

La Sapienza /Charles University

JELENA GAJIC
PhD dissertation supervisors' report

Title of the thesis:

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

Supervisors:

Rosanna Morabito, La Sapienza, Roma

Zora Hesová, Charles University, Prague

Zora Hesová:

Jelena Gajić thesis deals with an original subject, educational reform and women's emancipation in the successive Yugoslav states. It focuses mostly on Bosnian Muslim women's access to education.

The author takes a sweeping look at the position of Yugoslav Muslim women in the modernization period between 1918 and 1980s – that is, on three successive periods (First Yugoslavia with the Yugoslav nationalizing reforms, the war intermezzo characterized by setbacks but also early shifts in women's roles due to antifascist communist activism and communist Second Yugoslavia).

The author chose one of the most disadvantaged populace groups when it comes to emancipation in terms of gender and religion and within the larger Yugoslav Muslim female populace looked the regional group about which there is most accessible information.

The submitted work is based on extensive primary literature that echoes various frames and policies informing female education (school textbooks and large array of newspaper types) as well as exhaustive secondary literature on the history of Yugoslavia and to a lesser extent, Islam, socialism and modernity. Primary sources and parts of secondary literature are accessed in Serbo-Croatian, thus allowing for little available insights. The author also reflects newer Serbian and English language literature on gender relations in Yugoslavia.

The thesis is largely narrative and positivist in character although incorporating various critical studies in order to uncover underlying frames of nationalizing, gender and Orientalist domination in changing power relations throughout the period. The advantage of this approach is the wealth of information, single cases illustration and religious and socioeconomic complexity of education reforms in disadvantaged regions as well as a well communicated sense of ambivalence both amidst reform beneficiaries and a measure of radicality among antifascist female and Communist reformers.

Despite the information scarcity reflected by the author, the work brings about a wealth of information and brings out a sweeping picture of education reform and emancipation of Yugoslav Muslim women, the related projects, debates and resistances. What the broad focus and narrative approach does not allow for, is any kind of theoretical discussion about religious or gender minority or women emancipation. The work suggests that it was the adaptation of Soviet secularist modernizing frame and mobilization that finally achieved a measure of education parity and

emancipation that the previous nationalist projects were for reasons analyzed in the thesis not capable of achieving. A reflection on the concept of emancipation in general and emancipation through education, socialist and nationalist education in particular and Islam in a modernizing state stay out.

The thesis nevertheless integrates a large number of older and new literature with focus on gender relations and advances our understanding of Muslim emancipation in the successive Yugoslav projects based on a wealth of original archival data.

Formally, the submitted thesis fulfils the requirements of a PhD thesis. It is very well written, well-structured and well argued, works well with sources; it is driven by an original research question and data and represents a valuable contribution to Yugoslav gender history.

Rosanna Morabito:

Evaluation of the doctoral thesis of Jelena Gajić: Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia.

The doctoral thesis deals with the educational policies towards Muslim women and girls from the inception of Yugoslavia to its dissolution with an interdisciplinary approach by using the tools of cultural history, gender studies, sociology, and political discourse analysis.

The candidate had to manage with the complex history of the diverse communities in the area, along one of the most dramatic periods of European history. She had to deal with the extremely complex situation in Bosnia, where the Muslim community historically represents the relative majority of the population, being at the same time one of the largest religious constituents within the Yugoslav state. In such a context, Muslim women were the most backward part of the population.

The candidate's endeavours were rather fruitful and successful, particularly about history of Muslim girls education, a complicated issue for which there are very few primary sources.

There are some repetitions, which could be avoided, and some naivety and inaccuracies, but overall, the thesis comes across as original and ready to be discussed.

Conclusion

Therefore the supervisors recommend the thesis be formally defended.

Rome/Prague August 9, 2024

Rosanna Morabito

Zora Hesová

