinő Brassóban."

69 Ligeti, "Látogatás Kolozsvár vezető asszonyainál."

How Huszár have achieved her aspirations for international relations in this short, tense period? In practice, the RMKNKT was able to mobilize only those international organizations to which it had access through its subgroups (such as the International Association of Liberal Religious Women), the ties that Unitarian women had with figures and organizations in the United States, the International Union of Catholic Women, the Catholic girls' protection organizations, the International Catholic Association of Organisations for the Protection of Girls (Association catholique internationale des Œuvres de la Protection de la Jeune Fille, ACISJF), and the protestant International Federation for Aid to Young Women.

In summary, very few of these organizations were both supportive of and involved in international networks. The majority of these entities were religious organizations that operated in a relatively closed manner and primarily engaged in social work, with a particular focus on the protection of mothers and children. A distinctive initiative undertaken in this regard was the establishment of a program aimed at protecting female youth, a program that was meticulously spearheaded by the International Federation for Aid to Young Women (Union Internationale des Amies de la Jeune Fille, AJF), through its Romanian association, known as Asociația Amicele Tinerelor Fete (Association of Friends of Young Girls).

The following discussion provides a concise overview of the involvement of Hungarian women in two distinct station assistance programs. First, the discussion addresses the participation of Hungarian women in the nationwide Romanian station assistance program, which was initiated around 1932 by the AJF and its Romanian counterpart, Amicele Tinerelor Fete. Second, it examines the Hungarian women's initiative in establishing railway assistance social work under the auspices of the Church, with a particular focus on the contributions of Catholic nuns and the Society of the Sisters of Social Service, particularly their Bucharest center founded in 1930.

The Romanian Nationwide Station Assistance Program

The protection of girls who felled themselves pressured or compelled to move in search of labor was a priority in social policies across Europe, with numerous programs developed to combat trafficking in children and girls and to prevent prostitution. Romania was a signatory to the relevant protocols of the League of Nations. Notably, the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression

of the Traffic in Women and Children, specifically Article 7,⁷⁰ mandated that signatory nations undertake measures to oversee harbors and train stations, educate women about the risks they faced, and provide them with lodging and support. Representatives of the Romanian government launched the Asociația Amicale Tinerelor Fete (AATF) association, the Romanian branch of the AJF. The AATF also enjoyed the support of the Orthodox Church and the patronage of Queen Mary. Volunteers met with women seeking employment at train stations in Bucharest and other cities, such as Brașov, Constanța, and Galați. The representatives disseminated information, offered accommodations, and provided assistance and care to those in need.

In 1932–1934, there was active collaboration among women who belonged to the three major ethnic groups in the Transylvanian city of Brașov (a multiethnic city located on the border between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom of Romanian, or the so-called Regat). The president of the German-Saxon Women's Association, Amalie Musotter, emphasized at the meeting of representatives in 1931 that the participation of Saxon women in the founding of the Brașov branch of the Amicale Tinerelor Fete was important for their ethnic community.⁷¹

In 1932, the Bucharest and Brașov station assistance efforts were undertaken in Romania with the help of funds from the association's headquarters in Neuchatel but also with state support.⁷² It is important to note that there were no ethnically Hungarian or Saxon women among the association's leadership and its supporters.⁷³

The organization's Brașov-based center stood out as a unique platform, fostering collaboration among women from diverse ethnic and confessional backgrounds.⁷⁴ In Brașov, in 1932, a total of 633 individuals were consulted "with no regard to nationality," yet only 58 of these individuals were admitted to the home established to provide temporary accommodation for women travelers. In Bucharest, according to their 1932 report, at the Northern Railway Station

70 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, concluded in Geneva on September 30, 1921, as amended by the Protocol signed at Lake Success, New York, on November 12, 1947. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1921/09/19210930%2005-59%20AM/Ch_VII_3p.pdf

71 See Schiel, *Frei – politisch – sozial*.

72 See Asociația Amicale Tinerelor Fete, *Dare de seamă pe anul 1932*. ANR SANIC, Cantacuzino family documents, dossier 90, 49.

73 Ibid., 49.

74 Brassói Lapok, "Akció a leányok védelmére."

the organization provided aid for 1,320 women, with a negligible percentage of those beneficiaries being of Hungarian origin (44 in total). It was a small number considering the hundreds of Hungarian girls for whom some form of aid was provided in the same period by the Catholic Social Sisters,⁷⁵ as discussed in greater detail below. The figures below, which are revealing, indicate the number of Hungarian women for whom the Catholic Social Sisters provided accommodations in the given year: 1931: 188; 1932: 220; 1933: 582; 1934: 597; 1935: 682; 1936: 760; 1937: 780; 1938: 810; 1939: 870; and 1939: 930.

Despite its alleged commitment to multiculturalism, the organization's operational practices reveal that it was under pressure to deal with women as members of distinct national or ethnic communities. The AJF did not make possible the creation of a supportive ethnic space in the interwar period. Catholic Hungarian women and Saxon women thus found themselves compelled to launch their own, independent railway mission-type activities.⁷⁶

The “Railway Mission” of the Hungarian-Speaking Denominations of Romania

The Hungarian railway mission project, known as the “pályaudvari misszió” (train station mission), was initially spearheaded by religious women's associations in Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the war, various organizations engaged in similar social initiatives in Hungary. The most prominent of these organizations was the Magyar Egyesület a Leánykeresekedelem Ellen, or the Hungarian Association against Trafficking in Girls (MELE),⁷⁷ founded in 1909 in Budapest, which sought to prevent prostitution and assist women and girls who were seeking to secure livelihoods on the urban labor market. MELE was also part of the huge national organization Pályaudvari Missziókat Fenntartó Egyesületek Országos Szövetsége, (National Association of Railway Station Missionary Associations), founded in 1913. The aim of this Association

75 A bukaresti ház krónikája. 39. A Szociális Testvérek Társaságának Levéltára, Kolozsvár.

76 Something similar happened in Poland, where Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish women worked in separate railway mission projects. See Nithammer, “Closing the Abyss of Moral Misery.” The Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish denominations separately sent out station missionaries throughout Europe. See Bieri and Gerodetti, “Falling Women”; Nithammer, “Closing the Abyss of Moral Misery.”

77 MELE was predominantly funded by public money (alongside smaller private donations) and cooperated with state institutions, such as the Ministries of Justice, Health, and Transportation, as well as religious women's organizations, such as the National Association of Catholic Housewives and the National Association of Hungarian Protestant Women. See Bokor, “Nők a nemzetben, nemzet a nőkben.”

was to provide support (both moral and financial) for women from cities and villages outside of Budapest who came to the capital or planned to travel abroad by establishing shelters and homes for them (until their departure, in the case of those who sought to leave the country). However, the social programs administered by MELE, in contrast to those of the Transylvanian women's organizations, were primarily financed by public funds and were closely aligned with state institutions.

The Transylvanian Catholic women's elite convened during the Congress of the Catholic Women's Association, which was held from July 29 to August 1, 1928, and reestablished a committee tasked with resolving the situation of Székely girls who moved to the Old Kingdom of Romania. This committee was entrusted with the mission of assessing the living conditions of the Székely girls in major Romanian cities. During the conference of the RMKNKT on November 10–12, 1928, the organization passed a resolution that outlined several key directives for the Transylvanian confessions. These directives included the initiation of precise data collection in rural areas concerning the circumstances of young girls, the establishment of youth associations for girls, the initiation of educational initiatives regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls, the establishment of accommodation offices and servants' homes in major towns in collaboration with the relevant authorities, the promotion of domestic industry, and the organization of a railway mission in partnership with the authorities.⁷⁸ Therefore, the missionary endeavors of the Hungarian Christian confessions were initiated in the major Romanian cities, but primarily in the Old Kingdom of Romania, where the most of servants traveled to work.

Transylvanian Hungarians had begun to emigrate to the Regat for economic reasons in the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ The migration of Hungarian girls from Transylvania and particularly from Székely Land to the Regat has been a prominent topic in contemporary discourse⁸⁰ The Romanian middle class preferred to employ Székely women as maids, housekeepers, servants, and

78 Horváth, "Küzdelem a leánykereskedelem ellen"; "Határozat a leánykereskedelem elleni küzdelem tárgyában."

79 At the time of the 1889 census, there were 11,222 Hungarians living in the Old Kingdom of Romania. According to contemporary publicists, their numbers had been steadily increasing since the 1880s, and by the turn of the century, churches counted 26,000 Hungarian souls. See Árvay, "A bukaresti magyarok lélekszámának alakulása," 143. According to the 1930 census, Bucharest's Hungarian population numbered 24,052 individuals. This demographic, however, was not monolithic. It comprised individuals hailing from diverse regions of Transylvania, with many representing second-generation Hungarians.

80 Gidó, "Az 1902-es tusnádi székely kongresszus."

childcare providers due to their punctuality, discipline, and culinary expertise. The issue became politicized not only due to the danger of trafficking in girls or as an alleged symptom of moral decline and the breakdown of peasant values and values associated with womanhood, but also because it had significant ethnic implications.⁸¹ A prolonged stay in Romanian territory was often associated with a decline of Hungarian “blood,” ethnically or nationally mixed marriages, the loss of one’s mother tongue, assimilation, and permanent migration. These women were also frequently viewed as being at the mercy of a foreign world due to their ethnicity and otherness and therefore often more vulnerable to predation and violence. Although some women activists wrote or spoke about thousands of Székely girls who faced this fate,⁸² it is difficult to determine the actual numbers. According to the official statistics, by 1930, 1.04 percent of the women from Ciuc County (Csík) and 1.24 percent from the region known as Trei Scaune (Háromszék) had moved to Romanian cities (both Ciuc County and Trei Scaune were and to some extent still are home for the most part to Hungarian-speakers). The number of women from other Székely cities, such as Gheorgheni (Gyergyó), and administrative units (such as Odorhei, Udvarhelyszék, which was a former Székely seat), who were registered as residing in the Regat was less than 1 percent.⁸³ This data, however, should be approached with a critical eye, as it reveals nothing about seasonal migration patterns, for instance migration in winter months and the migration of the unskilled labor force during the agricultural off-season.

A considerable segment of the Hungarian population residing in Transylvania sought employment opportunities in the major Romanian cities. In response to the social changes caused by migration, the various institutions, each with its own discursive framework, promised or provided different types of protection. In response to the fear of life in a community of strangers, women’s organizations offered two courses of action. First, they recommended staying at home. This involved adhering to domestic patterns, the making of clothing, the promotion of traditional attire (as opposed to garments that had an “urban” nature), and active involvement in local religious rituals. Second, they recommended participation in urban women’s groups for women who did chose to migrate, founded especially for women who were in search for employment opportunities.

81 See also Bözödi, *Székely bánja*.

82 Stettner, “Leányegyesület – lélekmentés – fajvédelem,” 2.

83 *Recensământul general*, 1931.

One of the most promising projects in this minority program in support of girls was the Catholic railway missionary program initiated in 1930, when the Society of the Sisters of Social Service, founder of the Catholic Women's Association, was granted authorization to oversee the situation of Hungarian servants and maids in Bucharest. The Society ran a railway mission project and operated a labor exchange office and a girls' home. In the mid-1930s, the Reformed Church also launched its own servant mission program, which entailed the establishment of various initiatives for female servants who belonged to the Reformed Church and were engaged in work outside their home. The Church also established a home in Bucharest for girls who belonged to it. The Reformed Church incorporated the servant mission within its internal mission. This practice was adopted by the Unitarian Women's League, which operated employment centers and accommodation houses for servants in the 1930s. These organizations had initiated census monitoring and communication with girls working far from home. The social work involving peasant women had to be administered through existing social groups to ensure its efficacy. Consequently, this activity was implemented within confessional groups. These groups constituted living communities that operated according to their own networks and moral values.

In the discussion below I present the Catholic railway mission program as a case study. The initiators of the program, the Society of the Sisters of Social Service,⁸⁴ which was a prominent Catholic community of the RMKNKT, played a significant role in the social activism of Transylvanian Hungarians in the interwar period. They were engaged in various aspects of social life and have been recognized for their significant contributions. The Society, which had its center in Budapest, was led by Margit Slachta, a formidable character who significantly influenced the organization's social profile. The legal union of the Romanian branch with the Hungarian main organization was prohibited by Romanian law. However, this union was in practice maintained in secrecy. As articulated by Sister Augusztá to the leaders of the Hungarian organization in Budapest in 1923, on the occasion of the establishment of the Romanian branch, "We are united with you in spirit, direction, and love."⁸⁵

They considered the training and professionalization of women in various areas important. They maintained hundreds of girls' associations and provided

84 See Farinati, "Szerzetesnők a keresztény feminizmus – a társadalom szolgálatában."

85 See Murányi, "Szellemben, irányzatban, szeretetben egyek vagyunk veletek."

religious training for the female elite. Training courses were also held for mothers, and agrarian courses were held for women living in rural areas. Groups were also formed for servants and women working abroad.

The Social Sisters explained their mission as follows:

The most genuine and pioneering task of the Society is to place in the public arena intellectual workers whose vocation is to represent the Catholic public interest, the interests of the temporary and eternal wellbeing of the family, woman and child, and to defend them with the same modern instruments and in the same centers as those with which the holders of secular power operate, influencing millions of people of the future centuries.⁸⁶

The Social Sisters placed emphasis on the empowerment of women in rural and village society. These initiatives encompassed a wide range of activities, including preventive measures, intervention strategies, problem-solving in settings such as employment offices, and ongoing fundraising efforts. The sisters' organizational power derived from their efforts in community-building. They had an extensive Catholic women's network. They established numerous women's groups in their home villages and in major cities to which some of these women had migrated. These groups were referred to as the Saint Katalin groups, the Márta groups, and the Saint Zita groups. There were also groups, however, that were simply referred to as "girls' groups from," followed by the name of the given town or village. These groups were able to provide accommodations and food for girls in collectives and also to exert a strong influence on their life choices and opportunities. A notable example of this multifaceted endeavor was *Harangszó* (Chime of the Bell),⁸⁷ a monthly newspaper published in Cluj from 1935 to 1943 which was specifically intended for girls and women in villages, and *Ezer székely leány napja* (The Day of One Thousand Székely Girls) in the 1930s, the biggest procession of Catholic Székely girls in the interwar period.⁸⁸ The publication of narratives about and photos of girls in rural communities underscored two salient themes: their sense of providence, particularly the profound sense of connection to their homeland, and their sense of affiliation with a vast Catholic women's collective.

The rural girls' communities and the servants' homes in Timisoara, Braşov, and Bucharest eased the challenges of acclimatization process for young women

86 "A puszták rejtekéből az élet centrumába."

87 Bokor, "A mi kis világunk."

88 See Bokor, "A székely Nagyasszony testőrei."

who had to adapt to the demands and challenges of urban life when they moved to larger towns and cities in pursuit of work. These institutions functioned as temporary shelters for individuals lacking permanent accommodations. These institutions also served as communal gathering spaces, facilitating interactions among individuals on weekends and during community meetings. These institutions also functioned as communal support networks for women during their initial period of adjustment. Meeting and cohabitating with other girls facing similar challenges often led to the formation of distinct women's communities.

According to the memoirs of the aforementioned Sister Augusztá and her coworker, Sister Lília,⁸⁹ the aforementioned ACISJF in Brussels launched the first Romanian railway mission program. In response, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Bucharest asked the Sisters to carry out a railway mission in the capital. It is hypothesized that the international connection was ephemeral, as evidenced by the absence of reports to the ACISJF and the lack of support from the ACISJF. Despite its peripheral involvement in this ambitious undertaking, the international organization evidently facilitated the sisters' engagement by offering professional support and guidance derived from its extensive experience.

Stationed at Bucharest's Northern Railway Station, the Sisters' railway mission entailed the pickup of girls traveling alone, followed by interviews, accompaniment to the girls' home if necessary, and the placement of those in need into positions of employment. The girls' home, with a capacity of 14 beds, was established at Petre Poni Street nr. 3, in proximity to the Northern Railway Station. The St. Joseph's sewing shop, which provided additional income for the girls temporarily residing there, was also located there.

