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SLAVICA NON LEGUNTUR: ON A FEMINIST PROJECT OF INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA¹

Abstract: The article outlines the challenges for literatures created in "small" languages. The only chance for such cultures to emerge from literary obscurity is to be translated into a "big" language, a *lingua franca* of an international influence. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the spectacular *Bibliography of Books by Female Authors in Yugoslavia*, published by the Federation of Women with University Education in 1936 in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The book, a unique and remarkable feminist project of interwar Yugoslavia, was conceived to defy the *Slavica non leguntur* statement (the Slavic languages are not read [world-wide]). It features the intellectual achievement of women from South-Eastern Europe. This first discussion of *Bibliography*, which was composed in four languages: Serbian, Slovene, Croatian and French, presents its structure, aims and premises in a wider feminist context of interwar Yugoslavia.

Keywords: bibliography of books written by women, feminism, interwar Yugoslavia, translation.

Many small European literatures and cultures that sustain them, especially those on the outer rims of the Old Continent, function within a linguistic and cultural niche. Difficult to access, they can reach larger audiences only through translations into major, so-called world, languages. Naturally, translations cannot guarantee acceptance by default, yet they undoubtedly offer such literatures an opportunity to emerge and be heard (of).

Since the turn of the 21st century – the momentum of surging globalisation – in the countries of South-Eastern Europe (as the region of the Balkans has frequently been called) there has been a marked tendency to popularise

¹ This text has been written as part of the COST Action IS 0901 project: "Women Writers in History toward a New Understanding of European Literary Culture."

local problems – historical, political, social, cultural as well as literary – through the medium of English. This phenomenon has been particularly visible since the late 1990s, especially in academia. It has been paralleled by an ever more intensive de-universalisation of theory: there occurs a deliberate (g)localisation of knowledge, where the local reaches the status of the global. This process is supposed to decolonise Western narratives in the countries of the Balkan Peninsula and to free researchers from the methodological imperative of relying primarily on the Anglo-American paradigm. This imperative may be felt as more and more oppressive, as it narrows down or otherwise formats scholarly perspective. Such is the case of Southern Slavic gender and (post)colonial studies as well as feminist criticism, because academic circles in the Balkans were excessively fond of it (Slapšak, Blagojević, Kolozova 2006: 7–14). The situation has not been fundamentally changed by the fact which can be interpreted in terms of colonial relations: the decolonisation itself is carried out in the language of the “coloniser,” the “intellectually widest-ranging” idiom, *lingua franca* of the modern world, namely in English (Slapšak *et al.* 2006: 7–9). This paradox was pointed out by a Serbian, Svetlana Slapšak, professor at the Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis in Ljubljana. She reminds us of the sad, although popular rule, succinctly expressed in the formula *Slavica non leguntur* – the Slavic languages are not read (world-wide) (Slapšak *et al.* 2006: 8). Therefore, nowadays the medium of English offers a precious (if not the only meaningful) chance to present – more widely – and promote a literature, culture or theory of a given region, and thus to familiarise the international academic community with problems specific to culturally diverse South-Eastern Europe.²

² One instance of such a “voice from the Balkans” might be books in English: *Imagining the Balkans* (New York 1997) by a Bulgarian Maria Todorova; *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of Imagination* (New Haven 1998) by a Serbian Vesna Bjelogrić-Goldsworthy; *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (London 2004) by a Slovenian Božidar Jezernik; *GendeRings. Gendered Readings in Serbian Women's Writing* (Beograd 2006) by a Serbian Biljana Dojčinović-Nešić. Two more books deserve attention: a collaborative work edited by D. Bjelić and O. Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge 2002) as well as *Gender and Identity. Theories from and/or Southeastern Europe* (Belgrade 2006) edited by S. Slapšak, J. Blagojević and K. Kolozova (which I have already mentioned in my article). I elaborated on the subject in: M. Koch, “‘My’ i ‘Oni,’ ‘Swój’ i ‘Obcy.’ Bałkany XX wieku z perspektywy kolonialnej i postkolonialnej” (“Us” and “Them,” “Friend” and “Stranger.” The Balkans of the 20th Century as Seen from the Colonial and Postcolonial Perspective), *Porównania* (Comparisons), Poznań 6 (2009), 75–93.

