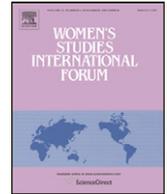


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Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif

Dissidents, disloyal citizens and partisans of emancipation: Feminist citizenship in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav spaces



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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 8 August 2014

SYNOPSIS

This paper aims to offer an alternative reading of the history of feminism in Yugoslavia and its successor states, relying on the concept of citizenship. Assuming that one could differentiate between three different citizenship regimes – the first framed by the socialist self-management state, the second by the nation-building processes and violent disintegration of the former state, and the last one by post-socialist, post-conflict transitional circumstances – the paper explores their impact on an uneven development of gender regimes and feminist activism. Seen as the model instance of activist citizenship, feminist activism is presented through three different phases in order to show how they, as well as the frameworks of their interpretation, change, changing also the meaning of feminism as a political force.

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Introduction

In Nancy Fraser's "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History", an article well-received in new left feminist circles in the post-Yugoslav region, there is one apparently irrelevant footnote which informs the reader about an omission. "I will follow", says Fraser, "the more conventional path of excluding the region [Communist bloc] from this first moment of my story, in part because it was not until after 1989 that second-wave feminism emerged as a political force in what were by then ex-Communist countries" (Fraser, 2009, 100). Fraser's overall argument did not suffer much because of this historical oversight. However, Yugoslav second-wave feminism did emerge well before the disappearance of the 'Communist bloc'. It gained confirmation at the seminal conference *Drug-ca žena* (Comrade Woman: Woman's Question – New Approach, organized in Belgrade in 1978), the first of its kind not only in Yugoslavia, but also in Eastern Europe as a whole.

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In this essay I will try to uncover the trajectories of a feminism which did not emerge in the context of the state-organized capitalism and the Westphalian framework of the welfare state, expounded, for example, by Fraser. I will sketch a very brief history of feminism in the Yugoslav region, relying on the conceptual framework which revolves around two notions, citizenship regime and activist citizenship. I argue that this frame offers valuable insights into the dynamics of interaction of feminist activism and the state, differing from those that were predominantly organized around ethnicity or nationality. The use of this framework also allows for the application of a wider time frame, which includes the socialist period, the Yugoslav war and nation-building, and the contemporary post-conflict and post-socialist phase.

The essay sets to explore two complementary issues: how feminists in the Yugoslav region related to the state(s), and how specific kinds of 'feminist citizenship' emerged, first in Yugoslavia and then in its successor states. The purpose of relating feminism and citizenship in this specific contextual framework is to shed light on what feminism as a 'political force', as Nancy Fraser puts

it, may refer to. I want to show that with the changes in the frames of interpretation, the meaning of what constitutes a political force changes as well.

It seems somewhat paradoxical that in feminist scholarship issues central to citizenship have not always been automatically linked to those of the state. Judith Squires (2000) gives a plausible explanation for this, referring to the atemporal, non-spatial 'patriarchal state' of early second-wave feminism. The 'patriarchal state' supplanted historical and geographical states, becoming an emblem of the structurally determined gendered power relations in all places and in all times. However, the space where second-wave feminist action normally took place was bound to politics, and the principal addressees of feminist demands were their respective 'local' states (Fraser, 2009, 106). This inconsistency would come to the fore in the 1990s under the joint influence of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the consequent reappearance of citizenship debates, the decline of the welfare state, the critique of the state as the arena of the feminist political change, and a feminist critique of the nation-state from a transnational perspective (Brown, 1992; Lister, 1990; Narayan, 1997). These debates showed that the issue of the state required not only a more thorough feminist approach, but also a more elaborated and refined contextualization. Yugoslavia can be taken as a paradigmatic case in point.

In contrast to their early Western second-wave counterparts, Yugoslav feminists did not invent a 'patriarchal state of their own'; they did not criticize explicitly the existing one as patriarchal, and they did not make the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) the primary addressee of their demands. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, feminist relationship to the state altered fundamentally, following the deep shift in citizenship regime. The collapse of Yugoslav socialist self-management and the transition into market democracies had been eclipsed by the violent disintegration of the federal state. The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the emergence of the multiple nation-states transformed feminism: from benevolent dissidents feminists were turned into disloyal citizens.

