



Citation:

Simić, Z. (2022). (With) Women scholars and scientists. *Slavia Meridionalis*, 22, Article 2740. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sm.2740>

Zorana Simić

Institute for Literature and Arts, Belgrade

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4636-5801>

(With) Women Scholars and Scientists

(Lada Stevanović, Mladena Prelić, and Miroslava Lukić Krstanović (Eds.), *Naučnice u društvu / Women Scholars and Scientists in Society*. Beograd: Etnografski institut SANU, 2020, 456 pages)

The collection *Naučnice u društvu / Women Scholars and Scientists in Society* (Stevanović et al., 2020a) was published in 2020 by the Institute of Ethnography (SASA) in the form of conference proceedings. A conference was held in the same year (from February 11 to February 13), under the same title, in an academic center of utmost importance in Serbia: The Serbian Academy of Science and Arts (SASA). Both the conference and the following Collection are part of the results of the project *Položaj naučnica u društvu i na tržištu rada u Srbiji (The Status of Women Scholars and Scientists in the Labor Market and Society in Serbia)*, which also included a seminar “Women Scholars for Women Scholars – Methodologies of Feminist Researchers” and a documentary film *Women Scientists and Scholars in Society – Significant but Invisible*. The Project

This work was supported by the Institute for Literature and Arts, Belgrade.

Competing interests: no competing interests have been declared.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s) 2022.

of the Institute of Ethnography of SASA was carried out under the auspices of the UNESCO Participation Program 2018/2019.

First of all, it is important to emphasize that this is a great precedent. SASA is officially “the highest scientific and artistic institution in the Republic of Serbia” (*About the academy*, n.d.), with a history of almost two centuries dating back to 1841, but at the same time it is an institution which is (known as being) almost exclusively or predominantly male, with a strikingly small percentage of female members. In the words of one of the authors in the Collection, Jelena Petrović, it is “a place where they (women, *author’s remark*) were usually neglected, excluded, underestimated and unwanted” (Petrović, 2020, p. 41, translated by Zorana Simić). This has been well illustrated by the notorious answer given in 2014 by Matija Bečković, one of the full members of the Department of Language and Literature of SASA (since 1991), to a journalist who asked him how it was possible that there were only 15 women in SASA out of 160 members:

I don’t know why it is surprising that there are almost no women among academics, nor why you are looking for them now in that place (SASA, *author’s remark*). If you haven’t noticed, there are no women in a football team either. And why do you think tennis is divided into men’s and women’s categories? It simply turns out that men are more talented and more capable of some things. You don’t enter the Academy through a connection, and the criteria must be met. Now, the fact that men meet those criteria in a far larger number and far better is just the real and current state of affairs, because gender and anything else doesn’t matter in the selection of academics. Even if someone is a hermaphrodite, if he is a genius, he will become a member of the Academy. (as cited in Stojković, 2015, translated by Zorana Simić)¹

No more than five years later, and on the occasion of the conference *Women Scholars and Scientists in Society*, for the first time in the history of this institution the hall of SASA was filled by about a hundred women scientists from Serbia and, to a lesser extent, other countries. Considering their presence and engagement in Serbian scientific circles in general (therefore, not solely in terms of positions in SASA), this number should not be surprising. In fact, as Adriana Zaharijević – like the conference proceedings editors themselves – states:

According to the data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, which monitors women in science around the world, it turns out that Serbia is in an enviable place. Compared to European countries, not to mention non-European ones, it is obvious that there *are* women in science. Here are some figures: more women enroll in doctoral studies than men (57%); they are almost equal when it comes to the number

¹ In this paper, I have translated all quotations from Serbian into English.

of employees in scientific research institutions (49%); there are surprisingly many of them in the field of natural sciences (54%); in medicine they dominate (60%); they are expectedly less present in the domain of technological sciences (37%); and, contrary to general trends, in the impoverished social sciences there are ‘only’ 50% of them, i.e., 58% of them in the field of humanities. Unlike their male study colleagues, who are three times more likely to go into private business, women are more likely to stay in public administrations and research institutions. (Zaharijević, 2018, translated by Zorana Simić)