Translation and feminism in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

Translation is thus an extremely important instrument, an operational method, of the academic circles conducting gender and feminist research in the states formed after the bloody break-up of the socialist Yugoslavia in the first half of the 1990s: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. An intuitive (because not verbalised at the time) awareness of *Slavica non leguntur*, namely, that one's own cultural issues should be presented and introduced to the international audience via "major" languages, was – in this part of Europe – shared by members of women's movements, or more widely, of feminist movements, in the interwar period (1918–1941³). I will show how at that time the problem was tackled by Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian women. To discuss one possible solution I will present one fairly spectacular feminist project involving translation.

In the wake of the First World War a new geopolitical situation crystallized in Europe. On the map appeared a number of new countries. One of them was the common multinational state by the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, created on the Balkan Peninsula on 1st December 1918, and renamed in January 1929 as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In that country a wide-ranging and diverse women's emancipation movement developed, in accord with a larger European tendency of the period. Women's organisations proliferated. In 1919, on the initiative of the Srpski narodni ženski savez (Serbian National Women's Union, established 1906), during the Congress of Women, the organisation called Narodni ženski savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca (National Union of Women of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia) was established in the Kingdom of SCS, renamed within ten years (1929) as the Jugoslovenski ženski savez (Yugoslavian Women's Union). Among the members of the organisation were representatives of all women's circles from the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, although not all groups constituting YWU were inherently feminist. Since its beginnings, the Union was in contact with the International Council of Women (ICW⁴),

³ The Second World War began for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with a German air raid on Belgrade, on 6th April 1941.

⁴ International Council of Women (ICW) was established during the Congress of Women, on 25th March 1888, in Washington, D.C., by Susan Brownell-Anthony; there were forty-nine delegates from nine countries. After the First World War, ICW cooperated with the

and its Yugoslavian representatives participated in international women's congresses and conventions (e.g. in London, Oslo, Rome, Copenhagen).

Additionally, in the interwar period a few typically feminist organisations were formed in the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia. In 1919, a women's organisation Društvo za prosvjećivanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava (Society for Education of Women and Protection of Their Rights) started its activity, publishing a feminist monthly entitled *Ženski pokret* (Women's Movement) from 1920 to 1939. There were many female intellectuals of the Kingdom of SCS among the Society's members: the writer Isidora Sekulić, the philosopher and the first woman to become associate professor of the University of Belgrade – Ksenija Atanasijević, literature theoreticians Katarina Bogdanović and Paulina Lebl-Albala, the poet and doctor of philology Anica Savić-Rebac. The year 1922 also saw the launch of Udruženje studentkinja Beogradskog Univerziteta (Association of the Female Students of the University of Belgrade), which, notwithstanding its declarations of political neutrality, sought to support the emancipation of women and to “awaken the awareness of their role in society” (Božinović 1996: 119) as well as to protect women's affairs. In 1923, at the congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in Rome, the Mala ženska antanta (Little Entente of Women⁵), comprising feminist organisations from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece (Božinović 1996: 119), was set up to promote exchange of experiences and common work towards peace. In 1928, a Yugoslavian branch of the international women's organisation, the Women's League for Peace and Freedom (active since 1915), was formed. In 1926, in the Kingdom of SCS, an organisation known as Alijansa ženskih pokreta (Association of Women's Movements) was founded; it became part of the International Woman Suffrage Association.

The end of 1927 saw an organisation involved in the multilingual feminist project of primary interest to this article. The organization was named Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena (Federation of Women with University Education), and it functioned as the Yugoslavian branch of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), founded on 11th

League of Nations. Cf. *Kronika kobiet* (The Chronicle of Women), edited collectively under the supervision of M. B. Michalik (Warszawa 1993) 368.

