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WOMEN’S AND FEMINIST PERIODICAL PRESS: RESEARCH AND TEACHING¹

1. WOMEN’S AND FEMINIST PERIODICALS AS VALUABLE SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Periodical press in general, and women’s and feminist journals in particular, present valuable sources for researchers and scholars in social sciences and humanities, because most periodicals (journals, weekly reviews, daily news), in the past and the present as well, publish(ed) articles which explore society and its problems.

Women’s and feminist periodicals represent fruitful sources for researchers who explore women’s and gender history, the history of women’s movement(s), women’s writing, and various gender identities which were – and still are – both described and constructed in periodicals (Delap 2007; Green 2017; Morrisson 2001; Scholes&Wulfman 2010; Scott 1995).

Such periodicals enable researchers to understand certain historical – and literary – periods from perspectives different from those which dominate in the mainstream histories of culture and literature (Bucur 2017; Felski 1995). Periodicals were a powerful tool for social and political advocacy – they were a valuable instrument in making women and their ideas better known. Periodical editorship made it possible for women to establish women’s networks, both nationally and transnationally, to influence public opinion, and to have an effect on decision-makers in the field of education and law (Cane&Alves 2001; Marek 1995; Kolarić 2017).

Women’s and feminist periodicals, and especially periodicals edited exclusively by women, represent:

¹ This article represents a longer version of the speech prepared for the conference “Archives of the Invisible,” held in Skopje, on October 29, 2021. Conclusions which I briefly present in this article have been thoroughly elaborated in my previously published articles and books on women’s and feminist periodicals.

1) An essential piece of evidence of the history of the women's rights movement (Offen 2000; Daskalova and Zimmermann 2017) as well as a testimony of strong national and transnational collaboration between women, especially in the late 19th and the entire 20th century (Cowman 2016; De Haan 2017).

2) A women's and feminist (counter)public sphere where women/feminists produced, presented – but also discussed and criticized – their ideas (Barac 2015; DiCenzo, Delap, Ryan 2011; Fraser 1990).

3) A storage of essays and literary works that might have never been published elsewhere. For example, literary criticism has been always published in periodicals. If one wants to truly learn about the history of literary criticism, they ought to take periodical press into account.

4) Useful guides to other sources. Let me give a concrete example. In the first explicitly feminist journal *Ženski pokret* (Women's Movement), which was published from 1920 to 1938, mainly in the Serbian language, Ljubica Marković, a librarian, published a long report about an exhibition of books which were written by Yugoslav women authors. In the report, she provided a catalogue consisting of numerous female authors, book titles and short descriptions of the books. Moreover, in 1937, this Serbian librarian eloquently explained why it was important to publish such a catalogue: female authorship in many areas and disciplines needed to be documented. At the same time, she provided future readers and researchers with large – mainly unknown – material for analysis.

2. REASONS FOR THE DIGITISATION OF WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST PERIODICALS

There are many reasons for the digitisation of periodicals in general, and women's and feminist periodicals in particular.

1) The preservation of cultural heritage in the broadest sense. The state of most women's and feminist periodicals from the 19th and early 20th century is concerning: in many cases, the paper is damaged and there are not many libraries that have all volumes of a particular magazine.

2) The theoretically, historically and socially significant reason for the digitisation of the periodicals stems from their low visibility and availability. We can safely assume that students of

Serbian literature or comparative literature will hear about *The Freewoman*,² *Žena* (Woman),³ *Žena danas* (Woman Today) or *Ženski pokret* (Women’s Movement)⁴ only if their professors decide to talk about those journals. Thus, knowledge of such periodicals is entirely dependent on the knowledge and, even more, theoretical and political preferences of the professors.

3) The digitisation of women’s and feminist magazines would enable researchers of periodicals to work on less researched materials as well as new, often comparative, topics. An important consequence of the digitisation and, consequently, analysis of those periodicals would be a different understanding of the history of (literary) periodicals and the history of literature, as well as cultural history in principle.

To sum up, the digitisation of women’s and feminist periodicals would enable easier reconstruction of women’s and gender history, shed light on the formation as well as activities of the feminist counterpublic(s), and provide new, previously unknown materials for research (e.g. literary works).

The Modernist Journals Project (<http://www.modjournal.org/>) represents an example of the successful digitisation of magazines and the creation of a digital scientific and research environment. The project was initiated at Brown University in 1995, and since 2003, the University of Tulsa has participated in its implementation.⁵ The project was envisioned and led between 1995 and 2012 by Robert Scholes. The leaders of the project on modernist magazines, much like its advisors and researchers, mostly come from the fields of literary studies (and are particularly interested in modernity and modernism), periodical studies and media studies, as well as digital humanities. This project encompasses magazines published in English from 1890 to 1922, regardless of their geographical location. In the history of the project, it is stressed that the focus during the first years was exclusively on the digitisation of magazines and added materials. It is only later that tools for the use of those materials were developed, such as the section “Teaching & Research.”⁶ The significance of the project can be summarised in the slogan that “modernism began in magazines.”

