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Women, Democracy, and the Political in the Writings of Women Intellectuals in Hungary and Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1948[1]

Abstract: This paper examines the negotiation of women's rights and democracy in the newly established people's democracies of Yugoslavia and Hungary in the aftermath of World War II. Focusing on the biographies and activism of women intellectuals who had engaged with both feminism *and* socialism during the interwar period, the contribution reveals the multiple and often conflicting meanings of democracy in this transformative era. Central to the analysis are figures such as Mariska Gárdos, Mitra Mitrović, Angela Vode, Rosika Schwimmer, and Boris Fái, whose interpretations of democracy placed women's rights at the centre of their political vision. These women reached divergent – sometimes opposing – conclusions about the potential and pitfalls of people's democracy for advancing women's rights and different democratic ideals. The paper analyses their work through a dual theoretical framework: Marxist conceptions of democracy as articulated by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, and feminist critiques of liberal democracy.

Keywords: political thought, democracy, women's rights, socialism, feminism, Hungary, Yugoslavia, theories of democracy

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The meaning, form, and layers of the concept of democracy, as well as women's rights *and* democracy and women's rights *in* democracy, were heavily renegotiated after World War Two. For women intellectuals and political activists in the Hungarian and Yugoslav contexts, the period from 1945 to 1948 was both a moment of rupture and a transition with strong ties to the pre-war period, both biographically and in terms of their ideas. Looking at these fascinating stories, it becomes clear that women are rarely visible and audible in accounts of political thought on democracy in this period, even though the mass enfranchisement of women and the various efforts to mobilize them for the post-war reconstruction process meant a crucial shift in how feminist, social democratic, and communist women conceptualized democracy.

Throughout Europe, the challenges of democracy after World War Two were driven by the challenge of "overcoming evil", most often manifested in the determination to prevent the return of fascism,[2] Hungary and Yugoslavia being no exception. For the people's democracies that emerged in East Central Europe[3] in the immediate post-war years, anti-fascism and peace were strongly intertwined with mass politics in a new key, that is, as mass participation. In this region, Soviet-style people's democracy as a concept and a politics challenged many of the interwar debates about anti-fascism, alternative democracies, the rights of the working class and peasantry, and women.[4] Yet, even in this period when many wanted to see the future wiped clean, personal and intellectual continuities marked many of the discussions about democracy and women's rights.

As I argue in this paper, based on the Hungarian and Yugoslav cases, many of the women thinkers and activists discussed democracy with ambivalence, embracing a wide range of its core concepts from both liberal and communist framings. The women in this paper, Mariska Gárdos, Mitra Mitrović, Angela Vode, Rosika Schwimmer, and Boris Fái, have a pre-war history of democratic (liberal) feminism, but their trajectories took them in different directions. Their choices and ideational negotiations are at the centre of this paper, ranging from embracing what Soviet-style people's democracies had to offer to women, to a fierce stance for liberal pluralist democracy, and many things in between. Debates about suffrage had struc-

2 Jan-Werner Müller, Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe, New Haven 2011, 126.

3 By East Central Europe I refer to the countries of the post-1945 socialist bloc on the European continent, excluding Russia. This approach is explained in Zsófia Lóránd/Adela Hîncu/Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc/Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz (eds.), Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women's Rights: East Central Europe, Second Half of the Twentieth Century, Budapest/Vienna/New York 2024, 2.

4 See Erez Manela, The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism, Oxford/New York 2007; Kevin McDermott/Jeremy Agnew, The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin, Houndmills 1996; Mona L. Siegel, Peace on Our Terms. The Global Battle for Women's Rights after the First World War, New York 2020.

tured many debates about women's rights more generally, within the social democratic and the communist parties and groups, as well as between liberal democratic and left-wing suffrage feminists on the one hand, and social democratic and communist women on the other.[5] The year 1945 marked a major shift in these debates with the introduction of universal suffrage, when the right to vote was taken for granted rather than contested. At the same time, the new state formations were heavily debated, which also became crucial for women's rights debates. This paper aims to contribute to existing histories of political thought on post-1945 negotiations of democracy,[6] as well as of feminist democratic theory, which has so far largely ignored the East Central European experience of state socialism.

The immediate post-war period in East Central Europe was far from unified, which is often overlooked in the amalgamating Cold War narratives about the region. Rather than a direct path to Sovietization, an abrupt and externally directed 'communist takeover', the development of people's democracies in this region was debated on a broad ideological scale. This process was shaped by long-standing intellectual traditions, particularly those of the interwar and wartime periods, as well as by the unique political histories of each country. Whilst national case studies allow for greater integration of detail, they risk both attributing exceptionality to one country and over-generalizing the regional history extrapolated from that one case study. It is often through contrasting and comparing the experiences of countries in the region with shared yet diverse histories that our understanding is best guided. Looking at two rather different political contexts in the newly formed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the short-lived Republic of Hungary between 1945 and 1948 reveals trajectories of very different political dynamics, but also the common element of anti-fascist women gaining political power at the state level and the necessary experimentation with Marxian approaches to and the Stalinist Soviet model of democracy at the time. Women activists from the interwar and WWII years still had a presence in the public sphere and some political influence. The year 1948 marked a major turning point in the history of both countries and as such offered opportunities for the political reorganization of the status quo. Democracy was contested and fiercely negotiated across Europe, and its liberal roots were no less under scrutiny in the 'West' than in the 'East'.[7]

5 Almost all the historiography on women's rights I mention below takes this into account.

6 See for example Müller, Contesting Democracy, 2011; Geoff Eley, Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000, Oxford 2002; Balázs Trencsényi/Michal Kopeček/Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič/Maria Falina/Mónika Baár/Maciej Janowski, A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe, vol. II: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond, part I: 1918–1968 (hereinafter HMPT vol. II, part I), Oxford 2018, esp. "Hybridized Modernity: Communism, Reformism, and Dissent in a Divided Europe", 277–458.

7 Müller, Contesting Democracy, 2011; Eley, Forging Democracy, 2002.

A comparative-integrative analysis of the cases of Hungary and Yugoslavia highlights the shared histories of women's thought, nuanced not only by the inventiveness of individual women but also by their respective histories and contexts. Debates on liberal democracy, social democracy, communism, and feminism took different paths, as did the wartime and post-war experiences of the two countries. Yet the women discussed in this paper were part of the same transnational political and intellectual networks structured around organizations such as the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the Second International, the Comintern, the World Committee of Women Against War and Fascism (*Comité mondial des femmes contre la guerre et le fascisme,* CMF), and the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). Moreover, Yugoslavia and Hungary were among the countries where women's social, political, and economic rights – which were to determine not only their place in the public sphere, but also their opportunities for reproductive autonomy, their choice of sexual partners, their hours of housework, the money they had at their disposal, and much more – unfolded in the framework of debates about different forms of democracy. These debates were shaped by a wide range of ideological positions between the perceived failure of liberal history and the promise or threat of Soviet-style popular democracy.[8] Women intellectuals and political activists played an active role in shaping these ideas of democracy, fundamental women's rights, and women's place in politics. Yet their interpretations and goals have been largely ignored in historical accounts.

This paper not only shows that women as diverse as Mariska Gárdos, Mitra Mitrović, Angela Vode, Rosika Schwimmer, and Boris Fái made a significant contribution to debates on democracy, and in particular people's democracy. By focusing on women who were already involved in both liberal democratic feminist and communist women's groups in the interwar period, my analysis contributes to research that aims to refine the treatment of 1945 as a rigid break in European history. For Fái, Gárdos, and Mitrović, people's democracy was a workable and often ideal framework for their women's rights politics in the immediate post-war era, whilst Schwimmer and Vode fundamentally questioned its democratic nature. The thinking of these women changed only partially after the end of World War Two compared to their interwar thinking, and as their individual cases show, it was determined by their biographies, networks, experiences, and simply individual choices.

In terms of the source base, this paper draws on a variety of material, from theoretically engaged analytical texts, such as Angela Vode's books, to argumentative journalistic pieces, mostly published in feminist journals or women's magazines, for

8 For an excellent cross-regional analysis of these debates, see Trencsény et al., HMPT vol. II, part 1, "Hybridized Modernity: Communism, Reformism, and Dissent in a Divided Europe", 2018.

example Rózsika Schwimmer's articles, to political activist documents and published memoirs (again, often published in women's magazines), written with the clear purpose of political activism, including those of Boris Fái. Mariska Gárdos and Mitra Mitrović wrote texts in several of these genres, and their position shifted depending on the period, genre, and context. Despite the fact that the sources at the core of this paper are more often documents of activism than theoretical or analytical texts, I would argue that these writings make a substantial contribution to debates on post-war liberal as well as Stalinist versions of democracy from divergent feminist perspectives, ensuring a variety of gendered views on these seemingly androgynous but actually male-centred discussions. These texts further complicate the "very question of what qualifies as 'political thought'", as it is raised in the chapter on "Communist Visions of Transformation" by the authors of *The History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*. They also remind us that whilst Marxism-Leninism produced highly abstract theoretical arguments, in this period these had direct political implications. Furthermore, the claim that the space for open discussion about people's democracies was increasingly shrinking in this period contributes to the reasons for the relative scarcity of sources by women,[9] and is less justified in the light of the sources I discuss below. The sources written by the women in focus here represent one of those cases where the Marxist-Leninist high theory is contrasted with activist languages, and they clearly push the boundaries of traditional political thought.

