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## Invisible Stitch: Ethnography and Women's Activism at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

This paper presents the activist dimension of ethnographic work within Serbian communities in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the context of women's emancipation. Central figures are Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska, folk embroidery and ornamentation experts, curators, essayists, and prominent figures in women's associations. The paper describes their activities: writing essays, organizing and curating local and international exhibitions, presenting lectures, and translation work. Special research attention is paid to the international perspective of their endeavors, which previous research has overlooked in favor of efforts pertaining to the national framework and gender policies. The international networking achieved through ethnographic activism had a transformative impact on the emancipatory discourse in Serbian culture at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ethnographic work reflects the transformation of feminist discourse from the struggle for women's inclusion in paradigmatic national narratives and economic and professional emancipation, to the pursuit of women's political rights. The cultural mediation by ethnographers provides insight into the diverse strategies employed by activists/feminists for international networking in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Key words:* ethnography, feminisms, cultural mediation, internationalism

## Скривени шав: етнографија и женски активизам почетком 20. века

У раду се представља активистичка димензија етнографије у српској заједници у Аустроугарској монархији у контексту еманципације жена. Централне фигуре етнографског активизма су Савка Суботић и Јелица Беловић Бернаджиковска, стручњакиње у области веза и орнаментике, кустоскиње, есејисткиње, уреднице и мобилизаторке женских група и организација. У раду се предочавају линије њиховог деловања: публицистички и есејистички рад, организовање и кустосирање локалних и међународних изложби, предавања, преводилаштво и учешће у раду женских удружења. Нарочита истраживачка пажња посвећена је интернационалној перспективи њиховог деловања која је у досадашњим истраживањима била маргинализована у корист деловања у националном оквиру и његовим родним политикама. Интернационално умрежавање, остварено кроз етнографски активизам у Монархији, имало је формативну улогу у трансформацији еманципаторских акција и дискурса почетком 20. века у српској култури. Етнографски рад рефлектује трансформацију феминистичког дискурса од борбе за уписивање жена у парадигматичне националне наративе преко борбе за економску и професионалну еманципацију до борбе за политичка права жена. Културно посредништво етнографкиња пружа увид у различите стратегије интернационалног умрежавања активисткиња/феминисткиња почетком 20. века.

*Кључне речи:* етнографија, феминизам, културно посредништво, интернационализам

### ETHNOGRAPHIC ACTIVISM AS A MEANS OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

In the final decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries, ethnography was an exceptionally dynamic and intricate social and cultural networking domain, comprising various micro-groups led by women within Serbian communities in Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Ethnographic activism traversed the political landscape of the struggle for national representation, liberation, and unification. It was also a field within which women conceived their strategies of action and acquired the agency that surpassed the expectations of nationalist gender policies. Examining ethnographic activism on a diachronic plane, from the late 19th century to the onset of the First World War, reveals more clearly the transformative processes

that engulfed emancipatory/feminist ideas and practices. The national and international contexts of action were intertwined and mutually conditioned. Previous studies on individual or collective initiatives and achievements in ethnography during that period prioritized the framework of national borders and policies (Cvetković 2006; Radisavljević 2017; Stojaković 2018; Reynolds-Cordileone 2019; Stolić 2023). Therefore, systematic research into the international dimensions of ethnographic activism, and the experience and ideas that arose from it, remains to be done. This is particularly significant in relation to feminist activism, allowing us to reflect on the homogenizing narrative of “national feminism” from that period.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ethnography was utilized in Europe to construct or reinforce national and cultural patterns. In Austria-Hungary, ethnography was also used as a means of political struggle among minority communities. Women played a prominent role in this process, whether independently or through women's organizations. The public recognized them as experts, and working in this field became the new professional role for women. Ethnography is a domain where women engage as active participants in the generation of cultural content and meaning, as well as knowledge production, thereby influencing public discourse and raising issues of importance for the (professional, national) community, while being elevated from anonymity and the position of passive consumer. Female ethnography experts engaged in a wide range of activities, including publicity, essay writing, organizing and curating local and international exhibitions, lecture delivery, translation, editorial and publishing work, and participation in global women's associations. Hence, female ethnographers became emancipatory figures who attained representational roles and the capacity to shape, conduct, and promote female authorship, interests, and needs.

