

“WHITE SLAVE TRADE” AND THE PROTECTION OF GIRLS IN SERBIA AND YUGOSLAVIA, 1840–1940

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Abstract: In Europe in the nineteenth century, at the time of the industrial revolution and the increase of the city population, prostitution became a burning social problem. According to the public opinion at the time, prostitution undermined the moral foundations of society and represented a danger not only for the moral, but also the physical health of the population. This article examines the issue of prostitution and sex trafficking of women and girls, and the position of authorities, expert-medical circles and women's movement regarding this issue in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Serbia and Yugoslavia. In addition to daily press and periodicals, archival material from the State Archives of Serbia and the Archives of Yugoslavia was used in this work, as well as relevant professional literature.

Key words: prostitution, “white slavery”, venereal diseases, women's societies, expert-medical circles, legal regulations

Apstrakt: U Evropi 19. veka, u periodu industrijske revolucije i rasta gradske populacije, prostitucija postaje gorući društveni problem. Prema tadašnjem javnom mnjenju, prostitucija je podrivala moralne temelje društva i predstavljala opasnost ne samo za duhovno već i fizičko zdravlje stanovništva. U ovom članku razmatra se pitanje prostitucije, to jest trgovine ženama u svrhu seksualne eksploatacije i odnos vlasti, stručnih medicinskih krugova i ženskog pokreta prema ovom pitanju u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 19. i prve polovine 20 veka. U radu je, pored dnevne štampe i periodike, korišćena arhivska građa Državnog arhiva Srbije te Arhiva Jugoslavije, kao i relevantna stručna literatura.

Ključne reči: prostitucija, “belo roblje”, polne bolesti, ženska društva, stručni medicinski krugovi, zakonska regulativa

Introduction

British writer and advocate of women’s rights Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1790, considered marriage as “legal prostitution.” She saw prostitution even as more honest, than marriage. In recent times some feminist discussions have argued that prostitution is merely a job and the prostitute is a worker like any other wage laborer. From the standpoint of contract theorists, a prostitute does not sell herself or her sexual parts, but rather contracts out use of “sexual services.” There is also no difference between a prostitute and any other worker or seller of services.¹ According to Carole Pateman, the claim that prostitution is a universal feature of human society relies not only on the cliché of the “oldest profession” but also on the widely spread assumption that prostitution originates in men’s natural sexual urge.² Rather than treating prostitutes solely as victims or problems, in contrast to much of the historical literature, Nancy Wingfield analyzed prostitution at three different interlinked levels: subjectivity, society and state.³

In scientific and professional circles is more often written about prostitution in contemporary Serbian society than as a historical phenomenon. The lack of historical sources is also an issue for the study of prostitution.⁴ This article examines the perception of prostitution and sex trafficking of women and girls, and the position of authorities, expert medical circles and women’s movement regarding this issue in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Serbia and Yugoslavia.

¹ See Carole Pateman, “What’s wrong with Prostitution?”, in: *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999, vol. 27, no. 1-2, 53-54.

² *Ibid.*, 57.

³ Nancy M. Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*, New York: Oxford University press, 2017, 1-2.

⁴ Cf. Tomislav Zorko, “Ženska prostitucija u Zagrebu između 1899. i 1934. Godine”, in: *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006, vol. 38, no. 1, 223-224.

In Europe in the nineteenth century, prostitutes became a symbol of the supposed comprehensive decadence that entered all pores of social life.⁵ In the fight against this phenomenon, which was tied mostly to urban environments and the city lifestyle, European states applied different strategies: regulation of prostitution included medical and police supervision of prostitutes (this model was applied in France, for instance). In some states – such as Spain, Prussia, and Italy – prostitution was completely forbidden, while in other countries – such as England, until the Contagious Diseases Act from 1864 was passed – there had been no police supervision, and as a consequence no medical examination as well. What those measures have in common is that they mostly targeted women. Prostitutes were thus interned in brothels, their freedom of movement in the city was limited, they were forbidden to stay on the street after dark, wear garish clothes, visit the theatre, concerts, etc. They were placed under medical and police supervision, that is, the police would take their names and they would undergo mandatory medical (gynaecological) examination; in case of any diseases, they were hospitalized.⁶

Almost simultaneously with the introduction of these measures, a movement that advocated their abolition emerged. Josephine Butler (1828–1906) was at the head of the movement to revoke the regulation system in England. This English activist travelled through Europe, asking women to support the abolition of the repressive measures against prostitutes. In 1875, English abolitionists founded the International Abolitionist Federation.⁷ Ten years after its foundation, they were the ones to speak up about

⁵ Anita Ulrich, "Einsperren – Überwachen – Verdrängen: Strategien zur Bewältigung des Prostitutionsproblems im 19. Jahrhundert", in: *Studien und Quellen*, Bern: Swiss Federal Archives, 2003, no. 29, 309-312.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 313-319.

⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the movement for the abolition of prostitution and traffic in women grew into a transnational movement. In Germany, the National Committee for the Suppression of Traffic in Women was founded in 1899. That same year, the first international congress in London was held, which dealt with this issue. Marianna Brentzel, *Anna O. – Bertha Pappenheim: Biographie*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002, 102-103.

the fight against traffic in women for the first time. State bodies, as well as legal solutions, completely overlooked the close connection between traffic in women and prostitution. While advocates for the abolition of prostitution encountered a lack of understanding from the public, the public still reacted positively to calls for the fight against traffic in women. The main cause of this phenomenon was found in poverty. Women were taken from Europe to Latin America, South Africa or the Near East.⁸ Jewish reformers saw the main cause for the strengthening of traffic in women in the pogroms in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, which led to the emigration of the Jewish population. However, they avoided speaking publicly about the participation of Jews themselves in traffic in women, believing that that would provide ammunition for anti-Semitic propaganda. Unlike them, Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936)⁹ stressed that silence was counterproductive.¹⁰

This German activist, who had many years of experience in fighting traffic in women and prostitution, believed that women did not sell their bodies voluntarily, but out of necessity. In 1901, she founded the society “Women’s Relief” [*Weibliche Fürsorge*] in Frankfurt, which specialized in helping “morally fallen” Jewish women, who had come from Eastern Europe (Galicia¹¹). Among other things, the society offered housing for these women and their children, legal aid, and helped them to find jobs.¹²

⁸ According to Milutin Miljković, traffic in women had two export pathways: 1. over Southeast Europe to Egypt and through the Suez Canal to India; 2. to South America through Antwerp and Dutch harbors. Trade was also carried out through French and Italian harbors (Marseille, Bordeaux, Genoa and Naples). Important points of export for the so-called white slavery were Hamburg and London. Milutin Miljković, *Belo roblje. Sociološko-kriminalna rasprava*, Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1901, 21-22.