It is, however, through these unconventional sources that this paper contributes to the histories of Stalinism and people's democracies in political thought, as well as to feminist political theory of the last few decades. Reading Marx's and Stalin's own thoughts on democracy and people's democracy, as well as the local Hungarian and Yugoslav versions of them in the party mainstream, is highly relevant when reading the sources written by the women in this article. In order to understand the communist framework, it is necessary to understand Marx's original ideas and their Stalinist adaptations, as this served as a subtext to whatever the women in the focus of this paper wrote, even if they were mostly not in direct but implicit dialogue with it. At the same time, the questions about democracy raised by women intellectuals from Yugoslavia and Hungary are a contribution to the history of feminist political theories of the state and democracy that emerged since the 1990s. What theorists such as Carol Pateman did in the 1980s and 1990s in rethinking the limits of the concept of democracy in classical political theory was already being debated between feminist, social democratic, and communist women in the first half of the twentieth century.[10]

9 Ibid., 303.

10 Daria Dyakonova/Michael Taber (eds.), The Communist Women's Movement, 1920–1922: Proceedings, Resolutions, and Reports, Leiden/Boston 2023.

Feminist critiques of classical political theory in the United States had contract theory and liberal democracy as their foundational framework, but as I argue in this paper, they offer insights into the long debates between feminism and socialism; the different versions of socialist, left, and communist feminism; and the role of women in Marxian views of democracy.[11] The protagonists of this paper are women thinkers and activists who were in some way interested in reconciling feminist and socialist thought and political traditions. The institutional clashes between self-described feminist and self-described socialist thought, resulting from alliances with various parties and other political groups, make the ideological similarities and shared agendas more difficult to reconcile than the ideas themselves would warrant.

1. Debates on democracy after the war

As Jan-Werner Müller summarizes, the post-World War Two era was marked by the task of reconstruction, not only in a material sense but also in a moral and symbolic sense.[12] Moreover, as Ulf Brunnbauer and Claudia Kraft emphasize, "the experiences of war undermined the authority of the state itself as an institution capable of guaranteeing security on the basis of its monopoly on the use of force", and a new political order could only be established in the shadow of the war.[13] Müller adds that for political thought, despite the marginal role of the Holocaust in political thought until the 1960s, mass violence and atrocity, what Hannah Arendt called "the problem of evil", was of immediate relevance.[14] Importantly, as this paper also shows, a great deal of political thinking in the post-war reconstruction period was done by political activists, not only political thinkers in the traditional sense. Many of them, including my protagonists, were already actively engaged in discussions about the desired social, political, and economic order in the interwar period, and their ideas were driven by their despair, disagreement, and protest against the functioning of the interwar states.

11 For this I draw primarily on the now classic writings of Carole Pateman, with the work of Drucilla Cornell, Diana Coole, Jane Duran, and Susan Moller Okin in mind. See esp. Carole Pateman, The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory, Stanford 1989; Drucilla Cornell, Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law, New York 1991; Diana H. Coole, Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism, New York/London 1988, 1993; Anne Phillips, Engendering Democracy, Cambridge 1991; Judith Squires, The New Politics of Gender Equality, Basingstoke 2007; Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy, Oxford 2000.

12 Müller, Contesting Democracy, 2011.

13 Ulf Brunnbauer/Claudia Kraft, Statehood in Socialism, in: Włodzimierz Borodziej/Sabina Ferhadbegović/Joachim von Puttkamer (eds.), The Routledge History Handbook of Central and Eastern Europe, vol. 2: Statehood, Abingdon/Oxon 2020, 215–290, 223.

14 Müller, Contesting Democracy, 2011, 126.

Müller's emphasis on Arendt's prediction that "the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of post-war intellectual life in Europe – just as death became the fundamental question after the last war" and that "a world that had witnessed the Nazis trying to do things that nobody had thought possible would also have to fundamentally re-assess its political thinking".[15] Reconciliation with the masses entering politics preoccupied mainstream Western European thought as a "defence of high culture as a barrier against barbarism" and characterized by fear and contempt for the masses, unlike Central European socialism and especially Stalin's Soviet model. That any war, but especially a war like the one that had just ended, had to be prevented was a consensus, even if the means and meanings were far from consensual. Socialist internationalism was a means of consolidating peace and a platform for a new political language that consolidated the meanings of democracy, peace, political ethics, and the rules of political participation. The question, in line with the thinking of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, was not how to tame the masses, but how to ensure the representation of their interests and rights beyond the electoral liberal framework. Soviet or people's democracy was a political system, also called the dictatorship of the proletariat,[16] which also provided the framework for defining peace and fundamental rights. Women's rights entered this scene, re-emerging from the interwar turmoil, which in many cases and by many scholars has been described as a crisis,[17] intertwined with the interwar crisis of democracy across Europe.

These interwar deliberations and argumentations about the failure of liberal pluralist democracy (which in many countries across the continent would exclude women, the poor, those deemed uneducated, and minorities) were reconfigured after the war, and after Yalta the Soviet-style people's democracies became the main challengers to the pluralist models. By this time, the Stalinist version of people's democracy was the dominant form, but I would argue that the early Marxist inspiration and interpretation of democracy is fundamental to understanding the layers of the democratic element in the concept of people's democracy and the motivations of all those communists and social democrats who chose to abide by the new regimes, including many of the women in this paper. The form, content, and ideals of a com-

15 Quoted in Müller, Contesting Democracy, 2011, 126: Hannah Arendt, Nightmare and Flight, in: Jerome Kohn (ed.), Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism, New York 1994, 134.

16 Eric van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin. A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism, London/New York 2002, 27–30. Van Ree provides a detailed and convincing analysis of the existing scholarship on what Marx may have meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

17 Kristina Andělová/Isidora Grubački, Crises of Feminism and Democracy in the Interwar Period: Yugoslav and Czechoslovak Entanglements, in: Balázs Trencsényi/Lucija Balikić/Una Blagojević/Isidora Grubački (eds.), East Central European Crisis Discourses in the Twentieth Century: A Never-Ending Story?, New York 2024, 159–182.

munist state had been intensely debated by local women activists and thinkers, but most visibly by influential women such as Clara Zetkin, Inessa Armand, and Alexsandra Kollontai. They made essential contributions to the role of women and their rights in a communist state.

Marx's writings on the Paris Commune and the young Marx's critique of the Hegelian concept of civil society are two crucial places in his vast oeuvre that proved to be the most formative on the concept of democracy. In his early *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, a text conceived in 1843, the 25-year-old Marx criticized Hegel by claiming a contradictory relationship between civil society and what at the time Marx called "true democracy".[18] Modern civil society, because it was based on individualism, violated man as a social being, "man's communist essence" (*das kommunistische Wesen des Menschen*) or "socialized man" (*der sozialisierte Mensch*). Contemporary civil society was therefore the consistent realization of the principle of individualism.[19] The atomization resulting from this individualism was what true democracy had to overcome. Marx's democracy was contrasted with a democracy based on what he saw as limited representation and civil society. The idealism and utopianism of the young Marx was reflected in Lenin's first vision of people's democracy and led Lenin to draft his utopian vision of communism in his 1918 *The State and Society*.[20] However, Lenin's thought soon abandoned Marx's vision of the proletariat as a uniquely collectivist and egalitarian class, replacing self-management (that is, workers' control within the factory) in industrial relations with a top-down Taylorist approach similar to capitalist labour organization, and reasserting party control from above in both the party and labour processes.

Marx's and Lenin's main objection to liberal democracy was that the periodic election of representatives limited popular participation in politics and delegated

18 Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, Cambridge 1968, 10. The text was first published in: Karl Marx, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, in: Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), Erste Abteilung, Band 1/2, Berlin 1927; translated as Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, trans. by Annette Jolin/Joseph O'Malley, Cambridge 1970. For another relevant analysis, see Lea Ypi, Democratic Dictatorship: Political Legitimacy in Marxist Perspective, in: European Journal of Philosophy 28 (2020), 277–291.

19 Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, 1968, 33.

