

Charles University

Faculty of Arts

Department of Czech and Comparative Literature

Germanic and Slavic Studies

Summary of dissertation

Autoreferát (teze) disertační práce

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Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and
Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia

Vzdělání muslimských dívek během meziválečného období a
socialistické transformace v Jugoslávii

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2024

Summary

This thesis provides an in-depth examination of the education of Muslim girls and women in Yugoslavia, spanning from the interwar period to the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia in 1945. Despite the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes' 1921 constitution mandating elementary education for all, the reality was that many Muslim girls were excluded from this promise due to deep-seated prejudices and inadequate educational infrastructure. The debate around women's emancipation through education, especially for Muslim women, was a heated topic in the Balkans during this period. However, the Yugoslav government allocated minimal resources to women's education, deeming it a low priority.

The thesis delves into the societal norms that hindered Muslim girls' access to education, such as the practice of discontinuing their schooling at the onset of menstruation and the high illiteracy rates in predominantly Muslim regions.¹ Despite these formidable challenges, feminist movements and modernist intellectuals championed the cause of women's empowerment, forcing politicians and the media to acknowledge the issue. Within the Muslim community itself, there was significant internal conflict between progressives and conservatives over gender and religious reforms. Notably, figures like reis-ul-ulema² Džemaludin Čaušević emerged as advocates for progressive changes.

The relationship between the Yugoslav state and its Muslim communities was marked by turbulence, discrimination, and assimilationist policies, especially during the complex process of nation-building.³ Educational policies were frequently exclusive, neglecting the specific needs of Muslim communities, which were often perceived as foreign and outdated.⁴ This historical backdrop raises critical questions about how state-Muslim community interactions influenced the education of Muslim girls and the effectiveness of addressing their educational needs during the interwar period.

The Second World War further complicated the educational landscape for Muslim girls and women but also provided new opportunities for redefining their societal roles. The

¹ Grgić, 'The Kingdom of Diversity and Paternalism: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, 1918–1941'.

² Religious leader

³ Troch, 'Between Tribes and Nation: The Definition of Yugoslav National Identity in Interwar Yugoslav Elementary School Curricula'.

⁴ Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia*.

National Liberation War, spearheaded by Yugoslav communists under Josip Broz Tito⁵, saw women, including Muslims, taking active roles in combat and educational programs.⁶ This period offered Muslim women new avenues for attending educational courses, prompting inquiries into the organization and impact of these programs.

In the post-war era, socialist Yugoslavia implemented sweeping reforms, including mandatory eight-year elementary education for all children, which encompassed Muslim girls.⁷ The education system was imbued with Marxist and socialist ideologies, promoting cultural diversity and inclusive education.⁸ The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) initiated campaigns to integrate Muslim women into the evolving socialist society, discouraging traditional practices such as veiling and encouraging secularism.

This thesis explores the evolution of educational policies and the narratives surrounding the education of Muslim populations. It examines how prejudices shaped these policies and investigates the role of media in transmitting societal messages and their impact. Additionally, the study considers transnational influences, particularly from Turkey and the Soviet Union, on domestic perspectives and policies.

By focusing on Muslim girls and women, the thesis underscores their unique social, cultural, religious, political, and historical significance within the Yugoslav context. It provides a comprehensive analysis of educational policies directed towards Muslim women and girls across three distinct periods, highlighting their agency and the intercommunal struggles to improve their social, political, and economic standing through education. Furthermore, the thesis situates the experiences of Yugoslav Muslim women within the broader context of Islamic modernity and gender reforms, connecting their struggles and advancements to global trends and debates.

⁵ Josip Broz Tito, born May 7th, 1892, played a pivotal role in changing the course of World War II in Yugoslavia and shaping its future as a socialist state. Despite limited education and early adversities, Tito led a Yugoslav communist revolution against the Axis powers and internal foes, emerging victorious. Post-war, he created a democratic federation of six republics, fostering unity among diverse Yugoslav peoples. Defying Stalin and balancing East-West interests, Tito established a prosperous, culturally varied nation, maintaining power until his death in 1980. On Tito, see: Jože Pirjevec, *Tito and His Comrades* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

⁶ Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke*.

⁷ Simić, *Soviet Influences on Postwar Yugoslav Gender Policies*.

⁸ Bacevic, *From Class to Identity*.

Academic activities

During the course of my doctoral studies, I have worked on the project: Communist Gender Policies Towards Muslim Minorities in Eastern Europe, led by the principal investigator Dr Ivan Simić, from 2020 until 2023. Within this project my obligations were: Archival research for the PI, analysing primary sources, helping on event organization, maintaining the research database.

The project's first workshop that I participated in was: The Sickle and Veil Project, in autumn of 2020. I worked on the preparations and logistics. Following on that, my next quest within the project was organization of the conference: Turning Muslims into Comrades: Gendered Transformations of Muslim Lives in Socialist and Post-socialist Contexts, Conference and special issue, 26-27 October 2021.

Moreover, I attended the 17th Biennial International Postgraduate Conference at UCL SSEES in London, 9 – 10 November 2022 – Presented the paper Socialist Transformation of Muslim Women's Education in Yugoslavia. Following on that, I presented at the Conference of British Association for the South and Eastern European Studies (BASEES) in Glasgow, 31 March – 02 April 2023 – Presented the paper Dissemination of the Educational Narrative through Media in the Socialist Yugoslavia – Socialist Transformation of Muslim Girls Education.

Next, together with my Italian colleagues I organized and presented at the Sapienza Università di Roma – Univerzita Karlova International PhD in Germanic and Slavic Studies, Graduate conference 6th-7th July 2023 – I presented the paper Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Period in Yugoslavia. I also attended Moving Beyond The Center-Periphery Dynamics: Central and Eastern Europe From The Mid-19th Century to The Present, conference in Ottawa, April 5-6, 2024; Presented the paper Education and Modernization: The Case of Muslim Girls in Interwar Yugoslavia. And finally, my proposed abstract was accepted for the Canadian Association of Slavists' congress that took place at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, June 14-16, 2024, where I also got the chance to present my research.

I also published: Review of Giomi, Fabio. *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Islam, and Gender in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878-1941)*. Slovo, 2022. In print.

Paper proposal *Imagined Modernisation Through Education: The Case of Muslim Community in Interwar Yugoslavia*. Submitted, 2025.

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