In the context of the development of feminist discourse within Serbian culture at the beginning of the 20th century, the figure of female ethnographer overlapped with another emancipatory figure – that of the female traveler. This figure of activism within Serbian culture, characterized by a radical approach to patriarchal gender politics due to international mobility, remains insufficiently researched and conceptualized. A fundamental part of emancipatory/feminist activity was the transition of women from the private to the public sphere, signifying the formation of a politics of place that transcended national ideas of gender roles. In this respect, the figure of the traveler was crucial because it embodied the various innovative aspects of women's engagement in a patriarchal society: attainment of higher education, professional mobility, social

activism and networking, new forms of leisure, and personal satisfaction. Travel, however, was not only an act of personal emancipation of women but also an essential feminist strategy, both discursive and operational.

Mobility (geographic, cultural, linguistic) was a critical requirement and strategy for promoting international action, providing a new perspective for shaping women's position in society. Working in ethnography represented a form of vertical and horizontal connection for women. On the one hand, the ethnographic discourse served as a unifying factor on a national/South Slavic basis, connecting women's micro-communities across several political centers (Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade). On the other hand, the emancipatory/feminist potential of ethnographic practice also served to establish connections on a pan-Slovenian and international level with fellow female activists in Prague, Budapest, and Vienna. Women's ethnographic activism opens up various modes of "the international," as Ann Taylor Allen defined the term. It indicates "relationships outside formal governmental and organizational structures and evolve from the many ways (...) in which people and ideas cross national boundaries" (Allen 2017, 5), such as intellectual exchange, publications, lectures, correspondence, and conferences. This paper examines these practices primarily from the lens of the Serbian community in Austria-Hungary, using sources in the Serbian language (alongside a Czech women's magazine), while suggesting potential future research that would include multilingual archives and a polycentric national and cultural-social standpoint.

## LEADERS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC ACTIVISM: SAVKA SUBOTIĆ AND JELICA BELOVIĆ BERNADŽIKOVSKA

The key figures of ethnographic activism in Serbian communities at the beginning of the 20th century were Savka Subotić<sup>1</sup> and Jelica Belović

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<sup>1</sup> Savka Subotić was born in 1834 in Novi Sad into a wealthy and respectable family. Her brother, Mihailo Polit Desančić, was a prominent Serbian politician in Hungary. Her first teacher was Svetozar Miletić, Hungary's most influential Serbian politician during the 19th century. After receiving homeschooling, she was educated in Timisoara and Vienna. After 1848, she lived in Vienna. She married Jovan Subotić, a lawyer and politician in the early 1850s. They returned to Novi Sad, but because of her husband's job, she often changed her place of residence (Osijek, Zagreb, Vukovar, Beč, Temišvar, Novi Sad, Zemun). She died in 1918. Savka Subotić initiated the establishment of Serbian higher education schools for girls in Hungary, as well as the founding of women's cooperatives to improve women's societal status and make education accessible beyond male privilege. She was the (honorary) president of all women's organizations in Serbia. The European press reported on her activities.

Bernadžikovska<sup>2</sup>. The ethnographic discourse of these two major figures established several emancipatory thresholds. Ethnologist Marina Cvetković elucidates the political dimension of Savka Subotić's ethnographic works, which significantly corresponds with Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska's engagement:

The impetus for her activities in theory and practice was political. It arose as a form of national struggle and resistance to hegemonic Hungarian and Germanophile politics. She tried to point out the authenticity and age of Serbian folk art, namely textile crafts and ornamentation, which in itself proves the Serbian national identity. Through public engagement, she tried to influence and animate different layers of Serbian women with the aim of all of them, in an adequate manner, participating in the fight for national interests. (Cvetković 2006, 287)

Work in ethnography intersected with female educational, professional, and economic emancipatory ideas.<sup>3</sup> Subotić and Belović Bernadžikovska published texts and books about Slavic folk handicrafts, embroidery, and textile ornamentation. The foundational context of their efforts was the Arts and Crafts movement, the cottage industry movements in Hungary, the "inventing traditions" discourse, the establishment of ethnographic museums and collections throughout Europe, and the rise of liberal capitalism (Cvetković 2006, 278; Radisavljević 2017). Contrary to the Austro-Hungarian strategy of using ethnographic material to

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<sup>2</sup> Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska, pedagogue, writer, ethnographer, and translator, was born in 1870 in Osijek. She finished teacher training in Zagreb and studied at the Higher Pedagogical School in Vienna and Paris. She worked as a teacher in Zagreb, Ruma, Osijek, Mostar, Sarajevo, and Novi Sad. She was the principal of the High School for Girls in Banja Luka. She spoke nine languages and published professional and journalistic texts in German and French.