20 David Priestland, Soviet Democracy 1917–1991, in: European History Quarterly 32/1 (2002), 111–130, 112; Eric van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin. A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism, London/New York 2002, 29. See also David Priestland, Red Flag: A History of Communism, New York 2009; V. I. Lenin, Государство и революция [Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia], Petrograd 1917. Annotated English translation: Vladimir Lenin, State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State & the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution, annotated edition, ed. by Todd Chretien, Chicago 2014. State and Revolution was translated into English in 1921 by the American Communist Party. It was reprinted in Lenin's Collected Works, published by Progress Publishers in Moscow.

real power to the bureaucrats.[21] In a similar vein, Lenin and Stalin remained critical of liberal democracy as not leading to a change in class hierarchies, perpetuating the imagined or real threat of bureaucratization to people's democracy and the process towards communism. In an in-depth study of Stalin's political thought, Eric van Ree argues that whilst Stalin orchestrated mass murders, massive-scale purges, and general repression, he was also invested in developing his argument that the USSR was a democracy in the sense that it abled the rule of the working class, the only truly democratic class.[22] Importantly, however, despite his alleged struggle against bureaucratism, his politics after 1930 was increasingly marked by centralization and purges of "class aliens" and those officials with alleged 'bureaucratic' behaviour during the Terror of 1936–38.[23] It is worth noting that Stalin's concept of democracy was not devoid of on popular sovereignty, but his regime also flagrantly violated the fundamental rights to life and physical integrity.[24]

There are significant differences in the concept of people's democracy from Marx to Lenin and from them to Stalin. The debate among social democrats and communists throughout East Central Europe in general and in Hungary and Yugoslavia in particular was even more complicated and heated. The context of these debates in the two countries had a different timeline. The newly established Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was celebrating the victory of Tito's anti-fascist People's Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba*, NOB), whilst in Hungary even the previously persecuted communists were coming to terms with being Hitler's last satellite. This was relevant to how the Stalinist 'blueprint' of a people's democracy could be challenged and debated in relative freedom in both countries. The Tito regime was still committed to its place in the Comintern and its alliance with Stalin, but the rule of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) in Yugoslavia was consolidated without Moscow's direct influence, as Tito's partisans were so advanced that the Red Army left the Yugoslav territory after the liberation of Belgrade in November 1944.[25] At the same time, Hungary, like other Central European countries, was a parliamentary democracy for the hopeful period between November 1945 and June 1948 (officially 1949), when the Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*, MKP) merged with the Social Democratic Party to form the Hungarian People's Republic. In contrast, the Yugoslav alliance with

21 Priestland, Soviet Democracy 1917–1991, 2002, 112.

22 Van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 2002, 1. On Stalin's thought and the Soviet state, see: Geoffrey Roberts, Stalin's Library: A Dictator and his Books, New Haven, CT 2022.

23 Priestland, Soviet Democracy, 2002,119–120.

24 See Anna Lukina, Soviet Union and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in: Max Planck Institute for European Legal History Research Paper Series 1 (2017), 1–18; Anna Lukina, Making Sense of Evil Law, University of Cambridge Faculty of Law Research Paper 14 (2022), 1–33.

25 John R. Lampe, Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country, Cambridge 2000, 226.

the Soviet Union ended in 1948 with the Stalin-Tito split.[26] Yugoslavia, liberated by its autochthonous partisan army, maintained its independence from Moscow, even whilst the Yugoslav communists were part of the Comintern, but already with the elections in November 1945 it excluded any other political party from politics.

In Hungary in 1945, and especially in 1947, a wide range of intellectual traditions and visions, from agrarians to civic radicals to social democrats to communists, contributed to the debates on the form and meaning of democracy.[27] Women are often omitted from these historical accounts, with the notable exception of the charismatic social democrat Anna Kéthly (1889–1976), although even in the *History of Modern Political Thought* (*HMPT*), it is her close companion, László Faragó (1896–1967), who is given a more detailed analysis. Both Kéthly and Faragó were fundamentally critical of anyone who contributed to fascist crimes, as well as of the communists in Hungary, who were willing to make deals with many of those with tainted pasts. The much lesser known feminist psychoanalyst and lawyer Lilla Wágner (1903–1978) published extensively on the relationship between education and democracy from a liberal perspective.[28] The debate between István Bibó (1911–1979) and György (Georg) Lukács (1885–1971) in 1945 in the journal *Valóság*, written with wit and sensitivity, contained many of the core elements of the debates between liberal and communist democratic visions. The radical democrat Bibó insisted on the importance of elements of democratic pluralism and individual rights as "Western democratic techniques", whilst Lukács expressed doubts about the formality of what he saw as "bourgeois democracy".[29] At the same time, Lukács's "more gradual vision of popular democracy"[30] was sidelined by the KPJ leadership, especially by József Révai (1898–1959) and Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971).

In the Yugoslav case, as the *HMPT* authors have shown, Bogdan Radica (1904–1993) and Dragoljub Jovanović (1896–1967) took a position similar to Bibó's, embracing ideas of radical social justice but treating political pluralism as a non-ne-

26 Ivo Banac, With Stalin against Tito, Ithaca 1988.

27 This period is broadly discussed in post-1989 Hungarian historiography. See for example Mária Palasik, A jogállamiság megteremtésének kísérlete és kudarca Magyarországon 1944–1949 [The Experiment and Failure of Creating the Rule of Law in Hungary 1945–49], Budapest 2000; Éva Standeisky, Demokrácia negyvenötben [Democracy in Fourty-Five], Budapest 2015; Máté Zombory, Demokráciavita a katasztrófa után (1945–47) [Democracy Debate after the Catastrophy (1945–47)], in: Replika 95/6 (2015), 31–58. For the main trends in an East Central European context, see: Trencsényi et al., HMPT vol. II, part I, 2018.

28 Wagner's biography in Hungarian: Anna Borgos, Holnaplányok [Girls of Tomorrow], Budapest 2018, 274–277. I am currently writing a paper on her feminist thought, which is under review: 'It Will not Take them Long before they Pin the Men to the Mat too' – Feminism, Conservative Nationalism, Fascism, and the Crises of Masculinity, Economy and Politics in Interwar Hungary.

29 See summary in Trencsényi et al., HMPT vol. II, part I, 2018, 299.

30 Ibid., 313.

gotiable element of democracy. Radica and Jovanović also problematized the "communist-controlled police and military" as incompatible with democracy.[31] Interestingly, extensive research shows that despite the loyalty to Moscow at the time, the new form of state was widely debated in Yugoslavia. Tito's main advisors, Edvard Kardelj (1910–1979) and Milovan Đilas (1911–1995), played a crucial role in shaping the Yugoslav constitution after 1945. Kardelj was the chairman of the Yugoslav constitutional committees in 1946, 1963, and 1974, and is considered the mastermind behind the idea of Yugoslav socialist self-management, a system and method of Yugoslav socialism after 1948. Đilas considered Kardelj a "genuine democrat" within the party,[32] which became crucial with his vision of self-management after 1948, offering an alternative to Stalinist centralization sliding into bureaucratism. Đilas became one of the most vocal dissidents of the Yugoslav regime in the mid-1950s and was imprisoned for four years in 1957,[33] whilst Kardelj remained loyal to the regime until his death. However, in the period between 1945 and 1948, they both clashed with Jovanović, who pressed for political pluralism and was fundamentally critical of the extensive use of state violence in the alleged defence of democracy.[34]

The debates of these three to four years, which have been researched and analysed in a large body of literature, need to be mentioned because, even if women's ideas rarely make it into the literature on the immediate post-WWII debates on democracy, these debates provide a context for the thoughts of the women discussed below. They also testify to the plurality of democratic traditions between agrarian, liberal and social democratic, and civic radical traditions in both Yugoslavia and Hungary. The recurrent concepts that structured the debates, all of which were also part of the communist language of democracy, included social justice, economic equality (often discussed as economic democracy), representation of the oppressed, and, more specifically, "the interests of the overwhelming majority of the working people",[35] but also rights traditionally seen as fundamental individual rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of association. All in all, the Stalin constitution, Rákosi's Hungarian case, and leading Yugoslav communists before 1948 treated the

31 Ibid., 317, 322.

32 Dejan Jović, Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away, West Lafayette, Ind 2009, 71. On the early intellectual history of the Yugoslav communists, see: Stefan Gužvica, Before Tito: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the Great Purge (1936–1940), Tallinn 2020.

33 See his seminal The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System, New York 1957, based on the articles he published in the Yugoslav magazines *Borba* and *Nova misao*. For a political analysis of Đilas's dissidence, see Tomaž Ivešić, 'Compared to him the Prisoners are Innocent People': The Fall of Milovan Djilas (1948–1954), in: Studia Historica Slovenica 15/1 (2015), 677–708.