⁹ Known as Anna O. in the history of medicine. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud presented her illness and supposed recovery in the book *Studies on Hysteria* from 1895. M. Brentzel, *Anna O.*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-104. See also N. Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution*, 12.

¹¹ The historical area at the foot of the Carpathians was a part of Austria-Hungary, inhabited by the Polish, Ukrainians and Jews. Economically, it was the least developed part of the Monarchy.

¹² It turned out that: “Woman is a greater migrant than man. [...] Nor do women migrate merely from the rural districts into the towns in search of domestic service, for they migrate quite as frequently into certain manufacturing districts, and the workshops is a formidable rival of the kitchen and scullery.” Ernst Georg Ravenstein, “The Laws of Migration”, in: *Journal of the Statistical Society of*

In 1903, Pappenheim travelled through Galicia to learn about the cause of traffic in women/prostitution and to form a proposal to improve the living conditions in the area.¹³ During her travels through Balkan countries and the Ottoman Empire in 1911, the German women's rights activist and president of the League of Jewish Women [Jüdischer Frauenbund] Bertha Pappenheim spent some time in Belgrade.¹⁴ While taking part in the second regular conference of the Serbian National Women's Alliance [Srpski narodni ženski savez], attended by retired finance minister Vukašin Petrović and Milan Jovanović-Batut (1847–1940), a hygiene professor and the rector of the Belgrade Higher School, Pappenheim called upon those present to get involved in the fight against the so-called white slave trade, labelling Serbia as a transit country. Answering this call, Petrović said that prostitution in Serbia was not developed, that it mainly consisted of "foreign elements", and that the Serbian authorities had to let everyone with proper documents pass through the border. However, doctor Jovanović-Batut confirmed that Serbia, that is, Belgrade, was a gateway through which "white slaves" passed on their road to the Orient. Despite the fact that "our women are not prone to prostitution and [...] our people do not usually recruit goods for prostitution", he advocated preventive actions against prostitution, that is, traffic in women. Just like Pappenheim, Batut believed that the transit could be prevented most efficiently through private initiative.¹⁵

London, London: Oxford University Press, 1885, vol. 48, no. 2, 196.

¹³ Bertha Pappenheim, *Sisyphus: Gegen den Mädchenhandel*. <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/pappenhe/sisyphus/chap001.html/> (accessed 24 April 2024).

¹⁴ During her travels, Pappenheim visited Belgrade, Sophia, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Smyrna, Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Jerusalem, Cairo and Alexandria. She held speeches against traffic in women and forced prostitution in many places before local women's societies, that is, representatives of the Jewish community; she talked with prostitutes and brothel owners; spoke about her experiences to police officers and doctors, mayors and governors. M. Brentzel, *Anna O.*, 154. See also Svetlana Stefanović, "Prostitucija, trgovina belim robljem i suzbijanje veneričnih bolesti u Srbiji u 19. i prvoj polovini 20. veka", in: *800 godina srpske medicine*, Beograd: Srpsko lekarsko društvo, 2018, 547-549.

¹⁵ "II Redovni glavni skup Srpskog narodnog ženskog saveza 7. marta 1911 god. u Beogradu održan u školi Ženskog društva", *Domaćica*, no. 10, October 1911, 367.

It was between the two world wars that Pappenheim published her impressions from her travels through the Orient. When she met Serbian women activists, Pappenheim noted that they complained about the difficulties they were encountering in their work, adding that the public was not informed about the problem; thus, it was also uninterested in solving it. On the other hand, her male interlocutors unofficially admitted that the Balkans were “the heart of the trade, the heart of that plague.” They also stressed that the public was still not ready for the opening of that issue.¹⁶

Prostitution and “white slavery” in Serbia: realities and representations

During the nineteenth century, the Serbian state applied various strategies to control prostitution. By 1850, the Serbian criminal law did not discern between prostitutes (persons who offer sexual services for monetary compensation) and persons that engaged in non-marital (pre-marital or out of wedlock) sexual relations (in both cases, the relations were considered illegal). According to attorney Ivan Janković, the equal status of prostitution and promiscuity had its equivalent in Ottoman law, and it had most likely been taken from Ottoman law and incorporated into the common law of Christians in the Sanjak of Smederevo (also known in historiography as Pashalik of Belgrade).¹⁷ There were no written regulations on prostitution and traffic in women. The so-called promiscuous women were mentioned in the Military Law (Vojni zakon) from 1839 – they were banned from staying at army barracks, on the border and near military manoeuvres pursuant to Article 102.

According to the Instructions on the Duties of Mayors of Belgrade from 1840 [Uputstva o dužnostima upravitelja varoši Beograda], the mayor was obligated to prevent “harlots” and “harlot homes” multiply, but the

¹⁶ B. Pappenheim, *Sisyphus*, <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/pappenhe/sisyphus/chap009.html> (accessed 24 April 2024).

¹⁷ Ivan Janković, “Obšte bludnice: prostitucija u Beogradu u prvoj polovini 19. veka”, in: *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2015, no. 2, 26.

Instructions did not stipulate the formal process to achieve that goal. In practice, prostitutes, as well as their customers, were occasionally arrested and punished for "fornication." This was in accordance with the model of treating prostitution in the Ottoman Empire. Considering there were no special penalty norms, Janković claims that prostitution at the time was not – *sensu stricto* – forbidden.¹⁸ This claim is substantiated by the fact that prostitutes could reside in towns, buy and sell immovable property, certify documents, receive travel documents and carry out other legal actions. If they were arrested and banished, the reason behind that was usually to control and prevent the spread of venereal diseases, that is, to prevent conflicts between Serbs and Turks. Serbian and Turkish men would sometimes fight for the affection of certain prostitutes, so, the prostitutes would be banished from towns for preventive reasons when Serbia and the Ottoman Porte went through a period of delicate relations.¹⁹

In the first half of the nineteenth century, "harlots" were "bought" in Austria and then brought to work as prostitutes in Belgrade taverns. There was a clear legal awareness of the unlawful nature of such trade, but, in practice, the authorities did not get involved in the so-called white slave trade.²⁰

When the Police Code [Policijski zakonik] from 1850 came into effect, on the one hand, out-of-wedlock relations were decriminalized, but, on the other, prostitution became a criminal offence, which was punished with a prison sentence (from three to 12 days) or corporal punishment (12 to 25 lashings). In the case of triple offence, the "harlot" was banished from the city (for a period of three to twelve months) or from the country (if she was a foreign citizen). The users of prostitutes' services were exempt from banishment and punishment. The same punishments were stipulated for pimping, and tavern owners who enabled fornication in their

¹⁸ I. Janković, "Opšte bludnice", 28-29.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29-30; Vladimir Jovanović, "Prostitucija u Beogradu tokom XIX veka", in: *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 1997, no. 1, 9.