⁵ The Little Entente of Women was formed on the initiative of a Polish physician, Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka (1867–1936), who served as its chairwoman since 1927. The 1929 convention took place in Warsaw.

November 1919 during a convention in London. It aimed to defend the rights of educated women as employees, among them the right to professional advancement. The Federation had its national branches – closely cooperating with one another – in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Novi Sad, Skopje, Užice, Šabac and Kragujevac (Božinović 1996: 120).

Bibliography of Books by Female Authors in Yugoslavia (1936) – a multilingual feminist project

On the initiative of the Yugoslavian Federation of Women with University Education an interesting feminist project was developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, laying solid foundations for further research in literature and translation authored by Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian women. In 1936, a unique book entitled *Bibliografija knjiga ženskih pisaca u Jugoslaviji* (Bibliography of Books by Female Authors in Yugoslavia) was published, a book not fully recognized even today. There would – perhaps – have been nothing extraordinary about the initiative, had it not been for the fact that its fruit was published in four languages at once: in Serbian, Croatian, Slovene and French. The authors of the enterprise had set for themselves two main goals. The first was domestic and, at the same time, feminist: presenting to the Yugoslavian readership the intellectual oeuvre of women of the three biggest nations of the multiethnic Yugoslavia; preparing a systematic inventory of the women's achievement; and acknowledging the scale of their activity, by no means unimpressive, in the women's circles. The second aim was to internationalise the project by means of translation into a “major” language, the *lingua franca* of the interwar Europe, i.e. French. As a result, the common compendium consisted of three bilingual segments: Serbian-French, Slovene-French and Croatian-French.

The publication was a complete (given the available resources) bibliographical inventory of the women's writing in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, from the first printed works (Croatians started their activity in 1661, Serbians in 1814 and Slovenians in 1863) to the end of 1935. It involved cooperation among three sections of the Federation: in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. The title of the book was also bilingual: apart from the Serbian/Croatian, there is the French title *Bibliographie des livres des femmes auteurs en Yougoslavie, rédigée et éditée par L'Association des femmes diplômées des Universités en Yougoslavie*.

The book begins with a common bilingual preface (*Преџовор/Préface*) – both in Serbian, using Cyrillic script, and in French. It has been signed by a feminist organisation, the Federation of Women with University Education in Yugoslavia, based in Belgrade. The preface reveals the aim of the publication: to familiarise the Yugoslavian and – by virtue of translation – the international audience with the intellectual oeuvre of women and their contribution to the promotion of culture and science in their respective nations. The preface also states that the book has been published thanks to the financial support of Jugoslovenski ženski savez (Yugoslavian Women’s Union), which emphasises the feminist significance of the whole project for the Yugoslavia’s women’s circles.

Another important text in *Bibliography* is a fairly short introduction (*Uvod/Introduction*), written in her mother tongue by a Croatian, Dr Elza Kučera, member of the Zagreb’s branch of the Federation, the eldest and most experienced librarian in the country. Her expertise and academic degree were to guarantee the project’s accuracy, professionalism as well as compliance with scientific standards. The author assures readers that *Bibliography* contains all available non-serial publications authored by women in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, collected primarily by National Libraries in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. On behalf of the editorial team, Kučera informs about a deliberate strategy to omit articles published in periodicals. These were supposed to be collected in a separate publication; however, it never came to life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Elza Kučera outlines the project and the principles of material collection. The project’s authors have aimed at creating a register of books, divided into three segments. The first catalogues original texts (literary, academic or popular science writing); the second collects translations, presenting considerable achievement of women as translators not only of literature, but also of scholarly books and popular science manuals; the third gathers information about the work of women editors of periodicals, mainly of women’s magazines or feminist journals. The authors of *Bibliography* seem to be aware of its pioneering character: it not only stresses women’s role in developing the cultures of their respective countries, but also gives testimony to feminist movements in pre-war Yugoslavia. As seen today, the project undoubtedly laid solid “inventory” foundations for the research on women’s creative work in the region; it provided a database for further detailed analyses. It also testified to the artistic skills and immense intellectual potential of the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian women; it pointed to the wealth of their interests and to their lively cooperation.