34 Trencsényi et al., HMPT vol. II, part I, 2018, 322.

35 Jović, Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away, 2009, 71.

representation of working people as a higher goal than any other; emphasized the importance of economic and social rights, framed as "economic democracy",[36] and treated fundamental basic rights such as freedom of speech and association as valuable as long as they allowed the development of the political consciousness of the working class.[37] The period from1945 to 1948 was marked by debates that focused on the possibility of democracy without individual freedoms and political pluralism. The individual statements of politicians of this period, perhaps even more than other periods, need to be read in the context of their broader oeuvre and beyond the linguistic context, also in the context of the political actions of their authors.

2. Women's rights, suffrage, women in politics, and democracy

In 1945, in both Hungary and in Yugoslavia, women's equal right to vote was enshrined in law for the first time. Importantly, this was the time when women had the same political rights as men, a goal that had long dominated debates about democracy.[38] However, as scholarship on feminist and women's rights activism in

36 Tito emphasized that "only in socialism could an individual be regarded as totally equal, because equality always has an economic basis. The economic basis makes democracy in socialism real." Jović, Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away, 2009, 75.

37 See, for example, Rákosi's speech of 1943, in which he declared "the indispensable precondition of democracy that all strata of the Hungarian people have the freedom to speak, that all strata of the Hungarian people are free to express their opinions". He then added: "freedom of speech in itself is not enough: everyone should have the right to organize gatherings (right of association), be free to (self-)organize, and be free to choose the leaders they wish to entrust with the representation of their interests and views." Mátyás Rákosi, Mi a magyar demokrácia? [What is Hungarian Democracy?], originally published in: Igaz Szó, 7 December 1943, reprinted in: Rákosi Mátyás, A magyar jövőért [For the Hungarian Future], https://mek.oszk.hu/04400/04456/04456.htm (12 September 2024). See also Standeisky, Demokrácia negyvenötben, 2015, 44; Trencsényi et al., HMPT vol. II, part I, 2018, 303–316.

38 In Hungary, the short-lived Károlyi Republic (31 October 1918 – 20 March 1919) guaranteed universal, equal suffrage for both sexes, but there was no time for elections before the regime collapsed. The succeeding Hungarian Republic of Councils and the Horthy regime after 20 March 1919 differentiated between male and female suffrage based on age, education, and citizenship. For details, see: Csilla Kollonay-Lehoczky, Development Defined by Paradoxes: Hungarian History and Female Suffrage, in: Bianca Rodriguez-Ruiz/Ruth Rubio-Marín (eds.), The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens, Leiden/Boston 2012, 421–437. In Yugoslavia, women were also granted universal (active and passive) suffrage in 1945, following a decision of the Temporary Constituent Assembly on 22 August 1945. Previously, in the Crown Land of Carniola of the Habsburg Monarchy, the only Slovenian land in the Monarchy with a Slovenian majority and Ljubljana as its capital, taxpaying women had had the right to vote in local elections from 1849, under the same census qualification as men. Irena Selišnik, Female Suffrage in Slovenia, in: Rodriguez-Ruiz/Rubio-Marín (eds.), Struggle for Female Suffrage, 2012, 339. After World War One, women's organizations in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and after the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, which united Slovenian and Croatian territories with the Kingdom of Serbia, looked for ways to further the struggle for women's suffrage. See Isidora Grubački/Irena Selišnik, The National

general from the first half of the twentieth century shows, even suffragist feminists did not see the vote as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end.[39] This was the case with the Hungarian Feminist Association (*Feministák Egyesülete*, FE) and its charismatic founder, Rosika Schwimmer.[40] The FE was registered as an independent organization in 1904. It was marginalized during the Horthy regime (1920–1944), then forced into illegality and re-established in 1945. It was finally dissolved by the communist regime in 1949. The right to vote was a clear organizational goal behind the foundation of the FE and a good mobilizing tool, but from the start Schwimmer and her fellow feminists treated the vote as a means for women to access the public sphere. Democracy as a concept and a value was at the heart of their arguments for women's suffrage, which they framed it as the basic right and the key to equality for all women.

For Yugoslav women, the interwar period was a particularly creative period in which democracy could be negotiated.[41] Yugoslav women entered the debate on women's suffrage later than Hungarian women, not only because they had already drawn some conclusions from the experience of other countries, but also because socialist feminism was able to enter the movement, as Isidora Grubački convincingly shows. In the Yugoslav context, the interwar period was marked by a critical debate on women's suffrage and democracy, with feminists discussing democracy both in the broader sense of rights and as peace.[42] In both contexts, a closer look at women's struggles for the vote and debates about democracy before World War Two shows that

Women's Alliance in Interwar Yugoslavia: Between Feminist Reform and Institutional Social Politics, in: Women's History Review 32/2 (2023), 242–260.

39 On comparative and transnational analyses of the agenda beyond the vote in suffrage movements, see Julie V. Gottlieb/Judith Szapor/Tiina Lintunen/Dagmar Wernitznig, Suffrage and Nationalism in Comparative Perspective: Britain, Hungary, Finland and the Transnational Experience of Rosika Schwimmer, in: Ingrid Sharp/Matthew Stibbe (eds.), Women's Movements and Female Activists in the Aftermath of WWI, London 2017, 29–75; Pat Thane, How Did Women Use the Vote? Women and Transnational Politics in the Twentieth Century, in: Oliver Janz/Daniel Schönpflug (eds.), Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders, New York/Oxford 2014, 127–143.

40 On the history of the FE, see Dóra Fedeles-Czeferener, International Women's Movements, Peace Activism, and the World of Politics. The Rosika Schwimmer Archive in New York, in: Hungarian Studies Review 49/2 (2022), 258–246; Judit Szapor, Sisters or Foes: The Shifting Front Lines of the Hungarian Women's Movements, 1896–1918, in: Sylvia Paletschek/Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (eds), Women's Emancipation Movements in the 19th Century: A European Perspective, Stanford 2004, 189–205.

41 Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, Opsane iluzije. Rodni stereotipi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji [Dangerous Illusions. Gender Stereotypes in Interwar Yugoslavia], Zagreb 2014; Irena Selišnik, Volilna pravica žensk kot demokratična novost: dejavniki, ki vplivajo na njeno uveljavitev na Slovenskem" [Women's Suffrage as a Democratic Innovation: Factors Affecting its Implementation in Slovenia], Ph.D. thesis, University of Ljubljana 2007.

42 Isidora Grubački, Political Transformations of Interwar Feminisms: The Case of Yugoslavia, Ph.D. thesis, Central European University 2023.

they already pushed the boundaries of what feminist democratic theory criticized as the core problem with traditional democratic theory. As Carole Pateman has argued, based on the case of John Stuart Mill, by accepting the private-public divide and not questioning the socio-economic bases of women's subordination to men, this subordination continued to be seen as natural and therefore "outside the domain of democratic theorists or the political struggle to democratize liberalism".[43] Despite the offer of liberal theories of democracy, which ignored the socio-economic and the public-private dichotomy, these theories perpetuated women's exclusion from the political.[44] Moreover, traditional democratic theories not only ignored but erased working-class women from any consideration of democracy, despite the fact that these women participated in labour outside the private sphere.

The complex story of women's suffrage and the only partially explored history of feminist thought that emerged around it shows that many of the ideas about the limits of suffrage, about women's rights as more than political rights, about the interdependence of all forms of democracy (parliamentary, socialist, Soviet) and peace were not new. However, after World War Two, these issues were rethought in a new framework: Yugoslavia after 1945, Hungary after 1948 as people's democracies modelled on the Soviet system. In both cases, legislation guaranteeing women's equality was negotiated and, in the years before 1948, dissenting opinions could be voiced, but the most vocal promoted a more conservative agenda (for example, on the status of illegitimate children and their mothers). Whilst the results were similar, the bargaining position of women in Hungary and Yugoslavia was quite different. The main organization representing women's interests in Yugoslavia, the Women's Anti-Fascist Front (*Antifašistički front žena*, AFŽ), gained its place in politics through its role in the People's Liberation Struggle[45] whilst the Hungarian Women's Democratic Federation (*Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége*, MNDSz) was founded in 1945 as a Popular Fronst style umbrella organization for all anti-fascist women and their organizations, but was financially supported by the Communist Party and dominated by communist activists.[46] In both cases, however, the new laws secured wom-

43 Carol Pateman, Feminism and Democracy, in: The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory, Stanford 1989, 213.

44 Ibid., 210–215.

45 On the history of the AFŽ, see Jelena Batinić, Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance, New York 2015; Barbara Jancar-Webster, Women & Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945, Denver 1990; Iva Jelušić, Gender and World War II in the Yugoslav Media, Abingdon/New York 2024.