<sup>3</sup> To my knowledge, Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska is the first author to elaborate on the concept of *modern woman* in the Serbian language in an emancipatory key. In 1899, she edited the "women's issue" of the Mostar literary magazine *Zora*. The issue opens with the programmatic text "Moderna žena" [Modern Woman] (Belović Bernadžikovska 1899, 393–395). For the author, the "modern woman" paradigm is Ibsen's heroine. Belović Bernadžikovska points out that "a modern woman is an independent individual, who does not need the encouragement of others; thus, modern women never succumb to feminine weakness. They courageously engage in the struggle of life..." She insists that "a modern woman wants to live, work, do business" and that "her feet are unafraid to step on volcanic terrain." Although Belović Bernadžikovska succumbed to conservative discourse, the progressive aspect of the text is vital.

demonstrate imperial power, Subotić and Belović Bernadžikovska based their ethnographic activity on anti-imperialism due to their minority position within Austro-Hungary. At the same time, embroidery served as a medium of global creative communication, a point of contact and interaction, as “through its most essential and intricate components, ornamentation unites people of all nations and all times” (Belović Bernadžikovska 1907, 22).

The ethnographic work by Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska established several inventive trajectories. Subotić was a pioneer in the study of Serbian folk textile arts; her writings represent the first attempt at a scientific interpretation of folk art (Radisavljević 2017, 50). She emphasized the necessity of modernizing folk handicrafts in order to adapt them to market demands and engaged in the international branding of Serbian products<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, she was the first Serbian applied artist (Radisavljević 2017, 143). Savka Subotić participated as a curator in international exhibitions in Budapest (1885) and Paris (1889) for the Serbian and Croatian community in Austro-Hungary. Simultaneously, Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska theoretically elaborated Savka Subotić's views on South Slavic ornamentation (Radisavljević 2017, 86); her classification of embroidery is still used today (Radisavljević 2017, 97). Belović Bernadžikovska also created and managed the textile ethnographic collection of the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, published two catalogs, and participated in establishing the Split Ethnographic Museum, making museology an essential aspect of her work.

Folk ornamentation became a means of national (self)representation, confirming a nation's authenticity and enduring continuity. Subotić and Belović Bernadžikovska fiercely criticized the appropriation of Slavic embroideries in the Vienna museums and the European textile ornamentation market. They participated in state-funded exhibitions and managed national pavilions, as well as contributed to the creation of public ethnographic collections. Both authors emphasized patriotic sentiments and goals in their texts. At the beginning of the 20th century, the fulfillment of patriotic duties was a commonplace in feminist discourse, particularly within state and national policies of “patriotic mobilization of women”

<sup>4</sup> Savka Subotić developed this idea in numerous texts. In 1904, she published a synthesis of her ethnographic research, initiatives, and projects, *O našim narodnim tkaninama i rukotvorinama* [On Our Folk Fabrics and Handicrafts].

or “national feminism.”<sup>5</sup> As Ana Stolić notes while analyzing women’s emancipatory aspirations within the national-patriotic discourse of the 19th and early 20th centuries, research should not overlook the potential this discourse carried for cultivating feminist ideas and strategies. In other words, there is reason enough to examine whether women used patriotism to formulate specific strategies aimed at securing benefits related to emancipation as they saw it (Stolić 2015, 145). While one of the tenants of this narrative was the crucial role of women in the cultural reproduction of the nation, specifically as guardians of national traditions, certain elements point to strategies that transcended this discursive platform.

Although some of the projects by Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska were part of the (in)formal cultural diplomacy abroad and the national campaign, in the ethnographic discourse, the figure of woman was innovative and emancipatory compared to the dominant gender discourse of Serbian culture at that time. Women’s ethnographic initiatives sought to show that women’s folklore art constitutes an integral part of national heritage, with embroidery and folk ornamentation serving as representative texts of culture. By showing the modern flavor of embroideries and ornamentation, these two authors positioned women’s works as a foundation of contemporary Serbian culture. Through their respective efforts, Subotić and Belović Bernadžikovska intervened in the community’s symbolic order and representation system. They sought to incorporate embroidery narratives into mainstream Serbian culture.