The entire publication is 312 pages long. It is divided – as I have already mentioned – into three national sections, and their separate identities are signalled by independent paginations: the Serbian section has 133 pages, the Slovenian – 62 pages, and the Croatian – 81 pages. At the end there is an index of names (*Zajednički indeks/Index général*), common to all three literatures.

The first part, in Serbian (employing Cyrillic script), is an alphabetic bibliography of authors who published in Vojvodina, Serbia, Southern Serbia or Montenegro (*Библиографија књига женских писаца штампаних у Војводини, Србији, Јужној Србији и Црној Гори*). The materials were collected and presented by Serbians, members of the Belgrade branch of the Federation of Women with University Education; the work was conducted under the supervision of the National Library's librarian Nadežda Petrović, assisted by Paulina Lebl-Albala, Milica Vojnović and Ljubica Marković. This part presents as many as 578 original works of Serbian women, 321 translations (the majority from Russian, French, German and English, although single volumes were translated from Norwegian, Czech, Bulgarian, Italian and Latin) and 63 entries recording journals and editorial work. The second part, written in Slovene, is a bibliography of Slovenian authors (*Bibliografija del slovenskih pisateljic*), compiled by a Slovenian, Zlata Pirnat. Here editorial work in periodicals is presented first (53 entries), followed by original works (244 entries) and translations (92 entries, chiefly from German, French, Scandinavian languages, with a few titles from English, Czech, Croatian, Russian, Italian; Polish is represented mainly by Maria Teresa Ledóchowska's texts on religious issues and missionary work). The third part, in Croatian, is a bibliography of authors from Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Bibliografija knjiga ženskih pisaca u Hrvatskoj, Slavoniji, Dalmaciji, Bosni i Hercegovini*). It was compiled and edited by Croatians: Branka Dizdarević, Jelka Mišić-Jambrišak. The collected original works total 434 and are followed by 149 translations (mainly from German, also from English, French and Russian, with ten publications translated from Polish; there are also translations from Hungarian, Greek, Czech, Scandinavian languages, and single translations from Italian or Spanish). At the end, 30 bibliographic entries enumerating periodicals and their editors are added. The supervisor of the whole project was, as mentioned above, Elsa Kučera, PhD, from Croatia.

It should be noted that each of the three national parts has its separate introduction in its respective language (*Uvod/Predgovor/Uvod*), and each has been translated into French (*Introduction/Avant-propos/Preface*). The titles

of the books listed in each section have also been translated into French in order to facilitate foreign readers' navigation or even to make it possible at all. The three parts have a similar threefold structure, with one segment presenting original works in alphabetic order, the second enumerating alphabetically works translated by women, and the third chronologically arranging women's and feminist periodicals edited by them. A chronological index of names, where publications can be searched by date, makes the handling of *Bibliography* easier. What is precious and what testifies to a well-thought structure of the whole is the decision to include a subject index at the end of each national part. The index classifies the entries into various fields: poetry, fiction, drama, religion, philosophy and psychology, pedagogy and education, law/sociology/politics, philology and literature, cultural history, ethnography and folklore, natural sciences, medicine and hygiene, music, feminism, household. The index of translations has also been compiled by subject: belles letters, anthologies, science; moreover, each category is accompanied by information about the source languages.