² See <https://modjournal.org/journal/freewoman/>.

³ See <http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr/serial-publications/zena>.

⁴ See <https://www.zenskipokret.org/arhiva/>

⁵ All data were taken from the website <https://modjournal.org/about/>.

⁶ See: <https://modjournal.org/teaching-and-research/>.

The digitisation of (women's and feminist) magazines in Serbian may take into account good examples like the Modernist Journals Project. Within the project "Ženski pokret 2020" (Women's Movement 2020) at the end of 2019, the digitisation of the magazine *Ženski pokret* (1920-1938) was finalised and the bibliography of the magazine was published (Poljak and Ivanova, 2019).⁷ This project is reminiscent of the digital archive of the Modernist Journals Project. It has a website that includes digitised issues of the magazine, a bibliography of the magazine in PDF form (considering that the bibliography was first published as a print edition), existing secondary sources on the magazine, information about the international research conference which was held in the autumn 2020 and entirely dedicated to the magazine, as well as sections "Gallery" and "News," which keep track of events regarding the project/magazine. Much like the digital archive of modernist magazines, "Ženski pokret 2020" offers a digital scientific and research environment. In that sense, this project can serve as a role-model for the digitisation of other women's and feminist magazines in Serbian.

3. WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST PERIODICALS AS VALUABLE SOURCES FOR TEACHING

I will elaborate a bit on reasons why women's and feminist periodicals from the past represent such great sources for scholars, especially for those who research/teach women's history and women's writing. I will speak from the perspective of a literary scholar who teaches courses in literary theory, Anglo-American modernity and modernism, feminist theory and criticism, and feminist pedagogy.

1. In contrast to the literary canon (which usually represents only "the best of" literary tradition), periodicals offer more inclusive, broader understanding of a historical period and its cultural and literary production as well. Women started publishing their own press in Serbia at the end of 19th century. Women's periodicals described women's position in a society at the time; but, they also served as tools for changing that position. Women gained a voice, some of them a profession as well, by editing periodicals or by writing for them. Thus, women's and feminist periodicals often represent better testimony of women's writing than standard literary histories.

⁷ The project was created and initiated by Jelena Milinković and Žarka Svirčev within the activities of the Institute for Literature and Arts in Belgrade. See: <https://www.zenskipokret.org/>.

By analysing those magazines, scholars contribute to the history of women's and feminist press, and to the history of the women's movement, too.

2. When *gender* is used as both an object of analysis and category of analysis in periodical studies, then already established literary and cultural histories begin to change. The revision of modernism that has been going on for the last three decades is a good example. Feminist revisions and rewritings of "official knowledge" about modernity and modernism provided us with new knowledge about women editors, women journalists and women literary critics from the early 20th century (Ardis and Lewis, 2003; Ardis and Collier, 2008). This new knowledge confirms that literary tradition and canon are never neutral and universal, but always selective and biased. Thus, critical interpretations that reflect upon politics of gender, class, race etc. question the supposed neutrality of a literary tradition and canon.

Let me give one concrete example. In one of the most popular literary histories in the Serbian language (Jovan Deretić, *History of Serbian Literature*), which is widely used in Literary Departments, only a few women writers have been mentioned. Thus, students who graduate from the Department of Serbian Literature, and then go to high schools and elementary schools to teach literature, firmly believe that there are two, maybe three, Serbian women writers worth mentioning. Of course, the reality is very different. Women's and feminist periodicals prove that many more women writers ought to be considered. (For example, in the online database *Knjiženstvo, Theory and History of Women's Writing in Serbia until 1915*, there are around 175 women authors.)⁸

3. Periodical studies acknowledge the significant role of editors: editors create the politics of a journal, convey specific worldviews, and often influence younger authors. However, more often than not, editors were forgotten the second their publishing house or journal was closed, or when they passed away. The analysis of women's and feminist magazines, especially magazines from the early 20th century, brings to light the significant role women had as the editors of modern and modernist magazines. In the English language, for example, one should mention periodicals edited by women such as *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, *The Egoist* (Dora Marsden, Rebecca West, Harriet Show Weaver), *The Poetry* (Harriet Monroe), *The Little Review* (Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap).