46 On the early history of the MNDSz, see Júlia Orosz, A Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetségének szerepe Magyarország újjáépítésében a második világháború után (1945–1946) [The Role of the Democratic Association of Hungarian Women in the Reconstruction of Hungary after the Second World War (1945–1946)], in: Debreceni Szemle 22/4 (2014), 302–310. On the restricted possibilities of the new leadership, see Anna S. Kosztricz, A nők mobilitásának vizsgálata a part- és az állami

en's rights on a spectrum that covered many of the debates and demands of feminist and socialist women's rights advocates and thinkers of the interwar period: in addition to the right to vote and hold political office, women were soon to be provided with economic and legal means to be independent of men by being able to initiate divorce, to have employment protection extended to childbearing and childrearing, and to have access to education.[47]

As legal theorist Anna Lukina argues about the 1936 Soviet constitution, these rights were emphatically collective.[48] In contrast, for interwar socialist feminists such as for the Slovenian Angela Vode, whose work and life I discuss in detail below, women's employment was a fundamental means of personal development.[49] Not only was it important for communist legislation and political discourse to frame women's newly granted rights as collective and serving the community rather than the individual, but they were also framed as part of achieving general human emancipation. However, while women's rights were framed as fundamental or even minority rights (women were named as a group distinct from men and became equal citizens), the collective framework contributed to the failure to achieve their full equality. As women were not only allowed, but expected, to enter the workforce, they traded economic equality, social rights, and a significant degree of legal freedom in marriage for double and triple shifts of work. Legislation to ensure gender equality before the law followed debates in the interwar period about the right kind of democracy and what democracy meant for women and their rights. After detailed debates about the kind of democracy women should fight for, the framework was given and in many ways provided more than ever before. But the collective framing of women's rights and the opposition to bourgeois individualism made it increasingly difficult for individual women to bring their problems into the public sphere, especially when it came to the shared burdens of public and private work, or the potential emotional strain of leaving their infants in childcare institutions in order to join the workforce.

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vezetésben a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja káderanyagai alapján (1948–1956) [An Examination of Women's Mobility in Party and State Leadership Based on the Cadre Files of the Hungarian Working People's Party (1948–1956)], in: Mária Palasik (ed.), A nő és a politikum [Woman and the Political], Budapest 2007, 145–165; and Mária Schadt, Struktúra és funkcióváltozások az MNDSZ–ben 1950 és 1953 között [Structural and Functional Changes in the MNDSZ between 1950 and 1953], in: Palasik, A nő és a politikum, 2007, 167–189.

47 Mary Buckley, Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union, Hemel Hempstead 1989, 36–37. On Yugoslavia, see Ivana Pantelić, Partizanke kao građanke. Društvena emancipacija partizanki u Srbiji, 1945–1953 [Partisan Women as Citizens: The Social Emancipation of Partisan Women in Serbia, 1945–1953], Belgrade 2011; on Hungary, see Palasik, A nő és a politikum, 2007; Andrea Pető, Women in Hungarian Politics, 1945–1951, Boulder, CO 2003.

48 Lukina, Soviet Union and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2017, 5.

49 Angela Vode, Žena v sedanji družbi [The Woman in Contemporary Society], Maribor 1934, 37.

The correlation between peace and democracy and the binary opposition between democracy and fascism had already been core concepts in the conceptual framing of democracy in the interwar period, as Isidora Grubački has meticulously analysed in the case of Yugoslavia.[50] As a result of a series of clashes between 'bourgeois' feminists and socialist women, the idea that suffrage alone was not enough to guarantee women's rights became the dominant paradigm among socialist women.[51] Angela Vode (1892–1985), one of the most original thinkers of mid-century Yugoslavia and probably of the entire region of East Central Europe, wrote as early as 1934:

> "While it is true that only men directly engage in warfare, women in fact suffer more than men as they must not only go hungry, but also care for the wounded, wander the world as refugees, and also sacrifice to war those who are dearest to them, their sons. And yet, men's faulty arguments have convinced women that these affairs are none of their business, thus reinforcing their passive role. As a result, the number of women participating in public life is extremely low almost everywhere in the world. This is also the reason for the relatively low number of adherents to the women's movement, despite the fact that this movement advocates not only for the right to work, but also for social equality in general. The women's movement has asked concrete questions, and all women should immediately recognize the importance of these questions for their own lives."[52]

While Vode wrote very little after World War Two, she was particularly prolific in the interwar period. Her thinking during this period is highly relevant here. She came from a working-class family and trained as a teacher. She was one of the founders of the Slovenian Communist Party (founded in April 1920) and a member of various women's and feminist organizations, including Women's Movement (*Ženski pokret*) and the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC).[53] As Manca Renko argues, Vode was deeply committed to the both communist and feminist principles.[54] In her writings, she presented the two ideologies as perfectly compat-

50 See esp. Grubački, Political Transformations of Interwar Feminisms, 2023, 186–188.

51 Clara Zetkin, of course, was the guiding light for many socialist women in these debates, although her position was not consistent over the years and decades. Richard J. Evans, Theory and Practice in German Social Democracy 1880–1914: Clara Zetkin and the Socialist Theory of Women's Emancipation, in: History of Political Thought 3/2 (summer 1982), 285–304; Karin Bauer, Clara Zetkin und die proletarische Frauenbewegung, Berlin 1978.

52 Angela Vode, The Woman in Contemporary Society, transl. by Lukas Debeljak, in: Lóránd et al. (eds.), Texts and Contexts, 2024, 98–108, 104–105. The original first edition: Vode, Žena v sedanji družbi, 1934, 53–54.

53 Manca G. Renko, 'About the Author' and 'Context' to Angela Vode: The Woman in Contemporary Society, in: Lóránd et al. (eds.), Texts and Contexts, 2024, 98–99.

54 Ibid.

ible with each other, as well as with her democratic values. History proved her wrong. She was expelled from the Communist Party for protesting against the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, whilst her anti-fascist stance landed her in the Ravensbrück concentration camp for three years. In 1947, she was sentenced to prison in a communist show trial for criticizing the first 'democratic' elections after World War Two, as well as the government and education system.[55] Her sentence was part of the so-called Nagode Trial, which followed the pattern of Stalinist show trials throughout East Central Europe after World War Two and in the USSR from the 1930s.[56] Vode's fate is not only tragic, but symbolic of the contradictions between political organizations seeking absolute control and individuals remaining committed to their moral and political principles.

Vode was deeply and vehemently critical of capitalism, blaming it for the spread of fascism, and prioritized women's employment as what enabled women to enter the public sphere and politics.[57] She wrote extensively about the weakness of Weimar democracy in the face of Hitler and considered Mussolini's dissolution of parliament the end of democracy in Italy.[58] However, in her 1934 *Woman in Contemporary Society*, writing about the capacity of fascism to destroy democracy, it is also clear that for Vode, democracy was parliamentary democracy. She did not believe that the vote in itself granted women equality,[59] but that women's economic and social rights were threatened if the vote was under threat. Although Vode's political identity has undoubtedly always been closer to socialism than to liberal or left liberal feminism, her view of democracy is reflected in one of the rare sources of a detailed and explicit critique of people's democracy by the founder of the soon-to-be-banned FE. Rosika

55 Karmen Klavžar, Angela Vode, in: Francisca de Haan/Krassimira Daskalova/Anna Loutfi (eds.), A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms, Budapest/New York 2006, 604–607, 605. See also the biographical notes by Mirjana Milharčič-Hladnik in: Zbrana dela Angele Vode [Collected Works of Angela Vode], vol. 1, Spol in upor [Gender and Rebellion], Ljubljana 1998, vol. 2, Značaj in usoda [Character and Destiny], Ljubljana 1999, vol. 3, Spomin in pozaba [Memory and Oblivion], Ljubljana 2000.

56 See Peter Vodopivec (ed.), Usoda slovenskih demokratičnih izobražencev – Angela Vode in Boris Furlan, žrtvi Nagodetovega procesa [The Fate of Slovenian Democratic Intellectuals – Angela Vode and Boris Furlan, the Victims of the Nagode-Trial], Ljubljana 2001.

57 This aspect in Vode's thought is highlighted by Renko in Ingrid Sharp/Manca G. Renko/Ali Ronan/Judith Szapor, Suffrage, Democracy and Citizenship, in: Corinne Painter/Ingrid Sharp/Matthew Stibbe (eds.), Socialist Women and the Great War, 1914–21: Protest, Revolution and Commemoration, London 2022, 99–132, 123; Grubački, Political Transformations of Interwar Feminisms, 2023,153.