French as a means of approaching the centre from the margin

I would like to draw attention to the significance of French, the language employed by the authors and editors of *Bibliography*, in interwar Yugoslavia. It seems that this choice was not accidental, as French was an international language, the official language of diplomacy until the Second World War, the fact of no small consequence. But there is another essential factor. At the beginning of the 20th century, particularly to Serbs, France mattered in a very special way. Alliances as well as a political and military cooperation established by the Kingdom of Serbia and France a few years before the First World War, later assistance during the war and post-war bilateral treaties, notably of 1927 (Jelavich 2005: 155), all strengthened the political and cultural bonds between both nations. One reminder of the Yugoslavian-French friendship is the Monument of Gratitude to France (*Spomenik zahvalnosti Francuskoj*) by a famous Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović, which stands until this day in the Kalemegdan fortress and park in Belgrade. The monument was unveiled on 11th November 1930, during state celebrations of the twelfth anniversary of the German capitulation which ended the First World War. It was erected on the initiative of the Serbian Society of Friends of France and the Society of Former Pupils of French

Schools, as a token of gratitude towards France for the shelter and educational assistance it offered to refugees from the territories of the Kingdom of Serbia after Serbian defeat in 1915 (many Serbian writers-to-be, who debuted in the interwar period, had ended schools or even graduated from universities in Paris between 1916 and 1920).

The French language promoted not only *Bibliography*, but also other women's achievements. In 1923, less than twelve months after the original Serbian version of 1922, the first doctoral dissertation in philosophy at the University of Belgrade was published in French: Ksenija Atanasijević's *La Doctrine Métaphysique et Géométrique de Bruno Exposée dans Son Ouvrage De Triplici Minimo* (Atanassièvitch 1923). Its author was also an active member of the Federation of Women with University Education, feminist, who published numerous texts in *Ženski pokret* (*Women's Movement*; Vuletić 2005). The thesis not only earned Atanasijević the first doctoral degree granted to a woman in Serbia, and subsequently the first professorship to be held by a woman at the University of Belgrade,⁶ but also, in its French version, brought her academic fame in the United States in the 1960s. The American philosopher Antoinette Mann Paterson, herself researching the legacy of Giordano Bruno, quoted the Serbian philosopher after the French edition, and highly valued her work (Vuletić 2005: 43). The book was even translated into English on Mann Paterson's request, and published in 1972, while Atanasijević was still alive (she died in 1981), as *The Metaphysical and Geometrical Doctrine of Bruno*. Thus, thanks to French, Ksenija Atanasijević's philosophical ideas reached larger readership. This example shows how transcending the periphery of one's own "small" language was possible due to the status of French in the interwar period.

Therefore, the choice of French to promote *Bibliography* should be seen as a deliberate decision of the feminist circles in interwar Yugoslavia.

⁶ She held this position rather briefly, since due to her male colleagues' intrigues (unjustified and ultimately undocumented accusations of plagiarism) she was dismissed from the University of Belgrade in 1936, despite a protest and a memorandum signed by many authorities and intellectuals. For more details, see Ljiljana Vuletić 2005: 93–152.

The significance of *Bibliography*

As shown, in the interwar period, Yugoslavian feminists, members of numerous women's formations, and particularly the intellectuals from the Federation of Women with University Education, sought active involvement with international feminist and emancipation movements. As citizens of a newly formed country situated on the fringes of Europe – the Balkans was, in fact, traditionally perceived as a problematic yet strategically important periphery of the Old Continent (Koch 2009: 75–93) – they were well aware of their double marginalization: both nationally and internationally. First, as women from the regions with the strong patriarchal tradition, additionally burdened by the legacy of colonised territories (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina had been within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire for several centuries, while Vojvodina and most territories of Croatia and Slovenia were part of the Habsburg Monarchy), they were marginalized on account of their gender. Second, as members of so-called “small cultures” or “minor languages,” they could hardly make themselves heard internationally, even in women's organisations, unlike their English, American, German, French and Russian counterparts. In order to counteract both those mechanisms of exclusion or marginalisation, they made diverse attempts at fighting their way from peripheries to the centre. We can see that the remedy for the process of marginalisation inside the patriarchal structures of domestic milieux, while one country of the Southern Slavs (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) was being “glued” and shaped into a multiethnic whole, was the cooperation of Serbian, Croatian and Slovene women, in the spirit of solidarity crossing over the national divisions. The women cooperated institutionally, within the framework of the Federation of Women with University Education, combining national and ethnic concerns with international issues, creating an inter-Slavic collective. At the same time they motivated one another in the joint effort to transcend their national ghettos and to integrate internationally with new women's organisations emerging in the wake of the First World War. They fought for their status by making accessible information about themselves, and via French translation they accomplished a cultural transfer of their achievement. *Bibliography* is a measurable and tangible proof of their ambitions, since its authors succeeded in creating a skilful and conceptually persuasive fusion of three elements: the national, the feminist and the international. Far from abandoning their own national languages (Serbian, Slovene and Croatian),