²⁰ For more see I. Janković, "Obšte bludnice", 32-33.

establishments. A special provision prescribed corporal punishments for a prostitute if she infected her customer with any venereal disease, and for a man, if he infected a woman (whether she was a prostitute or not). After 1850, the first attempts to ghettoize prostitutes in Belgrade, that is, attempts to limit their right to stay in specified parts of the city, were made.²¹

The Criminal Code [Krivični zakonik] from 1860 gave state bodies wide authorization for the purpose of preserving public morality. After the Ottomans left Serbian cities in 1867, the police were inclined not to persecute prostitution, but to tolerate it within certain establishments (taverns).²² In 1881, the Rules on the Regulation of Prostitution [Pravila o regulaciji prostitucije] were passed (amended in 1884 and 1900), which marked the period when Serbia took over the western model in treating prostitution. The regulation of prostitution was first carried out in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. That idea included hermetically sealing the prostitute to disinfect her. In agreement with doctors, the state defined what police and medical methods would be used to intervene in the sphere of prostitution. At the moment when the first brothels were opened in Serbia (Belgrade) in 1881, they were already being shut down in other states (the number of brothels plummeted after 1856, 1877/78 and after 1885 in Paris; brothels in larger German cities were shut down between the 1860s and the 1880s; in Zurich in 1897).²³

When brothels were founded,²⁴ prostitutes found themselves in a completely dehumanized position in Serbia. Aside from being ghettoized, exposed to the deleterious effect of venereal diseases and common miscarriages, prostitutes were more or less slaves in brothels.²⁵ According to the Rules (Article 17), they had the right to leave the brothel whenever they wanted; however, in practice, they depended on the mercy of their bosses

²¹ I. Janković, "Opšte bludnice", 33-34

²² V. Jovanović, "Prostitucija u Beogradu", 10.

²³ A. Ulrich, "Einsperren – Überwachen – Verdrängen", 314-315.

²⁴ Actually, this is a form of tolerance of prostitution (maison de tolérance) by the state. Ibid., 315.

²⁵ V. Jovanović, "Prostitucija u Beogradu", 12-14.

– and oftentimes they were physically abused by their customers.²⁶ Girls were encouraged to consume alcohol, which led to addiction. Pursuant to the Rules, police officers had the right to enter a brothel any time and check whether the rules were followed – for instance, Article 5 o) ban on pouring alcohol and m) ban on giving loans to girls for dresses and jewellery. In practice, the (mostly bribed) police officers worked in the interest of brothel owners.²⁷

According to municipal physician Vojislav Kujundžić,²⁸ girls were lured by false promises and brought from Austria-Hungary to Belgrade, where they were sold to brothels (and from one brothel to another), either in the Serbian province, or farther, to the Orient.²⁹ Serbian lawmakers did not recognize this practice as human trafficking and forced prostitution and did not punish these acts. At that time, there were also no special provisions on traffic in women in European justice systems.³⁰

In the first decade of the twentieth century, there were major changes in this area – the number of brothels in Belgrade was cut in half between 1900 and 1908 (from 12 to 6).³¹ As in other European countries where controlled individual prostitution³² came to the fore, according to the Rules from 1900, the Serbian lawmakers introduced order in prostitution that

²⁶ According to physician Milorad Savičević, *Javne ženske (prostitutke) u prošlosti, sadašnjosti i budućnosti i njihov uticaj na širenje veneričnih bolesti*, Beograd: Štampa Naumovića i Stefanovića, 1909, 198.

²⁷ Vojislav Kujundžić, *Prostitucija u Beogradu. Obavezna predohrana polnih bolesti*, Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1905, 17-18, 35-36.

²⁸ In interwar period, he was the Head of the Department for Health Education in Ministry of Public Health.

²⁹ V. Kujundžić, *Prostitucija u Beogradu*, 36.

³⁰ For more see M. Miljković, *Belo roblje*, 29.

³¹ V. Jovanović, "Prostitucija u Beogradu", 23.

³² Every free and independent prostitute (who was not interned in a brothel) had to be registered with the authorities; she would receive a medical card and was under the obligation to periodically (mostly once a week) undergo medical examinations. The police would take the prostitute who had been declared ill to hospital, where she would be treated. A. Ulrich, "Einsperren – Überwachen – Verdrängen", 316.

flourished in hotels and taverns. However, prostitution in private apartments remained almost intact.³³ As evidenced by the letter from 1907, prostitution flourished in the province – in small towns as Čuprija, Pirot, Leskovac, Aleksinac, Jagodina, Niš. The director of a Serbian Touring Theatre from Austria-Hungary Fotije Ž. Iličić (1846–1911) complained to the Serbian minister of education³⁴ on many entertainment companies, which offered also sexual services. He requested from the minister to protect the reputation of the acting profession and by law to prohibit such companies.³⁵

At the end of 1904, following the order of the minister of interior, a committee was formed to examine the problem of prostitution in the Serbian capital. The committee made a recommendation that was delivered to the minister at the beginning of 1905, and it stated that brothels should be completely cancelled, while prostitutes should be subjected to stronger police control. However, due to an insufficient number of prepared and trained lower police officers, the proposal could not be carried out.³⁶ According to the opinion of historian Vladimir Jovanović, the authorities lacked not only the money, but also the energy to fight prostitution in the capital at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

However, it is indisputable that expert circles did show an interest in solving the issue of prostitution and traffic in women. So, in 1901, the lawyer, military judge and university professor Milutin Miljković published a study on “white slavery” in *Branich* [*Defender*], a journal for legal and state sciences and the body of associations of public legal representatives in Serbia.³⁷ In the

³³ V. Kujundžić, *Prostitucija u Beogradu*, 25.

³⁴ The National Theatre was under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

³⁵ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), Fond: Narodno pozorište (hereinafter: NP), signature 3805. Letter by Fotije Ž. Iličić to the minister from Čuprija, 11. January 1907. It is interesting that Iličić is suspected in Austria-Hungary of being politically connected to the Serbian government. See Jelena Milojković-Đurić, “Srpsko-hrvatsko putujuće pozorište Fotija Ž. Iličića”, in: *Zbornik za istoriju Bosne i Hercegovine* 7, Beograd: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2012, 163-172.

³⁶ V. Jovanović, “Prostitucija u Beogradu”, 23.