One might well ask what distinguished this program from the Romanian programs run all over the country designed for the protection of girls and women. These servant programs, I would argue, were part of an internal initiative with its own set of objectives and a comprehensive integration of the perspectives and requirements of the ethnic community. They operated within a religious and ethnic context and offered a known set of conditions in the unknown. The resolution of the problem entailed the establishment of trust among the communities and groups formed during the migratory process. This trust was crucial if these girls were to be given a sense of belonging and protection that extended beyond the temporary accommodations and counseling

89 Sister Augusztá and Sister Lília, "A Szociális Testvérek Társasága Erdélyi Kerületének megalakulása." A Szociális Testvérek Társaságának Levéltára, Kolozsvár.

provided. This initiative was part of a comprehensive program to cultivate a sense of connection to their home and their religion. This occurred against the backdrop of the prevailing processes of ethnicization and identity construction at the time. In this period of distrust and the erosion of moral, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, the institution of the sisters served as a source of comfort, reliability, and a sense of community. The sisters' institution was a symbol of domesticity, confidence, and communal belonging. This was the distinguishing factor between the Catholic sisters' and the Amicele's railway mission.

Conclusion

The interwar period marked a profound transformation in the public engagement of Transylvanian Hungarian women. Forced to navigate the intersecting axes of ethnic marginalization, patriarchal norms, and political exclusion, their organizations forged a new model of female activism, a model that was simultaneously shaped by external limitations and internal strategies of resilience. These “minority” women (members of the RMKNKT and its affiliate organizations) employed an ambivalent politics in their pursuit of self-determination. On the one hand, they demonstrated a conscious adoption of feminist principles and the concept of the “new woman,” who was capable of engaging in public sphere activities and asserting her rights and who moved away from her static position and moved into the public sphere, the wider community of women, and the realm of state politics. On the other hand, they exhibited a degree of assimilation into the conservative discourse surrounding the role of women, which placed heightened emphasis on women's service to the family and nation. This politics did not align exclusively with traditional conservative or progressive frameworks. While it was founded on ethnic principles, it did not function through mechanisms of exclusion. Instead, it demonstrated a greater degree of openness to diversity and a propensity for collaboration with other ethnic groups.

This ambivalent politics, in addition to the multiethnic nature of the working space, rendered these women's organizations distinct from their counterparts in Hungary. Despite the evident parallels in their political ideologies, which bear a striking resemblance to those espoused by MANSZ in Hungary, it is crucial to recognize that the influence of MANSZ is undoubtedly evident, yet it is imperative to acknowledge the unique character of the political movements within Transylvania, which played a significant role in the history of women's

organizations.⁹⁰ Importantly, this study challenges the binary classification of women's politics into "left-wing" or "right-wing" categories. The Transylvanian case demonstrates that conservative notions of womanhood, centered on family, motherhood, and faith, could coexist alongside progressive aspirations, such as literacy, voting rights, and public engagement. Hungarian women's activism reflected a dual logic. It drew strength from both traditionalism and modernity, from religious obligation and political strategy. Moreover, Hungarian women's international ambitions were consistently constrained by structural exclusions. Despite symbolic cooperation with CNFR and international religious organizations, they were unable to integrate into global feminist platforms. These exclusions also led minority women to construct community-based networks rather than participating in universalist feminist agendas. Their inability to join large organizations, the impossibility of cooperating with Romanian organizations, and the window-dressing policies which limited them in the pursuit of their plans made them more enclosed in their ethnic groups. The "idea of internationalism,"⁹¹ advocated by the main international organizations, which were based on western models of state building, was not a viable model for Transylvanian women. Cultural and linguistic differences and a general lack of understanding of (or indifference or hostility to) the needs of ethnic and national minority communities hindered collaboration between Romanian and Hungarian women. The international organizations in question did not address the needs of the ethnic minorities. In this initial phase of organization, the CNFR played a pivotal role. It defined the concept of minority women, their working space, opportunities, and limitations. The other actor, the international organizations, by excluding minority women's organizations, narrowed the spectrum within which minority women could assert or voice their own international politics. Conversely, the inclusion of these regional women's organizations in the program by other international entities contributed to the shaping of their profile. The acknowledgement of minority status and the role of minority women as representatives of minority interests empowered these women to assume roles as advocates for their community, with the objective of addressing the challenges that minority communities faced and contributing to cultural mobilization. This process of empowerment also entailed significant

90 See the studies by Andrea Pető, Susan Zimmermann, Judit Szapor, and Judit Acsády listed here.

91 Zimmermann, "The Challenge of Multinational Empire."

political empowerment and assertion of the right to at least some limited spaces in the public sphere (including state and other policy platforms) for women.

This brief presentation of the railway mission programs reveals how national and international gendered discourses were reinterpreted in minority contexts. While Romanian and international initiatives functioned through official channels, they failed to engage meaningfully with the experiences of women who belonged to minority communities. In contrast, the Hungarian Catholic and Protestant railway missions operated through their own networks, combining social protection with identity preservation.

In conclusion, Hungarian women's organizations in interwar Romania were far more than charitable groups. Their legacy compels us to rethink how emancipation is articulated in minority contexts, not merely as a struggle for equality, but as a collective strategy for survival, solidarity, and self-determination.

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“Terror against Women.” The Struggle of “Red” Women at the Beginning of the Nazi Era: Between Invisibility and Solidarity*

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When the men kill, it is up to us women to fight
for the preservation of life. When the men are silent,
it is our duty to raise our voices on behalf of our ideals.¹

In a 1934 publication of the International Red Aid (MOPR), it can be read that Rudolf Diels, head of the Gestapo between 1933 and 1934, described communist women as “the most stubborn enemies of the state because they did not become informers despite being tortured.” Despite their absence in higher positions of the RHD (Rote Hilfe Deutschland, German Red Aid), women played a major role in the activities of the RHD: “It was women [in fact] who drove the bailiffs out of their homes and the provocative Nazis out of the welfare office. [...] In the Ruhr region, proletarian housewives put together a delegation and demanded a pay rise for their husbands in the factories. Women prevented arrests and demanded the release of their husbands. This was the case in Berlin and Breslau, where women snatched an arrested apprentice and market trader from the police. In Berlin, the police were unable to arrest a communist in one factory because the workers threatened to go on strike. In the Rhineland, 40 women went to the district administration office and demanded the release of their husbands. In another place, 60 women and their children forced the release of 40 prisoners through a demonstration. In Freiburg, women achieved the release of a communist woman.”² Taking this attestation as our starting point, the current paper aims to shed a light, at first, on the communist women activism during the Nazi Era. This activism is also reported by some members, like Rosa Lindemann, who was also the leader of a mostly women resistance group based in the Tiergarten district of Berlin: “Some of our women helped the men whose wives had been arrested in the household and looked after the children. We had contacted over thirty families and were able to alleviate some of the suffering. It was a particular joy for us to hear how happy our comrades in the

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1 Clara Zetkins: *Selected Writings*, 116.

2 Winter, Ella. *Frauen unter faschistischem Terror!*

prisons and penitentiaries were that we were looking after their relatives and caring for them.”³ Secondly, the paper aims to address the peculiar strategies that were used by the women, like it has been reported in the Berlin Moabit case, where there was a circle of women, that organized relief campaigns and met weekly, disguised as coffee parties or meetings in garden sheds; these women collected money for relatives of the prisoners and helped resistance fighters who had gone into hiding.⁴ Last, but not the least, the paper aims to address some key-role women in the Red Aid scenario: like Ottilie Pohl, who died in Theresienstadt.

Keywords: communist women, political activism, solidarity, Third Reich, resistance

Introduction:

Solidarity among German Women between Weimar and the Nazi Era

The history of German women’s associations is a complex, varied, and intertwined with the history of the legislative recognition of women as actors in public life.⁵ Far from proposing to offer an exhaustive picture of this history, the following essay focuses on politically oriented women’s associationism, with specific emphasis on a communist association, attempting to highlight behaviors, personalities, and actions carried out in the period between the National Socialist regime’s rise to power until the end of 1935, the year of Liselotte (Lilo) Hermann’s arrest.⁶ The choice to focus on this period and in these specific terms is motivated by what the documents have shown. Communist women were, initially, underestimated, even by their own comrades, who often hindered their efforts in the Party. Secondly, when the Nazi party took power, these women began to be persecuted, deported, and often killed by the new regime. Through a constant search for strategies, first of resistance and then of survival, these women never ceased to be activists. The final aim of this essay is to show how the struggle of communist women to be recognized was fought until it was no longer physically possible to do so.

It is also important to emphasize at the outset that, despite its specific goals, the story to be told here is neither specifically German nor monochromatic in terms of political alignments. Communist women’s associationism was, in fact, avowedly transnational, and the battle for the recognition of women’s

3 Schilde, “Das Columbia Haus.”

4 Ibid.

5 Hong, “Gender, Citizenship, and the Welfare State,” 1. Cfr. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*; Briedenthal, Koonz, Stuard, *Becoming Visible*.

6 Fischer, “Aber den Mut werde ich schon nicht verlieren.”

participation was a common thread among almost all party platforms of the time. Emblematic in this regard are the words of Gertrud Bäumer, president of the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF), the largest bourgeois women’s association during the Weimar Republic. In a 1918 speech, Bäumer declared that “German women are forced to breastfeed their babies with their hands tied behind their backs.”⁷ The image evoked by Bäumer later became one of the strongest and most defining symbols of femininity in the interwar period, namely the icon of the self-sacrificing mother.⁸ This iconography of the mother-martyr was also part of the narrative of proletarian women, according to which sacrifice was oriented toward a totalizing political life.⁹

In addition to the roles of icons of womanhood, another motif in the narratives and events I describe here is the link between women (also understood as political actors) and welfare activities. Associationism on a welfare basis was initially the main area of aggregation among women, since at least until the 1920s many German states denied women the right of associationism.¹⁰ However, even when political associationism was secured, care activities were defined as “a special area for women’s abilities, and as such they [women] must be given a prominent role in this area.”¹¹ Statements like this reflect what Rouette and Selwyn say was a fairly common expectation in early postwar Germany, namely that women were the caregivers of society.¹²

The social tensions and clashes that ensued in the period following World War I, however, made evident what Kaplan describes as the “contradiction between the feminine sacrificial ideal and real female power in society,” leading to the consolidation of what Kaplan defines as a new female obsession: survival.¹³ This “obsession” was also visible in the activities carried out by German communist women, who managed to forge a path of militancy and solidarity despite a cumbersome iconography and increasingly cramped spaces.

7 Fischer, “Aber den Mut werde ich schon nicht verlieren.” For the conservative movements, see also Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation*.

8 Apel, “‘Heroes’ and ‘Whores’,” 367.

9 Ibid.

10 Honeycutt, “Socialism and Feminism in Imperial Germany,” 31.

11 Hong, “Gender, Citizenship, and the Welfare State,” 8.

12 Rouette and Sewyl, “Mothers and Citizens,” 50.

13 Kaplan, *Women and Communal Strikes in the Crisis of 1917–1922*, 446.

The Struggle for Recognition inside the Parties

One of the difficulties that German women encountered within the parties in their efforts to have the “women’s” issue recognized and put on the political agenda was the autonomous management of welfare activities. Regardless of political alignments, between the 1920s and the 1930s, a real “commonality of difficulties” regarding women’s associations came to be established. I offer below three examples of this “commonality.”

The first example comes from the context that one might label with the adjective “bourgeois.” In 1924, Humanitas was founded, a handmaiden association of the BDF, which in its founding statute declared that women should be guaranteed a primary role in welfare work.¹⁴ Humanitas was founded at the initiative of Gertrud Bäumer, who had entrusted Anne Von Giercke with the organization of humanitarian activities, especially in areas involving members of the younger generations. This universalistic humanitarian ambition never really found expression, however, due mainly to the opposition of male officials and doctors within both the Ministry of Labor and the Langstein organizations, which were a series of interdenominational organizations dedicated to welfare activities and medical care.¹⁵

The second example concerns the German women’s socialist movement, which, as historian Charles Sowerwine has observed, was the largest women’s movement of any political color on the European continent between 1890 and 1914.¹⁶ Sowerwine contends that the initial independence of the female side from its male counterpart was central to the success of this movement.¹⁷ However, the goal of liberating working women from both the male yoke and capitalism, which Marxist theorist and activist for women’s rights Clara Zetkin called for in a speech in 1889,¹⁸ was never achieved because of a dependence on the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany, or SPD), which, as Karen Honeycutt has observed, was always male-driven and was fundamentally incapable of liberating women from the oppression of the family.¹⁹ Zetkin herself, who left the SPD after the assassination of Rosa

14 Langstein to Labor Ministry (no date), BAF Ram 9149.

15 Hong, “Gender, Citizenship, and the Welfare State,” 8.

16 Sowerwine, *The Socialist Women’s Movement from 1850 to 1940*, 406.

17 Ivi.

18 Ibid., 407.

19 Honeycutt, “Socialism and Feminism in Imperial Germany,” 31.

Luxemburg, was highly critical of the party’s failure to develop a strategy of women’s emancipation, as this failure, in her eyes, meant an unwillingness to break with bourgeois tradition.²⁰

Finally, the most emblematic example in this regard was the evolution of women’s activism within the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party, or KPD). In the mid-1920s, the KPD implemented a series of measures to recruit women into the party ranks and improve women’s rights, culminating in the creation of a new association called the Roter Frauen und Mädchen Bund (Red Women’s and Girls’ League, or RFMB), which was founded in 1925.²¹ As Sara Ann Sewell has noted, the party considered women’s militancy fundamental,²² and RFMB members were incited to take part in a variety of propaganda activities.²³ However, while inciting the active participation of female comrades, communist men generally remained reluctant to grant political equality to their female counterparts, as evidenced by the following statement made by a woman at the 1930 district party convention: “Very many male party comrades still hold the petty-bourgeois-opportunistic viewpoint that women belong at the cooking pot. They don’t believe it is necessary to inform their wives or to bring them to meetings.”²⁴

The “commonality of difficulties” described above never led to cooperation among the various associations, which always directed their outpourings of solidarity more toward their own “comrades” than toward other women’s organizations.²⁵ According to Honeycutt, the lack of solidarity among the various women’s associations was due to at least three reasons: 1) the “long shadow” of the anti-socialist laws issued under Bismark; 2) strong discrimination against proletarian women; and 3) the presence of anti-cooperation activists such as Zetkin, who always opposed cooperation with women whom she regarded as bourgeois.²⁶

20 Apel, “Heroes and Whores,” 368.

21 Sewell, “The Party does indeed fight like a man,” 166.

22 Sewell, “Bolschevizing Communist Women,” 281.

23 Ibid., 283.

24 Genossin Th., quoted in “Im Zeichen der revolutionären Selbstkritik,” SR (May 14, 1930) in Grashoff, *Gefahr von innen*; Sewell, “The Party does indeed fight like a man,” 167.

25 Honeycutt, “Socialism and Feminism in Imperial Germany,” 33.

26 Ibid., 32.

Rote Hilfe Deutschland: A Women's Association

Rote Hilfe Deutschland (Red Aid Germany, or RHD) was founded in 1924. In the period between the Weimar Republic and the early years of the Nazi era, it became the leading humanitarian organization devoted to the cause of political prisoners on German soil.²⁷ RHD was formally set up as a German detachment of the Russian social-service organization *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya pomoshchi bortsam revolyutsii* (or MOPR), known most commonly in English as International Red Aid. MOPR was a humanitarian organization linked to the Communist International. It was founded in 1922 to provide support and aid to communist prisoners and their families.²⁸

RHD can be defined as a women's association for two reasons. First, it was heir to a specific humanitarian tradition, including the work of organizations such as *Frauenhilfe für politische Gefangene* (Women's Aid for Political Prisoners),²⁹ which was founded in Munich in 1919 and which in its four years of activity managed to distinguish itself as a humanitarian body even outside the work of the KPD. Second, RHD was called a "women's organization" even by the male members of the party.³⁰

The clearly defined political orientation never limited, at least in terms of public statements, the humanitarian thrust of the RHD's communiqués, in which it defined itself as "a nonpartisan organization devoted to the assistance of all political prisoners, whatever their political beliefs."³¹ Within this narrative, the notion that welfare efforts should never show any trace of discrimination was central:

27 There are comparatively few works on the history of RHD, and there is little overlap in the existing secondary literature on the subject, mainly due to the scattered nature of the sources. For a framing of the RHD as a welfare/humanitarian organization, see Hering and Schilde, *Die Rote Hilfe*; Brauns, *Schafft Rote Hilfe!* It is important to point out, however, that the approaches used in these works are more militant than scientifically rigorous. To date, there is only one monograph that has attempted to deal with RHD in the years following the Nazi rise to power: Makowski, *Helft den Gefangenen in Hitlers Kerkern.*"

28 Ryle, "International Red Aid and Comintern Strategy."

29 The founder of *Frauenhilfe für politische Gefangene* was Rosa Aschenbrenner, who later served as the head of the RHD Committee at Munich, Schilde, "Schafft Rote Hilfe," 34; Sewell, "Bolshevizing Communist Women," 269.