they created a common Yugoslavian ground for the intellectual activity of women, within the framework of the Federation of Women with University Education. As a result of their joint effort, an important stage in the literary, academic, translatory and editorial activity of women, since its beginnings until the end of 1935, was re-examined. The significant contribution of these women authors to the development of culture and science of their three nations was emphasised. Intuitively conscious of *Slavica non leguntur*, they chose French to break free from the oppressive order and to become recognized in the larger European context. The translation of *Bibliography* into the locally recognised “major” European language marked their attempt to reach beyond the regional boundaries towards the centre of European feminism.

In the end, one may ask whether the authors achieved the goals they had set for themselves. The answers can only be moderately optimistic. Undoubtedly, *Bibliografija knjiga ženskih pisaca u Jugoslaviji* is a key publication to all researchers of Southern Slavic literatures who have dealt with gender studies or the activity of women both in the interwar period (Aleksijević 1994/1995: 164–181) and recently in Serbia (Dojčinović-Nešić 2006; Garonja-Radovanac 2010), also abroad (Hawkesworth 2000, Koch 2007). The significance of *Bibliography* was emphasized in 2007, in the international interdisciplinary project concluded with the publication of *Women & Gender in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Eurasia. A Comprehensive Bibliography. Volume I. Southeastern and East Central Europe*, published on the initiative of the Association for Women in Slavic Studies – AWSS (Livezeanu, Pachuta Farris 2007). Copies of *Bibliografija* can be found in such prestigious libraries as the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris or the British Library in London. Certainly the reception of this compendium needs to be thoroughly investigated; however, my preliminary findings suggest that the book is not used, even if it is available in various libraries. I am afraid that only few people outside the narrow circle of scholars in Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian literatures (chiefly those interested in gender studies and feminist theory) are familiar with this title, still available only in its 1936 edition. One reason may be that seventy years after its publication, the medium of international contacts is different. It is not French anymore, at least not on such a scale as it was before the Second World War. It is also possible that the compendium has suffered the fate of many other bibliographies, consulted by scholars yet not mentioned. Not without

a reason does bibliographical work tend to be described as ever unfinished and unrewarding.

We have to appreciate, however, the fact that *Bibliography* integrated female intellectuals from Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It was their first common work that saw its publication. Moreover, it can be considered an all-Yugoslavian feminist project that made visible intellectual endeavours of women of that time. It overshadowed an earlier publication presenting one nation and one language: an almanac called *Srkinja* (Serbian Woman) prepared in 1913 by Serbian women under the supervision of Jelica Belović-Bernadžikovska. The almanac's authors did not aspire to international presentation; the political and social circumstances would not allow that anyway (the years 1912 and 1913 saw two Balkan wars). *Bibliography*, with its French version, acted as a foundational text for Yugoslavian feminism. The significance of this work could be noticed even more clearly because the 1990 feminist conference in Belgrade failed to propose any firm all-Yugoslavian resolution as part of the anti-war campaign (Slapšak 2005: 140–141).

All things considered, the authors of *Bibliography* seem to have carried out their plan. They managed to “save from oblivion, make visible” the oeuvre of their sister-compatriots and “leave a trace” (Dojčinović-Nešić 2006: 38–39) not only in their native countries, but also – through the French version – internationally. It certainly helped to break the rule of *Slavica non leguntur*, to make one's voice heard and to popularise the work of women from one's own region.

trans. Mikołaj Denderski

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