Of particular significance to Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska, and the leitmotif of their principal works, was not only the originality of Slavic embroidery but also that of the embroiderer and her creative process. The recognition of women’s embroidery and weaving practices was emancipatory, enabling economic emancipation and independence for women (particularly rural women) and creating opportunities for public action. Subotić’s and Belović Bernadžikovska’s conceptualization of embroidery and motivation for its (re)affirmation aligns with the suffragette movement, which often highlighted the connection between embroidery and femininity in its struggle. Through

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of *patriotic mobilization of women* was developed by the historian Ana Stolić (Stolić 2015) in relation to Serbian women’s activism at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, drawing from the “national version” of feminism offered by Karen Offen. Society expects women to support national political projects and so immediately become a part of political representation, albeit in a separate and informal capacity. It is a form of participation in the political, public, and civil domain designated for women to affirm their key role in biological and cultural *reproduction*.



the analysis of numerous embroidered flags and banners, British art historian Rozsika Parker determined that the art of embroidery served the movement to change the idea of women and femininity. Far from wanting to free embroidery from connotations of femininity, Parker points out that the suffragettes aimed for embroidery to evoke femininity – portrayed as a source of strength rather than a sign of women's weakness (Parker 2010, 197).

## INNOVATIVE TEXTUAL FORMAT: WOMEN'S SELF-ARCHIVING

The bibliographies of Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska are extensive and include more than a hundred items. In ethnography, they published scholarly papers, popular science writings, essays, and speeches/lectures. Reflections on folk art, particularly embroidery and ornamentation, are present in writings focused on other topics. Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska wrote numerous pedagogical studies and literary texts, while Savka Subotić wrote travelogues and aphorisms. Such a diverse genre repertoire was unusual for female writers in Serbia in the late 19th century. Studies, lectures, and aphorisms – discursive formats and genres of knowledge production – were viewed as the exclusive domain of main authorship and authority. Travelogues, for instance, testify to an experience not traditionally reserved for women. Through ethnographic studies and essays, Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska not only initiated and affirmed female authorship in these genres but also engaged with this genealogical repertoire with conscious resistance to its masculinist discourse, thereby establishing a new gynocentric paradigm of genre.

In the ethnographic discourse of Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska, who established critical strategies for presenting embroidery and folk ornamentation practices, one may recognize methodologies conceptualized in the 1980s and 1990s within (the newly constituted discipline of) feminist ethnography. Approaching women's realities, rendering their lives visible and voices audible, and understanding their viewpoints are the primary objectives of feminist ethnography (Škrbić Alimpijević, Potkonjak & Rubić 2016, 118). According to Savka Subotić, the fundamental prerequisite for the development of embroidery practice, its study, and presentation, is the conversation between women: "... a woman must talk to a woman and confide in her about the most delicate things." (Subotić 2018, 28)

Subotić and Belović Bernadžikovska anticipated feminist ethnography with methods that are specific to this approach and type of research – focus on the biographical and personal experience, the emphasis on



intimacy, empathy, and care between researcher and interlocutor, and their representational emancipation (Škrbić Alimpijević, Potkonjak & Rubić 2016, 118, 123). Their ethnographic discourse – which is also autobiographical, shaped by literary conventions, based on the “ethics of grounded knowledge” and “engaged experience” (Škrbić Alimpijević, Potkonjak & Rubić 2016, 124) – is close to one of the basic strategies of feminist ethnography. The authors’ auto/biographical discourse, exposing the suppressed experiences of women’s everyday life, rendering them public, and thus not only visible in the sociohistorical sense but also relevant and exemplary for the public matter, (re)positions embroidery in different segments of contemporary social and artistic practices.

The genre innovations of Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska are also significant in the context of their international activism. Both authors documented their professional motivations, challenges, and strategies in their ethnographic writings. From their statements, we can reconstruct the micro-institutions of their professional and feminist engagement: personal relationships, professional and amicable ways of establishing contacts (correspondence, residencies in European cities, professional employment), cooperation in Austro-Hungarian periodicals in various languages, the reception of their work in the press, inter/national collaborative projects, and the method through which they acquired financial and social resources for their projects (connections with political elites and institutions or independent fundraising by women’s associations). The autobiographical discourse of Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska reflects the necessity of documenting and (self-) archiving women’s emancipatory practices, establishing female authority, inscribing this practice into the public space, affirming it, and leading the feminist scene towards international events, ideas, and sites of action.