30 "For most party members, the RHD's welfarist attitude was better suited to women than the self-defense Red Brigades." Sewell, "The Party does indeed fight like a man," 172.

31 BArch, RY1/3211, *Berichte der Zentralvorstandes*, "Terror's statistics," 132.

Aid is not only a relief to the material needs of prisoners and their oppressed families, it is also an enormous lever to uplift all those who hesitate, to strengthen the spirit and resistance of prisoners, to give new strength to those in the anti-fascist struggle. [...] Solidarity must include all victims, without exception, regardless of which party they ever belonged to and regardless of their worldview.³²

However, as was true in the case of the way in which the women’s issue was regarded within the KPD, there was a similarly strong discrepancy between words and acts in the RHD. Historians such as Kurt Schilde and Klaus-Michael Mallmann have called attention to this ambivalence.³³ Their analysis of the communiqués issued by the organization reveal that the RHD did not even consider itself a welfare organization, even going so far as to declare, “we never intended to become charitable in the bourgeois sense of the term.” Despite this contention, however, both Schilde and Mallmann agree that the RHD, by pruning its welfare activities, closely resembled the various “bourgeois” associations that were particularly active on the German scene at the time.³⁴

Like many other welfare associations, RHD was an association with high female participation,³⁵ but it never succeeded in balancing power relations within the Communist Party, where women always represented a minority. As Sewell observes, one should not be fooled by the presence in the history of the KPD of figures such as Zetkin, Luxemburg, Fischer, who managed to hold high ranks in the party hierarchy. The presence of these women did not change the nature of the party, which remained, according to Helen Boak, an “out-and-out men’s party.”³⁶ Mallmann notes, however, that in 1928 women comprised 23 percent of the KPD, a proportion significantly higher than in any other German party of the time. So even before the beginning of the “Terror Era” (as it was dubbed by the KPD), the scenario for women involved in political activities was very limited and limiting. In the 1930s, the women involved in RHD welfare activities had to face another hardship: the National Socialist movement. The Nazis’ rise to power became the fundamental external factor that drastically limited women’s opportunities for political involvement. It had two immediate consequences. The

32 BArch, RY1/3211, Berichte der Zentralvorstandes, “Our duties,” 253.

33 Mallmann, “Zwischen denunziation und Rote Hilfe,” 81; Schilde, “‘Schaft Rote Hilfe,’” 31

34 Among the many, the one with which a similarity in terms of services provided appears evident is Caritas, Schilde, “‘Schaft Rote Hilfe,’” 32.

35 RHD activities were considered by fellow party members to be more suitable for women, Hagemann, “Frauenprotest und Männerdemonstrationen,” 210.

36 Boak, *Women in Weimar Germany*, 157.

first was a collapse in women's participation (in KPD activities), which declined by up to 10 percent. The second concerned the motivation that drove many "comrades" to withdraw from militancy and activism. This motive was fear.³⁷

On the Front Lines: Activism and Acts against Nazi Terror

With the banning of the KPD by the Nazi authorities, one of the first measures taken by the party was to dissolve all women's auxiliary associations, a step taken in August 1933, i.e., very soon after the Nazi rise to power. There were two main reasons behind this decision. The first involved the disorientation experienced by the KPD in the early years of the "period of illegality," as has been noted by Silke Makowski.³⁸ The second (which was probably more important than the first) relates to the prevailing machismo within the party itself. About the latter, we have already seen how associations such as the RHD were considered more in keeping with the "feminine nature" of "women's" work than the efforts of groups that might have engaged in armed struggle.³⁹ It took two years for the KPD leadership cadres to open itself again women's activism, as shown, for instance, by the following statement:

Women are particularly well-suited to carry out outreach activities. Women must be included in the functions of all our work, as broadly as possible, decisively and through the elimination of all prejudices that exist within our ranks. There is much evidence that the wives of arrested anti-fascists have agreed to take over the functions of their husbands.⁴⁰

Despite the formal disestablishment of women's sections, communist women continued to be active promoters of spontaneous initiatives and demonstrations, sometimes exploiting in their favor the prejudices according to which they should serve merely as a "fifth wheel" of the party.⁴¹ As for the media-propaganda sphere, a 1934 pamphlet offers the following words of encouragement for women's participation in activism of all kinds, including militant activism:

37 Mallmann, "Zwischen Denunzation und Rote Hilfe," 86.

38 Makowski, *Helft den Gefangenen in Hitlers Kerkern.*

39 Mallmann, "Zwischen Denunzation und Rote Hilfe," 86.

40 BArch, RY/3213, Rundschreiben der Zentral Vorstandes (ZV), 26, "Unsere Antwort auf die neue Terrorwelle und die Massenprozesse im Reich," 1935.

41 Mallmann, "Zwischen Denunzation und Rote Hilfe," 85.

It was women [in fact] who drove the bailiffs out of their homes and the provocative Nazis out of the welfare office. [...] In the Ruhr region, proletarian housewives put together a delegation and demanded a pay raise for their husbands in the factories. Women prevented arrests and demanded the release of their husbands. This was the case in Berlin and Breslau, where women snatched an arrested apprentice and market trader from the police. In Berlin, the police were unable to arrest a communist in one factory because the workers threatened to go on strike. In the Rhineland, 40 women went to the district administration office and demanded the release of their husbands. In another place, 60 women and their children forced the release of 40 prisoners through a demonstration. In Freiburg, women achieved the release of a communist woman.⁴²

Such spontaneity was not always welcome within the KPD or even within the RHD itself, which from 1933 onward had been promoting a genuine policy of mass demonstrations. The reopening to women’s activism was, in fact, a necessity, deeply linked to the mass revolutionary movement envisioned by the communist leadership. In a scenario in which, to use the Party’s words, Germany “had been turned into a prison,”⁴³ “mass resistance” was considered the only means by which it would be possible to stop the “degenerateness of this dictatorship,” which through increasingly intense political repression had already set the stage for the “looting and further impoverishment of the working masses.”⁴⁴ From this perspective, the RHD represented itself as a guiding light capable of leading the masses, even before rousing them to action:

We as Rote Hilfe must show the way to the social democratic workers, showing them how their leaders have betrayed them and how they too are victims of the fascist regime. Our main task must be to make social democratic workers join the RHD, the struggle against fascist terror and active solidarity within a collective discussion.⁴⁵

The goal of uniting communist-driven anti-fascist resistance efforts (or even some of these efforts) was never reached, however, as recently pointed out by Udo Grashoff, who studied the resistance practices implemented by

42 Winter, *Frauen unter faschistischem Terror*, 2.

43 BArch, RY1/3213, Rundschreiben der Zentralvorstandes, 1.

44 BArch, RY1/3213, Rundschreiben der Zentralvorstandes, 2.

45 BArch, RY1/3213, Rundschreiben der Zentralvorstandes, 5.

communists against the Gestapo.⁴⁶ Despite attempts at coordination, communist women continued to hold spontaneous demonstrations and shows of defiance:

The wives of those arrested went first to the police stations, then to the SA [Sturmabteilung] centers, and finally began demonstrating outside the KLs [Konzentrationslager]. They often brought their children to these protests [...] The entire group of women from our committee participated in the funeral of a well-known pediatrician who had been denied treatment because he was Jewish, thus turning that moment into a large demonstration.⁴⁷

This resilience was also noted by some comrades, as in the case of Georg Bruckmann, who in 1934 noted that women were more effective than most of their male comrades in the strategies they used to pass on information. This observation was confirmed by Mallmann, who shows how women used at least three specific expedients: 1) carrying propaganda leaflets inside strollers; 2) disguising themselves as “mistresses” to distribute information, especially at night; and 3) using sites that were regarded as typical gathering places for women to share information, such as cemeteries and cafes.⁴⁸

The histories of some RHD committees offer perhaps the most emblematic examples of women’s defiant activism. One could mention, for instance, the issue concerning the “refunding” of the Central Committee (ZV). In 1933, Kurt Bartz, coordinator of the Central Committee of the RHD was arrested. Taking the reins of the ZV was his wife Erna Bartz, who together with Hilde Seigewasser and Maria Lehmann tried to push forward both humanitarian-solidarity activities, such as providing financial aid for the families of political prisoners, and propaganda activities, such as founding a communist newspaper devoted explicitly to women’s issues.⁴⁹ One could also mention the welfare activities carried out by the Berlin-Tiergarten Committee, where Rosa Lidemann, who was also involved in an array of other activities, coordinated an assistance group for orphans and the children of political prisoners:

46 Grashoff, “Outwitting the Gestapo?”

47 BArch, RY1/3217, Presse Und Information Material, 93–94, “Gestapo Methods.”

48 Mallmann, “Zwischen Denunzation und Rote Hilfe,” 88.

49 Lehmann was arrested in 1935 and sentenced to a two-year prison term; in 1939, she fled to England; Seigewasser continued her welfare work until she was arrested in 1943. She died in 1945 as a result of a bombing that hit the prison in which she was imprisoned; Bartz’s trail was lost shortly after the “closure” of the Berlin ZV. BArch, RY1/3211, 86.

Some of our women helped the men whose wives had been arrested by offering assistance in the household and looking after their children. We had contacted over 30 families and alleviated some of the suffering. It was a particular joy for us to hear how happy our comrades in the prisons and penitentiaries were that we were looking after their relatives and caring for them.⁵⁰

Perhaps the most emblematic case was that of Otilie Pohl. Pohl, who was Jewish and a long-serving activist, was a member of the Berlin-Mohabit Committee. She had devoted the previous years of her life, up to the time of her deportation in 1942, to assisting the children of those politically persecuted by the Nazi regime. She was arrested the first time in 1940 on charges of aiding an “enemy of the state,” but she was released after only eight months.⁵¹ She was subsequently arrested by the Gestapo in 1942 and deported to Theresienstadt, where she died in 1943.⁵²

“The Most Stubborn Enemies”

Rudolf Diels, head of the Gestapo between 1933 and 1934, described communist women as “the most stubborn enemies of the state because they did not become informers despite being tortured.” However, the targeting of communist women was not an immediate goal for the Nazi regime but rather the result of a gradual path toward the construction of a new “enemy of the state.” This propaganda goal was only achieved in late 1935, when Liselotte (Lilo) Hermann was arrested. More than others, Hermann’s case could be read as a real turning point for at least two reasons. The first reason concerns the mother-martyr symbolism. The second concerns the radicalization of Nazi policies against women activists. Hermann was indeed a young mother who was deeply involved in the KPD’s illegal activities.⁵³ After her arrest in December 1935, she was incarcerated for almost two years. She was then put on trial at the People’s Court in Stuttgart,⁵⁴ where she was sentenced to death in June 1937. Before 1935, if arrested, communist women were usually given light prison sentences, usually less than a

50 Schilde, “‘Schaft Rote Hilfe!’”

51 BArch, R3018/2757.

52 BArch, R3017/5540; BILDY 10/1101.

53 Schad, *Frauen gegen Hitler*, 203–20.

54 BArch, R3017/28892-28917. The charge was “treason in concomitance with preparation of high treason in aggravating circumstances.”

year. Beginning in 1935, however, the sentences imposed on communist women arrested by the Nazi regime increased dramatically, as evidenced, for instance, by the case of Eva Lippold, who was arrested in 1935 and sentenced to nine years in prison.⁵⁵ But even in this case, there are exceptions, as we have seen in the case of Otilie Pohl, who, despite being a communist and a Jew, was initially sentenced to an eight-month prison term. One could suggest two possible reasons for the initial “levity” with which the Nazi authorities dealt with communist women. The first involves the simple fact that, as repeatedly pointed out in the discussion here, women’s activism was consistently underestimated. The second is simply the general failure to consider even the possibility that women were political aware and engaged.

From 1935 onward, references to violent acts committed against communist women specifically by the Nazi regime appeared ever more frequently in RHD communiqués. In this regard, the most emblematic documents are those collected in two files, *Methods of the Gestapo* (Methoden der Gestapo)⁵⁶ and *Terror Against Women* (Terror gegen Frauen).⁵⁷ Both files were compiled by several hands, probably in 1934, and were part of the information that was reported in a series of pamphlets published by MOPR between 1935 and 1936. In these files, we read of how the Gestapo would arrest the wives of dissidents to increase pressure on these dissidents and to limit their sabotage actions.⁵⁸ The intensification of so-called precautionary measures against communist women was also recorded in the last reports issued by the RHD Central Committee, which sought in its final months to collect as much material as possible concerning political persecution in Germany. One of these reports describes how as many as 193 Communist women were arrested in the early months of 1935.⁵⁹

After not even two years of Nazi rule, only a few scattered committees of the RHD remained in operation, often run by the wives of the men who until recently had headed them. The more the horizon narrowed and the dark clouds of the regime smothered any attempt at solidarity, the more the goals of the RHD came to seem little more than mirages:

55 BArch, NY 4550.

56 BArch, RY1/3217, 79–89.

57 BArch, RY1/3217. 45–51.

58 BArch, RY1/3217, 80.

59 BArch, RY1/3211, Berichte der Zentralvorstandes, “Our Duties,” 251.

The RHD has the urgent task of organizing aid and protection for the persecuted and organizing reception facilities. Relief for all detainees and victims is a duty for all who reject this barbarism.⁶⁰

In 1935–1936, these illusions gradually gave way to a bitter realization:

Efforts so far have not been sufficient to organize effective protection and truly comprehensive help for all victims. There are tens of thousands of families who are without aid. There are tens of thousands of prisoners with whom there is no connection and/or communication. [...] The situation in Germany requires that the whole problem of protecting all politically persecuted people and their families be considered.⁶¹

The latter reports reveal a more intense awareness of the need to create a common humanitarian front, unencumbered by political allegiances, though this awareness, alas, was belated:

In the interest of helping all victims imprisoned behind prison walls and barbed wire, in the interest of helping families deprived of their livelihood, in the knowledge that only together can a dam be built against this terror... The RHD declares itself willing to accept any proposal to be absorbed into such an (all-inclusive humanitarian) organization.⁶²

As the circumstances in Germany made it increasingly difficult for the RHD to remain active, the work of gathering information regarding the conditions of political prisoners was increasingly directed to foreign interlocutors in cities such as Paris, London, Prague, Brussels, Basel, Oslo, and Copenhagen. The intention was to encourage protests in these cities and demonstrations of solidarity with, in particular, the defendants in the trials of the People's Courts.⁶³ In Paris, for example, several RHD leaders took refuge, organizing in 1935 within the Lutetia Kreis (Lutetia Circle), which was established to promote an international campaign for the release of Rudolf Claus and then, following Claus' execution, to promote mass demonstrations, efforts which continued until 1937.⁶⁴ In early 1936, two newspapers in Prague, a city in which KPD leadership had taken refuge, published detailed reports on the developments in two political trials: the

60 BArch, RY1/3211, Berichte der Zentralvorstandes, "Our Duties," 252.

61 BArch, RY1/3211, Berichte der Zentralvorstandes, "Our Duties," 253.

62 BArch, RY1/3211, Berichte der Zentralvorstandes, "Our Duties," 254.

63 BArch, RY1/3219, Internationale Protests Kampagnen gegen den Terror in Deutschland, 1–121.

64 BArch, RY1/3219, Internationale Protests Kampagnen gegen den Terror in Deutschland 1, 121.

Wuppertal Trial⁶⁵ and the third trial concerning clashes between KPD members and the SA, which took place at Berlin's Richardstasse.⁶⁶ A rally led by German women in front of the German embassy was also reported during this period.⁶⁷ In the summer of 1937, several student and working women's committees in Basel responded to the call for mass mobilization in reference to the abuses reported in a trial in Stuttgart.⁶⁸

It seemed for a moment that the long-sought goal of solidarity, which was consistently part of the RHD appeals at the beginning of the "Nazi Era," had finally been achieved. This proved a fleeting illusion, however, for things had radically changed in Germany, and the few remaining members of the RHD had been silenced and forced to hide their political activism out of fear for their lives. The story of the "Red Caritas," as it was called by Mallmann, had its final act in 1938, when what remained of the RHD (as an association) was absorbed by the Deutsche Volkshilfe, one of the many humanitarian organizations directly controlled by the Nazi party.

As with many of the moments in the history of the RHD, even in this case the fate of this association was deeply intertwined with the fate of the women who belonged to it and who tried to pursue humanitarian actions against a very hostile backdrop. The RHD ceased to exist in 1938, the year in which Liselotte Hermann was executed on June 20 in the Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.

