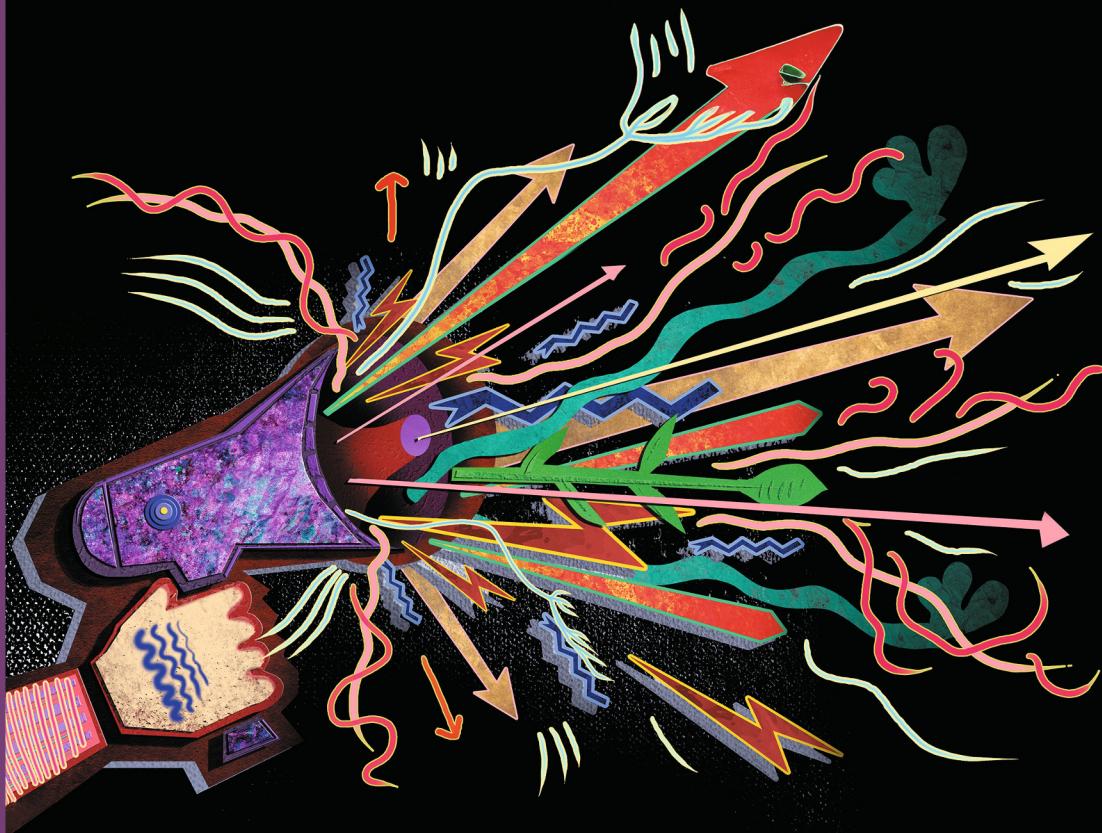




GLOBAL QUEER POLITICS



Anti-Gender Mobilizations in the Post-Yugoslav Space

Hidden Connection

Edited by Roman Kuhar · Adriana Zaharijević

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Global Queer Politics

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The Global Queer Politics book series is a new outlet for research on political and social processes that contest dominant heteronormative orders in both legal and policy frames and cultural formations. It presents studies encompassing all aspects of queer politics, understood in the expansive terms of much activism as addressing the politics of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and intersex status, as well as non-heteronormative sexualities and genders more widely – including emerging identities such as asexual, pansexual, or non-binary. As struggles over violence, human rights and inequalities have become more prominent in world politics, this series provides a forum to challenge retrenchments of inequalities, and new forms of contestation, criminalization and persecution, situated in wider geopolitics. Particularly welcome are works attentive to multiple inequalities, such as related to class and caste, race and ethnicity, nationalism, religion, disability and age, imperialism and colonialism. Global, regional, transnational, comparative and national studies are welcome, but that speak to international processes.