## STAGING EMANCIPATION: CURATING ETHNOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS

In 1884, the Charitable Cooperative “Serbian Woman” from Novi Sad<sup>6</sup> organized the first ethnographic exhibition in Serbian communities in Austria-Hungary, the show *Exhibition of Folk and Artificial Handicrafts of Serbian Women*. Newspaper and magazine reports were highly laudatory

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<sup>6</sup> The Unions of Charitable Cooperatives “Serbian Woman,” founded throughout Austria-Hungary, aligned with the activist model of women’s civil societies from that period, as they were engaged in humanitarian, educational, and social activities.

of the event. The public welcomed it in the context of the representation of national creative identity. Savka Subotić participated in organizing and curating the exhibition. She also gave a speech at the party organized on the occasion of its opening. The speech, published in *Zastava* on July 25, 1884, highlighted the patriotic duties of the female intelligentsia and the necessity for inter-class cooperation, as well as the significance of modernizing women's handicrafts to meet global market demands, an idea she further developed and advocated in subsequent years. Alongside ideological and patriotic objectives, Savka Subotić focused on pragmatic goals with her first curatorship. She believed that, rather than highlighting the illustrative nature or ethnographic value of the exhibits, which pertain to the museum domain, the show should prioritize their adaptation for the international market. From the observed necessity to transform the production and marketing of folk art, she derived the idea of women's economic emancipation. This exhibition provided Savka Subotić with additional curatorial assignments. She participated in the National Exhibition in Budapest (where she was awarded the grand medal of the exhibition jury) and the World Exhibition in Paris (for which she received the silver medal for the women's set, featuring a dress, hat, and parasol). Additionally, she designed "Serbian salons" for Viennese families.

The feminist profile of Savka Subotić is also marked by her expertise in ethnography, interior design, applied arts, professional mobility, and her public and international involvement. At the end of the 19th century, she connected with female activists in Belgrade, emerging as one of the key cohesive figures of national women's organizations. She was the first president of the Serbian National Women's Union.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, her writings and activities were also directed toward the international scene. In the first years of the 20th century, she published translations in the Serbian magazine *Ženski svet* concerning the organization of women in England and stories about women in Turkey and Tunisia. Her involvement in translation activism within women's periodicals served as a vital form of cultural mediation, aiding in the circulation of diverse

<sup>7</sup> The Serbian National Women's Union was founded in 1906 as a national women's organization initially consisting of the Belgrade Women's Society, the Circle of Serbian Sisters, the Princess Ljubica Society, the Serbian-Jewish Society, and the Mother's Association. Until 1909, there was no clear concept of work, and it was only with the Rules of 1911 that the objectives of its initiative were determined: national work, improving the position of women in society and the state, and attaining the right to vote for women. See Stolić 2023.

cultural narratives.<sup>8</sup> She traveled and established cooperation with European activists, and articles about her were featured in the European and American press.<sup>9</sup>

The exhibition *Serbian Women*, held in Prague in May 1910, was the culmination of the ethnographic project initiated by Savka Subotić. The initiative was one of the most extensive efforts of Serbian women's activist groups before the First World War, integrating several discursive formats that defined the emancipatory agenda. The exhibition was initiated by Zorka Hovorka.<sup>10</sup> The Union of Charitable Cooperatives "Serbian Woman," the Belgrade Women's Society, and the Ethnographic Museum from Belgrade were in charge of logistics. Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska curated the exhibition. The event attracted much attention from the Czech public. The organizers presented it as the first in a series of Slavic exhibitions in Prague aimed at strengthening Slavic solidarity. Members of women's societies, professional associations, the business sector, student organizations, and political leaders all participated in the opening ceremony. The politically tense climate of that year, heightened in the Czech national movement due to government policies in Vienna and Serbia's animosity towards Austria-Hungary following the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, only intensified the exhibition's political significance (Stolić 2023, 108). In the report from the exhibition submitted to the Belgrade Women's Society, Katarina Holecova emphasized the importance of the exhibition in the context of the (informal) cultural diplomacy between Slavic nations, strengthening ties and providing mutual support. She also highlighted the exhibition's potential to alter the negative image of Serbia in the "cultural West" (Holecova 1910, 7–10). Sima Trojanović, director of the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade and associate at the exhibition, noted its significance in the representation of works from all South Slavic regions, and he saw the exhibition as complementary to the national political project (Trojanović 1910, 3).

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<sup>8</sup> In the early 20th century, translations in Serbian women's magazines were a primary strategy for internationalizing feminist ideas, mediation, and advocacy. This aligns with Lucy Delap's assertion that being "a feminist [at the beginning of the 20th century] was very centrally a reading experience" (Delap 2007, 4).

<sup>9</sup> Gordana Stojaković compiled a list of articles about Savka Subotić in the English, German, French, Dutch, and Russian press (Stojaković 2018, 112–125).

<sup>10</sup> Zorka Hovorka (1859–1939) was born in Novi Sad. She finished teacher training in Hungarian in Subotica. She was one of the leaders of the Central Administration of the Czechoslovak Women's Union; she edited the magazine *Ženský Svět* and *Serbian Flowers - A monthly magazine for entertainment and education*; together with her husband, she edited the edition *Serbian Library* in the Czech language.

