Peace Activism and Human Rights
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Feminist Correspondence over Borders: The Changing Ways of International Activism of the Feminist Association in Budapest after WW1

The documents of the golden epoch of progressive social movements in the good old times of peace years before WW1 are getting more and more discovered and relatively well presented for both the professional and the wider public, however significantly less is known about the activities of women’s organizations after the war in Hungary.

Earlier research has already explored that the Feminist Association in Budapest ever since its foundation worked together with international organizations. As part of the International Women’s Suffrage Association (IWSA) the Association sent delegates to congresses and took part actively in the organization’s efforts. In 1913 the IWSA held its VII congress in Budapest. This event had 2800 participants from all over Europe and America: the number of international delegates was about 500. During the war the members of the FE in Budapest joined the efforts of international peace organizations and women’s groups. Thus they took part at the International Women’s Peace Congress in 1915 in Hague and joined also the Women’s Committee for Permanent Peace.

Based on the archive documents of the Correspondance of the Feminist Association the recent paper aims to present the ways in which the feminist activists were able to maintain their former international relations. How did the form and the content of these relations prevailed among the new circumstances of the Afterwar Europe with newly drawn maps, newly constructed and deconstructed communities and changing political atmosphere? What were the difficulties the activists had to overcome, what kind of achievements could they reach. Thus through the case of the correspondance of the Feminist Association an attempt will be made to demonstrate, how women actors of civil society were able to cope with the conditions of the Afterwar period of cultural demobilization (similarly to other countries losing the war), the revival of war propaganda and how could feminists maintain their earlier endeavours in the field of women’s rights.
Sexual Knowledge: Educating the Nation in the Aftermath of War

This paper explores the production (and control) of popular sexual knowledge in the aftermath of war in Britain. While historians have given ample attention to wartime discourses of morality and sexual health, with focused studies on the treatment of venereal disease,\(^1\) as well as on attitudes toward women’s wartime sexual behaviour,\(^2\) they have written relatively little about how sexual knowledge was created and transmitted among the general population, especially during the period of post-war reconstruction.\(^3\) Sensational figures like Marie Stopes and Stella Brown dominate our understanding of 1920s sexual discourses, but their messages competed in influence with the information provided by doctors, religious and youth organizations, and social hygiene organizations such as the National Council for Combatting Venereal Disease (NCCVD), the National Council of Public Morals (NCPM), and the Association of Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH.) Furthermore, the current historiography does not thoroughly explore the legacy of war on the shape and implementation of sexual knowledge and sex education.

While this paper considers a broad range of pamphlets and other literature published by social and religious organizations, it is anchored in an exploration of the work, writings, and reputation of Mary Scharlieb, a gynaecologist hailed as the “most important medical woman of her generation.” With a medical career that took her from London to Vienna, to Madras and back to London, she became Britain’s first female gynaecological surgeon (at the Royal Free Hospital in London), served as a member of the wartime Royal Commission on Venereal Disease, and frequently testified in public and private investigations into sexual health and morality. Also a prolific author, Scharlieb’s *Youth and Sex* (1913; rev. 1919) was one of the first manuals to present detailed physiological discussions of female puberty, menstruation and the function of the ovaries and womb. Her many other best-selling books and pamphlets, including *England’s Girls and England’s Future* (1916), *A Child Welfare Manual* (1919), and *Health and Fitness* (1921), can be credited with raising sexual awareness among young people and their parents, both in Britain and abroad.

The legacy of World War I on popular sexual knowledge was complicated. Anxiety about declining morality was pervasive, but as this paper argues, the dialectical struggle between those who believed that sexual information would corrupt the nation’s youth and those who advocated clean, healthy, scientific knowledge began to tilt distinctly toward the latter.

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Women’s Suffrage and Peace Networks and International Prison Reform, 1919-39

Following the First World War, women activists in Britain, with links to both the peace movements and women’s suffrage campaigns played prominent, yet now largely forgotten roles in attempts to secure humane treatment for prisoners held around the world.