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ISSN 2569-1317

Global Queer Politics

ISBN 978-3-031-92412-5

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-92413-2>

ISSN 2569-1309 (electronic)

ISBN 978-3-031-92413-2 (eBook)

This work was supported by Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency and the European Union.

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia disappeared in 1991, but it keeps haunting the minds of its former citizens. Despite the atrocities of the war, a special bond still exists, a sort of “hidden connection” largely anchored in the idea of “Yugoslavian exceptionalism.” Under leadership by Roman Kuhar and Adriana Zaharijević, the contributors to this volume explore this long-lasting legacy in relation to anti-gender politics, claiming that this “secret bond” has mattered to the contemporary social and political developments up until today. They also examine how global anti-gender dynamics unfold on the ground, constructing former Yugoslavia as a privileged vantage point or “a miniature showroom.”

Indeed, the post-Yugoslavian context offers a promising comparative puzzle. This territory is not only extremely diverse in terms of culture and religion; it has also split up into various countries that, after decades of joint history, have taken divergent paths. All have experienced a return of religion in the public sphere and a re-traditionalization of gender and sexual norms. However, this process did not happen the same way, and, today, these countries display different social and legislative achievements in the field of gender and sexual equalities. In the same vein, ethnonationalism has become central to post-war politics, with a redefinition of citizenship deeply engrained in a more traditional gender order. The traumas of the war have deeply impacted the demographics of the region, and the conflict has contributed to the construction of militarized masculinities and a revalorization of motherhood as a political category.

Finally, some of these countries have joined the European Union or claim their belonging to Europe while others are closer to Russia and Hungary.

All these elements are crucial to anti-gender politics, and this book examines them in innovative ways. It brings together leading scholars from the region in a pioneering volume that investigates both the past and the present of gender and sexual politics in the region. Each chapter focuses on one of the countries that emerged out of the collapse of former Yugoslavia, making a significant contribution to our understanding of the region, given that some cases remain poorly studied. Croatia and Slovenia are both pioneering countries in anti-gender mobilizations, with Croatia now firmly established as an international hub for anti-gender organizing. This is also true of Serbia, if to a lesser extent, where the cultural and religious proximity with Russia (and Hungary) has deeply influenced local anti-gender politics. Conversely, we knew very little about the other countries that emerged out of the former Yugoslavia.

We are delighted to publish this volume in the Global Queer Politics series. The collection is not only important because it makes new research available to English-speaking readers; it also contributes to global anti-gender studies. Post-Yugoslavia is indeed a unique laboratory, which exhibits great variance within an extremely small territory. The context includes different religions that are not necessarily aligned in anti-gender politics; it is of geopolitical importance to the rivalry between Russia and the European Union; and it is one of the few locations where researchers can examine the interplay between post-war dynamics and anti-gender politics. This book also makes a significant theoretical contribution by suggesting to move beyond a backlash perspective in order to study the impact of a broader ethno-nationalist re-traditionalization process on anti-gender politics.

Rio de Janeiro
Toronto
Brussels
Glasgow

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David Paternotte
Matthew Waites

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was conceived at the first meeting of the GenPolSEE informal network in November 2022, gathering scholars from the Western Balkans region who deal with gender and politics. One solid strand of the GenPolSEE network continued to steadily evolve in the years that followed. Our edited volume is the key testimony to this. It is, however, also a testimony to joyful exchange, enthusiasm, activist and academic cooperation and support across borders of what we call ‘post-Yugoslav space’. We often refer to this book as a labour of love. It took shape and was further developed in the corridors of the Belgrade’s Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, at the stairs of Zagreb’s Faculty of Philosophy and in the cafes of Skopje and Ljubljana, with endless virtual exchanges not only on things academic, but also on politics, love and hope.