However, as the editors of the Collection are highly aware of the disproportions in the distribution of power and decision-making positions that such statistics (can) mask – as well as of the necessity of critical (feminist) examination of the position of women scholars and scientists in modern contexts, the (gender-based) obstacles and problems women face, and the possibilities of overcoming these problems – they (the editors of the Collection) initiated and implemented the project *The Status of Women Scholars and Scientists in the Labor Market and Society in Serbia*. All of the three editors, Lada Stevanović (senior research associate), Mladena Prelić (senior research associate), and Miroslava Lukić Krstanović (senior research associate), have been employed for many years at the Institute of Ethnography of SASA, where they have been continuously engaged in scientific research in the fields of ethnology and anthropology. As they themselves point out in the preface to the Collection, they “have tried to contribute to visibility, to break away from stereotypes about women, to hear each other and look back at [our] predecessors, to listen to different approaches to women’s research and research on women” (Stevanović et al., 2020b, p. 15, translated by Zorana Simić). For this successful initiative, they received the “Anđelka Milić Award” for the year of 2021, which was established by SEFEM (Sekcija za feministička istraživanja i kritičke studije maskuliniteta / Section for Feminist Research and Critical Studies of Masculinity of Serbian Sociological Association) in 2016 on the initiative of Marina Blagojević Hughson. The jury, consisting of Dr. Lilijana Čičkarić (president), prof. Dr. Nevena Petrušić and Dr. Zarka Svirčev, estimated that

[t]he conference proceedings *Naučnice u društvu / Women Scholars and Scientists in Society*, which contains nearly forty works, as a whole represents a significant contribution to the production of contemporary feminist knowledge and, from a double, synchronic and diachronic perspective, illuminates both the position of science in society and the place and importance of feminist approaches and methodologies in (humanistic) sciences and disciplines. (Čičkarić, 2021, translated by Zorana Simić)

More precisely, this bilingual (Serbian-English) collection consists of a short preface by the editors and thirty-nine papers. With the exception of the last paper, which functions as a subsequent editorial review by Miroslava Lukić Krstanović that is focused on the assumptions and outcomes of the Project, the papers are mostly written in the form of conference proceedings. The final contribution of Miroslava Lukić Krstanović (in which the author expresses gratitude to Vladimir Kostić, the current president of SASA, and to Bojan Bugarčić, the manager of affairs in SASA, as well as to the Commission of the Republic of Serbia for Cooperation with UNESCO) is valuable not only because it systematically and thoroughly shows the course and development of the entire Project, but also because the author presents, in the same way, the main conclusions of this gathering of a large number of contemporary women scholars and scientists, as well as the key problems they face in Serbia today.

As Lukić Krstanović points out, these problems are *large resources of knowledge; low investment and inconsistent regulations (inconsistency in equal opportunities policy); lack of historical heritage of famous women scholars and scientists as well as of their achievements; insufficient visibility; support and strengthening of individual and joint efforts when it comes to gender education and programs; insufficient connection of individuals and institutions when it comes to scientific cooperation; the fact that the position of women in science is only discussed from time to time, mostly without continuity (which was emphasized by the rector of the University of Belgrade, Ivanka Popović, who opened the Conference along with Lukić Krstanović herself, Tanja Ćirković Veličković, a corresponding member of SASA, and Brankica Janković, commissioner for protection of equality); under-representation of gender-sensitive topics in research; strategic barriers in the context of private life and public engagement; trivialization in shaping the identity of women scholars and scientists; invisibility of the scientific diaspora; gender imbalance in leadership positions and, consequently, the aforementioned problem of disproportion between knowledge and quotas; the problem of ageism and the relations between academism and activism.*

All the thirty-eight papers which precede this review are divided into five thematic units: 1. Women Scholars and Scientists in/about Society; 2. Scientific Disciplines and Gender Equality; 3. Regional and Global Parallels; 4. Feminist Knowledge and Education through History; 5. Being a Woman Scholar and Scientist: Interpretations. The first part most explicitly concerns the problem areas that are prioritized by the editorial board of the Conference in the context of the Project, and it constitutes a valuable framework for the following units. The introductory

paper in the first unit, “The Struggle for the Achieved: Researchers in Natural Sciences” by Dragana Popović, provides an overview of the “position of women in natural sciences in Serbia and the former common Yugoslav space”, where, in the author’s words, “the history of science, unfortunately a brief one, is itself insufficiently and fragmentarily researched” (Popović, 2020, p. 19, translated by Zorana Simić). Popović concludes with a slightly pessimistic but still strong call for caution and action, which other authors in the collection are also aware of and which is, in various forms, repeated as a leitmotif throughout the Publication:

Even after centuries of struggle for the entry of women into the world of science and for equal evaluation of their results, many problems still persist which seemed to us to have been solved. Some of them, such as gender equality in the context of education and of reconciling personal/family life and scientific careers, seem to be multiplying in the current circumstances of the retraditionalization of societies in transition, globalization, and under the harsh conditions of neoliberal capitalism. In the new system of valuing *knowledge as a commodity*, women may have to reconquer already conquered spaces. (Popović, 2020, p. 26, translated by Zorana Simić)

Sanja Lazarević Radak also points out the dangers of the capitalist context, this time with a focus on the aspect of media reporting on women scholars and scientists and on the accompanying trivialization, while Tatjana Rosić Ilić, for instance, dwells on the challenges to the possibilities of “associations of women scholars and scientists in the neoliberal labor market of the 21st century”, i.e., topics such as exile and migration, the precariat, the generation gap and ageism (Rosić Ilić, 2020, p. 57). Daša Duhaček and Milica Miražić consider the representation of women’s and/or gender studies in the contents of the programs of The University of Belgrade. The remaining papers are written by Marijana Pajvančić, Jelena Petrović, Jelena Čeriman, Irena Fiket, and Isidora Jarić. They explore, in various ways, the relations between gender and science, announcing some of the obsessive topics which emerge in the later segments of the Collection. Such are the problems of negotiating between the private life and the public and professional activities of women scholars and scientists, the types and mechanisms of gender-based phenomena in the various scientific fields, as well as the (dis)continuities of feminist history in Serbia and, to a lesser extent, abroad.

The second unit of the Collection consists of papers written by women experts and researchers in particular scientific disciplines and/or artistic fields who provide their own reviews on either the gender aspects of these disciplines/fields or on the positions of women in them. The authors represented in this unit are Dubravka Đurić, Olga Atanacković, Senka Gavranov, Aleksandra Izgarjan,

Slobodanka Markov, Zorica Mršević, Vladislava Gordić Petković, Lada Stevanović, Magdalena Sztandara, Aleksandra Pavićević and Svenka Savić, and they focus on various research fields: astrophysics, STEM, jurisprudence, literature, literary history, (historical) anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, etc.

Unlike those that precede and follow it, the central, third unit is entirely dedicated to “regional and global parallels”, i.e., to the foreign context (Bulgaria, Sweden, USA); it contains three articles, written by Ana Luleva, Mirjana Prošić Dvornić, and Vladana Vukojević.

The papers in the next, fourth unit, as indicated in its title, offer diachronic examinations of the so-called women’s issue and feminism in the context of Serbia/Yugoslavia, but they also synchronically concern the problems of the institutionalization of gender studies and feminist approaches in studies of history (literature and periodicals), extending throughout the 20th and 21st century. This unit is designed especially coherently and the papers complement each other, both thematically and methodologically, in a very suggestive way. Since the authors are close both generationally and in terms of their professional approaches and interests, this unit by itself shows that in today’s Serbia there is a high degree of feminist cooperation in the context of academia. Contributions by Jelena Batinčić, Sanja Petrović Todosijević, Adriana Zaharijević, Stanislava Barać, Jelena Milinković, Žarka Svirčev, Ana Kolarić, and Katarina Lončarević function not only as (first-hand) testimonies of current gender research in the scientific community (both at institutes and faculties, i.e., teaching practice), but also as a good starting point and useful reference for all of those who have been studying the history of Serbian and Yugoslav feminism and who tend to locate key dis/continuities within it, especially if they are interested in cultural and literary history/research at the same time.

Finally, in the fifth segment of the Collection, which is also noticeably coherent, the reader can find ten papers, all of which examine *being a woman scholar and scientist* through the prism of bio-bibliographical portraits (an otherwise important genre in the context of women’s history) of individuals who left (today unrecognized or obscured) traces in various spheres: philosophy, aesthetics, anthropology, ethnography, medicine, etc. These are thorough biographical pieces of research on the (professional) lives of Anica Savić Rebac, Ksenija Atanasijević, Smilja Kostić-Joksić, Margita Hercl, Ana Cimer/Czimmer, Marica Radojčić, Mileva Filipović, Ninoslava Radošević, sisters Ljubica and Danica Janković, and Miroslava Malešević, which were conducted by Svetlana Slapšak, Ivana Bašić, Ivana Pantelić and Dragomir Bondžić, Margareta

Bašaragin and Draga Gajić, Gordana Stojaković, Sanja Kojić Mladenov, Ervina Dabižinović, Larisa Orlov Vilimonović, Selena Rakočević and Mladana Perlić, as well as Sonja Radivojević.