58 Vode, Žena v sedanji družbi, 1934, 77. On the Weimar crisis and the general interwar crisis of democracy, see Moritz Föllmer/Rüdiger Graf, Die 'Krise' der Weimarer Republik: Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters, Frankfurt am Main 2005; Balázs Trencsényi/Lucija Balikić/Una Blagojević/Isidora Grubački (eds.), East Central European Crisis Discourses in the Twentieth Century: A Never-Ending Story?, New York, NY 2024.

59 On her ambivalence, see Sharp et al., Suffrage, Democracy and Citizenship, 2022, 123.

Schwimmer, who had already emigrated to the United States, gave a series of interviews to the American Voice of the People (*Amerikai Népszava*) in 1946, in which she spoke of her sense of threats to democracy in Hungary:

> "In politics there are constant lies. […] There is no hope for democracy without freedom of political opinion, and all 'liberation' is futile. Forcing the working class to take forced class action […] creates a false situation. […] If they want the people to decide, they should let the people decide. When we fought for women's equal rights, we knew that was what we wanted and nothing else. […] You can build democracy only if it is based on honest programmes like this. You need an internal programme that is socially just and fair and that does not exhausts its resources. Clean democracy is a break with the extremes of capitalism and the press. The world needs more democracy, not less […]."[60]

Her concerns were shaped by a lifelong struggle for suffrage in the first place, but also women's rights more generally, and her peace activism from World War One. Her fierce criticism was clearly aimed primarily at the Communist Party. It was driven not only by the long history of clashes between the FE and socialist women, as their shared commitment to pacifism during World War One. The brief democratic period brought the two groups closer together and made them more aware of the common aspects of their politics. It was the period of the Republic of Councils, which excluded many middle-class liberal women, Schwimmer herself, from suffrage, that "sealed the fate of any potential united front of left-liberal women's rights activists".[61] In this interview, Schwimmer returns to her understanding of democracy, prioritizing first tier fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, but as she has done throughout her political career, she emphasized the importance of including the peasantry and working class into Hungarian democracy. She cautioned, however, that this should be done with an eye to local specificities and not imposing categories on social groups which, both as a collective of individuals and through their historical formation as a group, would resist such categories.[62]

Schwimmer criticized the emerging communist concept of democracy from exile, whilst Angela Vode suffered severe consequences for standing up for her principles. At the same time, many of the intellectual activists of the interwar period worked to reconcile the radical and suffragist feminist agenda with communism. Although the path to people's democracy was different in Yugoslavia and Hungary, and the way in which communist women's organizations came to dominate had its

60 Látogatás kortársaknál: Schwimmer Rózsa [Visiting our Contemporaries: Rózsa Schwimmer], interview by Géza Gáspár, Amerikai Magyar Népszava, 22–29 April 1946, part V, 2.

61 Sharp et al., Suffrage, Democracy and Citizenship, 2022, 111.

62 Látogatás kortársaknál, 1946, part V, 2.

own trajectory, in both contexts we find women in leadership positions whose political thought, like that of Angela Vode, was also shaped by feminism and socialism. In her youth, MNDSz founder Boris Fái (1908–1983) was involved in the work of the suffrage campaigning feminist FE in Hungary, which embraced radical feminist issues from sexual liberation to the question of economic rights and the rights of working class and peasant women. At the same time, the FE was often engaged in fierce ideological battles with the social democratic women, particularly over issues of women's employment protection as opposed to equal employment rights. The socialist women saw the FE's compromise on census-based female suffrage in 1912 as a betrayal. But Fái had learned to work with women's groups from an early age through her mother, and as a dancer and physical education teacher she was invested in the relationship between women's bodies, exercise, and freedom of movement.[63] She was inspired by and saw the benefits of an intellectual and democratic liberal feminism, but through her activism in the peace and anti-death penalty movements in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as her personal relationships, she became a communist. When she and fellow activists, including Magda Aranyossi and Anna Kara, founded the MNDSz and started mobilizing thousands of women, she recalled the similar experience of being in the FE with her mother. Working with women and building the movement was her long-term plan and desire,[64] and although she never denied her mother's feminism, she saw a generational difference between their politics. Feminism was the past, communism was the future: the movement that had the potential to mobilize and emancipate masses of women – workers, peasants, and bourgeois alike. In her published memoirs of the time in the 1960s, her ideas of women's emancipation always embraced all women and emphasized the importance of inter-class reconciliation.[65]

Fái was a delegate to the first congress of the *Women's International Democratic Federation* (WIDF) in Paris in 1945, which brought together left-wing women's rights activists from all over the world. Her account on the meeting is also her reflection on the ideal meaning of democracy: "We wanted to found a worldwide organization of democratic women. […] We [Hungarian women] finally found out […]

63 The pioneer of mind-body coordination as a means of women's liberation from patriarchy in Hungary was Alice Madzsar, whose work and ideas must have been part of Fái's intellectual development, given the family connections. On Madzsar, see Anna Borgos, Madzsarné Jászi Alice a női testkultúra új útjain [Mrs Madzsar Alice Jászi on the Paths of Women's Physical Culture], in: Holmi 25/5 (2013), 653–668; Tamás Repiszky/Zita Zaletnyik (eds.), A gyógyító mozgás művésze – Madzsar Alice emlékének [The Artist of the Healing Movement – On the Memory of Alice Madzsar], Budapest 2012.

64 In her memoirs she wrote: "As early as my time in France, in exile, and then right before the liberation and during the siege, I prepared myself to work for the women's movement," in: Fái's memoires, PIL, 906, f. 29, 23.

65 Ibid., 29.

that we were not alone, that there were women all over the world who were fighting for democracy, women's equal rights, peace, and the happiness and protection of children."[66] The restoration of the post-World War One ideals of peace and democracy was now under the protection of a powerful party committed to the interests and future of the people.

In Yugoslavia, one of the main platforms for the role of women in the new state was *Žena danas* (The Woman Today), a journal founded in 1936 with a history as both a socialist and feminist platform.[67] One of its two editors-in-chief in 1945 was one of the most fascinating women intellectuals of the interwar Yugoslav feminist scene, Mitra Mitrović (1912–2001), writer, literary scholar, and politician, minister of education in the Government of the People's Republic of Serbia from 1945 and the first female minister in the country's history. Mitrović's ideological trajectory is both similar to and different from that of Fái: Mitrović's early intellectual formation was driven by joining the communist circles of her fellow students at the University of Belgrade. She read Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* and Engels' *The Origin of the Family*, and became familiar with the writings of Alexandra Kollontai, whose "The New Woman" from *The New Morality and the Working Class* (1918) was translated into Serbian[68] as early as 1922.[69] Her exposure to liberal and radical feminist ideas came later on, when she joined the Youth Section of the feminist organization *Ženski pokret* in Belgrade.[70]

From a biographical point of view, Mitrović's experiences were similar to Fái's, as she belonged to a group of young women who knew and respected the path of the feminist generation before them, a generation with extensive political experience in their struggle for women's equality, mostly legal and political, which, in short, was for them a strategic precondition for social and economic equality. The generation of the Feminist Alliance (*Feministička alijansa*, 1923), with its leader Alojzija Štebi – editor of the journal *Demokracija* (Democracy) –, even if they were critical

66 Ibid., ő. e. p3.

67 For a summary of the history of *Žena danas,* see: Isidora Grubački, 'About the Magazine' and 'Context' to *Žena danas* Editoral Board: 'The New Feminist Movement', in: Lóránd et al. (eds.), Texts and Contexts, 2024, 111–117.

68 Aleksandra Kollontaj [Alexandra Kollontai], Nova žena [The New Woman], Belgrade 1922.

69 Veljko Stanić, 'Parče velikog života': Mitra Mitrović o tridesetim godinama 20. veka ['A Piece of a Great Life': Mitra Mitrović on the 1930s], in: Stanislava Barać (ed.), Časopis Žena danas (1936–1940): Prosvećivanje za revoluciju [The Magazine Woman Today (1936–1940): Enlightenment for the Revolution], Belgrade 2022, 55–97, 76, 87. On the reception of Kollontai in interwar Yugoslavia, see Minja Bujaković, Recepcija ideja Aleksandre Kolontaj u časopisu Ženski pokret (1920–1938) [The Reception of the Ideas of Alexandra Kollontai in the journal Women's Movement], in: Jelena Milinković/Žarka Svirčev, (eds.), Ženski pokret (1920–1938): Zbornik radova [Women's Movement (1920–1938): Conference proceedings], Belgrade 2021, 421–438.