³⁷ In: *Branich*, no. 3-4 and 5-6, March-April and May-June 1901, 208-225, 447-463. The study was printed also as a separate.

study, he pointed out that engaging in prostitution and pimping should be differentiated from traffic in women. He believed "white slave trade" to be the intentional recruiting and procuring of girls for the purpose of delivering them to brothels.³⁸ Activists for the abolition of prostitution such as Josephine Butler tied all state laws and practices that almost placed prostitutes in the position of slaves to the notion of "white slavery." This generally accepted term referred to various forms of coercion in the sphere of prostitution and all unwanted forms of sexual interaction in general in the first half of the twentieth century. The term did not encompass various forms of sexual violence in the sphere of prostitution, and outside of it, to which women of colour were exposed.³⁹ Miljković also advocated shutting down brothels and was against tolerating prostitution in any form.

An opposing opinion was expressed at the first congress of Serbian doctors held in Belgrade in 1904 by the physician Vojislav Kujundžić - his stance was that prostitution could not be suppressed and that medical supervision should be improved, that is, private and secret prostitution should be placed under control. While the former proposed informing the public about venereal diseases through popular writings, and believed that "rational education and work", as well as protecting free love "would cause [...] the moral declination, which leads to prostitution, to vanish",⁴⁰ the latter advocated placing brothels in a specific part of the city/street and forming a specific department for medical supervision. In other words, he advocated taking control away from the police, since officers were corrupt – "and aiding unscrupulous people."⁴¹

It should be mentioned here that, at the time, making a diagnosis and differentiating between syphilis, soft chancre and gonorrhoea was difficult

³⁸ M. Miljković, *Belo roblje*, 23-24.

³⁹ Sonja Dolinsek, "Konvention zur Unterbindung des Menschenhandels (1949) und Erklärung über Prostitution und Menschenrechte (1986)", <https://www.geschichte-menschenrechte.de/schluesselftexte/konvention-zur-unterbindung-des-menschenhandels-1949-und-erklaerung-ueber-prostitution-und-menschenrechte-1986> (accessed 24 April 2024).

⁴⁰ M. Miljković, *Belo roblje*, 34-35.

⁴¹ V. Kujundžić, *Prostitucija u Beogradu*, 38-39.

due to the lack of medical knowledge on the diseases. That means that the treatment methods were inadequate and inefficient. An important breakthrough was made in 1838, when Philippe Ricord noted a difference between syphilis and gonorrhoea. Mercury was initially used to cure syphilis, but the first efficient medicine Salvarsan (organoarsenic compound) was used as of 1909. However, it was not until penicillin was discovered in 1929 that a true breakthrough in treating the aforementioned venereal diseases was made. The fact that prostitutes were held for treatment for brief periods of time was another issue, even though only long-term exposure to treatment could bring results.⁴²

Unlike his colleague Kujundžić, dermatoveneorologist Milorad Savićević believed that brothels were the source of “white slavery”, as well as syphilis and other venereal diseases.⁴³ In his study from 1909, he called upon the members of women’s societies to work on suppressing venereal diseases – by creating opportunities for poor women to “earn their living in an honest way”; by informing schoolgirls, maids, workers and parents (mothers) on the perils of venereal diseases and, that way, contributing to the creation of “healthy marriages”; informing travellers not to stay in hotels that served as prostitute parlours; visiting diseased women in hospitals and dissuading them from working as prostitutes.⁴⁴

The Serbian press did not deal with this topic much. *Velika Srbija* [Great Serbia], for instance, in 1903, reported on “white slave trade” in two columns on the front page. An unknown author, in accordance with the spirit of the times, made a distinction between “white slavery” (prostitutes), in which persons traded their bodies of their own free will, but out of financial necessity or “a psychopathic state of mind” and “white slave

⁴² A. Ulrich, “Einsperren – Überwachen – Verdrängen”, 316-317. See also Kujundžić, *Prostitucija u Beogradu*, 39-41; Indira Duraković, *Serbien und das Modernisierungsproblem. Die Entwicklung der Gesundheitspolitik und sozialen Kontrolle bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014, 233-234.

⁴³ M. Savićević, *Javne ženske*, 240-241.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 303-307.

trade”, in which there was no free will. The link between slave traders and certain police officers represented the main obstacle to suppressing that trade, according to the authors. The ways that young and poor girls were lured to go abroad, mostly with false business or marital offers, where they would – with no money to return and their documents taken away – end up in the hands of brothel owners, were presented in detail in the text. We do not know whether calling the minister of interior out for the corrupt police officers, who allowed traders and their girlfriends with forged documents to cross the border undisturbed, had any consequences. In any case, the author wanted to inform the public about this problem and call upon them to get involved in the fight against “white slave trade.” In his opinion, the fight against prostitution was more or less futile, but, with the help of good legal solutions and charities, they could contribute to suppressing traffic in women.⁴⁵

Politician and scientist Stojan Novaković (1842–1915)⁴⁶ believed that “laws of morality and humanity” instruct to move towards revealing the shameful traffic in women, if there truly were such a thing on the territory of Serbia. As the foreign minister, he urged the Ministry of Interior, to respond to the request of Austro-Hungarian embassy and help them check the anonymous report that certain owners of prostitute parlours in Belgrade were trading girls and sending them to Istanbul and Asia Minor. In order to check this anonymous report, the Austro-Hungarian consulate asked to interrogate all prostitutes, who were citizens of Austria-Hungary, from the reported brothels. The reply of the Belgrade municipal authority [Uprava grada Beograda], which got the order to do so from the Ministry of Interior, shows that, on the one hand, prostitutes were willing to give a statement to the Serbian authorities, while they refused to appear at the consulate.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the mayor of Belgrade, in his letter

⁴⁵ “Belo roblje”, *Velika Srbija*, no. 79, 1 November 1903, 1-2; “Belo roblje”, *Velika Srbija*, no. 80, 3 November 1903, 1.

⁴⁶ Member of the Progressive Party, prime minister and foreign minister in 1895/96.