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The Journalistic Activity of Rosika Schwimmer from the 1890s until her Death in a Transnational Perspective

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This paper examines the journalistic career of Rosika Schwimmer, a prominent Hungarian feminist and pacifist, from the 1890s until her death. It situates her work within the broader historical context of transnational feminist and pacifist movements of the early twentieth century. Schwimmer's career was shaped by a wide network of contacts in the international progressive women's movement. Her activism enhanced her visibility as a public intellectual, but her controversial pacifist stance later led to political isolation and negatively affected her professional opportunities after emigrating to the United States. Throughout her life, Schwimmer used the press as a tool for activism and as a platform for self-promotion. The paper also explores her qualifications, skill sets, and the range of publications she contributed to, which included liberal newspapers and feminist journals.

The paper also provides insights into the challenges women faced in journalism in the first half of the 20th century, contrasting two articles from 1912 and 1914 that present opposing views on women's prospects in the field. Schwimmer's career began with translations, which served as a gateway to international journalism. She published in Hungarian, German, and later English-language journals, often on topics like women's rights, peace advocacy, and international cooperation. Her controversial and eccentric personality led to conflicts with colleagues, which also shaped her professional image and legacy. The paper concludes with a case study of her articles from 1919–1920, which illustrate the fusion of her political and journalistic identities.

Key words: Rosika Schwimmer, journalism, feminist, pacifist, women's rights, activism, transnational, Hungary, international press.

Introduction

In October 1912, *A Nő és a Társadalom* (Woman and Society), a journal published in Budapest between 1907 and 1913 as the first official press organ of the Budapest-based Feministák Egyesülete (Feminists' Association, or FE) and Nőtisztviselők Országos Egyesülete (National Association of Female Clerks, or NOE), included a short article in its *Szemle* (Review) column. According to the

author of this article, who wished to remain anonymous, “the new phenomenon in the occupation of female labor is the employment of women in the field of political journalism.” The author could not, of course, undertake an analysis of the general trends in this phenomenon in such a short article, but (s)he did provide a number of examples in support of his/her arguments. In addition to journalists from Budapest, the article shares the names of female reporters living and working in Timișoara (or Temesvár by its Hungarian name; today a city in Romania).¹ Because the text emphasized the importance of Timișoara, we might suppose that it was written by the leader of the FE’s Political Committee, Rosika Schwimmer, who had grown up in the city and was obviously familiar with local conditions. By that time, she had emerged as an internationally well-known progressive feminist activist and pacifist. She would have been a logical choice as author, as she was the editor-in-chief of *A Nő és a Társadalom*, which by the early 1910s had a nationwide circulation in Hungary. The article also mentions the women editors of a political daily in the southern regions of Hungary and in Transylvania. Furthermore, it lists a few women from the membership and supporter circles of NOE and FE who were employed by various daily newspapers published in Budapest. At the end of the text (which is only 15 lines long), the author expresses his/her wish that “we do hope that professional women journalists will replace the sports journalists who are damaging through the amateurism and imitation of male writers.”²

This was not the only time that *A Nő és a Társadalom* devoted attention to women journalists. However, after a series of articles was published in this organ encouraging women’s empowerment in journalism, reporting, and editing, *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* (Woman. A Feminist Journal), which was the successor to *A Nő és a Társadalom*, began to deal with the issue. In one article, it reported on journalism courses that were organized for women in Budapest. The author of the article is identified merely as “A woman reporter.” The relatively detailed and long article approaches the issue from several different aspects and argues that “Hungarian journalism is closed to women’s contributions.” After discussing the

1 For example, a member of FE leadership, Count Mrs. Sándor Teleki, née Júlia Kende (1864, Pest–1937, Budapest), who published her works under the pseudonym Szikra [or Spark], is mentioned in an editorial in the journal *Világ* [World] (Budapest, 1910–1949). Four other women journalists are mentioned: Mrs. Géza Antal, who also published in *Világ*, Lydia Kovács (?–1918, Budapest), who was employed as a reporter by the journals *Az Est* [The Evening] (Budapest, 1910–1939) and *A Nap* [The Day] (Budapest, 1904–1922), and Mrs. Hollós née Nandin de Grobois, who was “secretary of the editorial office of the [newspaper] *Budapesti Hírlap* [Budapest News] [Budapest, 1883–1939].” “Nők a sajtóban,” 185.

2 Ibid.

reasons for the “male domination” of newspaper editorial offices, the author explains that, “with a few exceptions [...] the situation and living conditions of women writers and journalists are dire [...], their position is uncertain, and their success is sometimes dependent on petty considerations.” The author therefore warns women who are about to embark on a career in journalism not to do so. She claims that even if they succeed, they will almost certainly fall victim to the exploitative attitudes of male editors.³

While the article published in 1912 is entirely optimistic about women’s prospects in journalism, the article which appeared two years later is negative. This can be interpreted in several ways. The interpretations can be linked to the structural characteristics of the two journals and the editorial motivations behind their publication. Like many of the short news items in the two periodicals, which share many similarities in terms of structure, content, and style, the earlier text seems to have been intended to inspire the readers with propagandistic elements. The author of the 1912 text clearly wanted to convey the message that women were able to succeed in careers in journalism and editing that had previously been almost entirely dominated by men. The 1914 article, in contrast, is a longer, analytical piece. In its structure and length, it is a problematic article that uses every possible argument and rhetorical device to dissuade women from pursuing careers in journalism. Of course, the author of the article may have been several reasons for writing this. However, given her identity (a “female reporter” who chose to keep her name secret), she may also have sought to discourage other women from becoming journalists, as they might have been competition for her.⁴

The reality is roughly halfway between the claims made in the two articles. As early as the 1880s, a few Hungarian women were able to make a living from journalism and editorial work.⁵ At the turn of the century, Rosika Schwimmer was one of these women. She made an unparalleled contribution as a journalist,

3 Egy női reporter [A female reporter], “Laptudósítói tanfolyam,” 244–45.

4 Ibid.

5 Compare with Janka Wohl (Pest, 1843–Budapest, 1901) and her sister Stefania Wohl (1846, Pest–1899, Budapest), who worked as authors for different journals and editors of various fashion magazines. They published articles in Hungarian and also in German, English, and French in several foreign press organs. In addition to their work as journalists, they published independent volumes, ran a popular salon in the center of Budapest, and worked as translators. For more details on their lives, work, and international reception, see Mészáros, “Wohl-nővérek munkássága.”

author, and periodical editor in Hungary, western Europe, and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶

This paper explores the key turning points in Rosika Schwimmer's journalistic career, situating her work within the broader historical context of early twentieth-century transnational feminist and pacifist movements. I argue that from the outset of her career, Schwimmer benefited from substantial support from prominent figures in the international progressive women's movement, particularly in Austria, the Netherlands, and the United States. This network of allies significantly shaped her trajectory as both a journalist and editor. Drawing on the growing historiography of transnational feminism and the role of the press in women's activism,⁷ I show how Schwimmer's involvement in the women's and peace movements intersected with and influenced her professional path. During the formative years of her career, her activist engagement enhanced her visibility and credibility as a public intellectual. However, this relationship became ambivalent following her emigration to the United States, where increasing political isolation, amplified by her controversial pacifist stance, negatively affected her professional opportunities and public reception.

Throughout her life, Schwimmer sought to utilize the press not only as a tool for activism but also as a platform to construct and maintain her own public persona. Her self-branding strategies can be understood in light of recent literature on women's authorship and media,⁸ which underscores how women navigated public discourses through journalism. At the same time, her strong and eccentric personality led to frequent conflicts with colleagues and collaborators, and these tensions shaped her professional image and legacy. This paper also investigates Schwimmer's qualifications and the specific skill sets that made her well-suited to a journalistic career. What kind of formal or informal

6 On this, see Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*.

7 E.g. Offen, *European Feminisms*. This foundational text maps out transnational feminist networks and contextualizes the work of figures similar to Schwimmer. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, which discusses the emergence of an international feminist movement and the key role played by women like Schwimmer in shaping its discourse.

8 E.g. Delap et al., *Feminism and the Periodical Press*, 1. This book offers insights into how early twentieth-century feminist writers used the press as a tool for activism and self-fashioning. It also highlights that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the periodical press became "a crucial vehicle through which women's movements debated and disseminated ideas, developed organizations and networks, and connected readers across social and geographic lines." Ibid xxvii. See also Lake, *The History*. Though it focuses on Australia, this analysis of feminist political agency and public engagement through the media is conceptually relevant to the discussion here. On the advancement of women's journalism in the Austro-Hungarian context, see Klaus and Wischermann, *Journalistinnen*, 66.

training did she have? What editorial or rhetorical techniques characterized her work? I map the types of publications she contributed to, which ranged from liberal newspapers to feminist journals, and I examine the scope and reach of these press outlets within and beyond Hungary. In terms of content and genre, Schwimmer wrote primarily on issues related to women's rights, peace advocacy, and international cooperation. Her work spanned various formats, including editorials, news reports, and opinion pieces, reflecting a deep commitment to both activism and professional journalism.

The article concludes with a close reading of a three-part series of articles published by Schwimmer at the turn of 1919–1920. I interpret this series as a form of *ars poetica* for her activism, or in other words as a reflection on her political ethos and the challenges of sustaining idealism amid disillusionment and exile. This case study illustrates the fusion of her political and journalistic identities and sheds light on the intellectual and emotional foundations of her lifelong struggle for peace and women's emancipation.

Sources

In addition to meticulously preserving her correspondence and documents related to her personal life and political activism, Schwimmer also archived her journalistic writings, organizing them as a distinct section within the Rosika Schwimmer Papers in the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division.⁹ Her extensive documentation practices, driven by a tendency toward graphomania, a growing compulsion for systematization, and a persistent need for self-vindication following her unsuccessful diplomatic mission in Switzerland as envoy of the Hungarian government in 1918, are especially evident in Series 2 of the collection, which comprises twelve boxes. In this section, carefully sorted and catalogued published and unpublished articles can be found from the period between 1896 to 1948. These articles are supplemented with notes and research materials, partly produced by Schwimmer herself. Her secretaries also included the different references/reactions Schwimmer received to her articles between 1899 and 1940. Regarding the correspondence she carried on with the editors of the journals she published in, however, only a small fraction can be found here.¹⁰ The archivists who organized the collection have integrated the vast majority

9 NYPL RSP.

10 Writings and speeches, 1896–1948. NYPL RSP II.

of these materials into the 465 boxes of Schwimmer's general correspondence (Series 1).¹¹

The six publication indexes, which have also been preserved in this series of the collection, contain Schwimmer's articles published in Hungarian, German, English, and French, as well as references to her early writings. The indexes include her writings published in Hungary, further regions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Europe, and the United States of America in chronological order.¹² Schwimmer's short articles are also included here, the majority of which had been published anonymously or under pseudonyms. These were submitted to the review sections of various Austrian and German journals, and most of them appeared in the early 1900s. A tremendous amount of manuscripts can also be found here, partly with notes made by editors and proofreaders.

Schwimmer's Journalistic Career within the Context of Women's Intellectual Work

It is essential to begin with an examination of Rosika Schwimmer's journalistic career within the broader context of women's intellectual labor at the fin-de-siècle. After this, I briefly analyze the particular situation of Schwimmer and her family background. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century was a period marked by profound social and cultural transformations in East Central Europe.¹³ It can be characterized as one of the most turbulent periods in the economic, social, and cultural development of the region, including Austria and Hungary. Vienna was at the forefront of the adaptation of modern Western culture within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but Budapest also played an important role.¹⁴

The innovations of the industrial revolutions, the development of transport, communications, and the press, as well as the gradual expansion of institutional education greatly expanded the world of traditionally closed communities.

11 General Correspondence 1890–1948. NYPL RSP I.A.

12 The indexes, written initially in Hungarian and German and later in English, include the title of the article, the name of the newspaper or journal, the place of publication (country and city), and occasionally information on the honoraria received by Schwimmer. Publication index volumes, 1899–1914. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10; Publication index volumes, 1906–1915. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467.1; Publication index notes (incomplete), 1903–1940. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467. 2–3.

13 Hanák, *A dualizmus korának*, 47.

14 E.g., various political conflicts, recurrent economic crises and the debates related to ethnic minorities. Ibid.

Distances that had seemed unbridgeable in previous decades were shortened, and the flow of ideas and information accelerated rapidly, alongside the flow of products. However, it was not until the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867 that Hungary began to experience a major economic boom. The social and economic changes, the growing “surplus of women,” and the increasing number of widows even before World War I forced more and more women into the world of paid work. This was exacerbated by the economic crisis of 1873 and the subsequent recurrent recessions. Marriage was therefore no longer a “solution” for all women in society, as the example of Rosika Schwimmer also illustrates.¹⁵

The increased participation of women in the labor market began in the late 1880s, i.e. around the time of Schwimmer’s birth. In 1900, more than a quarter of women (27.6 percent) were already working to earn an income in Hungary, with a higher proportion (36.1 percent) in the capital. The general trend was for girls to start working at a very young age, but the majority of them stopped working after they got married. In 1910, 70 percent of working women were unmarried.

After the turn of the century, the structural transformation of the economy in the Dual Monarchy led to the feminization of certain professions. In many cases, this led to the reduction of the prestige these professions had enjoyed.¹⁶ Until World War I and in many respects even in the interwar period, a large part of public opinion, still dominated by men, considered women unfit to do work requiring serious concentration. Nevertheless, even before 1914, the number of women employed in certain intellectual jobs in agriculture, industry, and the service sector had begun to increase gradually.¹⁷ Importantly, however, a significant proportion of women did not “rush” into the world of labor of their own free will, but in response to overwhelming pressures. The postponement of marriage compelled women to support themselves financially. Over time, these multifaceted social transformations contributed to a growing recognition that the role of a wife could be reconciled with participation in the paid labor market.¹⁸

The Budapest-born and, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, internationally renowned Rosika Schwimmer was a women’s rights

15 On these trends, see Gyáni and Kövér, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete*, 19.

16 See Appelt, *Von Ladenmädchen*, 212–16.

17 Ibid.

18 Gyáni, *A nő élete*; Koncz, *Nők*.

and peace movement activist and also editor-in-chief and author for the first Hungarian feminist journal, *A Nő és a Társadalom*. She was born into a middle-class Jewish family as the oldest of three children. After her father's bankruptcy, the family had to leave Budapest. From the age of six, Schwimmer grew up in parts of Transylvania and also in the cities of Timișoara in the region known as Banat and Subotica in the region known as Vojvodina. She moved back to Budapest in the middle of the 1890s and lived there until 1920. She attended primary school in Budapest and Transylvania. For a while, she was educated in a convent school that she later criticized harshly, and she graduated from a public school for girls. She also enrolled in a special school for commerce. She became proficient in several languages aside from Hungarian: German, English, and French, and she was able to communicate in Dutch, Italian, Swedish, and Norwegian. In the capital, she worked as a governess and later as a female clerk, meaning she became well aware of the troubles faced by working women.¹⁹

Schwimmer's journalistic activity has to be examined within the context of women's paid work for several reasons. First, she could not rely on her impoverished father for financial support, and she thus had to support herself from a relatively young age. From the sources on Schwimmer's income and expenditures, it is clear that she could not or did not want to rely on her husband Béla Bédy's support during their comparatively brief marriage. Bédy was also a journalist, but their marriage only lasted from 1911 until 1913. Thus, Schwimmer needed money, which may explain why, in addition to progressive, feminist journals, she also published in the organs of social democratic women's organizations and even in several fashion magazines. Schwimmer needed the money she earned from journalism throughout her entire life, including the decades she spent in emigration in the United States. Even a few weeks before her death, she noted among her medical records that "it would be much more useful if I wrote my article [instead of these notes on the state of my health]. Everyone reads articles, but no one will read these..."²⁰

Schwimmer did not remain, however, at the level of the average female journalist. By the eve of World War I, she had become a celebrity about whom the world's leading newspapers and journals published. This popularity did not change from the period of her isolation beginning in the 1920s. And even though she became persona non grata in certain groups of the women's and

19 This paragraph is an extract from my book on the life and career of Rosika Schwimmer. Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*, 117–18.

20 Rosika Schwimmer's diary note in English. June 21, 1948. NYPL RSP X. Box 586.

peace movement during the last two decades of her life, stories about her still frequently appeared in the papers, and she gave interviews regularly.