70 Grubački, 'About the Author', 2024, 294–306, 294.

of the opportunities that suffrage brought for women, when they discussed democracy, they thought of it in terms of parliamentary democracy.[71] Mitrović and her colleagues, on the other hand, were communists and feminists. They split from the Feminist Alliance in 1940, and the institutional shift was accompanied by clear ideological demarcations. Their political positions were characterized by Popular (People's) Front-style anti-fascism and anti-war politics[72], and their focus within women's rights shifted increasingly towards class and economic issues. For both Fái and Mitrović, the shift to a Marxian, and, in 1945, Stalinist concept of democracy was a stage in the process of a long negotiation of their role in the struggle for women's rights with liberal and radical feminist foremothers. In contrast to Vode, who saw the dissolution of multi-party politics and elections as a threat, Fái and Mitrović treated this framework as one in which women's rights could be negotiated with better results than any previous system. They believed in the potential of the communist fight against class-based oppression and the elimination of capitalism, and, in more practical terms, in the promise of the elimination of poverty. At the time, this was enough for them not to look for alternatives. Still, Mitrović had a deeper investment in democracy as pluralism and open debate than Fái, who never critically engaged with or questioned the Hungarian communist regime.

While Mitrović's intellectual development and political career were achievements of her own merit, both were deeply intertwined with the life and politics of Milovan Đilas, to whom she was married for a few years in her youth and with whom she had a daughter. The two were not a couple during Đilas's clash with Tito and the Yugoslav communist regime, but Mitrović was sympathetic to Đilas's revolutionary, radically democratic critique of the regime, even though she distanced herself from him at the Central Committee plenum in March 1954 and in a letter to the Central Committee in December of that year.[73] As she noted in her memoirs of the 1970s, she gave in to party pressure, even though she believed that Đilas was right in his criticism.[74] In her 1960 book, *The Woman's Position in the Contemporary World*, Mitrović revisited the question of suffrage and its importance. As Isidora Grubački argues, for Mitrović, "women's political rights are the most 'expressive affirmation of women as citizens with full rights' and argues for the importance of the demand for women's suf-

71 For an excellent analysis of interwar Yugoslav feminism, democracy, and Yugoslavism, see Grubački, Political Transformations of Interwar Feminisms, 2023, esp. 186–188.

72 In English and internationally, Popular Front / Front populaire. In the Yugoslav context, the official name was Narodni (People's) Front, in Hungary. Nemzeti (National) Front. Throughout the text, I alternate between these with the context in mind.

73 Dragomir Bondžić, Dokumenta o držanju Mitre Mitrović u slučaju Milovana Đilasa 1954. godine [Documents on the Demeanour of Mitra Mitrović in the Case of Milovan Đilas in 1954], in: Istorija 20. veka 1 (2013), 195–207, esp. 206.

74 Stanić, 'Parče velikog života', 2022, 60.

frage rights in all contexts where these are lacking".[75] In light of the 1960 book and her posthumously published autobiography, *Otpisana* (Written Off),[76] it becomes clear that Mitrović's concept of democracy was more pluralistic than what the Yugoslav version of people's democracy became, most importantly because she gave less credence to the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist juxtaposition of economic democracy and political pluralism.

However, in 1945, Mitrović and Đilas were still a couple and looking hopefully towards a communist future, which after the war years was the only one they could imagine. The ways in which democracy was negotiated through everyday discourse in the women's movement in Yugoslavia differed significantly from Hungary in that while pacifism and anti-fascism were central to the People's Front's discourse of democracy, the experience, aftermath, and memory of the war were equally central to the understanding of democracy in Yugoslavia after 1945. *Žena danas* told the story of the war as a fight for democracy, and women who died in battle were women who "gave their lives for democracy".[77] Women of the Yugoslav AFŽ had more space to argue for the right to defend peace (and democracy) with violent means than Hungarian Fái. Hungarian women, especially in international forums, whether in bilateral meetings with AFŽ-women or in participation in the WIDF, struggled to distance themselves from Hungary's recent past as Hitler's last ally.[78] Mitrović and the AFŽ women in general, however, spoke from the position of the partisan women whose sacrifice, often with a rifle in their hands and dying in the trenches, contributed to the liberation of Yugoslavia:

> "Those who are the enemies of the democratic law are the enemies of the people. We, the partisan women, fought for this right, with rifles in our hands, enduring the worst tortures, with our own blood and the blood of our children, which will be engraved in our hearts for a long time, this law was written in battle."[79]

These are the words of Blaženka Mimica, member of the AFŽ in various capacities, who in 1948 took over the editorial position at *Žena danas* at Mitrović's side. Peace and the right to democracy were written in battle, equality was fought for in war, not through the illusion of suffrage. This framing of women's rights in the new demo-

75 Grubački, 'About the Author', 2024, 294–301, 299.

76 Mitra Mitrović, Otpisana [Written Off], Belgrade 2023.

77 Žena danas 35 (October 1945).

78 On this, see Zsófia Lóránd, International Solidarity as the Cornerstone of the Hungarian Post-War Socialist Women's Rights Agenda in Women's Magazines, in: International Review of Social History 67/30 (2022), 103–129.

79 Blaženka Mimica, Neprijatelji demokratskih zakona – neprijatelji naroda [The Enemies of the Democratic Laws – Enemies of the People], in: Žena danas 35 (October 1945), 7–8, 7.

cratic order is perhaps the best summary of the shift in the meaning of the concept. Whilst the legislation which granted women equal rights in politics and the economy was made possible by a male majority in the assembly, in the Yugoslav case the partisan women saw it as their rightful compensation for their share of the struggle and sacrifice in the NOB. Mimica herself recalled her time during the war as a time of political maturation and political awareness.[80] Her memories served as an example to the women readers of *Žena danas,* women who were to become politically aware and active participants in the young socialist state.

In her 1945 pamphlet, *Women's Right to Vote: Proof and Tool of Democracy*, Mitra Mitrović combined the arguments that women would get the vote thanks to the NOB and that women's participation was essential for the new regime. It was important that women learned to make good use of this right won in war, which meant voting for the KPJ. Freedom, suffrage, democracy, liberation, and the party were closely linked:

> "We know, above all, that without freedom there is no life. And the millions of women know better than the learned 'democrats' [democratic parties of interwar Yugoslavia] that they cherish and protect national as well as their own freedom, equality, and human rights, which were never given to them, nor would all those learned 'democrats' ever give them."[81]

Mitrović relied heavily on the claim that, despite the struggles of the Feminist Alliance, women did not get the vote in interwar Yugoslavia, as further proof that the KPJ was the bearer of women's future socio-political equality. Mitrović, like Fái and the MNDSz women, argued for the recognition of the political insight and wisdom of uneducated women, which had been overlooked or even denied by other parties. She stressed that the women's vote, a prerequisite for true democracy, was secured exclusively by the People's Front among the parties contesting in the elections:

> "Can you even imagine a woman voting against her own rights in her first elections, voting against her right to vote! Because those who would present a list against the People's Front are the same ones whose regimes we lived under for years, humiliated and deprived of our rights. By voting for the People's Front, we complete the work."[82]

80 Blaženka Mimica, Pod rukovodstvom Partije žene Jugoslavije postale su aktivni i svjesni borci za socijalizam [Under the Leadership of the Women's Party of Yugoslavia, We Became Conscious Fighters for Socialism], in: Žena danas 55 (August 1948), 2–4.

81 Mitra Mitrović, Pravo glasa žena–dokaz i oruđe demokracije [Women's Right to Vote: Proof and Tool of Democracy], Belgrade 1945, 10.

82 Ibid., 14.

It is striking how important the vote itself was in Mitrović's pamphlet, given that it was primarily the social and economic rights of working-class women that were prioritized in social democratic and communist women's rights discourses. However, the importance of the vote was an excellent theme for the first elections where women could vote.

In Hungary, Boris Fái, reflecting on women's political participation and activism and her work between 1945 and 1948, was both fascinated and deeply motivated to bring as many women as possible into the movement. This kind of post-war enthusiasm was, of course, widespread, but for Fái it was personally significant as something that reminded her of the work of her mother in the FE.[83] The task facing her and her colleagues in the MNDSz was far from easy: they had to attract women who had been kept out of politics by the previous (nationalist-elitist and then fascist) political regimes, but also by a feminist movement that, despite its best intentions, had a bourgeois base, and who did not even want their husbands to be involved in politics. Fái was well aware that these peasant and working-class women, tired from multiple shifts at the workplace and then at home, wanted their husbands to come home from work instead of going to meetings organized by the Communist Party. The male leadership of the MKP, including Rákosi himself and József Révai, would express their dissatisfaction because they felt that Fái and her fellow activists in the MNDSz were not explicitly 'political' enough in terms of communist language and open efforts to recruit women to the party. In response, Fái wrote:

> "it is not the dictatorship of the proletariat that we must organize first, because you cannot build socialism from 'scrap'. This is the time to form alliances with every well-meaning person who is against fascism and war, who wants to build a new, democratic Hungary from scratch."[84]

It is not at all clear from the way this part of the memoir is written what Fái's vision of democracy actually was at the time. She may have embraced the Soviet version, but in her speeches, and even in this retrospective recollection, her vision of the political arena included all the other anti-fascist parties that operated in Hungary until 1949.