We wish to thank our contributors who were and are fearless not only in their thinking, but also in trying to make the post-Yugoslav space a more livable one. This volume is more than a book: it is also a proof that the ‘secret bond’ remains in place.

For the support to meet again in November 2023, as a full team, we wish to thank Heinrich Böll Stiftung office in Belgrade, and Paola Petrić in particular. This book was also made possible through the support of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (as part of program P6-0194 and project J5-50158). For his endless reservoirs of energy and a push towards creating GenPolSEE, we are also grateful to Saša Gavrić.

CONTENTS

1 Post-Yugoslav Space: Ima neka tajna veza ...	1
Adriana Zaharijević and Roman Kuhar	
2 Mobilizing the Womb: Anti-Abortion Activism and the Institutionalization of the Anti-Gender Movement in Croatia	27
Tanja Vučković Juroš and Maja Gergorić	
3 ‘First Our Children, Then Our Gender’: Anti-Gender Mobilization in Slovenia	57
Nina Perger and Rok Smrdelj	
4 Your Gender is a Battleground: Anti-Gender Issues in Serbia	85
Milica Resanović, Milan Urošević, and Gazela Pudar Draško	
5 Anti-Gender in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Yet Another Instrument of Ethnonationalist Mobilization?	113
Edma Ajanović	
6 The Old New: Anti-Gender Mobilizations in North Macedonia	139
Slavcho Dimitrov, Manja Velichkovska, and Irena Cvetkovik	
7 Gender as Collateral: The Case of Montenegro	165
Paula Petričević	

8 Challenging Heteronormativity: Sexual Citizenship, the Family, and Social Justice in Kosovo	193
Vjollca Krasniqi	
9 Anti-Gender Mobilizations with an Ethno-Nationalistic Hangover	215
Roman Kuhar and Adriana Zaharijević	
Index	245

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CHAPTER 1

Post-Yugoslav Space: Ima neka tajna veza ...

Adriana Zaharijević  and *Roman Kuhar* 

When we initially discussed the concept of this book with some of our colleagues from Western academia, a common remark was why discuss current political affairs, such as anti-gender mobilizations, in connection to Yugoslavia, a country that ceased to exist over thirty years ago. We were suggested to use newer geopolitical referents, such as Southeastern Europe or the (Western) Balkans. Yet, the first is too broad, the second too narrow. Neither of these descriptions adequately encompasses the states that emerged in the region of what used to be Yugoslavia.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia broke apart in 1991. Its dissolution took place in stages. Instead of one, today there are seven states—Slovenia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo—all nested in the space of what is colloquially called ‘former Yugoslavia’. Scholarship originating from

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the region more often resorts to the term *post-Yugoslav*—admittedly, an imperfect concept, lacking precision or a clear and widely accepted definition, symbolically loaded and open to contestations (Kasapović, 2023; Milutinović, 2021). In that regard, it shares a conceptual ambiguity with its kin-concept, post-socialism (Bailyn et al., 2018; Müller, 2019; Stenning & Hörschelmann, 2008), which it also encompasses. In our understanding, post-Yugoslav space is not only the space once characterized by shared political, social, cultural, and economic frames, but also a ‘*post*-partition, *post*-conflict, and *post*-socialist landscape, one that seems to be in a never-ending transition (Štiks, 2015, 135).

This is important to emphasize because when we talk with colleagues from Eastern academia, they rarely fail to remind us that we are different. ‘Yugo-exceptionalism’ often stands in the way of meaningful discussions on the commonalities between us, both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, post-Yugoslav space is doubly exceptional. Yugoslavia was the country that defied the Three-Worlds political cartography, with a peculiar self-management system, membership in the Non-Aligned movement and ‘Coca-Cola socialism’ (Vučetić, 2012). It was also a country that hosted the first unabashedly feminist conference in the socialist part of the world as early as 1978. The first decade of its transition from socialism to post-socialism, marked by the concatenation of gruesome wars, emphatically differed from the trajectories of other (former) Eastern European countries as well. Thus, although Yugoslavia does not exist, its exceptionalism still defines how we perceive ourselves and are perceived by others.