Influences, Challenges, and Rewards: How Schwimmer's Relation to her Journalistic Profession Altered over the Years

How did Rosika Schwimmer's family background, her childhood in southern Hungary, and her involvement in both the Hungarian and international women's and peace movements shape her development as a journalist? To what extent did her determined, passionate, yet markedly egocentric and at times confrontative personality facilitate or obstruct her professional advancement? I consider additional aspects that require further exploration in order fully to understand the intersections between her personal history, activism, and journalistic career. Schwimmer graduated from a state school for girls. After her graduation, she enrolled in a special trade school. From an early age, her parents and teachers recognized her talent for languages and writing. This talent proved invaluable in her later career. Within the family, they spoke not only Hungarian but also German, and she learned French at school. This likely explains her ability to master English and a few other languages as an adult. At around 16, she already had ambitious career plans, envisioning herself as a journalist, which was rather unusual in contemporary Timișoara. Her maternal uncle, Lipót/Leopold Katscher, who made a living as a writer and journalist, certainly served as an inspiration in this respect.²¹

Schwimmer had no qualifications of the type that would have predisposed her to a career as a journalist. At that time, however, this was not a problem, as very few female journalists had any qualifications in this field. Schwimmer's *ars poetica* as a journalist may have been influenced, later, by the work of her husband, the aforementioned journalist Béla Bédy, but we cannot be sure of this, as their marriage lasted only two years. When Schwimmer began to build her career as a journalist and activist in the early 1900s, her first mentor was her uncle. In addition to his valuable professional and practical advice, he provided her with ongoing financial support and publication opportunities in Hungarian

21 Leopold Katscher studied at the Academy of Commerce in Pest and Vienna and also attended medical and law courses. He was interested in literature. He studied literature and economics in Vienna, Budapest, and London. The fact that he was addressed as "Dr. Katscher" in the letters preserved in his papers may indicate that he had a doctorate. Leopold and Berta Katscher Papers 1866–1939, NYPL LBP K MssCol6318.

and foreign (German-language) periodicals.²² As Katscher was also the head of Magántisztviselők Országos Szövetsége (National Association of Private Officials, Budapest, 1893–?) at the time, he presumably influenced Schwimmer's future activism and political agency.

Within the frames of FE, Schwimmer was responsible for the associations' international relations, from which it continued to benefit even after Schwimmer left Hungary permanently in 1920. Until her emigration in 1920, she was also responsible for monitoring the international women's movement press and promoting the achievements of the FE and the NOE in the official organs of women's associations in Hungary and abroad.²³ The development of Schwimmer's career as a journalist went hand in hand with the gradual broadening of the FE's scope of activities. The 1905 working program of FE merits consideration here, as the objectives of the association were primarily related to women as individuals existing and functioning within families, rather than to women as separate entities.²⁴ This strategy was certainly adopted by the FE leadership in the hope of reaching more supporters in different layers of the society. According to the minutes of the board meetings, the number of FE members, and thus the number of subscribers to *A Nő és a Társadalom* and subsequently *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat*, increased from 319 to 5,312 between 1906 and 1918, and the association gained more and more press coverage in Budapest and the rest of the country.²⁵ The number of FE members, however, decreased to around 500 in the interwar period, a tendency which continued during and after World War II. At the same time, the number of people who followed FE's official organ declined dramatically. *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* finally ceased publication in 1928.²⁶

At the time of FE's foundation in 1904, Schwimmer, who was barely 30 years old, was increasingly strategic in her efforts to build her international career. Partly as a result of this, by 1905, she was publishing in several Austrian,

22 One of the first German-language journals to which Schwimmer sent an article was *Ethische Kultur: Monatsblatt für ethisch-soziale Neugestaltung* (Berlin, 1893–1936).

23 The association did not pay for the press products, which were compiled in the FE documentation in the Hungarian National Archives. Most issues are complimentary copies, which Schwimmer received because they contained her articles. For a series of correspondence with the editors of these press products, s. NYPL RSP I.A.; for an index of articles, s. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10; Box 467.1–3. S. also the notebooks in which Schwimmer kept her receipts and expenditures. NYPL RSP I.A.

24 Feministák Egyesülete, "Tájékoztató."

25 Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*, 138–48.

26 Ibid.

German, Swiss, and Western European journals. Related her lecture tours first in Western and Eastern Europe (after 1907 yearly) and then in North America (1914–1915, 1916), she gradually became a widely published journalist, writer, and popular speaker. She also became an encouraging role model for a growing number of young middle-class women. Her persuasiveness and speaking style won the sympathy of large audiences. A form of celebrity culture began to coalesce around her, illustrated by the many “fan letters” addressed to her, which offer testimonies to the personal admiration she inspired among her contemporaries.²⁷ However, her commitment to her ideals, her eccentric personality, and her impulsiveness made daily life increasingly difficult for her and got her embroiled in professional and private debates and irreconcilable conflicts.²⁸

As a result of her writing and journalistic activities in Hungary and abroad, as well as her lecture tours in Europe and the United States, Schwimmer built up a wide network of contacts, corresponding and collaborating with a wide range of women’s rights and peace activists, politicians, church leaders, intellectuals, and artists. She benefited greatly from these contacts throughout her life. She became increasingly isolated after going into emigration, however, and also came into conflict with her former coworkers at various journals. She never regained her role in feminist and pacifist organizations in the United States, although she continued to write, publish, and hold public speeches and lectures. Even in the last weeks of her life, she remained active writing articles.

From a Town in Southern Hungary to the Top of the Journalistic Profession: Schwimmer Path towards a Career as a Professional Journalist

Rosika Schwimmer started her career not by publishing articles but by doing translations. This work laid the foundation for her knowledge of and interest in the international world of ideas. In the early 1900s, she translated several works on the women’s emancipation movement from German into Hungarian. Among her first translations were articles published by Leopold Katscher in

27 I studied the celebrity cult around Schwimmer within the frameworks of the FWF project “Frauen schreiben an Frauenbewegungsaktivistinnen, ~1870–1930” at the University of Vienna under the direction of Corinna Oesch. Between 1902 and 1930, Schwimmer received a total of 303 “fan letters” from unknown women and men in Hungarian, German, English, and French. 74 of these letters are related to her journalistic and editorial activities.

28 On this, see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*.

the German periodical *Ethische Kultur: Monatsblatt für ethisch-soziale Neugestaltung* in 1896–1897.²⁹ From the late 1890s onwards, she began to build her journalistic career intensively. She sent her first contribution to a well-established Budapest periodical, *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News), in April 1898. The editor, however, refused to publish her article for the following reasons:

The article submitted bears the character of a woman so impressed by her reading that a man [...] cannot be judged from it. The essay itself, regardless of its author, is superficial and breezy, and [...] lacks thoughtfulness and substance. I would have liked to have said something kinder and more positive.³⁰

Schwimmer's first articles in Hungarian finally appeared, with the support of Leopold Katscher, in *Magántisztviselők Lapja* (Journal of Private Officials), the official organ of Magántisztviselők Országos Szövetsége.³¹ The issues addressed in these articles can be reconstructed from letters written by Katscher, which are part of the Rosika Schwimmer Papers. Schwimmer usually reported on the activities and general board meetings of NOE and the exploitation of working women.³² She soon began to publish in several Hungarian journals, including *Huszádik Század* (Twentieth Century), *Független Magyarország* (Independent Hungary), *Nemzeti Nőnevelés* (National Education of Woman), *Az Újság* (The News), and the aforementioned *Budapesti Hírlap*.

At the same time, she also began to send articles to German and Austrian periodicals. She first posted an article for the Berlin monthly journal *Die Frau* in August 1901,³³ but it was rejected for publication. The first stage of her international journalistic endeavors was the Austrian bourgeois women's movement journal *Frauenleben*, which was published out of Vienna between 1894 and 1901 and which was edited by Austrian women's movement activist Helene Littmann.³⁴ *Frauenleben* published a submission by Schwimmer a mere month after her rejection by *Die Frau*. Its readership included members of

29 Schwimmer's translations of works by Leopold and Berta Katscher, 1896–1897. NYPL RSP II. Box 467.8.

30 Letter from Jenő Módos to Rosika Schwimmer. April 21, 1898. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 1.

31 Letter from Leopold Katscher to Rosika Schwimmer. December 14, 1900. Ibid.

32 Letters from Leopold Katscher to Rosika Schwimmer. December 1900. Ibid. Schwimmer's outgoing letters from this period are not in the collection.

33 Postcard of the editorial office of *Die Frau* to Rosika Schwimmer. August 23, 1901. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 2.

34 Rosika Schwimmer first published in the journal in September 1901. Postcard from the editorial office of *Frauenleben* to Rosika Schwimmer. September 7, 1901. Ibid.

women's associations outside the Monarchy, as indicated by a letter by Aletta Jacobs to Schwimmer in 1902.³⁵ In the following years, Schwimmer published articles in several German and Austrian journals (they were mostly women's periodicals that focused on the women's movement), including the following: *Die Zeit*, *Wiener Mode*, *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung*, *Neues Frauenleben*, *Illustrierte Frauen-Rundschau*, *Ethische Kultur: Monatsblatt für ethisch-soziale Neugestaltung*, and *Dokumente des Fortschritts*.³⁶ The titles of these papers reveal two things. First, Schwimmer did not publish exclusively in the journals of progressive, bourgeois-liberal women's associations, since the *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung*, to which she sent articles relatively frequently for a few years, was the most important official organ of the Austrian social democratic women's movement. Second, alongside the various periodicals that focused on the women's movement, Schwimmer also published in women's magazines and even in fashion magazines and newspapers.³⁷

Schwimmer reported on the activities and achievements of women's associations in Hungary, at first exclusively in German periodicals. After 1902, the aforementioned Aletta Jacobs helped her translate her articles into English and publish them in western and northern European journals.³⁸ Schwimmer did not speak any English until the mid-1900s. This lack of knowledge of English had not been a major problem, since Schwimmer had corresponded almost exclusively with German, Austrian, French, and Swiss activists. Jacobs was the only exception, but she spoke German relatively well.³⁹ After this point, however, Schwimmer began to correspond with Carrie Chapman Catt, founding president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, which was established in Berlin in 1904 and then renamed the International Alliance of Women in 1926. This correspondence was only possible in English. Because of their inadequate knowledge of English, Schwimmer, internationally renowned progressive women's rights and peace activist Vilma Glücklich, and a few other FE members hired a native English-speaking tutor to give them evening classes

35 In her letter, Jacobs made several references to the *Frauenleben*. Letter from Aletta Jacobs to Rosika Schwimmer. August 1, 1902. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 2.

36 For the correspondence with the editorial offices of these journals, see NYPL RSP I.A. Box 1–11. For the articles, see NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10.; Box 467. 1–3. For the notebooks, in which Schwimmer kept her receipts and payments, see NYPL RSP I.A.

37 Publication index volumes, 1899–1914. NYPL RSP II.A.

38 E.g. letter from Aletta Jacobs to Rosika Schwimmer. March 5, 1904.

39 General Correspondence. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 1–5.

several times a week in the association room of FE and NOE.⁴⁰ Schwimmer's talent for foreign languages enabled her to master English within a short period of time, to the extent that within a few years, she was able to convey her ideas eloquently in what was for her a fourth language after Hungarian, German, and French.

One salient feature of Schwimmer's personality was her apparently constant yearning for conflict. There are numerous signs of this in her journalistic oeuvre. In her correspondence, one finds regular traces of her conflicts with periodical editors from Hungary and other countries, of which I briefly outline one typical case below. Schwimmer published articles in *Neues Frauenleben* (Vienna, 1902–1918), the successor to the periodical *Frauenleben*, from the moment it was launched. She had a good collegial relationship with Auguste Fickert (1855, Vienna–1910, Maria Enzersdorf, Austria), editor of the periodical and a leading figure of the Austrian progressive women's movement. Their good relationship, however, was overshadowed in 1908 by a dispute over Fickert's editorial practices. The disagreement erupted because Fickert had entirely rewritten a news item sent by Schwimmer on the Hungarian women's movement. He had published the rewritten piece without Schwimmer's permission.⁴¹ After this conflict, Schwimmer did not publish in *Neues Frauenleben* until 1910, and no further letters from Fickert are found in her correspondence.⁴²

By the 1910s, Schwimmer was able to express her ideas in English with relative fluency. By this time, she was publishing in several English-language journals and attending IWSA congresses every two years, where German and French were also used as official languages, though English became the major language of communication.⁴³ By this time, she had become a well-established member of the international women's movement, and her articles originally written in German were translated into English by the editorial offices of the

40 These courses were open to all FE members. Courses were held in small groups in the evenings after working hours and came to an end with an examination, after which participants received a detailed assessment of their performance and a certificate. On this, see e.g. "A Feministák Egyesületének éves jelentése," 89.

41 Fickert's revisions as a proofreader clearly reveal that she frequently shortened the paragraphs in the articles, in addition to making minor stylistic changes. Sometimes, she restructured and rewrote entire sections of articles, changing or simply removing important elements of their original content. Konvolut von Artikeln über die Frauenfrage. WR NF. B-77991; Tagebuch von Auguste Fickert. WR NF. H.I.N.-70494.

42 In spite of this conflict, she remained in close collegial contact with other leaders of the Austrian progressive and bourgeois women's movement. On this, see Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*, 16–173.

43 See Gehmacher, *Feminist Activism*.

papers. In 1910, the editor of the journal *Englishwoman* asked her permission to publish a translated version of one of her articles originally written in German.⁴⁴ A few months later, the editor of *Englishwoman* again commented on Schwimmer's knowledge of English and criticized the article she had sent to the journal:

Your article on the women's movement in Hungary is very interesting. If I may say so, the English still sounds of a bit foreign flavour, and the article is very short. [...] We cannot offer payment for the articles, as we consider them propaganda, [...] but if it is in the interest of the cause, we are happy to publish them.⁴⁵

Schwimmer did not stop writing propagandistic articles proclaiming the success of progressive women's associations in Hungary. She continued, however, to work hard on her English. As a result of her efforts, she was capable of writing longer texts and giving relatively long lectures in English. During her lectures, she spoke freely without using notes. She was increasingly strategic in the steps she took to build her career as an international journalist and activist, from which both NOE and FE benefited greatly. Almost from the beginning, the IWSA leadership was open to her innovative ideas. It was Schwimmer who initiated the creation of the organization's badge and who, at the Copenhagen Congress in 1906, proposed the launch of the organization's official monthly journal, *Ius Suffragii* (1906–1924), which was also published in English.⁴⁶ Schwimmer's efforts were finally crowned with success. Her articles were published in the most prestigious Western European and North American journals after 1914. Editors of the most outstanding papers (e.g. *The New York Times*) continued to publish her writings even after her political influence had dissipated.⁴⁷

Thus, as the discussion above has shown, for Schwimmer, translation was a gateway of sorts to the world of international journalism.⁴⁸ From the early 1910s, she published not only in women's journals but also in renowned Western European and North American newspapers and periodicals, as I discuss in greater detail below. The interest taken by the international press in her personality and

44 Letter from E. M. Goodman to Rosika Schwimmer. August 24, 1910. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 23.

45 Letter from E. M. Goodman to Rosika Schwimmer. July 1, 1910. Ibid.

46 "A Feministák Egyesületének éves jelentése," 89.

47 NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10; Publication index volumes, 1906–1915. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467.1; Publication index notes (incomplete), 1903–1940. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467. 2–3.

48 On the different translation practices in women's movements, see Gehmacher, *Feminist Activism*.

her articles was further stimulated by the IWSA Congress in Budapest in 1913, as well as by her peace movement activities after the outbreak of World War I.

The most Common Subject-Matters of Schwimmer's Articles

Schwimmer's articles, which were written between the turn of the century and 1948, cover a relatively wide range of topics and almost all aspects of womanhood. In terms of genre, they range from news articles consisting of only a few lines (with or without titles) to glosses and reports on various women's rights events and congresses. They include a wide range of editorials, interviews, and reports. Before 1914, most of her writings were on women's work and education, the women's movement, and suffrage, but she also authored many writings on child labor and the various approaches to providing support for mothers. Between 1914 and 1918 and before World War II, the subject of pacifism dominated her articles. After 1920, she started to discuss the motivations behind her political agency. In the 1920s, she also began to reflect on the situation of Jewish people.

From the outset of her journalistic career, Schwimmer wrote on the advancements of women's emancipation from a transnational perspective. She also published numerous biographical articles on the activities and achievements of various politicians (including Hungarians), women's movement activists, and artists. This can be interpreted as a career building strategy. I offer here only a few examples as illustrations. Schwimmer regularly published articles on leading figures of the Hungarian and international women's movement. She wrote several articles on the aforementioned Vilma Glücklich (1872, Vágújhely [today Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Slovakia]–1927, Vienna) after Glücklich's death in 1927. At the time of FE's foundation, she regularly published biographical articles on the aforementioned Aletta Jacobs and Carrie Chapman Catt, who also served as a role model for Hungarian progressive women's activism. The lecture tour held by the two women in Hungary in 1906 was covered in detail not only in *A Nő és a Társadalom* but also by the Hungarian dailies.⁴⁹ In addition to her organizational work before the 1913 IWSA Congress in Budapest, she found time and energy to write articles on the event.