⁴⁷ Based on current information, it is impossible to determine whether they had been under pressure, that is, whether they had been instructed by brothel owners to give such a response, or if something else had been the matter.

to the minister of interior (and, indirectly, the minister of foreign affairs) stated that he did not believe it was right to force these women to go to the consulate, adding that, by enforcing its power, the Municipal authority would recognize the right of a foreign authority to conduct an independent investigation in Serbia. To him, preventing violations of Serbia's law and sovereignty were of higher priority than meeting the requests of the Austro-Hungarian consulate, "to which this single case would serve as basis to demand the same right in other situations."⁴⁸

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior of the Kingdom of Serbia attempted to meet the demands of the Austro-Hungarian embassy every time. However, lower instances were less inclined to cooperate. The Belgrade municipal authority responded in relation to the matter of taking and "selling" girls (from Galicia) to Istanbul that one of the three men accused of trade (Jews from Stanislav in Galicia)⁴⁹ had stayed in Belgrade with two girls; this happened only after several requests and orders from the Ministry of Interior had been made. Having registered them as wife and sister-in-law, the suspect had not listed their names.⁵⁰ And while the governments of Serbia and Austria-Hungary condemned the trade between Hungary and the Orient, there were conflicts concerning the jurisdiction of their officers in the field. For instance, on a steamboat of a French society near Smederevo, a Serbian officer prevented an officer of the Austro-Hungarian consular agency from that town, who was acting following the call of the captain, from rescuing an underage girl from a woman pimp, with whom she was travelling.⁵¹

As we can see, certain efforts to shed light on the issues of prostitution and "white slave trade", that is, their influence on spreading venereal diseases had been made even before Bertha Pappenheim came to Belgrade. These issues were certainly not on the list of priorities to the Serbian

⁴⁸ DAS, Fond: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih dela Policajno odeljenje (hereinafter: MUD P), f 1, r 36/1896.

⁴⁹ Today Ivano-Frankivsk in Ukraine.

⁵⁰ DAS, MUD P, f 5, r 135/1894.

⁵¹ DAS, MUD P, f 4, r 82/1894.

authorities, because in Serbia, whose population was predominantly rural, prostitution was not perceived to be a burning social problem, as it was in the aforementioned European states. Furthermore, since "white slave" traders and their victims were mostly foreign citizens, and only the customers were Serbian men the whole issue was considered of small relevance. The nonexistent clear legal regulations contributed to the lack of motivation to suppress this trade. Most existing women's societies were involved with working on the national plane, while the members of the Serbian National Women's Alliance, as well as the social-democrats, focused on achieving the right to work and equal pay, as well as the right to vote.⁵²

The legal und international context in interwar Yugoslavia

In the interwar period,⁵³ the Kingdom of Yugoslavia adopted and ratified an international convention to suppress the traffic in women and children from 1921,⁵⁴ as well as a convention from 1910 on the international agreement for the successful protection from criminal trade, known as "white slave trade", with a law from February 28th 1929.⁵⁵ It is indicative

⁵² See Svetlana Stefanović, *Nation und Geschlecht. Frauen in Serbien von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig, Faculty of History, Art and Oriental Studies, Leipzig, 2013, 139-278.

⁵³ About Prostitution during the Wartime see Jovana Knežević, "Prostitutes as a Threat to National Honor in Habsburg-Occupied Serbia during Great War", in: *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011, vol. 20, no. 2, 312-335.

⁵⁴ Four international agreements to suppress white slave trade were adopted between 1904 and 1933. None of these agreements defined precisely what is meant under the notion of white slave trade, even though each of them dealt with more or less forced forms of transporting women and children across international borders, for the purpose of more or less "voluntary" sexual work. While in the first two agreements, the term "white slavery" was still used, in the international convention from 1921, the neutral term – traffic in women and children – was used. S. Dolinsek, "Konvention zur Unterbindung des Menschenhandels."

⁵⁵ Josip Šilović, *Trgovina bijelim robljem. Pučka sveučilišna predavanja 29. i 30. januara i 1. i 2. februara 1932. godine*, Zagreb: Tiskara Narodnih novina, 1932, 28. The Government of the Kingdom of SCS signed in 1927 the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery (an international treaty) prepared by the League of Nations (25 September 1926). Arhiv Jugoslavije (hereinafter: AJ), Fond: Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Velikoj Britaniji – London, Opšta arhiva, Međunarodne

that this happened after the king Alexander I Karadjordjević dissolved the parliament and created an authoritarian regime.⁵⁶ Yugoslavia was elected as a non-permanent member of the Council of the League of Nations for the first time in the period between 1929 and 1932.⁵⁷ Even though it is believed that the League was unsuccessful regarding the issue of disarmament and the preservation of world peace, it did contribute to the development of international law. Article 23 was included in the contract of its foundation, which stipulated that the League of Nations shall carry out general supervision over contracts which referred to traffic in women and children. At the International Conference held in Geneva in June 1921, it was requested that “white slave trade” be changed into “traffic in women and children”, to clearly show that the movement against such trade was not limited solely to the members of the white race. The content of the aforementioned Convention was formulated in this conference, and it was passed in the second ordinary session of the League of Nations in September that same year.⁵⁸

Yugoslav authorities were not only acquainted with the issue of human trafficking from the very moment the state was founded in 1918, but they also tried to formulate certain preventive measures for the protection of girls in accordance with the recommendations of the League of Nations. The Ministry of Social Policy passed the Regulation on Emigration [Uredba o iseljavanju] in 1921, which banned selling tickets to persons under the age of 18 if they were not traveling accompanied by their family or

organizacije, konferencije i kongresi (hereinafter: 341-146-352). The Convention was ratified in 1929. AJ, Fond: Stalna delegacija Kraljevine Jugoslavije pri Društvu naroda u Ženevi (hereinafter: 159-6-612).

⁵⁶ The legislative action of the Assembly was blocked with frequent changes of governments between 1918 and 1928. Passing important laws was postponed from one year to another. For more see Holm Sundhussen, *Geschichte Serbiens 19.-21. Jahrhundert*, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2007, 264-266.

⁵⁷ Yugoslavia had permanent delegates in the League of Nations, who chaired the Assembly of the League of Nations on several occasions. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was elected twice as a non-permanent member of the Council of the League; the second time was in 1938/1939. *Kraljevina Jugoslavija u Društvu naroda*, available at: https://www.arhivyu.rs/izlozbe/izlozbe-arhiva/2014_kraljevina_jugoslavija_u_drushtvu_naroda (accessed 24 April 2024).

⁵⁸ J. Šilović, *Trgovina bijelim robljem*, 27.

authorized persons. The Regulation also banned the sale of tickets to girls when there was reasonable doubt that they were recruited to travel abroad for the purpose of human trafficking. Due to the vague nature of the formulation "reasonable doubt", that is, out of fear that lower police bodies would subject all women to unpleasant course of action, the Legislative Board of the National Assembly deleted that part of Article 19, when the Regulation was submitted as a legal project. Some, even though insufficient, regulations, which protected girls, remained in the Law on Emigration [Zakon o iseljavanju] (e.g. a travel document could be issued only to a person older than 18; if the person was younger than 18, it could be issued only together with the travel documents of the family, if they travelled accompanied by family members or a person who was authorized as a companion by their father or guardian, in which case the person needed a certificate issued by the authorities; the ban on issuing tickets to persons under 18 unaccompanied by parents or authorized persons remained in effect). It can be deduced from the memo that the Ministry of Social Policy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to the Ministry of Interior (1922), that women between the ages of 18 and 25 represented a particularly endangered group, since they were lured to overseas countries (Canada) with promises of marriage by their countrymen, and then subjected to sale and resale there.⁵⁹

However, on the territory of Yugoslavia, the treatment of prostitution differed from one part of the country to another. Austrian Criminal Code from 1852, which was still valid in the former provinces of the Austro-Hungary, allowed every city to independently regulate the problem of prostitution – city authorities used this right to open and regulate brothels.⁶⁰ At the beginning of the 1920s, brothels were abolished in Slovenia

⁵⁹ AJ, Fond: Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije, Odeljenje za državnu zaštitu, Migraciona politika (hereinafter: 14-37-114).