We may be said to be tied by a secret bond. ‘Ima neka tajna veza’ (There is a Secret Bond), the title of a hugely popular 1977 song by Bijelo Dugme, arguably the most popular band in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has by now turned into a cultural reference point, frequently invoked to articulate the ineffable. There is no straightforward rational explanation, but there is a ‘secret bond’ that, to us, renders things comprehensible. Today’s cynics might dismissively label this as ‘Yugonostalgia’ (Velikonja, 2008), but we insist on a ‘secret bond’ that extends beyond such simplistic affective framings. The connection holds deeper political and cultural significance and transcends mere symbolic ties among people and their pasts.

The papers collected in this volume scrutinize anti-gender mobilizations in seven post-Yugoslav countries. Each of them portrays the national manifestations of the transnational narrative on ‘gender ideology/theory’.

They do this by looking into relevant contexts, main actors, discursive practices and the mobilization strategies they employ. Since anti-gender mobilizations belong to newer socio-political phenomena (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017), all papers focus on temporally recent developments. Notably, these campaigns result in similar outcomes across the region, irrespective of the varying levels of progressive gender equality legislation. This demonstrates how global ideologies are localized and adapted to specific cultural and political contexts, with the post-Yugoslav space serving as a compelling case study.

We therefore suggest that this region offers a unique and underexplored lens for examining anti-gender mobilizations in a global context. Far from being a peripheral or isolated case, the post-Yugoslav space illustrates how global anti-gender narratives are translated and adapted to local contexts. Our analysis reveals that while the rhetoric and strategies of anti-gender actors in the post-Yugoslav space often mirror global trends, the region's ethno-nationalist legacies and varied Europeanization trajectories imbue these campaigns with distinct characteristics. For this reason, we propose a reading that positions the post-Yugoslav space as a miniature showroom, a 'microcosm' of how anti-gender politics germinates and branches out. The collected volume demonstrates how the implementation of discursive and policy strategies leads to complementary results in purportedly different contexts, albeit at different paces.

While much of the existing scholarship frames anti-gender mobilizations as reactive 'backlash' movements responding to progressive advances in gender equality and LGBTQ rights, this volume introduces a new dimension to the debate: the role of re-traditionalization in shaping these movements. Drawing on Paternotte (2020) and Corrêa et al. (2023), we argue that anti-gender mobilizations are not merely reactions to progressive developments but are deeply rooted in the broader, ongoing processes of re-traditionalization, particularly intensified in post-socialist contexts. In the former Yugoslav space, these mobilizations stem from a historical trajectory of ethno-nationalist re-traditionalization, which predates and informs their current forms. By tracing the continuity of these dynamics from the 1990s to the present, this book reconceptualizes anti-gender politics as an integral part of the region's sociopolitical evolution rather than a straightforward backlash. This perspective challenges linear interpretations and highlights how anti-gender mobilizations amplify and adapt pre-existing re-traditionalization processes, creating what we describe as a 're-traditionalization process on steroids.'

Andrea Pető's concept of 'symbolic glue' (see also Kováts & Pőim, 2015) is central to understanding how anti-gender rhetoric unites diverse actors and agendas under a shared narrative of existential threat. This book contributes a more nuanced perspective to this concept by demonstrating how the strength and 'stickiness' of this symbolic glue are influenced by religious and ethno-nationalist divisions, particularly in a post-conflict setting. While gender as 'symbolic glue' facilitates vertical collaborations between local groups and their transnational counterparts, it is less effective in fostering horizontal collaborations across the borders of former Yugoslav states. Enduring ethno-national divisions and religious differences often outweigh shared agendas, even among actors who use gender as a tool to advance populist objectives. By analyzing this dynamic, the book reveals how symbolic glue functions unevenly, shaped by the unique historical and cultural complexities of the post-Yugoslav space. This insight enriches our understanding of the interplay between global narratives and local specificities, offering a critical addition to the theoretical discourse on anti-gender mobilizations.