49 These events were covered, for instance, by *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation), *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News), *Új Idők* (New Times), *Az Újság* (Journal), *Pesti Napló* (Journal of Pest), and *Pester Lloyd*. Among women's periodicals, *Nemzeti Nőnevelés* (National Women's Education) reported on the news. For the articles written by Schwimmer, see e.g. Bédy-Schwimmer, "Két kiváló asszony," 383–84.

Schwimmer also published only on those activists with whom she had personal working or friendly contacts. Thus, the list of activists on whom she wrote offers a clear index of her growing international network of contacts. She wrote several pieces on Helene Stöcker, leader of the radical wing of the German bourgeois women's movement. Like Schwimmer, Stöcker also emigrated to the United States after World War I. Schwimmer also wrote on Gina Krog, a Norwegian women's movement activist and one of the founding members of the IWSA. After the death of Marianne Hainisch, president of Bund österreichischer Frauenvereine (Vienna, 1902–), the umbrella organization of the Austrian bourgeois women's associations for more than three decades, she wrote several obituaries for American newspapers. From the years of World War I until the mid-1940s, she published numerous articles on Count Mihály Károlyi (1875, Fót, Hungary–1955, Vence, France), president of the Hungarian Democratic Republic (acting between November 16, 1918–March 21, 1919), and his wife Katinka Andrassy, both in Hungarian and international journals.⁵⁰

In autumn 1914, Schwimmer interviewed US President Woodrow Wilson. This interview brought her international recognition. In the months following the outbreak of World War I, in part thanks to the efforts of the aforementioned Catt, Schwimmer undertook a determined campaign to persuade President Wilson to assume the role of neutral mediator in hopes of bringing the war to a swift conclusion. In September, President Wilson received Schwimmer at the White House and granted her a formal interview. Schwimmer's efforts were not crowned with success, however, in spite of the fact that she met Wilson for a second time in 1915 and that both presidential audiences were widely covered by the media. Schwimmer herself also reported on the events in the international press.⁵¹

Probably most of Schwimmer's articles after 1916 were written on her dispute with US magnate Henry Ford.⁵² After the unsuccessful negotiations with President Wilson, Schwimmer finally managed to persuade Ford in November 1915 to finance the (in)famous Peace Ship. This became well-known in world history under the name of the Ford Peace Expedition. Most of the participants in this mission were influential Americans, including, of course, Schwimmer and Ford, as well as a number of journalists. The ship carrying them sailed from

50 For the Hungarian-, German-, and English language articles, see Manuscripts and drafts, 1896–1948, n.d. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466–478.

51 See Rosika Schwimmer's literary work on Ford & Wilson. NYPL RSP IX. Personal Press Clippings. Box 511.

52 Ibid.

Hoboken (New York harbor) on December 4, crossing the Atlantic and arriving in Oslo. Its primary aim was to draw attention to the importance of immediate peace negotiations. However, the world press and later Schwimmer herself reported only on the disputes among the passengers, who quarreled with one another during the voyage. During the cruise, Schwimmer's and Ford's earlier conflicts became irreconcilable differences.⁵³

The failure of the Ford Peace Ship and the conflict between Schwimmer and Ford was partly caused by Schwimmer's eccentric personality and aggressive attitudes. This failure led to the collapse of Schwimmer's carefully nurtured political influence in the United States in 1914–1915. This was exacerbated by a barrage of derisive, disparaging articles and cartoons in the international press, which deeply undermined Schwimmer's earlier popularity.⁵⁴ This was the reason why, during the three decades of her exile in the United States, Schwimmer published a large number of articles criticizing Henry Ford and excusing herself in the most popular American and Hungarian American periodicals. Numerous articles appeared, for instance, in *The Day*, *The New York Publisher's Weekly*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Buffalo News*, *The New York Times*, *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* (American Hungarian People's Word), and *Az Írás* (The Writing), in which she sought to clarify Ford's political role in 1918. It is important to keep in mind, as an important element of the backdrop of these disputes, that Schwimmer never received US citizenship on account of her pacifist beliefs, and her documents thus always labeled her as "stateless."⁵⁵

Even in the 1940s, editors of well-established periodicals were still happy to publish Schwimmer's articles and other writings or interviews with her, despite the fact that she was no longer part of the leadership of the Hungarian and international peace and women's movement organizations. Why did the press take such a strong interest in her work and ideas? I argue that this was partly because Schwimmer remained in relatively close contact with a number of influential politicians, public figures, artists, and activists in the United States and Europe. This fact, together with her eventful life and controversial personality, made her interesting to the press. Her previous involvement in domestic political affairs in the United States only made her more interesting to the press, as did her unsuccessful years-long fight for US citizenship, not to mention the (false) accusations according to which she had served as a Soviet during her diplomatic

53 Ford Peace Ship. NYPL RSP IV. Box 486–490.

54 Ford Peace Ship. NYPL RSP IV. Box 486–490.

55 For Schwimmer's official documents relating to her emigration, see NYPL RSP X. Box 554, 555.

mission in Switzerland. These various factors made her an interesting figure for broad readerships.⁵⁶

*"The Grievances of Feminism during the Proletarian Dictatorship":⁵⁷
A Close Reading of Two Articles by Schwimmer*

In the discussion below, I analyze two editorials written by Schwimmer in December 1919 and January 1920. I argue that these articles offer insights into her journalistic *ars poetica*, her values, and her political orientation. In these texts, Schwimmer problematizes FE's and her own controversial relations with the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the social-democratic women's associations. The texts thus offer indirect explanations for her decision to emigrate. They also provide insights into FE's views on women's employment and women's labor activism, which differed from the views of the abovementioned groups. Finally, in these two texts, Schwimmer lists the alleged crimes committed by the Hungarian Soviet Republic against women and the discriminatory practices of the Republic against women when it came to paid work. Her journalistic *ars poetica*, her values, and her political orientation changed very little during her lifetime, including the period of nearly three decades that she spent in exile. The texts also reveal her views on the regime changes after World War I and on the short-lived Soviet Republic. Finally, the texts also give an impression of the image Schwimmer wanted to convey of herself to the public immediately before she emigrated from Hungary in January 1920. The texts are important in part simply because the political, economic, and social shifts (and upheavals) that took place over the course of the few months covered in the articles had a profound impact on Schwimmer's later life and career. It became evident at the time that her active political involvement as an envoy of the Károlyi government in Switzerland had made her *persona non grata* for the authorities in Hungary. Due to these factors, she decided to leave her home country and live in exile.⁵⁸

With regard to the historical moment in which these texts were published, it is important to note that, in the wake of the Great War, the heretofore relatively stable situation of FE and the positions of the entire progressive feminist movement in Hungary weakened. The Soviet Republic and the subsequent regimes (during what is known as the Horthy Era after Regent Miklós Horthy)

56 On news values, see Brighton and Foy, *News Values*.

57 Schwimmer, "A feminizmus sérelmei," 2–3.

58 C. McFadden, "A Radical Exchange," 494–504.

made every effort to marginalize feminists. There was also a radical attempt to limit the press activity and press coverage that the movement had established for itself over the course of the previous decade and a half. Publication of *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* was banned, first in 1919 and then temporarily in 1920. Through revisionist propaganda, the valorization of religious and nationalistic ideas, the glorification of women's (traditional) roles within the family, and the demonization of the belief systems of progressive feminists, the foundations of a whole new women's movement were finally laid. At the heart of this was the Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége (National Association of Hungarian Women, or MANSz), founded in January 1919 by the writer and activist Cécile Tormay, which according to some sources managed to grow to approximately half a million members in Budapest and the rest of Hungary by the eve of World War II.⁵⁹

As Rosika Schwimmer herself emphasized several times in the two texts, the new circumstances did not automatically bring an end to the feminist movement. This does not mean, of course, that the various organizations and figures at the vanguard of this movement did not suffer enormous setbacks, as Schwimmer notes in the texts. Beyond the specific examples mentioned by Schwimmer in the texts, it is worth noting that NOE, for instance, was unable to adapt to the challenges that arose in the new transitional period. Some members of NOE, which had been dissolved in the summer of 1919, joined the Communist Party, while others joined FE. FE could never regain its former position within the new right-wing women's movement of the interwar period. Nevertheless, in the early 1920s, it managed to redefine itself and its aims. Thus, although it was only able to operate within a narrower framework than before, it remained active until it was banned in 1942, and it then became active again between 1946 and 1949.

The two articles are the first two pieces in a series of articles that were to be published in the future. As I have already noted, Schwimmer wrote these texts for *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* right before she left Hungary. In the end, only the first part of the series of articles was published in December 1919 under the title "The grievances of feminism under the proletarian dictatorship."⁶⁰ The second part survives in the Rosika Schwimmer Papers, among the numerous unpublished manuscripts and draft speeches.⁶¹ This handwritten text is in some

59 Szapor, "Who Represents"; Szapor, "Good Hungarian Women."

60 Schwimmer, "A feminizmus sérelmei," 2–3.

61 *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* was not published between January and June 1920, and the July issue was no longer devoted to the Hungarian Soviet Republic but to a much more current event for the FE, namely

places difficult to read, since Schwimmer almost invariably recorded her articles and drafts in pencil on poor-quality paper until she emigrated to the United States. Beginning in 1921, the handwritten notes, which were written for the most part in Hungarian, gradually disappeared, and most of the later texts were typed in English.

The two texts thoroughly clarify the relationship between the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the progressive feminist movement. They can, thus, also be interpreted as an indirect explanation of Schwimmer's decision to leave Hungary permanently. In addition, the writings reflect on a number of issues that were discussed on several occasions within the framework of FE, as well as the Magyarországi Munkásnő Egyesület (Hungarian Working Women's Association, or MME, Budapest, 1903–) and the broader labor movement. MME was headed by Marika Gárdos, with whom Schwimmer had had a rather complicated relationship since 1902. Their relationship was characterized as much by camaraderie as by conflict and rivalry. Although Schwimmer was actively involved in the establishment of MME and Gárdos followed the activities of FE, conflicts between the two associations were inevitable. The goals of feminist organizations and social democratic women's organizations differed dramatically, as did the ideal means with which these goals were to be achieved. This led to the two associations insulting each other in every possible way, for example at their official meetings, in their public protest events, and in the press.

This controversy ridden relationship was important for several reasons. Liberal and radical feminists at the time were often accused of campaigning exclusively for the extension of female suffrage and of being unconcerned about the social and economic problems faced by working-class women and women who belonged to ethnic minorities. These two articles, however, clearly show that this picture needs to be considerably more nuanced. In this context, the texts highlight the most important points of contention between feminists and contemporary Hungarian socialists on women's paid work, their position in the labor market, their organization, and their wages.

In addition to the abovementioned issues, the texts touch on issues that were on the agenda of FE from its foundation, including women's employment structures and the issue of equal pay, women's (vocational) education, the

the eighth Congress of the IWSA in Geneva. For more details on Hungary's participation in the IWSA Congress in Geneva, see Szapor, "Who Represents."

protection of mothers and children, the promotion of women's labor activism, the fight against prostitution and sex-trafficking, and sex education in schools. Considering the prominence of these issues in the texts, alongside other important points, it is evident that Schwimmer's reflections in the two articles refer not only to the Hungarian Soviet Republic but also to the nearly two decades of the history of FE and the cornerstones of the controversy between feminists and social democrats.

In the text, Schwimmer reveals the indirect insults made by the Soviet Republic against her and FE and also notes its direct attacks against feminist ideology in general and against FE in particular. In the first article, Schwimmer contends that FE managed to escape "violent dissolution" because of "its membership and representation in several international women's federations, and the People's Commissar's fear of protests from foreign feminists."⁶² Since Béla Kun (1886, Hadad, Romania–1938–1939, Moscow), People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and War under the Soviet Republic, considered feminist ideology "a remnant of bourgeois ideology," the dictatorship mobilized all possible means against organized feminism. In addition to banning the secret meetings of FE's board, the authorities also made it impossible for the association to publish its official journal between March and August 1919. Schwimmer offered a detailed list in the article of the crimes allegedly committed by the regime against progressive feminist ideology and the feminist press.

At several points in the text, Schwimmer impresses upon the reader that the dictatorship had the characteristics of a medieval state: it was both anti-democratic and anti-feminist. She does not fail to mention that women who, like her, refused to join trade unions were not allowed to vote. Female suffrage had already been introduced by the government of Mihály Károlyi. In addition, the communist regime, which was in power for 133 days, had, according to Schwimmer, enacted legislation that would have continued the exploitation of working women in line with previous practices. She pointed out that the FE (along with other women's associations and trade unions) had been fighting against this kind of exploitation since 1904. Its main objectives included equal pay for men and women workers and the introduction of a complex system of health care, as well as support for working mothers. The Soviet Republic did not achieve any of this, and Schwimmer blames it for this failure. Towards the end of the first article, she discusses the situation of married women and the

62 Schwimmer, "A feminizmus sérelmei," 2–3.

problems of regulating prostitution. These ideas fully reflect the initial objectives of the FE, which were published immediately after its establishment in 1905.⁶³

The second (handwritten and unpublished) part of the article focuses almost exclusively on discrimination against women in paid employment. Schwimmer provides precise statistics showing that, despite the regime's widely trumpeted principle of "equal pay for equal work," women workers were paid significantly lower wages than men. In my opinion, this is the most detailed and well-developed part of the article. These arguments are followed by a brief reflection on marriage, prostitution, and the centralized household (or *Zentralhaushaltung* in German).⁶⁴ After this discussion, the text ends abruptly. And although Schwimmer indicates at the end of the paper that the article will be continued, I have not found the third part in her collection.

Brand Building in the Press

Over the course of her career as a journalist, Rosika Schwimmer learned how to use the press as a tool to build her brand (in modern terms). The interviews that were done with her with by journalists who worked for world-renowned papers provided an excellent platform for this. Through these interviews, Schwimmer was (or wished to be) able to influence the public and the public's perception of her. She followed the same practice in her work as an author, of which I give an example at the end of this paper. Schwimmer's brand-building efforts offer insights into her strategic use of the media and personal connections to shape her public image in exile. In 1928, Schwimmer, who had been living in the United States for some seven years as an emigrant, published her first book, which was an illustrated children's book in English. *Tisza Tales*, which contains Hungarian stories, was published by Doubleday-Doran Publishing Company in New York.⁶⁵ Reviews of the book were published in American and American-Hungarian periodicals and newspapers between 1928 and 1931, and they were systematically archived in the Rosika Schwimmer Papers. From these reviews, it is clear that Schwimmer herself actively sought to influence the press response

63 Feministák Egyesülete, "Tájékoztatás."

64 The notion of the centralized household was a revolutionary model of urban housing development in which a large, centrally managed kitchen within a multi-apartment building replaced kitchens in individual apartments. The concept was based on the ideas of the German women's rights activist and social democrat Lily Braun (1865, Halberstadt, Germany–1916, Zehlendorf, Germany).

65 Schwimmer, *Tisza Tales*.

to the book and, thus, to her own work as an author. Her efforts to influence the reception of *Tisza Tales* reveals her strategic use of branding principles in a literary context, highlighting the interplay between her various public roles. Furthermore, the mixed reception with which the book met and Schwimmer's responses to criticism offer insights into the challenges and complexities of her brand management.

