



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

[Review of: Z. Lóránd (2018) The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia]

Miškovska Kajevska, A.

DOI

[10.3167/asp.2019.130118](https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2019.130118)

Publication date

2019

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Aspasia

License

CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Miškovska Kajevska, A. (2019). [Review of: Z. Lóránd (2018) The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia]. *Aspasia*, 13, 212-213.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2019.130118>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)



Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 270 pp., €88.39 (hard-back), €71.39 (e-book), ISBN 978-3-319-78222-5.

Book review by **Ana Miškovska Kajevska**
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands



Reading about the intellectual history of Yugoslav feminism in the 1970s and 1980s can be an emotional endeavor; it makes us long for a time when the idea of a war in Yugoslavia was inconceivable. One of the great strengths of this book is the author's ability to write about prewar Yugoslavia without extensively referring to the country's violent demise and its aftermath. This approach helps the reader to go back to the last two decades of Yugoslavia's existence and (re)discover parts of its amazing non-war-related legacy. This legacy can easily be overlooked: the atrocities, human tragedy, and interethnic hatred of the 1990s form a lens that is not easily cast aside. Yet, Zsófia Lóránd succeeds in doing exactly that.

The book's main goal is to examine the various components and nuances of the complex interaction between the Yugoslav feminists and the state: "Through rereading concepts and meanings, integrating ideologies and theories from 'Western' feminisms and through transfer creating their own version, new Yugoslav feminism was cooperating with the state and criticising it at the same time" (2). While the author is correct to distinguish between the state and its feminist challengers, she is equally right to occasionally blur this binary. The intertwinement of these two actors is also why she speaks of feminists as engaging in dissent rather than dissidence: "Yugoslav feminists attempted to engage the state in a dialogue rather than refusing it per se, as most dissidence does" (9). As such, this book will be of interest to a broad public, including those who explore the intellectual history and the development of feminism,

those immersed in the subjects of dissent and dissidence, and those who study the history of the quite peculiar socialist state of Yugoslavia.

Lóránd has gathered data from published sources, archival materials, and semi-structured interviews with twenty Yugoslav feminists. This rich empirical material about the substantial, albeit pioneering, steps in the formation of feminist thought and action is organized in four chapters: “‘Neither Class, nor Nature’ —(Re)Turning to Feminism in the Social Sciences and Humanities,” “Feminist Dissent in Literature and Art: Sisterhood, Motherhood and the Body,” “Feminism in the Popular Mass Media,” and “Reorganising Theory: From Kitchen Tables to the Streets, from Theory to Activism.” By choosing to look not only at the scholarly contributions of Yugoslav feminists(-in-becoming), but to also consider an array of localities where feminist dissent was coming into being, interacting with the state, and developing further, the author gives justice to the impressive and diverse production of feminist ideas that took place in less than two decades. Besides leaving a trace in Yugoslavia’s three cultural and political centers (Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Zagreb), the knowledge and experience feminists gained during this period greatly influenced and facilitated feminist engagement across the post-Yugoslav region in the 1990s—notably related to war rapes—and also shaped more recent feminist activity during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

Another important accomplishment of this book is its skillful elaboration of how Yugoslav feminists criticized Marxism, arguing that to focus solely on abolishing class difference insufficiently helped women’s emancipation. Instead of advocating the end of socialism, these feminists attempted to improve it by exposing and re-dressing the state’s failure—including that of the mass women’s organizations—to achieve the equality of women and men in practice. These efforts led to “the creation of a feminist form of dissent and a new feminist language, an intervention into the existing discourse on women and women’s rights, thus providing not only a vocabulary, but also new ways of organising, new forms of collectivities and even parallel institutions” (223–224), such as emergency hotlines and shelters for female victims of male violence.

Ideally, Lóránd would have made greater use of Slovenian sources. This neglect is especially noticeable in her analyses of art, literature, and the mass media. Given Yugoslavia’s many languages, some such lacunae were perhaps inevitable, but the author should have noted them and reflected upon their significance. It would also have been fitting to give slightly more attention in the last empirical chapter to the feminists’ prewar engagement with ethnicity and nationalism. Moreover, including only passing references to the situation in Kosovo and post-1991 feminist discourses on (war) rape brings that chapter to a very abrupt end. These omissions notwithstanding, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* is an exceptional book that will be hopefully savored by (feminist) scholars and activists alike, including those born after the state ceased to exist.