This volume positions the former Yugoslav region as both a unique and globally relevant case study for understanding anti-gender mobilizations. The unique post-socialist transitions of the former Yugoslav states provide a critical lens for understanding how anti-gender mobilizations intersect with broader socio-political processes. Comparisons with Central and Eastern Europe reveal shared patterns and distinct divergences, enriching the understanding of post-socialist societies. We focus on this dimension in the concluding chapter of this collective volume, where we also bring a comparative perspective on the countries analyzed in this book, situating the results of our research within the broader scholarly debate on anti-gender mobilizations as a transnational phenomenon. However, in this introduction, our aim is to provide a common framework that underscores the shared historical and cultural background of the region, against which the national differences become even more poignant and theoretically provocative. We chose to look for this commonality in one particular dimension of our 'secret bond': the longstanding history of collaboration among feminist and LGBTQ groups.

This 'secret bond' has persisted from the 1970s to the present, embodying feminist and queer solidarity. One of the most touching manifestations of this solidarity is illustrated through a brief story recounted by Vlasta Jalušić (2002), a prominent Slovenian feminist, in her book on the history of the feminist movement in Slovenia. She recalls how she and

her feminist colleagues from Croatia and Serbia attended a conference in Germany in 1992, amidst the full-blown military conflict back home. Following the conference, they were invited to an interview by Berlin's *Die TAZ*.

The journalists looked at us, three women sitting together and talking, as if we had fallen from the moon. At the end, they asked us in astonishment: 'How is it possible that such a terrible war is raging in the Balkans, and yet here, in Bremen, you are talking to each other in a friendly manner?' Žarana Papić, my dear friend and one of the first new feminists in Yugoslavia, responded: 'Don't you know that we attended the feminist high school together?' (Jalušić, 2002, 5).

Of course, no such school existed, but the story serves as a compelling illustration of the 'secret bond' that has survived the Yugoslav wars, and all the political, economic, and cultural turmoil, hatred, and exclusion that post-Yugoslav space has experienced.

The echo of the selfsame feminist high school resounded in 2022, when a powerful slogan *Nese tutesh prej territ natën, ja qesim flakën qytetit* (If you're afraid of the dark, we'll set the city on fire) appeared at the huge rally against rape in Prishtina. Less than a month later, it appeared again, this time in the streets of Belgrade, in a slightly modified form: *Ako se plasiš mraka, zapalićemo i ovaj grad* (If you're afraid of the dark, we'll set this city on fire *too*). The heated relations between Belgrade and Prishtina, or the profound differences between the languages spoken in the two cities, did not stand in the way of a mighty feminist message travelling across borders. Despite a generally transnational nature of feminism today, such translational travels rarely happen with Bulgaria, Hungary, or Italy, Austria, Greece, Romania, or Albania, all of them neighbouring countries. They are, however, *de rigueur* in secretly bonded post-Yugoslav space.

SISTERHOOD IN BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY

On 4 March 2024, CNN published an article with a declamatory title, stating that 'France becomes world's first country to enshrine abortion rights in constitution' (Berlinger & Xu, 2024). Overnight, France also turned into the *only* country with such a constitutional provision. In the global overview of the constitutional framings of the right to abortion, written a year before, such a gross mistake was not made. 'Guarantees

of reproductive freedom can be found in the constitutions of Bolivia, Cuba, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe' (Śledzińska-Simon, 2023, 400). Śledzińska-Simon signals, however, that these 'most liberally framed constitutions' result from the involvement of international experts in their drafting and mobilizations of women's organizations on ground (*ibid.*, 400–401). Apart from the implication that the rights landed on a foreign soil as an international import, with the help of the local NGOs—a favoured claim of anti-gender actors—something else also escaped the author: the fact that four out of seven Yugoslav successor states have a claim to the 'most liberally framed constitutions'. There is a forgotten historical root to this fact, entirely unrelated to international expertise. The Constitution of the SFRY of 1974 stated that 'it is the right of the human being to freely decide on the birth of children. This right can only be restricted for the protection of health' (Ignjatović, 2024; Drezgić, 2010, 24). The same provision was included in the constitutions of the Yugoslav republics, some of which—upon proclamation of their independence—retained it in their new constitutions. In 1974, France still had a year to go before it decriminalized abortion.