Utilising national and international networks including the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and the League of Nations Union (LNU), British feminists campaigned during the 1920s and 1930s for the introduction of a charter of international minimum standards for the treatment of those held in jail,¹ a campaign which ultimately resulted in the 1955 United Nations (UN) ‘Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners’. The Howard League for Penal Reform, led in the 1920s by a vigorous group of women activists including former suffragists Margery Fry and Gertrude Eaton, also backed these proposals, and pressed for their adoption not only across nations but also within Britain’s own Empire.² Moreover, peace and suffrage activists also played prominent roles in penal reform debates within Britain, for example in support of the abolition of both corporal and capital punishment. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom was officially represented at the inauguration of the National Campaign for the Abolition of the Death Penalty in 1923 by the leading suffragists, Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth.³

Peace activism, prison reform and certain strands of feminism are linked by common discourses concerning human rights and social justice, yet the connections between these issues have received little sustained historical analysis. This paper seeks to explore the ideological underpinnings of international campaigns for reform of punishment, setting them against the background of incipient globalisation and trans-national policy debate. The paper will also seek to make connections with other issues that concerned contemporaries, including the aftermath of total war and the development of political ideologies that showed scant respect for the human rights of prisoners. The paper will therefore conclude with a critical account of the progress of the campaigns (in which feminists played a substantial part) for international prison reform, and in favour of the abolition of corporal and capital punishment in Britain and its colonies, up until the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe during 1939.

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**Feminist Peace Activism 1915 – 2010: Are We Nearly There Yet?**

In 1915, over 1,000 women from warring and neutral nations met at The Hague in order to protest against the First World War. In 1919, some of them met again in Zurich to discuss ways of building a sustainable peace. Focusing on the concepts of human security and positive peace, this paper compares these activists’ vision of a gendered peace with the principles underlying UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and considers whether the barriers and obstacles to women’s participation in formal peace negotiations have been overcome. It also considers whether the Hague women’s work for peace was informed by a discourse of human rights and to what extent their priorities are reflected in present day concerns about the effects of warfare on women.

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**Advocating for the Nation’s Cause across Borders: Transnational Aspects of Women’s Movement and Female Activism in Bulgaria after the End of the First World War**

One of the aspects that put Bulgaria in a unique situation after the First World War was that the catastrophe that it faced was second in a series after the disaster that ensued with the end of the Balkan wars of 1912-13. The economic, social, and political constraints imposed by the war victors led the country into one of the most difficult periods in its modern history, marked by international isolation, war reparations, internal tension, and upsurge of violence that continued well until the end of the 1920s. The challenges posed by the war and its aftermath brought to a substantial change in the role of women in Bulgarian society, finding expression in the enhancement of the women’s movement and in women’s increased participation in all spheres of public activity. Although the immediate postwar years were marked by a relative standstill of the struggle for equal rights in education and the professions, they revealed an intensification of women’s role in the public arena and women’s crucial input in the country’s restoration and cultural demobilization. From a transnational perspective, particularly notable was their role in overcoming the international isolation, which the country faced in the early post-war years, and in maintaining a network of contacts across national borders that would help reintegrating the country in the ranks of other European nations.

The goal of the current paper is to explore the transnational aspects of female activism in Bulgaria after the end of the First World War – in conditions of the country’s overall isolation as a defeated state and at the face of the enormous internal difficulties after the war end. The paper will analyze the attempts of women’s organizations and individual female activists to
maintain existing transnational contacts and to establish new ones with associations and institutions abroad – following the agenda to overcome the isolation and to alleviate the harsh consequences of the war for Bulgaria. Involved in intensive correspondence, meetings and paper presentations, female activists and women’s organizations expressed protest declarations to international women’s groups about the country’s heavy post-war treatment, collaborated in repatriating refugees and POWs, instigated establishment of political and cultural contacts with former war enemies, and, not least, took an active part in international peace movements. The paper will focus particularly on the creation of the Bulgarian branch of the International Council of Women for a Permanent Peace in 1918, the activities of female diplomats in the post-war period and the participation of Bulgarian representatives at international congresses, such as those of the International Women’s Congress and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Without intention to disregard the activities of socialist women’s movement, the paper will focus predominantly on the work of the so-called “democratic” women’s organizations and on prominent female activists, such as Ekaterina Karavelova, Evgenia Pateva, etc., whose transnational activities provided a critical input in the country’s reintegration with other European nations in the aftermath of the First World War.