4. One must keep in mind the fact that editors and contributors to women's and feminist magazines lived and worked in those specific cultural, social and political contexts and were, at

⁸ See: <http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr/autorke>

least to some extent, immersed in the ideologies of their time. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to always contextualize and historicize their texts. Or, as Rita Felski says in her book *Gender of Modernity* (1995), feminist scholars need to be empathetic and critical. *Empathetic* means that we should carefully engage with the voices of the past and take seriously past women's and men's own understandings of their positioning within historical and social processes. *Critical* means that we can and should learn from the past. For example, scholars may analyse certain discourses from the past in order to identify if they had – or still have – implications for our present or future lives and in what ways.

5. Finally, working with women's and feminist periodicals forces feminist scholars to think carefully about our own role as editors and authors. Where do we publish? Is feminism present in our scholarly articles? Who do we imagine as our implicit readers when we write about literature and culture? Do we perceive (mainly academic) journals which we edit and in which we publish as places that could and should foster social and political transformation? Finally, should we enter the public sphere by using more accessible and open platforms than academic journals?

One of the most important advantages of the digitisation of women's and feminist periodicals occurs in the crossing of the national boundaries, in both theory and practice.⁹ For example, literary scholars and students from Serbia can explore modern and modernist magazines in English by using the MJP database. Without such a database, those magazines would be entirely invisible and inaccessible for those not living/studying in the USA or the UK, that is, those without access to the libraries which have such magazines on their shelves. And vice versa, scholars and students interested in Slavic/Slavonic Studies or Central and East European Studies would benefit from the digitisation of magazines in those languages.

As I have already said, the digitisation of periodical press provides plenty of new, unexplored comparative topics for scholars and researchers. For example, women's and feminist movements in the 19th and 20th centuries were an international/transnational phenomenon. Women were connected across national boundaries through many international (suffrage-oriented) societies and those connections were documented in women's and feminist periodical press. Interestingly enough, contemporary research of women's and feminist periodicals from the past

⁹ The pandemic which started in 2020 completely changed the educational environment. Both teachers and students were faced with new challenges, from online classes to studying, for example, literature when all the libraries have been closed. In such a situation, digitised materials became crucial for teaching.

often results in establishing connections between female scholars and researchers, proving that there have been – and still are – many theoretical/intellectual issues which go beyond linguistic, cultural and national boundaries. It is of the utmost importance for students/young researchers to acknowledge and identify those issues and thus perceive themselves as part of the larger intellectual community.

In conclusion, I will say a few words about the specific educational context, because I teach women's and feminist periodicals at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. This is a rather recent development in the curriculum.

Since 2014, I have taught a one-semester course on modernity, modernism and literary criticism to fourth-year students. The syllabus is divided into two parts. The articles in the reader for the first part of the semester focus on the concepts of modernity and modernism. Together with the usual, must-read authors and articles, the students also learn about “the gender of modernity” and feminist revisions of the dominant representation of literary modernism (Rita Felski).

The articles in the reader for the second part of semester focus on the modern periodical studies. As I have already said, feminist revisions and rewritings of “official knowledge” about modernity and modernism inform us about women editors, women journalists and women literary critics from the early 20th century. This is something that I underline in the syllabus and discussions. Let me give a concrete example. Students are sometimes aware of the existence of famous modernist magazine *The Egoist*, in which T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound published their works. They, however, do not know that this magazine was financed and led mainly by women. One of these women has already been mentioned – Dora Marsden, the editor and co-editor in three related modern magazines: *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*. For example, she was the one who accepted Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* for serial publishing in *The Egoist*. Yet, until recently, her name and important work were missing from the curriculum.

Besides this course, I teach one MA course and two doctoral courses on women's and feminist periodical press. I believe that by teaching these courses, it is possible to institutionalise theoretical, cultural and activist work by feminists and make it a part of legitimate knowledge at my faculty. In October, when the school year starts, none of the students from my BA course have ever heard of Dora Marsden or *The Freewoman*. In May, when it finishes, many of the students refer to her name and work without any hesitation. Some even decide to dig deeper into women's

and feminist periodicals. The same goes for MA and PhD courses: students often decide to write their MA and/or PhD thesis in the area of periodical studies. This only confirms that curriculum and the production of knowledge are always shaped by our own politics, preferences and beliefs; they are never neutral.

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Electronic Sources:

The Freewoman:

<https://modjourn.org/journal/freewoman/>

Žena (Woman):

<http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr/serial-publications/zena>

Ženski pokret (Women's Movement):

<https://www.zenskipokret.org/arhiva/>

Knjiženstvo, Theory and History of Women's Writing in Serbia until 1915:

<http://knjizenstvo.etf.bg.ac.rs/sr/autorke>

Modernist Journals Project:

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