With anti-gender mobilizations on the loose, the news from France is a very good one. But being mindful of history is no less important. Refusing such obliteration contributes to the de-Westernization of women's human rights and helps preserve the recent history of the legal frames and practices originating in the Eastern (post-socialist) part of the world, heavily exposed to the erasures of its history. The symbolical meaning of this gesture is significant too: freedom and equality are not only constitutional givens but have been lived by people who framed their lives in accordance with them. Sometimes, they wanted more freedoms and a more substantial equality. This is where the story of Yugoslav feminism begins.

The feminist movement in Yugoslavia originates in the late 1970s. Some might contest this claim, not only because there are indications that initiatives which could be labelled as feminist had emerged as early as the 1960s (Bobićić, 2021; Jalušić, 2002), but also because defining what a feminist agency is can never be entirely straightforward (Haan, 2016). Indeed, certain activities undertaken by the socialist government after World War II closely resembled some aspects of the second wave feminist movement's liberal agenda in the West. The socialist project incorporated—in contemporary terms—'gender equality politics' aimed

at equalizing the status of women in socialist society. The Constitution of 1946 proclaimed women equal to men in all spheres of state, economic, social, and political life. It guaranteed equal pay for equal work and protected the interests of mothers by provisioning maternity homes, nurseries, and kindergartens, and by ensuring prematernity and maternity leave with full pay.¹ In 1958, at the Seventh Congress of the League of Communists, the new legal reality of women was put into a broader perspective:

The problem of equality of women in Yugoslavia is neither political, nor one of women's legal position in society; it remains chiefly an issue of economic backwardness, religious opinions and other retrograde prejudices, private-property relations, which still impact family life. Backward household and existing material problems of the family hamper woman from full participation in the economic and social life of the country (qt. in Petrić, 1980, 75).

In addition to abortion rights, the 1974 Constitution expanded the already existing women's rights to further guarantee equal rights to work, health, and social protection, schooling, and access to higher education, proclaiming discrimination based on sex illegal. Marriage partners could assume either surname, retain their prenuptial property, as well as, in the case of divorce, the portion of the communal property each contributed through work, including household work.

There is a durable tendency to diminish the magnitude of the socialist emancipation of women—either because it was enabled from above (with a supposedly ulterior and exclusive motive of raising general productivity), or because it was not engendered by a home-grown feminist movement. In the aftermath of socialism, we were all too eager to reject everything socialist only for being socialist, shedding light on motives rather than on effects, in our quest for a ‘genuine’ feminism rather than on the many and various ways in which emancipation could be and was brought about.

¹ Notably, similar protective measures were not extended to men, except in Slovenia where the income support during parental leave was granted to mothers or to another person entitled to it for the care and protection of the child. Women were acknowledged, safeguarded, and ultimately celebrated as both workers and mothers, whereas men were seen as self-managers, but not as fathers (Einhorn, 1993). It was not until the new millennium that some post-Yugoslav countries began to acknowledge the paternal role, introducing policies such as paternity leave.

Hana Havelková's criticism (1996) of the socialist process of modernization without feminism can be taken as exemplary. The Yugoslav case, however, complicates the discussion: the statement that in socialism there was no politicization of private life and the status of women in the family is simply incorrect.