The conceptual framework which allows us to understand this specific nexus between the state and feminist activism revolves around the notion of citizenship regime. The term 'citizenship regime' comprises, as Jo Shaw and Igor Štiks show in their introduction to *Citizenship after Yugoslavia*, four dimensions: responsibilities of the state towards its citizens, their acquired rights and duties, state governance and broadly defined issues of belonging (Shaw & Štiks, 2012, 4). In his chapter "Laboratory of Citizenship" in the same volume, Štiks (2012) aptly demonstrated how citizenship served as a tool for the making, un-making and re-making of ties between legal status and political belonging in the relatively long history of Yugoslav state(s). Relying on this historical time frame and on the conceptual grid provided by Shaw and Štiks, I will argue that the feminist relationship to the state, as the space for the enactment of a certain citizenship regime, changed strikingly with the changes in citizenship regimes.

From the emergence of the Yugoslav second-wave feminism in the mid-1970s, there were three successive citizenship regimes. Yugoslavia was the space for the enactment of the first, a socialist citizenship regime. During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, an important shift occurred, transforming a multinational socialist federation into a multitude of mostly

ethno-national states, whose citizens, formerly workers and 'self-managers', rapidly transformed into Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovenes, etc. The second citizenship regime was marked by the violent disintegration of the former state and the nation-building processes. It was, in effect, related to the transformation of the state, the emergence of new borders and constitutionally defined exclusionary citizenships. Finally, the third citizenship regime is being enacted in the post-socialist and post-conflict states which are still in an uneven process of political, social and economic transition. Although they can be differentiated, citizenship regimes also overlap and each builds upon the remnants of the previous one. In different Yugoslav successor states, similarities aside, these regimes also had – and have – their own peculiarities.

Transformations of citizenship regimes produced profound changes in gender regimes, which were of paramount importance for the development of feminist citizenship. Feminist citizenship is well captured by Holloway Sparks (1997) notion of dissident citizenship. Sparks argued that since feminists (all around the world) partake in different types of dissenting practices – discursive, performative, organizational, and everyday life. They could be seen as the model of "engaged, active and self-governed citizens" (Sparks, 1997, 83). However, what I want to stress in this paper is not an active, but emphatically activist dimension of feminist citizenship: one which, in a certain sense, opposes active citizenship. This is why I will rely on Engin Isin's concept of activist citizenship elucidated in his article "Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen".

"Thinking about citizenship through acts", says Isin, "means to implicitly accept that to be a citizen is to make claims to justice: to break habitus and act in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses" (Isin, 2009, 389). Active citizenship might be described as direct participation in public affairs (Ibid, 382), without fundamental questioning of either participation or the public. It may be seen as a constant process of building a citizenship regime and making its rules as diverse as possible. On the other hand, activist citizenship questions and subverts the rules of enactment of a certain citizenship regime. With reference to Isin, Lynn Staeheli emphasized the difference between active and activist citizenship in an even more unambiguous way: active citizenship has a goal of getting things done, whereas activist citizenship has a goal of challenging and perhaps transforming the status quo (Staeheli, 2011). Hence, activist forms of citizenship involve redefinition of the basic tenets of a certain citizenship regime and its enactment, whereas active citizenship refers to an active engagement in the enactment of a citizenship regime with the view of its expansion and inclusiveness. This difference will be further emphasized in this paper by Farnak Miraftab's useful distinction between invited and invented spaces of citizenship: the former referring to the legitimized spaces of action, while the latter is, contrarily, in an open confrontation with the "authorities and the status quo" (Miraftab, 2004, 1).¹

Historically speaking, feminism fought both for the admittance of women into active citizenship and in the realm of state politics, and for the disruption of existing citizenship orders, practices and statuses. I want to argue that in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav contexts, due to the changing nature of the state and its citizenship regimes, feminism as a political force needs to be seen as a form of activist citizenship.²

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