Despite Schwimmer's efforts, the reception of the storybook on the US book market was mixed. In addition to the reviews, there were also several articles in both the American and the American-Hungarian periodical press which, while promising a review of the book in their titles, for much of their length focus on Schwimmer's political efforts and, more importantly, her active political involvement. The positive reviews praise the book's "fantastic," "elegant," and "charming" presentation, as well as the illustrations. According to several reviews, the stories are engaging for adults as well as children.⁶⁶

Many praised the book's language and style, which according to the reviews are particularly charming and accessible to children. Schwimmer's American friends and acquaintances of Hungarian origin living in the United States also played a major role in organizing the publication of the reviews. Zoltán Haraszti, a newspaper editor and librarian who lived in New York for many years, Lola Maverick, Schwimmer's wealthy American patron, and women's movement activist Alice Park did much to help the cause. In October 1929, Park offered the following comments on her progress in promoting the book:

I succeeded in getting a review of *Tisza Tales* in *Open Forum* of October 5. I sent a copy to the publisher and one to Franceska [Franciska Schwimmer (1880, Budapest–1963, New York), Rosika Schwimmer's younger sister, who also emigrated to the USA and worked as her elder sister's secretary]. I have tried in vain for other reviews. But have succeeded with libraries and their order lists.⁶⁷

The review published in *Open Forum* also mentioned that Schwimmer's mother had told her daughter the stories in the book when Schwimmer had been a child. *Tisza Tales* was named one of the 50 most outstanding children's

66 Reviews of *Tisza Tales*. NYPL RSP Series VIII. Box 516.

67 Letter from Alice Park to Lola Maverick Lloyd. October 17, 1919. Reviews of *Tisza Tales*. NYPL RSP Series VIII. Box 516.

books of 1928 by the *Chicago Evening Post* and was included in the *New York Times* Christmas Booklist.⁶⁸

In addition to the American English-language newspapers, the book also received a relatively large amount of attention in the American Hungarian press. This was due in part to Schwimmer's personal relationships with many journal editors but certainly also to the book's importance. *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* emphasized that the storybook introduced Americans to the "gems of Hungarian storytelling" and that it also offered Hungarian children born in the United States, who had become somewhat Americanized, an unforgettable reading experience in English that took them to the world of stories from their parents' homeland.⁶⁹ According to a columnist for the periodical *Az Írás*, published in Chicago, "the irredentism of the beaten track has not done Hungary as good a service as the book of the bowed down writer." In their view, the collection of stories was the biggest Christmas sensation in America's extremely rich book market.⁷⁰

According to the article in *Az Írás*, the publisher had not been excessive when giving the book what was arguably a high price, since, "printed on 250 pages of molded paper, it was a book in the artisanal sense of the word."⁷¹ Many, however, considered the storybook overpriced, and it was indeed quite expensive at the time compared to most books. *The New York Herald Tribune* was not far off the mark when it wrote that, for \$5, the storybook would be a hard sell. The Public Library of the District of Columbia in Washington, D.C. claimed that the book was not on the American Library Association's book list because it was priced above the limit for which libraries could buy books.⁷²

It should be pointed out that two rather negative reviews appeared in *The New York Herald Tribune* and the *New York World*, which Schwimmer and her circle of friends did not ignore. Schwimmer herself wrote an indignant letter to the editor of *The New York Herald Tribune*, accusing the author of the review of not having read *Tisza Tales*. In his reply, the editor of the newspaper said that Schwimmer's allegation was nonsense and that it was only natural that someone might not like a book. He also stressed that, as editor, he was not able to read

68 Christmas book recommendation of the *Chicago Evening News* and *The New York Times*. December 1928. Ibid.

69 Z. Sz, "Magyar mesék." Press clipping, page number is not given. Ibid.

70 "Karácsonykor." Press clipping, page number not given. Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 The Public Library of the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C. Ibid.

every book reviewed and that it was not his job to judge or overrule the opinions of reviewers. At the end of his letter, he added the following:

These things are always happening, you know. If every author who did not agree with his reviewer were to reply we should have little room for new reviews. Personally, I am sorry, but one cannot let personal friendship dictate editorial action.⁷³

Tivadar/Theodor Koppányi, a physician and university professor who was a confidant of the Schwimmer family and also Schwimmer's family doctor, responded to the other review, which was published in *The New York World*. According to this review, the main problem with Schwimmer's book was that a similar children's book had already been published in London by Nándor Pogány (*The Hungarian Fairy Book*). Nevertheless, Koppányi insisted that Schwimmer was a pioneer in this field, if only because her book contained a completely different type of fairy tale from that of Nándor Pogány's book.⁷⁴

Conclusion

This article has explored the defining contours of Rosika Schwimmer's journalistic career, with a particular focus on how her political activism and personal ambitions shaped and were shaped by her engagement with the press. I have argued that Schwimmer's political agency, rooted in the interconnected struggles for women's suffrage and international peace, was instrumental in launching her journalistic trajectory. However, the same qualities that made her a powerful public actor (her uncompromising stance, her self-promotion strategies, and her refusal to conform to conventional gender norms) ultimately contributed to her marginalization within increasingly conservative or male-dominated professional spaces.

To understand the mechanisms with which Schwimmer sought to assert herself as both journalist and activist, I turned to the rich collection of her papers: her diary notes, extensive correspondence (both official and private and both incoming and outgoing), and the vast body of journalistic texts and speeches that she carefully archived. These documents provide more than biographical detail. They reveal a methodical effort to shape her own public memory and to control the narrative of her life's work. Her archival practice

73 Letter from the editor of *The New York Herald Tribune* to Rosika Schwimmer. n. d. Ibid.

74 Letter from Tivadar/Theodor Koppányi to the editor of *The New York World*. n. d. Ibid.

itself can be interpreted as an extension of her political and authorial agency. It constituted a refusal to be misrepresented or forgotten and an assertion of her right to define her own legacy. This is especially evident in Series 2 of her papers, where she organized her articles.

In tandem with articles written about her and interviews she gave during different periods of her life, these self-curated materials illuminate a complex media strategy aimed at navigating gendered constraints on women's participation in public discourse. Schwimmer was acutely aware of the challenges facing women who sought intellectual and political authority in early twentieth-century Europe and North America. Her story thus exemplifies how women could and, in her case and others, did use journalism as both a platform for advocacy and a means of crafting enduring cultural capital.

From the perspective of gender history and feminist theory, Schwimmer's career invites us to reconsider the boundaries of political agency. Her case reveals how women in marginal or contested positions mobilized the tools of authorship, archiving, and self-representation not simply to "participate" in public life but also actively to construct the conditions under which their voices would be heard and remembered. In this sense, her biography challenges static understandings of women as secondary figures in the media or political history of the period. She emerged instead as a historical agent whose efforts to claim discursive spaces across borders, languages, and genres were both innovative and deeply reflective of the structural limitations she faced.

Finally, to put this issue in a larger context, I briefly compared the journalistic activity of Schwimmer with the leading female journalists, editors, translators, and authors of books in the region, i.e. with the aforementioned Austrian progressive women's activist Auguste Fickert,⁷⁵ and two important activists from

75 Fickert, the eldest of the four women, was a middle-class teacher, women's rights activist, and devoted pacifist. She was also founding president of the leading Austrian bourgeois-liberal women's association Allgemeiner österreichischer Frauenverein (General Austrian Women's Association), Vienna, 1893–1922) and editor-in-chief of its official organ *Neues Frauenleben* (New Women's Life, Vienna, 1902–1918). On her, see Hacker, *Auguste Fickert*, 131–33.

the region i.e. Slovenian feminist Zofka Kveder,⁷⁶ and German radical women's rights activist and later völkisch politician Käthe Schirmacher.⁷⁷

Schwimmer, Fickert, Kveder, and Schirmacher each wielded journalistic platforms to advance different yet overlapping feminist agendas across diverse linguistic and cultural spheres before 1918. Each of these four women that they became central figures of their national women's movements through their journalistic activity. Schwimmer leveraged her international connections to report on every aspect of women's emancipation and peace activism. Kveder published on the situation of women wage earners and women's university education. Schirmacher's articles analyzed different aspects of transnational women's movement and issues related to legal reforms for women's rights, women's employment, and prostitution. As multilingual women, Schwimmer, Kveder, and Schirmacher published their articles in many countries apart from their home homelands. In contrast, Fickert focused her journalistic efforts primarily on Austria in her efforts to advocate women's suffrage and support women's rights in the field of education and on the labor market.

All four women engaged with contemporary feminist debates. Schwimmer's focus extended beyond national borders to global peace movements and pacifist activism. Schirmacher's work was deeply embedded in the specifics of German legal and social reform, while Kveder's journalism often took a more literary and regionally focused approach, highlighting the lived experiences of women in a multi-ethnic context. Fickert's idealistic views are reflected in her articles, as is her sympathy for the social-democratic women's associations. Their collective journalistic output reveals a diverse yet interconnected struggle for women's emancipation and social justice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After 1920, a different world emerged in the field of women's journalism. As Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe have argued in their edited volume,

76 Kveder (1878, Ljubljana–1926, Zagreb) was a journalist, editor, and author of fiction who became a central figure of the Slovene women's movements. She lived and published articles in Ljubljana, Trieste, Bern, Munich, and Prague. Through her journalistic activity, she had a broad network of contacts with women from various countries of Central and Southeastern Europe. Poniz, *Kveder, Zofka*, 282–84.

77 Schirmacher (1865–1930), the second eldest among the four women, was a writer, journalist, translator, and activist in the German left-wing women's rights movement before 1918. She traveled extensively, lectured internationally, and wrote and published on women's (higher) education, work, and suffrage in German, French, and Austrian papers. Her texts were also published in English translations. She later became involved in German nationalist politics. On her life and work, see Gehmacher et al., *Käthe Schirmacher*; Gehmacher, *Feminist Activism*.

although mainstream conservative newspapers typically preferred their female correspondents to cover exclusively “women’s” issues, it is notable that certain right-wing women managed to secure column space to discuss political matters from a nationalist (or radical) viewpoint. Some established their strong patriotic stance by criticizing nationalist men for any perceived weakening of their ideological dedication. Others achieved this by completely disregarding their own gender while still advocating for conservative family values and a “natural” separation of roles between men and women, which communists, liberals, or feminists (or a combination thereof) were allegedly trying to dismantle. Hungarian journalist Cécile Tormay, who was also the leader of MANSZ, the most powerful right-wing women’s association, offers a clear example of this.⁷⁸ By this time, however, Fickert had been dead for ten years, and Kveder and Schirmacher were struggling with worsening health. Schirmacher, however, was one of the founders of the right-wing Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People’s Party), and she briefly entered the National Assembly in 1919 as its deputy and representative for West Prussia. Schwimmer was practically forced to leave Hungary, and while she remained a widely-published publicist in the United States, she did not send articles to Hungarian periodicals except for the official organ of FE.

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Straßen im 16. Jahrhundert: Erhalt – Nutzung – Wahrnehmung.
Ding, Materialität, Geschichte 5.

By Alexander Denzler. Cologne: Böhlau, 2023. pp. 544.

Mobility is a basic historical and general constant of the *conditio humana*. While historical research has repeatedly dealt with the social, religious, and cultural conditions of mobility and migration in particular, its material basis has tended to be neglected. This is the starting point for Alexander Denzler's professorial dissertation, which breaks new ground in various ways.

After a concise overview of the secondary literature with differentiated consideration of the conceptual disparities in historical scholarship on streets, the introduction explains the aim of the study, the source basis, and the methodological approach. The volume aims to examine the natural and material conditions of the street in the sixteenth century. To this end, Denzler analyzes the maintenance, locomotion, and appropriation practices of the time, thereby acknowledging his commitment to the historical praxeology that has recently shaped the discourse in the historical sciences. Furthermore, he reveals his hermeneutic premise at the outset: "Streets are thus to be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that was 1. materially existent, 2. socially marked, 3. sovereignly-legally percolated, and 4. the result of preconditioned social practices" (p.14).

Denzler highlights the shortcomings of older research on early modern streets, according to which they were in poor condition and were chronically underfunded in the early modern period. To prove his point, he analyzes the diverse manifestations, uses, maintenance practices, and forms of appropriation of transport routes by people in relation to nature. Denzler examines the many streets and paths of the sixteenth century, focusing on the Upper German region, with the centers of Augsburg, Nuremberg, Ulm, Regensburg, and in particular Nuremberg a "traffic junction" of the sixteenth century.

With regard to the maintenance of streets in the sixteenth century, Denzler strives for an analysis of street maintenance from below and thus an appreciation of the social dimensions of street construction. A further object of investigation is the analysis of the material condition of sixteenth-century streets in the context of the tense relationship between humans and nature. Methodologically, the study follows a praxeological and environmental-historical approach that focuses on the various "doings" (practices) and "sayings" (speech acts) in relation to streets conceptualized as a "contact zone of humans and nature." By including the "artifacts" of streets in the sixteenth century, Denzler

also calls attention to the materiality of the early modern street in the sense of the material turn, centering on the concept of the “street space” defined from a pluralistic approach. Denzler applies this diverse set of research questions, research objectives, and methodological considerations to an impressively broad array of sources, including account books and official records, treatises on *Policey*, territorial and village orders, official and private correspondence, court records and cartographic representations, country surveys, leaflets, itineraries, travel reports, travel prayers, and travel guides.

Denzler’s study is divided into five systematic chapters and presents five fields of investigation: namely visualization and terminology; travel; materiality; governance; and micromobility.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 is devoted to the blurring of many terms mentioned above. Here, Denzler shows that a schematic typology of the phenomenon “street” misses an essential aspect of the premodern “street,” which was characterized precisely by its hybrid form of use and thus also of name. In addition to this aspect of historical semantics, Denzler uses a broad and methodically differentiated selection of sources to analyze the techniques used to create visual renderings of streets in the sixteenth century, which oscillated between “aestheticizing fictionality and documenting factuality” (p.107).

With these analyses, Denzler is able to demonstrate, for example, the methods used to assert the public significance of streets in early modern leaflets or the relevance of visual depictions to emphasize the importance of the roadside. Overall, according to Denzler, in the sixteenth century there was a “typological canon of representational elements for the visual description of street space” (p.102), which was less diverse than the semantic field of “street.” Denzler describes an intensification of the administrative recording of physical space in the second half of the sixteenth century, which can be seen in the country descriptions and mapping projects. In addition, this chapter examines the roadside as an inherent component of the street space that has been particularly extensively shaped by people, also making it clear that the sacralization of the street space unfolded through roadside shrines and roadside crosses. Leaflets, on the other hand, reflected the public nature of the street in the sixteenth century and used selective depictions in specific contexts, especially in the case of street crimes.

Chapter 3 examines various anthropogenic forms of interaction and experiences with the street space. To this end, Denzler analyzes itineraries, travel reports, travel guides, and, in particular, medical and theological travel instructions (the so-called apodemics, in the discussion of which Denzler draws in particular on the two *Reißbüchlein* by the humanist physician Georg

Pictorius and the Lutheran theologian Michael Sachs). In doing so, he ultimately focuses on the plural practices of traveling, with which the physicality of the travel experience correlated significantly. Denzler seems to have three things in mind: the physical challenges of the itinerary, the constraints and possibilities for action of biomotor-induced locomotion, and the dependence on the street space as an essential point of reference for the world of experience reflected by contemporaries. In principle, according to Denzler, a direct interweaving of actors, physicality, mobility, and nature was characteristic of travel in the sixteenth century. His remarks on travel *memoria* in the sixteenth century and the “great silence” of contemporaries about the travel routes and streets they encountered are particularly fascinating. Denzler contends that a street space is constituted and produced in the first place and ultimately also categorized according to the travel itineraries he has examined.

Chapter 4, which focuses on the materiality of streets in the sixteenth century, deserves special mention. Denzler examines this aspect on two levels. In addition to the material resources of streets, he also includes the workforce that maintained the streets in the sixteenth century. Ultimately, he provides a vivid picture of the multi-layered maintenance practice of the transport infrastructure (streets, bridges, paths) in the early modern period. This is all based on the specific case study of the imperial city of Nuremberg and the municipal accounts of the street and bridge office (*Weg- und Stegamt*) from 1544 to 1562. The focus of the study is therefore on the actors and resources involved in maintenance and repair. Particularly important is Denzler’s observation at the very beginning of the chapter concerning the double dependence of infrastructure on nature (building resources from nature and deterioration due to nature). In this chapter, Denzler vividly and comprehensibly discusses the multifaceted work process for the maintenance of streets and bridges by various actors, materially and pecuniarily, through labor, knowledge, pious efforts by charitable foundations, and governmental action. Last but not least, Denzler is also able to make the various actors involved in street maintenance (including officials and building craftsmen, such as stonemasons, carpenters, foresters, blacksmiths, laborers, henchmen, peons, and unpaid peasants) tangible, and he impressively traces their scope of action and everyday work lives.

In Chapter 5, Denzler examines street rule in the sixteenth century in order to determine the significance of streets for rule and society within the territorialization process characteristic of this era. He repeatedly and convincingly points out the disparate “openness of the records,” which entails specific heuristic, epistemological, and methodological challenges. Denzler is particularly concerned with the tension between the usability of the streets

and the actions of the rulers with regard to the streets. Another aspect is the controversial and constantly renegotiated street peace in the sixteenth century, i.e., the question of safety on the streets in the sense of an increasing securitization as an “imagined ideal and practiced obligation of rule.” Denzler is able to show how streets were a “symbol and means of rule.” He sums this up in the concise formula “ruling with and over streets.” Denzler does not understand this dynamic negotiation process of “‘street-related’ acts of rule” as a mere top-down process of rulers vis-à-vis their subjects, but also focuses in particular on intermediary actors, such as tax collectors, carters, and merchants, whose street-related supplications he examines in more detail. In particular, Denzler’s analysis of cross-confessional cooperation between the Catholic prince-bishops of Würzburg and the Protestant dukes of Saxe-Coburg with regard to street maintenance policy should also be highlighted, as it allows us to question and, to a certain extent, deconstruct sometimes overly monolithic interpretations of the so-called confessional age. Questions and investigations pointing in this direction of the possible confessionality (*Konfessionalität*) of streets and transport infrastructure in the sixteenth century would be very welcome in the future. In this chapter, Denzler is also able to show that street inspections as a form of authoritative quality management already began in the sixteenth century, which had not been taken into account in earlier research.