The 'state feminists' openly rejected feminism because they saw feminist demands as too narrow. For example, Vida Tomšič, a prominent politician who held high political office in the government of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and was also the president of the Women's Anti-Fascist Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ Yugoslavia), explained: 'What we are talking about here is not 'legal equality', but a new position of man and woman in work, family, and society, a new status and behaviour of the members of each sex, new moral, ethical values' (Tomšič, 1978, 167). However, despite their dismissal of feminism, they were largely responsible for furthering 'gender equality politics' (Bonfiglioli, 2016; Dobos, 1983). In addition, they discussed the 'double burden' issue, the randomness of emancipatory actions, the double standards among male comrades, 'or the absence of extensive societal moves towards the eradication of "inherited" divisions' (Zaharijević, 2017, 271). When in the late 1970s a new generation of 'liberationists' emerged—addressing the politicization of the private in a 'properly' feminist way, bidding for a feminist socialist self-management—they initially collaborated with the older generation of the 'emancipationists', appearing at the same conferences and writing for the same publications (Zaharijević, 2017). In Yugoslav socialism, emancipation had different faces.

Historical analyses of the feminist movement in Yugoslavia highlight several pivotal events that played key roles in the shaping of the movement. As early as 1976, a section titled 'Contemporary Feminism' was featured at a sociological conference in Portorož (Slovenia). This event saw the participation of academic feminists from throughout Yugoslavia and marked the first public discussion on feminism under socialism. Feminist issues began to be further explored within the Croatian Sociological Society. In 1979, the section *Žena i društvo* (Woman and Society) was established in Zagreb (Croatia). Several years later, the section with the

same name was established in Belgrade.² However, the most transformative event for Yugoslav feminism was the conference *Drug-ča žena* (Comrade-ss Woman: The Woman's Question—New Approach?), held in 1978 in Belgrade.

The English brochure prepared for the meeting elucidates how Yugoslavs understood themselves, as well as how they positioned themselves towards their foreign guests from various corners of Europe. The document entitled 'The Need for a New Approach to the Women Question'³ introduces a stark contrast between 'present-day industrial capitalism' and 'socialist societies in which many things have been achieved'. While capitalist societies saw 'the new process of women raising their self-consciousness, more radical than ever, inside the heterogeneous woman's movement', socialist societies are faced with 'a series of open questions concerning the position of women, the family, marriage, social relations between the sexes and their still present inequality'. As if reiterating the statement from 1958, the document states that the relations between the sexes are 'under the pressure of bourgeois morality, patriarchal tradition, religion and various social taboos and (new and old) habits' to conclude that such an anachronism is not in accord 'with the progressive tendencies of a self-managing society'. The translated texts accompanying the brochure—translated both *to* Serbo-Croatian, and *from* Serbo-Croatian into English—also speak about the two-way exchange expected from the meeting: the foreign guests would speak about what had changed in the social position of women after the rise of the women's movement, while Yugoslav hosts would reflect on the 'real position of women in socialism', linking the existing emancipation with the potentials for liberation.

Throughout the 1980s, Yugoslav feminists focused on the realm of the private and the patriarchal structures that governed it, identifying sexism in practices distinctly separated from the workings of the state. They challenged these as the manifestations of patriarchy that was as present in socialism as it was in Western capitalism. Such a critique could have had

² The section organized public lectures at the Students cultural centre, on topics as varied as (in years 1982–83): sexism in socialism; patriarchalisms in us; attitudes towards marriage in the past; women in mass media; rape as a measure of repression; family rituals around the first period (menarche); the choice of toys; obesity; sexuality in The Hite Report (Vušković & Trivunac, 1998, 52–53).

³ All quotations from the document, written on a typewriter without page numbers, are taken from Chiara Bonfiglioli's valuable MA thesis (2008), where the text appears as a photograph.

significant societal effects—if history had not taken another turn. This is proven in a seemingly different area of the private life, that of Yugoslav queer people. In 1977, the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Vojvodina (the northern autonomous province of Serbia) decriminalized homosexuality at a time when no organized LGBTQ movement existed. This action was part of socialist modernization practices, aimed at distancing from the old bourgeois-moralistic and religious residues in the criminal codes of Yugoslav republics. Homosexuality was decriminalized as a private practice, where the state had no right to intervene, as long as it was consensual and non-violent (Takács et al., 2017).