However, reports from the exhibition in Serbian and Czech press reveal women's creativity beyond their "domestic" roles and promote the discourse of Slavic sisterhood in a multidirectional manner. Sisterhood is emphasized in the extensive text published in *Ženský svět: list paní a dívek českých*. The author (probably Pavla Maternová) described women's creativity as an inseparable part of national history and tradition, a representative artifact of national culture, noting that the Serbian woman proves herself as a "true daughter of her nation" (P. M. 1910, 135). The author perceived women's creativity as a strategy of national resistance employed over the past centuries against various conquerors, highlighting the affinity between Serbian and Czech folk women's art. Folk art connects Serbian and Czech communities both morally and economically. Furthermore, the article aims to challenge Western European negative stereotypes of South Slavic nations by analyzing the design and production of textile ornamentation. Nonetheless, the representation of the exhibited works extends beyond their importance for the cultural reproduction of the nation and the position and role of women as guardians of folk traditions. For, "a Serbian woman is the creator of domestic industry; her hands produced works of exceptional artistic value and rare creative talent" (P.M. 1910, 136). Embroidery art is *herstory*, with women independently conceiving and designing the ornaments, rather than creating them as a result of impulse or fantasy. They stem from a woman's mental state; they are her feelings, her dreams, her speech, and her poetry (P.M. 1910, 136).

Patriotic and feminist discourses underlie the reports on the exhibition published in the Serbian press. The Slavic sisterhood narrative is also prevalent. The authors note how much more advanced the Czech feminist scene was compared to the Serbian scene, and the necessity of establishing connections with them. In honor of the exhibition, Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska published the article "Czech Woman" in a German newspaper, which was subsequently translated in the magazine *Ženski svet*. With highly emotional rhetorical intensity and pathos, she presents Czech women as leaders of emancipation in the Slavic world. Belović Bernadžikovska accentuated their patriotism, dedication to work, organizational and managerial skills, and intensive cooperation with men (Belović Bernadžikovska 1910, 152–154). Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska was a well-known figure in the Czech community. A year before the exhibition *Serbian Women*, Vlasta Havelková, founder of Czech ethnography in Moravia, published a highly favorable article about her in *Ženský svět*. Havelková detailed all aspects of her work, particularly in ethnography (Havelková 1910, 216–217). The author notes the two did not meet

during Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska's visit to Prague. However, Belović Bernadžikovska expressed a desire to meet and connect professionally, so they became well acquainted through correspondence.<sup>11</sup> An article from 1913 reveals that Vlasta Havelková, activists and writers Eliška Purkyňová and Pavla Maternová, along with ethnographer and curator of the Moravské Zemské Muzeum in Brno Madlena Wanklová, provided vital support to Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska in organizing the exhibition *Serbian Women* (Varađanin 1913, 35).

Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska's contacts with *Czech sisters*, ethnographers, collectors, curators, and museologists involved in feminist associations suggest that this domain was a cohesive factor among activists on the international scene. In the Serbian-Czech context, female ethnographers engaged in collaboration, mutually affirming and promoting one another. This affirmation was also pitched in a patriotic key, deemed as a valuable contribution to and an effort toward national emancipation. However, they also distinguished themselves as women of exemplary professional competence and ethics who helped to organize and mobilize women. Therefore, the sisterhood metaphor acquired new connotations in the pan-Slavic context, pointing to the transformative tendencies that became a feature of feminist discourse and practice. The metaphor of sisterhood, one of the key tropes of women's patriotic mobilization during the constitution of the (proto)feminist scene in Serbian communities, also facilitated connections beyond the national framework. As articulated by female writers of the time, the cultural mediation that resulted from the *Serbian Woman* exhibition established a hybrid Czech-Serbian sisterhood.

The discourse of Slavic affiliation, understanding, and togetherness places it within the framework of national ideological agendas, i.e., the pursuit of national political goals. It is from this perspective that the female authors further established sisterly affiliation, recognizing a specifically female experience while drawing from the ethnocentric discourse of femininity. The Serbian press notably highlighted the importance of the sisterly exchange of experience in the fight for women's emancipation, advocating for a model of social-economic activism that decisively transcends the domestic domain. Hence, the horizontal connection between women was not solely subject to the pressures of national (self) determination; the affirmation of Serbian woman at the exhibition is

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<sup>11</sup> Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska's correspondence and diaries are kept in the Museum of Vojvodina in Novi Sad and are inaccessible to researchers.