⁶⁰ See Bojan Cvelfar, "No, zdaj pa če imaš denar, daj ga sem, potem se hitro z menoj spolsko združi. K zgodovini tajne prostitucije v Ljubljani na začetku stoletja", in: *Zgodovina za vse*, Celje: Zgodovinsko društvo, 1994, 11-29; Dubravko Habek, Iztok Takać, Roko Habek, "Prostitution in Laibach in 1888", in: *Acta Medica Croatica*, Zagreb: Academy of Medical Sciences of Croatia, 2023, vol. 77, no.1, 101-103; T. Zorko, "Ženska prostitucija u Zagrebu između 1899. i 1934. godine", 223-

(according to a decision from 1 March 1919), Zagreb⁶¹ and Belgrade, while other forms of prostitution were tolerated. Nonetheless, brothels were still allowed in Zemun,⁶² a suburb of the capital, making the legal measures of Belgrade municipal authority quite ineffective.⁶³ The unified Criminal Code from 1929 marked the beginning of a new age in suppressing prostitution in Yugoslavia: brothels and other form of regulated prostitution were no longer allowed. Prostitution itself became a crime.⁶⁴ The crime of international “white slave trade” was standardized for the first time: “Who takes another person abroad for the purpose of fornication, or delivers that person to another, or associates with anyone for that purpose, shall be punished with a prison sentence of up to fifteen years.”⁶⁵

National and translational advocacy groups against “white slave trade” and prostitution

The work of women’s societies on suppressing prostitution preceded the passing of the aforementioned international agreements by the Yugoslav authorities. The section for abandoned girls was formed in 1922 within the National Women’s Alliance of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes [*Narodni ženski*

241; Iris Živičnjak, “Zagrebačke prostitutke početkom 20. stoljeća. Podrijetlo, svakodnevni život i položaj u društvu”, in: *Pro tempore*, Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu Filozofski fakultet, 2020, no. 15, 157-183. See also N. Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria*, 6-10, 253.

⁶¹ According to Rulebook on brothels from 1899. (Bludilišni pravilnik), the brothel owner in Zagreb could only be a woman. T. Zorko, “Ženska prostitucija u Zagrebu između 1899. i 1934. godine”, 225-226.

⁶² Zemun was separate town that was incorporated into Belgrade in 1934. “Poslednja odborska sednica gradskog odbora u Zemunu”, *Politika*, no. 9292, 28. March 1934, 5.

⁶³ Bogoljub Konstantinović, *Prostitucija i društvo. Socijalno-medicinska rasmatranja sa naročitim obzirom na problem prostitucije i njeno suzbijanje u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd: Knjižarnica Franje Baha, 1930, 76-78. For more see Stefano Petrunaro, “The Medical Debate about Prostitution and Venereal Diseases in Yugoslavia (1918–1941)”, in: *Social History of Medicine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 2-7; Ljubomir Petrović, “Između scenskog glamura i javnog nadzora. Strani artisti u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1920–1941”, in: *Istorija 20. veka*, Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2001, no. 1, 52-53.

⁶⁴ S. Petrunaro, “The Medical Debate”, 6.

⁶⁵ J. Šilović, *Trgovina bijelim robljem*, 119.

savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca], upon the initiative of its first president Danica Hristić (1864–1923).⁶⁶ In 1924, the section grew into the independent Society for the Protection of Girls [Društvo za zaštitu devojaka], located in Belgrade, with the purpose of “morally, physically and financially” taking care of abandoned girls, from the ages of 7 to 21, regardless of their religion or nationality. According to *Jubilarni zbornik života i rada Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* [Jubilee Record of the Life and Work of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes], the Society managed the shelter for girls in Belgrade, while their subcommittee in Slavenska Požega led workshops for women crafts.⁶⁷ The Society for the Protection of Girls supported the founding of the National Committee for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children,⁶⁸ as a branch of the International Bureau in London.⁶⁹

With these activities, Yugoslav women activists followed the work of their contemporaries from other European states. The first illustrated women’s magazine *Žena i svet* [Woman and the World] tried to direct the attention of their female readers to the activities of the aforementioned women’s associations, i.e. to the fact that state protection of young girls did not include those older than 16, that is, that such protection stopped at the most critical time for them. This was attempted through a series of texts written by Zorka Janković, one of the founders of the society for “fallen” girls. At the time, the state had prepared correctional institutions and institutes for forced education and forced labor for the “fallen.” According to Janković’s opinion, her society filled the void within the existing system of the protection of youth.⁷⁰

According to the writings of the same author, activists from Zagreb were the first in the field. Since 1912, the “Patronage of Girls” [Patronaža

⁶⁶ “O palima”, *Žena i svet*, no. 3, 15 March 1926, 8.

⁶⁷ Mileva Milojević, “Naše žene”, in: *Jubilarni zbornik života i rada Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1918–1928*, vol. 2, Beograd: Matica živih i mrtvih Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1929, 708.

⁶⁸ “Živi mrtvaci. Iz ciklusa O palima”, *Žena i svet*, no. 9, 15 September 1926, 21.

⁶⁹ International Bureau for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children was founded with the mission to coordinate the work of national committees.