Chapter 6, with which the book comes to a close, focuses on streets as a communal resource within the rural neighborhood and social proximity of the early modern village. Drawing on recent research on premodern rural society, Denzler assumes three levels of actors for the village in the early modern period: 1. village community; 2. officeholders; 3. governance. Here, Denzler focuses on the villagers and unpaid laborers and analyzes their scope of action as empowering interactions. He calls attention to the micromobility of rural society in the context of rural mobility and street maintenance practices, which has been largely overlooked in the earlier scholarship. To this end, Denzler focuses on the small streets that were essential for the (village) proximity of rural society and the production and use of rural street space. Denzler convincingly and quite rightly classifies these supposedly small streets as central components of the premodern street system, which were constitutive of the everyday reality of life for the majority of the village population. Denzler provides these analyses on the basis of the village orders he examined, paying particular attention to responsibilities and maintenance practices. He defines the maintenance of the streets by the village community in the field of tension between cooperation and individual responsibility. However, Denzler also identifies the divergent and sometimes very different spectrum of normative regulation in such village

orders. He takes a critical look at the relationship between authorities and subjects in the sixteenth-century village, convincingly demonstrating that the ruling and the common socage at this time were not exclusively coercive and were only reluctantly fulfilled by the subjects as a burden. Rather, the work necessary to provide such traffic-infrastructure services was fundamentally accepted, as the subjects performed unpaid street socage (*Straßenfronen*) for the government but also for themselves and the other subjects.

In general, Denzler notes an increase in the importance of the street system in the sixteenth century. He quite rightly points to the close correlation between the intensified use of streets and the changing world and spatial experiences of the people of the time. Furthermore, he repeatedly emphasizes the fundamental processual nature of mobility and locomotion, identifying the carriage as an innovation in travel, and he even speaks of an incipient carriage age in this context. Denzler draws a differentiated, convincing picture of the streets as plural-used, sensitive spaces of economy and trade, property, money, and monetary materialities, also postulating that the technology of street and road construction before the construction of the causeway was characterized by the participation of many non-experts.

The summaries at the end of each main chapter are particularly useful. Unfortunately, the book does not contain an index of persons or places, which would have facilitated more targeted and faster access for future case analyses. Some linguistic errors only slightly diminish the overall very good impression of the study, which remains a consistently pleasant read.

Alexander Denzler concludes his study with a concise summary of the important results of his analysis, projecting all the individual findings back onto the three areas of practices that were ultimately constitutive for the sixteenth-century street: 1) practices of use and transportation, 2) practices of maintenance, and 3) practices of exchange and appropriation. In doing so, he cleverly ties his findings to the fundamental praxeological methodology of his study. Denzler has offered an impressively nuanced new perspective on street history by overcoming the deficiencies (and oversimplifications) of prevailing perceptions of the early modern street system.

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Fiume hosszú árnyéka – A városi modernizáció kritikája a 19. század második felében [The long shadow of Fiume: Criticisms of urban modernization in the second half of the nineteenth century].

By Veronika Eszik. Budapest: HUN-REN Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2024. pp. 196.

This book, which focuses on critical assessments of urban modernization in Fiume during the second half of the nineteenth century, is based on Veronika Eszik's doctoral thesis in history, completed at the Atelier Department of Interdisciplinary History at Eötvös Loránd University, which is already an indication of the rigor of the methodology and the quality of the academic supervision. Eszik, furthermore, is fluent in the three languages necessary for work on Fiume (Italian, Croatian, and Hungarian), which is not always the case in studies on this city. She has based her work on several conceptual and methodological decisions for which she offers ample explanation in the introduction. Starting from the notion of development as a Promethean phenomenon (Chapter 2 is dedicated to urban space and planning), Eszik proposes a study on the various narratives of the city (Chapter 3) to address anti-urban reactions on several levels: the surrounding rural populations, which was gradually integrated into the city but felt excluded, both because of the acceleration of "progress" and for political reasons, since the Slavic hinterland found itself facing the Italian-Hungarian urban elites. These contradictory aspects generated conflicts centered on the appropriation of the urban space and the challenges of modernization (Chapters 4 and 6). Fiume is therefore well situated, in its imperial, Hungarian, Italian, and Croatian context, as case study of the tensions of urban modernization.

The book offers a deliberately partial picture of society, urban spaces, and discourses (and one hopes that Eszik's discussion will prompt more in-depth research). Eszik offers a rich look at the laboratory character that Fiume took on for the Hungarian state from the perspectives of infrastructure (the recurring dispute over the railway line that only served Hungary), industry, and urban planning. The city assumed this place as a kind of textbook study in part because of the arrival of numerous experts who formed a group of agents promoting discourses of modernization. In this regard, Eszik has a tendency, common in studies on various parts of Austria-Hungary, to seek models and points of comparison in Western historiography, in this case largely French, when works on the empire would have been more relevant. This is particularly true of the

colonial dimension, where insights from Czernowitz or Sarajevo would have been useful. Similarly, when it comes to urban planning and the destruction of the old urban fabric, the examples of Prague (*asanace*, or the major project undertaken in Josefov, the Jewish Quarter, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, allegedly to modernize and sanitize the area) or even Vienna are essential, not to speak of Hungarian examples, such as the city of Temesvár (today Timișoara, Romania). Not surprisingly, some reactions noted here were found elsewhere, when the urge to modernize was seen as a negation of urban heritage.¹

The comparison with Zengg (Senj), which is presented in Chapter 5 and which may seem surprising at first glance, proves convincing. It is understandable why another coastal city in Croatian territory was chosen, given that, in purely quantitative terms, one would expect a comparison with Pola (Pula) or Zara (Zadar), which were under Austrian administration. This would be a useful avenue to explore in further research. The discussion of Zengg allows Eszik to illustrate the anti-modern narrative that is one of the central themes of her study. More surprising, however, is the absence of the theme of mirror rivalry between Fiume and Trieste, which is constantly evoked in contemporary sources. This is an important element that dominates the discourse in Fiume, and some consideration of this rivalry would have added nuance to the description of the Hungarians' ambitions, which were also directed against Austria. One of the objectives of the development of the port and the shipping companies was to divert part of the freight traffic from Trieste to Fiume, regardless of how illusory this undertaking was.

One of the book's great strengths is its focus on the discourses of various actors, from the central government to Hungarian intellectuals and local Italian and Croatian protagonists. However, it would have been useful to see a more detailed picture of Fiume's society, particularly from the perspectives of its community life and school system, on which there are abundant sources, as this would have helped clarify certain elements of these discourses. Among the aspects of the narrative put forward by the central government, that of Fiume as a "second capital" is very well demonstrated, and Eszik draws on an extensive array of sources, including literary ones. The analogy between Budapest, which was gradually conquered by the nation, and Fiume serves to turn difficulties

1 Cf. Wolfgang Kos, Christian Rapp, eds, *Alt-Wien: Die Stadt, die niemals war* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2005).

(distance, non-Magyar populations) into assets. Eszik also highlights the paradox of exalting a regional center that was not conceived as such due to its status as the kingdom's only port. This proactive policy was supported by a propaganda campaign at both the local and national levels. Never did the since paraphrased words "Tengerre magyar!" (To the sea, Hungarians!), attributed to Lajos Kossuth in 1848, seem more apt.

The flip side of this discourse, characterized by anti-modernism and Croatian nationalism, is explored through the 1883 bilingual sign affair. Croatian nationalism began to focus more and more on the city of Fiume, and Croatian nationalist discourses (of which the sign affair was a motif) began to fuel resentment among members of the rural populations and in the hinterland in general, as also became increasingly true in Zengg, which emerged as a stronghold of the Party of Rights (Stranka Prava). The arguments subsequently developed by the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka) echoed this observation of a growing divide between urban and rural areas. Eszik provides clear discussion of the Catholic religious dimension of the movement, but she would have done well to have offered more details concerning its anti-Hungarian (no doubt linked to the Calvinist beliefs of certain members of the Magyar elite) and anti-Semitic aspects. Less attention is devoted to the third actor, the Italian municipality, though its attitude towards irredentism on the one hand and autonomism on the other is very revealing of the unease felt towards the central state, Croatia-Slavonia, and the desire to preserve the Italian character of the city. These issues were raised not only in debates concerning architecture. The figure of Riccardo Zanella, briefly mentioned, reflects these ambiguities. Eszik would have done well to have noted that the state initially attempted to exploit the autonomist movement in order to prevent the development of irredentism, which was poisoning political life in Trieste. The tacit alliance between the local elites and Budapest only reinforced the anti-urban Croatian discourse, which portrayed the city as a true *corpus separatum*.

This informative and engaging study opens up many avenues for discussion and further research, which hopefully will address the lacunae that remain and enable Eszik to engage in dialogues with specialists in the urban history of Austria-Hungary.

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Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar Period and Beyond:
A Transnational History.

By Balázs Trencsényi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. pp. 336.

It has become commonplace on both sides of the Atlantic to declare that liberal democracy is in crisis. For some years now, a grim politics of neoliberal austerity has eroded faith in a better future. The Left has gone into a defensive crouch everywhere, trying desperately to preserve what can be saved of the twentieth-century welfare state. And anti-democratic populists have risen to power in many places, not least in Washington, D.C. Their xenophobia, pro-natalist fantasies, and contempt for liberal norms at home and abroad have reminded many observers of the 1930s, when democracy faced an even graver crisis. What should we make of these resonances? Are the similarities between past and present superficial, or are they evidence of deeper continuities? What can historical understanding offer in the present moment?

Balázs Trencsényi tackles these questions in his impressive new book, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar Period and Beyond*. Rather than reconstruct the genealogy of a particular anti-democratic movement or trend, Trencsényi devotes his study to the very concept of crisis used by critics past and present. He begins, as any conceptual historian must, by paying his debts to Reinhart Koselleck, who showed how crisis evolved from a turning point in history (the moment of crisis) into a critical diagnosis of a conjuncture (we are in a crisis) that also and at the same time legitimized political action (the crisis demands a solution).¹ Writing in the 1950s, Koselleck famously traced this evolution back to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In this book, Trencsényi repurposes Koselleck's approach for the present moment by historicizing it and putting it in a wider spatial frame. According to Trencsényi, the idea that crises can jump across national borders and multiply in dozens of different places simultaneously—the sheer ubiquity of crisis that so many people sense today—was profoundly shaped in the ideological crucible of the interwar era. Crisis as a concept did not radiate out into the world from a birthplace in Western Europe. It emerged in many countries and in many distinct but intersecting forms at once both local and global. A history of discourses about crisis—one that includes even Koselleck's foundational contribution—must

1 Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

therefore be, Trencsényi insists, a transnational history focused squarely on the decades between the two world wars.

Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics is a panoramic survey of interwar European debates about crisis. Reading it is a humbling experience. Is there no intellectual whose works Trencsényi has not read? Alongside canonical figures like Carl Schmitt and Antonio Gramsci, he discusses an astonishing range of writers from East Central and Southern Europe. Even regional specialists will not know them all. By casting his net so widely, Trencsényi can juxtapose unfamiliar thinkers and texts with much more familiar ones, revealing how various global crises were interpreted differently in different corners of Europe. A particularly striking example comes in his discussion of the interwar precursors to present-day neoliberalism (pp.128–32). Trencsényi begins where one might expect: in Vienna with Ludwig von Mises. But he then shifts the focus to Bucharest and the Romanian economists Mihail Manoilescu and Ștefan Zeletin. Like their Austrian counterpart, Manoilescu and Zeletin wanted to defend private property against collectivist ideologies, and they similarly worried that parliamentary democracy was too weak for the job. But the two Romanians were nationalist politicians who wanted to build a liberal capitalist society for the Romanian nation. Eager to put their thumb on the scale in favor of ethnic Romanians, they were far more willing to consider state intervention in the economy than von Mises and the other members of the so-called Austrian school. They were also more sympathetic to populist nationalism than the Austrians would ever be. (Manoilescu flirted with the fascist Iron Guard and served in the pro-Nazi government of Marshal Ion Antonescu; von Mises was forced to flee Vienna in 1940 because he was Jewish.) By setting these figures next to one another, Trencsényi shows how the interwar crisis of liberalism could be interpreted very differently, depending on the context. He also reminds us that places outside Western Europe are better understood, in his words, as “laboratories of ideas and practices with global repercussions” (p.267), rather than as semi-peripheral regions that only digested ideas generated elsewhere.

The richness of the book’s intellectual landscape has another advantage. Across chapters devoted to different aspects of the interwar crisis (such as the crises of liberalism, democracy, and capitalism), Trencsényi considers the legacy of interwar-era thought for the two ideological streams that dominate global politics today: neoliberalism and populism. A subtle analyst, he avoids polemical “hot takes” that warn “Fascism is back” or that “it is 1933 all over again.” Instead, Trencsényi argues that the crises of the interwar era cast a “long shadow” over

the present, and he prefers to speak of affinities and resonances with the past instead of continuities or connections. In his view, “both neoliberalism and populism carry the experience of the interwar crises with them, and, in turn, their self-legitimization is also deeply entangled with the discourse of crisis” (p.242). In other words, historical study of the interwar period shows us how the same political conjuncture can give birth to diametrically opposed ideological streams. It teaches us to see the deeper conceptual structures shared by those streams. It also opens our eyes to differences between the past and the present and, in particular, to the ways in which historical time in contemporary crisis discourses (routinized, looping, and eternally stuck in the present) feels very different from the temporality of crisis in the interwar years (a radical choice in the present between alternative ideological futures).

There is, however, one critical aspect missing from Trencsényi's analysis: gender. Consider the case of the Czech economist and Minister of Finance, Karel Engliš. Engliš appears briefly in the chapter on the crisis of capitalism as someone who believed (not unlike Mihail Manoilescu) that a certain amount of state intervention was necessary to save liberal capitalism. So far, so good. But how could liberals intervene in society and still call themselves liberal? Much depended on the form that state intervention would take. As Melissa Feinberg has shown, Engliš hoped to manage the looming economic crisis in part by banning married women from the workplace, enshrining the male breadwinner as the social norm, and thereby (in his view) restoring balance to the labor market.² In the end, his plans were never put into effect. But they reflected a belief, shared by liberals and their opponents everywhere and very much still with us today, that in order to ensure social order, it was necessary to regulate relationships between men and women at home and at work. To be sure, Trencsényi devotes a few pages to figures like the Myrdals in Sweden or the Slovenian feminist Angela Vode in a brief section on the place of demography and birth rates in the crisis of social reproduction. But the general absence of gender from the analysis feels like a missed opportunity, not least because the demonization of “gender ideology” is a central issue in the politics of the populist right today. Weaving gender into the survey of interwar intellectuals would make it possible for Trencsényi to tease out a more complex net of affinities between past and present modes of crisis management. It would highlight the bundling, in

2 Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 112–14.

populist and neoliberal politics, of those forms of crisis discourse which he discusses in depth, like the crises of democracy and capitalism, with those he does not, like crises of masculinity or natality. Perhaps most importantly, it would have connected his important reflections on temporality and crisis with one of the most explosive debates about historical time in contemporary politics: the supposed timelessness of gender identities proclaimed by the populist Right (now enshrined in the Hungarian constitution since 2025) versus the assertion, commonplace on the Left and among academics, that genders are concepts constructed in and by history.

“The frequent appearance of the discourse of crisis,” Trencsényi writes in the last pages of the book, has become “indicative of a real emergency—that of the growing rift between liberal and democratic principles. The consequences of this rift can be very tangible and painful” (p.287). What should liberals do? Can they say that there is a crisis without propping up the neoliberal status quo or legitimizing the populist assault on democracy? In reply, Trencsényi imagines a liberal democratic discourse of crisis that is self-reflective and open to dialogue. As answers go, it is hopeful if a bit unsatisfying. But *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics* was not written to be a manifesto. It is an outstanding comparative and transnational guide to the ways in which previous generations of intellectuals conceptualized and reacted to crisis. By considering their successes and failures, we gain better insight into our own current predicament.

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Women's Activism

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