simultaneously an affirmation of female intellect and creativity, while highlighting the contributions of individual women to the organization and implementation of the exhibitions affirms women's professional roles that extend beyond their roles in national projects (and include competencies in fundraising, public advocacy, logistics of international events, transnational mobility). The establishment of a pan-Slavic sisterhood was politically motivated. However, women's mobility led to the gradual inclusion of the discourse of social sisterhood based on international networking in their feminist discourse and practices. Apart from the personal connections of Jelica Belović Bernadžikowska, Savka Subotić's engagement exemplifies these tendencies.<sup>12</sup>

## TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL SISTERHOOD

The lectures held in Vienna and Budapest after 1910 demonstrate Savka Subotić's departure from ethnocentrically understood sisterhood. She gave two lectures at the Scientific Societies in Vienna: "Thoughts on National, Social and Women's Issues" (Subotić 1911a) and "Woman in East and West" (Subotić 1911b). At the invitation of Hungarian feminist Rózsa Schwimmer, she delivered one of these lectures, "Woman in East and West," in Budapest. Whether Savka Subotić and Rózsa Schwimmer had been in contact before the lecture is unknown. Schwimmer may have learned about the work of Savka Subotić and the particular lecture from the press. Schwimmer was familiar with her work and sympathized with the idea of women's economic and labor emancipation, a formative element of Savka Subotić's ethnographic efforts. Novi Sad magazine *Ženski svet* published a letter of gratitude from Rózsa Schwimmer and Vilma Glücklich to Savka Subotić for her lecture. Among other things, the message from Budapest to Savka Subotić stated: "We collectively recognize the profound gratitude we owe

<sup>12</sup> *Almanach Srpskinja* [Serbian Women] (edited by Jelica Belović Bernadžikowska, 1913), dedicated to Savka Subotić, can be deemed a re-staging of the exhibition *Serbian Women*. The almanac contains clichés of folk embroidery and ornamentation exhibited in Prague. In this context, the almanac functions as a museum exhibit, as in the early 20th century, the idea of a museum of women's handicrafts, advocated by Savka Subotić and members of the Belgrade Women's Society, never materialized. The aim of the *Srpskinja* publication was, as highlighted in the subtitle, to present a Serbian woman's "life and work, her cultural development, and her folk art until today." The almanac sought to summarize women's achievements, recognizing their efforts as an essential contribution to the "production of feminist knowledge and the formation of an interpretive community of women" (Milinković 2019, 326). Building mnemonic communities was noted as key to the almanac direction toward women's self-legitimization. Ethnographic activism was, thus, essential to memory activism within the feminist movement in Serbian communities in Austria-Hungary and Belgrade.

you for your precious life's work, deserving of utmost respect, through which you aspired and succeeded in elevating the status of Serbian women among the people." The letter is followed by a translation of Rózsa Schwimmer's article "Savka Subotić, leader of the women's movement in Serbia," published in the *Neues Pester Journal*. Schwimmer described the family circumstances of "that wonderful woman" and the vitality of her spirit despite her seventy-eight years of age, particularly complimenting to her oratorical talents. The author pays particular attention to the ethnographic activism of Savka Subotić, which is the basis of her social work. Schwimmer ends the article apologetically: "Mrs. Subotić worked for the upliftment of women throughout her entire life. Her writings are among the gems of folk literature in Serbia (...) Whether she traverses the ranks of the people or walks among the kings, all bow their heads before the greatness of this magnificent personality." (Anonym 1912a, 8)

Activists in Novi Sad took interest in the activities of Hungarian feminists, as evidenced by articles in the magazine *Žena*. The magazine published frequent reports on the initiatives and actions of Hungarian feminists. The international perspective was essential in the periodical culture of South Slavic women during this time, serving as a significant indicator of emancipatory tendencies. Women's magazines covered events related to European women's movement and the most recent news from the "world of women." As Ana Kolarić observes, the editor and contributors used the columns "News from the World of Women" and "Miscellaneous Notes" to express progressive and subversive views (particularly about women's political rights or sexual politics), more so than in their signed pieces (Kolarić 2020, 6).