Fái took very seriously one particular aspect of Soviet-style democracy that even her mother and her mother's comrades were expected to embrace within a liberal democratic framework: participation in state organs. As Eric van Ree points out, certain degree of participation was crucial to Stalin's democracy, where policies allegedly in the interest of the people took precedence over fair procedure. To this end,

83 For a collection of amazing stories of women's organizing and political work in communist movements, see Francisca de Haan (ed.), The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists Around the World, Cham 2023.

84 Fái, PIL 906. f. 29. ő. e. p22.

van Ree continues, the "undivided rule of the communist party was (…) precisely the crux of any true democracy, because that party was committed to the only economic system truly in the popular interest, i.e. communism."[85] Participation had a specific meaning as well: it meant giving the population a chance to participate in state organs, but "without having a determining say in it."[86]

Fái and her closest colleague and comrade, Magda Aranyossi, were genuinely interested in getting women to care and join the movement, but they were reluctant to impose a political language on women who were not ready. Moreover, although they had been party activists for decades by the end of the war, they themselves underwent a serious ideological retraining, reading Stalin and Rákosi instead of traditional Marxism.[87] What is important to note, however, is that both the AFŽ and the MNDSz saw the task of organizing women to participate in decision-making bodies, at least at the grassroots level, as essential to women's inclusion as equal citizens in the new people's democracies. Their vision of self-government was highly gendered and thus challenged the universalism of the way male politicians and thinkers conceptualized people's democracies.

3. Conclusion

Whilst women's equality with men was a principle enshrined in both the Yugoslav and the Hungarian constitutions, the resolution of the conflict between women's participation in the public sphere and their double and triple burden was far from complete.[88] Ongoing research shows that women party activists were aware of the problem and were searching for a solution that would guarantee gender equality, but the process of debating one of the cornerstones of patriarchy (the one that has remained almost entirely unshakable until today)[89] was one in which women activists, debating democracy and socialism in the early post-war period, made gender-specific claims about women's role and citizenship rights in the new regimes. Much of these debates were marked by a focus on women as mothers as a form of justification, which was strategically wise as it strengthened the argument for full

85 Van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 2002, 3.

86 Ibid.

87 See Fái's personal notes from her "political studies", PIL 906. f. 37. ő. e.

88 See for example Daria Dyakonova, 'Through the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in All Countries, Onward to the Complete Emancipation of Women!': The Transnational Networks of the Communist Women's Movement in the Early 1920s, in: Journal of Women's History 35/1 (2023), 11–33.

89 The statistics on women's vs. men's unpaid work in the private sphere and women's extra care and emotional labour in both the public and private spheres show how little has changed and how difficult it is to change the situation.

recognition of women as citizens, but also helped to keep women to their reproductive role.[90]

The struggle of socialist women since the nineteenth century to include the role of domestic work in debates about women's political participation and the meaning of socialist citizenship continued after WWII, and was partially successful, as the state-socialist regimes did incorporate women's "distinctive qualities and tasks" into citizenship, "that is, that they should be citizens as women" – the crux of a feminist political theory of democracy for Pateman.[91] This does not mean that the existing socialist regimes found satisfactory ways of becoming systems in which women could be "citizens as women, as autonomous, equal, yet sexually different beings from men" (ibid.), precisely because women as non-mothers and women as sexual beings were essentially invisible in the new era. From this early period, almost nothing has survived from the discussions about sexual liberation and sexuality as women's right as such, which was very important especially for the Hungarian feminists of FE, but also for the early communist women's rights activist and intellectual, Mariska Gárdos (1885–1973). Gárdos devoted books to the topic in her early work and, despite her fierce clashes with 'bourgeois feminism', praised the FE for embracing it and recognizing its paramount political importance.[92]

Early post-war communist women's rights thinkers and activists, not only those with a feminist past and feminist 'training' such as Fái and Mitrović, but also important women's rights advocates within communism such as Vida Tomšič (1913–1998),[93] incorporated women's work in the private sphere into their vision of a new democracy. In class contract theory, as Pateman argues,

90 This was argued most eloquently by the Croatian socialist feminist philosopher Blaženka Despot, writing in socialist Yugoslavia in the 1980s. See Blaženka Despot, Žensko pitanje i socijalističko samoupravljanje [The Woman Question and Socialist Self-Management], Zagreb 1987; English translation: Feminist Marxism and Violence against Women, in: Lóránd et al. (eds.), Texts and Contexts, 2024, 495–505; Women and Self- Management, in: Contradictions: A Journal of Critical Thought 2 (2020), 148–151 (Special Issue "Left Feminist Theory and Historiography"). In a study of the history of the Czechoslovak legal system, legal historian Barbara Havelková concluded that the Czechoslovak socialist system was, after all, family and not women-friendly: Barbara Havelková, The Three Stages of Gender in Law, in: Hana Havelková/Libora Oates-Indruchová (eds.), The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice, Oxon/New York 2014. On motherhood and citizenship, comparing Western democracies and the WIDF, see Celia Donert, Women's Rights in Cold War Europe: Disentangling Feminist Histories, in: Past & Present 218 (2013), 180–202, 184.

91 Pateman, The Disorder of Women, 1989,14.

92 Mariska Gárdos, A nő a történelem sodrában [The Woman in the Backwash of History], Budapest 1939–1940, 144–146.

93 See Manca G. Renko's Introduction and biography to Vida Tomšič, On the Question of Women's Social Position in the Contemporary World, in: Lóránd et al. (eds.), Texts and Contexts, 2024; Chiara Bonfiglioli, Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia, in: Aspasia 8/1 (2014), 1–25; Mateja Jeraj, Vida Tomšič, in: Francisca de Haan/Krassimira Daskalova/Anna Loutfi (eds.), A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms, Budapest/New York 2006, 575–579.

> "[i]n the story of the creation of civil society through an original agreement, women are brought into the new social order as inhabitants of a private sphere that is part of civil society and yet is separated from the public world of freedom and equality, rights, contract, interests and citizenship."[94]

The way in which her 1980s feminist critique of liberal democratic theory resonates with how communist women worked to incorporate women's role in the private sphere into the political takes us back to the beginning of this paper and to Marx's original critique of Hegelian civil society as one that, through its individualism, violated human relations and sociability. Even thinkers as ideologically distant as early post-war communist women and an American political theorist of the 1980s working on radical democratic and contract theory come together in the recognition that the core of women's exclusion lies in the private sphere.

The example of the USSR and the political developments up to 1948 in both Hungary and Yugoslavia left little doubt that people's democracies would infringe on political pluralism and individual freedoms. But it was more than political naïveté or ideological blindness that made these regimes, or at least a compromise with them, attractive to communist women such as Fái and Mitrović with feminist interwar experience. On the one hand, their concept of democracy organically included peace, anti-fascism, and economic equality. On the other hand, they saw the political and emancipatory potential of what these regimes offered to women, particularly working-class women. The aspect of 'working-class representation' brought with it the hope that uneducated women would be treated as equal citizens. Moreover, the politicization of domestic work, as discussed above, was a key feature that offered much hope. A combination of these aspects of socialist democracy contributed to these women, who had a grounding in feminist democratic thought, embracing a fundamentally totalitarian understanding of democracy in the period of 1945–1948. Others, such as Rosika Schwimmer and Angela Vode, were deterred by the lack of pluralism and the use of state violence, which they saw as contradictory to true democracy. Fái and Mitrović, survivors of war and persecution and disillusioned with interwar politics, embraced a concept of democracy that prioritized women's vote for economic and social equality, peace, and anti-fascism over pluralism of political views and basic human rights. They did not have Vode's and Schwimmer's critical edge about freedom of dissent, at least not in that peculiar period of hope and fear that was the few years after World War Two.[95] The different but converging ways in which Angela Vode, Rosika Schwimmer, Boris Fái, Mitra Mitrović,

94 Pateman, The Disorder of Women, 1989, 4.

95 Importantly, as mentioned above, Mitrović increasingly developed a strong critique of the socialist regime, starting around the time of Đilas's *The New Class* and even more markedly with the purges of critical communists in 1971.

and other women negotiated feminism, communism, and democracy show that the story of women's rights and women's place, women's citizenship in people's democracies, as established in Yugoslavia in 1945 and as openly and clandestinely discussed in Hungary between 1945 and 1947–49, is strongly shaped by women's personal stories, the role of the private as both a political motivation and a depoliticizing factor, and women's intellectual trajectories in the interwar period.