In most Eastern Europe's post-socialist countries, LGBTQ movements began to take shape only after the political changes of the 1990s (Kuhar & Takács, 2007). Yugoslavia stands out as an exception—the origins of its gay and lesbian movement date back to the early 1980s. In 1984, the first gay organization, Magnus, was established in Ljubljana. This organization was deeply connected with the new social movements emerging in Slovenia at the time, including the feminist movement, which by then had started to address issues of sexual orientation too. While lesbians were involved in both movements, they established their own organization, LL, in 1988, followed by Zagreb based Lila inicijativa (Lavander initiative) a year later. This was a strategic move to focus on specific issues that were either marginalized or deemed irrelevant within the male-dominated gay movement and the predominantly heterosexual feminist movement. Another instance of public engagement was the first regular radio broadcast dealing with gay issues in 1985 in Zagreb, named 'Frigidna utičnica' (Frigid Socket). However, since gay and lesbian activism did not fully emerge until the late 1980s or early 1990s, these movements were not as closely connected as the feminist movement was. This does not diminish the significance of the Slovenian gay and lesbian movement in the eighties for the rest of Yugoslavia. On the contrary, Ljubljana's first gay disco, the pioneering venue of its kind, attracted visitors from across the country, as well as from Italy and Austria, underscoring its importance as a cultural and social hub for the LGBTQ community.

The gay and lesbian movement in the 1980s shifted the discourse on homosexuality from a psychiatric to a cultural and political context. For example, in 1986, Magnus issued a public declaration calling for amendments to the Yugoslav Constitution to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Despite not

achieving their demands, these political interventions garnered media and public attention. Amidst the fraying political cohesion of Yugoslavia, homophobia was instrumentalized within emerging nationalist discourses, which construed the tolerance of homosexuality as a deviation from the ‘Yugoslav idea’. A significant event in 1987 marked the first major scandal involving homosexuality in Yugoslavia, sparked by the scheduling of the annual Magnus gay culture festival to commence on 25 May. This date coincided with the birthday of the late Yugoslav president, Tito, a coincidence that the Yugoslav government considered a provocation. The media sensationalized the coverage of this incident, falsely reporting that a ‘world congress of homosexuals’ would be organized in Ljubljana, purportedly posing a health threat to the healthy segment of the Yugoslav population. Fears that Yugoslavia might be perceived as a ‘haven for gays’ prompted the Bosnian weekly magazine *As* to suggest that every heterosexual Yugoslav should wear a badge reading ‘Topla braća? Hvala, ne!’ (Nancy boys? No, thanks!) (Kuhar, 2003).

GOODBYE, BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY

Feminist and queer bonds began to grow at the time when the Yugoslav ‘official bond’ started to dissolve. As the tensions between Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces rose, the idea that all Yugoslavs live as brothers in unity rapidly devolved into what seemed like a hollow slogan. Ethno-national distinctions, previously eclipsed by the official bonds of brotherhood and unity, blossomed, and nationalisms of all stripes emerged as a viable alternative. Instead of unity, the ideological emphasis was now on the ethno-national differences magnified by nationalist propaganda, transforming the yesterday’s brotherly neighbours into today’s deadly foes.

By the end of the 1980s, what merely a decade ago seemed incomprehensible—socialism falling apart, Yugoslavia dissolving, spawning unimaginable violence on vast portions of its territory—was just around the corner. In the country that was feared to become a haven for gays, a new type of masculinity began to be fostered, a militarized one—the one that will sweep the stage in the 1990s. The feminist issue of rape was reappropriated for nationalist purposes, followed by the fearmongering discussions on (Serbian) depopulation and (Albanian) overpopulation in Kosovo as a form of demographic warfare (Papić, 2006). Simultaneously