The article "On Women's Suffrage" describes Rózsa Schwimmer's visit to Novi Sad, providing an imposing portrait. It details how the Hungarian Independent Party, Radical Party, and Social Democratic Party met in Novi Sad to discuss electoral law. Schwimmer accompanied Julius Just to all of the gatherings and often took part despite the objections of other speakers who attempted to remove her from the floor or the audience that mocked her. The author portrays her as a strong and steadfast woman. Her agitation included the distribution of leaflets, and there is a translation of one of the leaflets in the article. The translation is strategically included, as a rhetorical simulation of Rózsa Schwimmer's speech. The article mentions that Schwimmer got the opportunity to speak at a gathering in Novi Sad and that her speech was met with approval. It establishes a link between her views regarding women's work with those of another speaker, Jaša Tomić, husband of Milica Tomić, the editor of the magazine *Žena*. The



anonymous author of the article (likely Milica Tomić) expressed particular fondness of Rózsa Schwimmer's idea of women's general strike in the home as a form of protest against the dual duty of women, who are burdened with both professional and household chores. The article ends with a conversation at a train station and an evaluation of Rózsa Schwimmer's speech, showing a lack of consensus among politicians regarding the struggle for women's political rights. The article's author ends with a note that s/he does not want to delve deeper into suffragette issues and, in a magazine that predominantly promoted traditional female duties, notes that

However, I am reminded of the last bloody demonstrations in Budapest. Those demonstrations were in favor of the universal vote for men. There were dead and wounded and still are. Many of the accused are women. One of the dead was a Serbian woman, and two were wounded. Moreover, many of them were accused only because they stood in front of police and military bayonets. (Anonym 1912b, 352)

The Serbian women's press covered the Seventh Conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in Budapest with particular attention. Magazine *Žena* published Rózsa Schwimmer's invitation letter to Milica Tomić and the latter's interesting response to that invitation addressed to her readers.<sup>13</sup> Considering it is an exceptional gesture of Serbian-Hungarian feminist alliance and solidarity, a sisterhood beyond nationality, I quote this dialogue in its entirety:

As the day of our congress approaches, we are highly motivated to gather all those women interested in the women's movement into our circle. We particularly care about welcoming women of other nationalities as participants in our congress. For we, organized by internationality, are looking for a friendly community with various nationalities around the country working for common interests. We would be very grateful if you were to engage as many members from Novi Sad as possible in our congress. We put much effort into welcoming as many Serbian

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<sup>13</sup> Stojaković pointed out that "Milica Tomić's collaboration with Savka Subotić and Rosika Rosa Schwimmer is significant for the history of feminism in Vojvodina and Serbia," adding that "Rosika Schwimmer and Milica Tomić must have been working together on the plan for the struggle for women's voting right" (Stojaković 2018, 18, 32). However, Stojaković did not cite examples of their cooperation (apart from the articles in the magazine *Žena*).

women as possible as participants. We assure our Serbian sisters that we will welcome them wholeheartedly and, with great consideration, allow them to join our congress in as large a number as possible. In the hope that we will see you here, dear lady.

This is commendable attention and a sincere call from our Hungarian sisters, and we ought to respond as sisters and attend that congress in as large numbers as possible because they support women's right to vote; together, we should raise our voice in the fight for this right, which, if attained, will yield significant fruits in all fields: social and cultural. (Anonym 1913: 243)

Because of the Balkan wars, the Serbian National Women's Union delegation did not participate in the Seventh Conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. However, Savka Subotić spoke on behalf of Serbian women. Her speech expressed general views on the economic and social situation in the modern world, criticism of parliamentary democracies that exclude women's participation, and ideas of pacifism. She concluded with greetings addressed to Carrie Chapman Catt and leading Hungarian feminists Countess Teleki, Rózsa Schwimmer, and Vilma Glücklich. Savka Subotić included the speech given at the congress in Budapest in the brochure *Ideali Srпкиnje* [Serbian Women's Ideals] (1913). Although one may have expected that in 1913, the ideals of Serbian women would be infused with national and patriotic sentiments, the speech denationalized them and placed women's emancipation before national emancipation.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The transnational networking, accomplished within the framework of ethnographic activism in Serbian communities in the Austro-Hungary Monarchy, had a transformative impact on the emancipatory discourse at the beginning of the 20th century, ranging from local ethnographic exhibitions within the national liberation campaign to the performance of Serbian activists at the Seventh Conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. In other words, the ethnographic work reflected the transformation of the feminist discourse from the struggle to present women as bearers of national cultural reproduction and economic and labor emancipation, to the pursuit of women's political rights. Finally, the ethnographic activism of Savka Subotić and Jelica Belović Bernadžikovska represents a vital resource for documenting inter/national feminism

in Austria-Hungary (and its connection to Serbia as a nation state). It allows us to provide more refined interpretations and insights into the various aspects of women's agency. Moreover, it allows us to recognize the connections and alliances that went unacknowledged, as well as to further explore the cultural mediation of the feminist narrative in its two-way and multi-directional aspects.

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