⁷⁰ “Živi mrtvaci. Iz ciklusa O palima”, *Žena i svet*, no. 9, 15 September 1926, 21.

devojaka] had been active in Zagreb, with the aim of educating girls in the spirit of morality, religion and aesthetic and offering them financial and moral support. Tinka Šilović was at the head of the society, which was oriented mostly towards preventing the “moral” decay of girls, but not towards rescuing the victims of prostitution.⁷¹ The Society of Friends of Young Girls [Društvo prijatelja mladih djevojaka], founded in Zagreb in 1927, is mentioned in *Jubilarni zbornik*,⁷² and it was linked with the society of the same name based in Neunburg. This Swiss society, made after the First International Congress of Abolitionists in Geneva in 1877, fought against regulation and for equal sexual morality for women and men. The practical work of its members consisted of waiting for girls, who would come to the city to look for jobs, at train stations and finding them cheaper housing, as well as work.⁷³

The Yugoslav women’s movement, its bourgeois and socialist/communist wing, supported abolishing brothels and regulating prostitution in the period between the two world wars. Like their contemporaries in other European countries, members criticized the double moral standards of society that criminalized prostitutes and considered them the main source of venereal diseases, while their male customers were always spared of persecution. Above all, they supported the fight for abolishing discriminatory legal solutions, for instance, the rule that stipulated that, prostitutes and

⁷¹ “Živi mrtvaci. Iz ciklusa O palima”, *Žena i svet*, no. 9, 15 September 1926, 21. Data taken from the magazine *Nova Evropa* (*New Europe*) on the frequency of arresting children and adolescents for vagrancy and prostitution speaks of the importance and useful action of such and similar societies after the end of World War I. According to these claims, 463 children aged to 14 and from 14 to 16 were arrested in Zagreb in 1923 and 1924. Out of that total, 202 were girls, and 16 per cent of them were infected with some venereal disease. “Prostitucija sa kriminalno-socijološkog stanovišta”, *Nova Evropa*, no. 11, 11 April 1925, 342-353.

⁷² M. Milojević, “Naše žene”, 708. See also Jelena Seferović, “Analiza prezentacije i interpretacije prostitucije i prostituiranih žena u časopisu *Ženski pokret*”, in: *Ženski pokret (1920–1938): zbornik radova*, Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2021, 226-227.

⁷³ Eidg. Kommission für Frauenfragen, *Frauen Macht Geschichte. Zur Geschichte der Gleichstellung in der Schweiz 1848–2000. 1. I. Frauenbewegung von ihren Anfängen bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, available at: <https://www.ekf.admin.ch/ekf/de/home/dokumentation/geschichte-der-gleichstellung-frauen-macht-geschichte/frauen-macht-geschichte-18482000.html> (accessed 24 April 2024).

women suspected of prostitution (female staff working in public establishments: artists, singers, dancers, waitresses, maids, cooks, etc.)⁷⁴ were obliged to undergo a gynaecological examination. They insisted on separating solving the issue of prostitution from the work on suppressing venereal diseases; they also insisted on introducing free medical treatment of the diseased and increasing the number of dispensaries for venereal diseases.

Physicians Maša Živanović and Vera Kićevac were given the leading role in formulating the stances and the demands of the Women's Movement [Ženski pokret] in this area. Živanović believed that there was an unbreakable bond between the women's issue and prostitution and that many were overlooking it.⁷⁵ The Women's Movement was not fighting, she would emphasize, just for the right to education and the political, economic and legal equality of women and men, but for equal sexual morality as well.⁷⁶ Which meant that men, just like women, should abstain sexually until they were married. That would solve, in her view, the issue of prostitution, as well as the issue of any other forms of sexual exploitation. Unlike feminists, members of left-wing options believed that abolishing class society would contribute to solving these problems. Dedicating attention to the sexual education of young people (whose ultimate goal was to restrain the sex drive until marriage) and its introduction into schools was, according to the opinion of many, also one of the means of suppressing prostitution and venereal diseases.

It is interesting that some members of the Women's Movement supported the Law on Suppressing Venereal Diseases [Zakon o suzbijanju polnih

⁷⁴ The criticism refers to the Rules on the Examination of Female Staff Employed in All Public Establishments (Pravila o pregledu ženskog osoblja uposlenog u svima javnim lokalima) from 1922. Svetlana Stefanović, *Žensko pitanje u beogradskoj štampi i periodici 1918–1941*, Master thesis – unpublished, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, 2000, 144, 146. According to Konstantinović, the implementation of those Rules could not be carried out due to technical reasons. B. Konstantinović, *Prostitucija i društvo*, 82.

⁷⁵ "Prostitucija, reglementacija, abolicija", *Ženski pokret*, no. 7–8, July-August 1932, 98-104; "Pitanje prostitucije i njegovo rešenje", *Ženski pokret*, no. 7–8, July-August 1932, 104-108.

⁷⁶ "O jednakom moralu", *Ženski pokret*, no. 1-3, January-March 1936, 2-8.

bolesti], as well as the handbook for the implementation of the Law, from 1934, despite the fact that it encroached upon the right of individuals to have control over their bodies and enforced the obligation of forced treatment even when there was no danger of the disease spreading. According to Article 9 of the Law, men were obliged to prove they were not infected with any venereal disease with a doctor's certificate before getting married. Živanović demanded that women be included in the obligatory examination. In accordance with the Law, the Ministry of Social Policy and People's Health had to found homes in every major city for the temporary accommodation of women in search of income and those who lost their jobs. Also, the Law stipulated cancelling all existing brothels.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in April 1935 the minister of Social Policy and People's Health abolished the notorious Article 9.

In expert-medical circles, the overall opinion was that regulation was an unjust solution that represented an attack on personal freedom; that it neither improved the position of prostitutes nor removed the perils of spreading venereal disease. On the other hand, abolition was considered an ideal solution, supposedly applicable solely in an enlightened and cultural society. There were those who supported the introduction of medical supervision of men among doctors/specialists for skin and venereal diseases. In a resolution from a conference held in Zagreb in 1928, Yugoslav venereologists demanded the immediate cancellation of brothels in the entire country and the introduction of the neo-regulation system. That meant taking away supervision of prostitution from the police and placing it in the jurisdiction of medical bodies.⁷⁸ Yugoslav physicians made a major contribution to conceiving, debating and finally formulating the

⁷⁷ S. Stefanović, *Žensko pitanje*, 133-167; Svetlana Stefanović, "Ženski pokret o problemu braka, slobodne ljubavi, seksualnog vaspitanja, prostitucije i kontrole rađanja", in: *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 1998, no. 1-3, 66-84. These measures were quite similar to the venereal disease legislation adopted in the Scandinavian countries and Germany. S. Petrungrar, "The Medical Debate", 7.

⁷⁸ J. Šilović, *Trgovina bijelim robljem*, 93-108. B. Konstantinović, *Prostitucija i društvo*, 79-82.

prostitution policy and laws.⁷⁹ The influence of the medical profession on Yugoslav interwar society can be seen, according to the findings of Stefano Petrungaro, in the rise of social medicine and eugenic thought. The constitutional and administrative reform of the state provided physicians, in his view, with legal and institutional tools for enacting socio-medical beliefs. For instance, the state had a duty to prevent the spread of venereal disease by any means, in order to remove all threats to collective health; common interests were to be defended without hesitation, even at the expense of the individual rights.⁸⁰

In the 1930s, the trend against a regulatory system was gaining ground: a professor of the University of Zagreb and Senator Josip Šilović held several lectures on "white slavery" in 1932, including one at the Attorney Association in Belgrade. Based on the conviction that the environment in Yugoslav cities was no less conscientious than in countries where abolition had already been carried out, Šilović advocated abolition. According to him, private initiative was meant to play the determining role in suppressing prostitution.⁸¹ As already mentioned, the Law on Suppressing Venereal Diseases came into force in August 1934 and in April the following year the Article 9 (concerning the pre-marital medical tests for men) was already abolished. The implementation of legal measures was also, according to reports of contemporaries, not successful, among other things, because of the lack of funds.⁸²

⁷⁹ Some of the leading figures among them were also members of parliament and the Senate House. S. Petrungaro, "The Medical Debate", 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18-19, 22.

⁸¹ Ibid., 114, 122. "Jedno zanimljivo i značajno predavanje. Trgovina belim robljem kod nas i na strani – G. dr Šilović u svom predavanju traži potpunu zabranu prostitucije", *Politika*, no. 8623, 14 May 1932, 6.

⁸² S. Stefanović, *Žensko pitanje*, 155-156. See also Svetlana Stefanović, "Prostitucija, trgovina belim robljem i suzbijanje veneričnih bolesti", 547-560.

Conclusion

At the end of the nineteenth century, “white slave trade” became a subject of transnational negotiations, international regulation and inter-state agreements, an important field for the equalization of law and the standardization of legal norms. Charities and women’s societies played an important role in the fight to suppress this type of trade. They had a great influence on public opinion and legislation of their states. The strategies for suppressing prostitution and traffic in women in Serbia and Yugoslavia were almost from the start under the influence of conceptions and legal solutions of Western European countries, as well as international agreements. In practice, though, there were many inconsistencies and existing laws were not being implemented rigorously.

In the interwar period, members of the Yugoslav women’s movement got involved in the debate on prostitution (traffic in women) and suppression of venereal diseases, in which doctors and lawyers had had the final say. The Feminist Alliance (Feministička alijansa) proclaimed in 1923 that “the destruction” of prostitution was necessary “for the general progress of our people.”⁸³

The interwar women’s movement was heterogeneous and within its folds it is possible to distinguish bourgeois and socialist groups. While members of leftist option advocated “free love” and saw the solution of the prostitution problem in solving the class issue, within the bourgeois women’s movement there was no complete unity with regard to solving the problem of prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases. That is, there was no unity regarding the sexual liberation of women. The Yugoslav Women’s Alliance [Jugoslovenski ženski savez] and a part of feminists supported the anti-venereal law, thus supporting the intervention of the state within the private sphere of the individual, and requested the introduction of a special women’s police to better enforce the law, while a part remained reserved

⁸³ “Pravila Feminističke Alijancije u državi S. H. S”, *Ženski pokret*, no. 9-10, November-December 1923, 460.

towards Article 9 of the Law. Alojzija Štebi (1883–1956), the founder of the Women's Movement in Ljubljana and the long-term president of the Women's Movement in Belgrade, as well as of the Feminist Alliance, believed that the issue of moral and corporal health of the society was more important than the discomfort of an individual. In her opinion, the law had a task to "clear the atmosphere" in which society lived.⁸⁴

As many participants of the debate believed, the introduction of sexual education in schools could solve the problems of venereal diseases and prostitution. However, was it realistic to expect sexual education to be carried out in a state which was unable to secure the respect of the law on compulsory primary education?

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⁸⁴ "Različita gledišta o § 9 nacrta zakona za suzbijanje spolnih bolesti", *Ženski pokret*, no. 4-5, April-May 1933, 53; "Različita gledišta o članu 9 nacrta zakona za suzbijanje spolnih bolesti", *Ženski pokret*, no. 6, June 1933, 75-76.

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Stefanović, Svetlana, *Žensko pitanje u beogradskoj štampi i periodici 1918–1941*, Master thesis, Belgrade: University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, 2000.

“TRGOVINA BELIM ROBLJEM” I ZAŠTITA DEVOJAKA U SRBIJI I JUGOSLAVIJI, 1840–1940.

Rezime

Krajem 19. veka, fenomen “trgovine belim robljem” postao je predmetom transnacionalnih pregovora, internacionalnih propisa i međudržavnih sporazuma, važno polje za izjednačavanje prava i standardizaciju pravnih normi. Ženska društva su igrala važnu ulogu u borbi za suzbijanje ove trgovine. Ona su imala jak upliv na javno mnjenje i na zakonodavstva svojih država. Strategije za suzbijanje prostitucije i trgovine ženama u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji bile su gotovo od početka pod uticajem koncepcija i zakonskih rešenja zapadnoevropskih država, kao i međunarodnih sporazuma. U praksi je bilo dosta nedoslednosti i postojeći zakoni se nisu striktno sprovodili.

U međuratnom periodu, u debatu o prostituciji (trgovini ženama) i suzbijanju veneričnih oboljenja, u kojoj su glavnu reč prevashodno imali lekari i pravnici, uključile su se i pripadnice jugoslovenskog ženskog pokreta. Feministička alijansa je 1923. godine proklamovala da je “uništenje” prostitucije neophodno “radi opšteg napretka našeg naroda”. Međuratni ženski pokret je bio heterogen i unutar njega je moguće razlikovati pripadnice građanskog i socijalističkog/komunističkog bloka. Dok su se pripadnice levih opcija zalagale za “slobodnu ljubav” i u rešavanju klasnog pitanja videle i rešenje problema prostitucije, unutar građanskog ženskog pokreta nije vladalo potpuno jedinstvo po pitanju rešavanja problema prostitucije i širenja veneričnih bolesti, odnosno u širem smislu po pitanju polnog oslobođenja žene. Jugoslovenski ženski savez i deo feministkinja tako je na primer podržao antivenerični zakon, i time intervenciju države u privatnu sferu individue, te zatražio uvođenje specijalne ženske milicije u svrhu što boljeg njegovog sprovođenja, dok je deo ostao rezervisan prema članu 9 ovog zakona. Alojzija Štebi, osnivačica Ženskog pokreta u Ljubljani, dugogodišnja predsednica Ženskog pokreta u Beogradu kao i Alijanse, smatrala

je da je pitanje moralnog i telesnog zdravlja društva bilo važnije od nelagodnosti pojedinca. Zakon je prema njenom viđenju, imao zadatak da "očisti atmosferu" u kojoj je društvo živelo. Uvođenjem seksualnog vaspitanja u škole, po mišljenju mnogih sudionika debate, mogli su biti rešeni problemi veneričnih oboljenja i prostitucije. Ali da li je bilo realno za očekivati da se to sprovede u državi, koja čak nije bila u stanju da obezbedi poštovanje zakona o obaveznom osnovnom obrazovanju?