This Collection appears to be a fairly solid whole despite, or, in fact, thanks to its extensiveness and the (inter)disciplinary and authorial heterogeneity and diversity of its methodological approaches, discourses and presentation styles, especially considering the editorial emphasis on its pioneering and initiating character. The same elements which make it a coherent and valuable source for getting acquainted with former and current tendencies in gender-based scientific research, as well as the status of science and scholars and scientists examined from a gender perspective, are at the same time its most striking qualities. To begin with, it is an open and inclusive approach to the very concept of *science* and *scholars/scientists*, which implies a cooperation among and a truly equal and respectful treatment of all kinds of scientific research and disciplines, regardless of whether they belong to the fields of humanities or the natural, technical or social sciences. In this regard, it is quite clear that there is no underestimation, degradation or *a priori* rejection of various scientific endeavors – not only on the basis of gender, but also given that there is no tendency to hierarchize domains in which research is conducted.

In addition, in the context of the publishing tendencies and policies in Serbian academia, the Collection stands out due to the high degree of (self)reflexivity of its editors and authors, who possess awareness of the economic, social and ideological context in which they (co)operate. More or less explicitly, the critical feminist impulse unites a wide range of papers in this collection. The problems, challenges, establishment and legitimization of the ruling epistemologies, as well as the potentials of their examination, revision and transformation, are continuously and consistently pointed out, contemplated and interpreted. In this regard, there is a noticeable tendency to respect and to (re)illuminate the contributions of female and/or feminist predecessors, and there are also noticeable efforts to meet the authors' own contemporaries and to establish and/or maintain professional cooperation with them. Moreover, through other aspects of the Project (for instance, webinars and presentation sessions), the editors Lada Stevanović, Mladena Perlić and Mirjana Lukić Krstanović have shown initiative in terms of including junior associates and (PhD) students, thus the editors suggested that this project should be seen as a valuable starting point for upcoming struggles. Considering the intellectual atmosphere and academic context in today's Serbia, we can conclude that it is a truly commendable and pioneering endeavor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- About the academy.* (n.d.). Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Retrieved January 23, 2022, from <https://www.sanu.ac.rs/en/about-the-academy/>
- Čičkarić, L. (2021, February 20). *Nagrada Anđelka Milić 2021 – dr Miroslava Lukić Krstanović, dr Lada Stevanović i dr Mladena Prelić – Pojekat “Položaj naučnica u društvu i na tržištu rada u Srbiji” (Etnografski Institut SANU 2019–2020).* SeFem. <https://sefem.org/nagrada-andelka-milic/2021/nagrada-andelka-milic-2021-pojekat-položaj-naucnica-u-društvu-i-na-trzištu-rada-u-srbiji-miroslava-lukic-krstanovic-lada-stevanovic-i-mladena-prelic-etnografski-institut-sanu/>
- Petrović, J. (2020). Feministička teorija i praksa: (Dis)kontinuirano prevazilaženje granica. In L. Stevanović, M. Prelić, & M. Lukić Krstanović (Eds.), *Naučnice u društvu / Women scholars and scientists in society* (pp. 41–50). Etnografski institut SANU.
- Popović, D. (2020). Borba za osvojeno: Istraživačice u prirodnim naukama. In L. Stevanović, M. Prelić, & M. Lukić Krstanović (Eds.), *Naučnice u društvu / Women scholars and scientists in society* (pp. 19–27). Etnografski institut SANU.
- Rosić Ilić, T. (2020). Moć, umrežavanje i prakse otpora rodnom režimu u polju naučnoistraživačkog rada. In L. Stevanović, M. Prelić, & M. Lukić Krstanović (Eds.), *Naučnice u društvu / Women scholars and scientists in society* (pp. 57–72). Etnografski institut SANU.
- Stevanović, L., Prelić, M., & Lukić Krstanović, M. (Eds.). (2020a). *Naučnice u društvu / Women scholars and scientists in society.* Etnografski institut SANU.
- Stevanović, L., Prelić, M., & Lukić Krstanović, M. (2020b). Predgovor. In L. Stevanović, M. Prelić, & M. Lukić Krstanović (Eds.), *Naučnice u društvu / Women scholars and scientists in society* (pp. 11–15). Etnografski institut SANU.
- Stojković, B. (2015, January 6). Žene u SANU. *Peščanik*. <https://pescanik.net/zene-u-sanu/>
- Zaharijević, A. (2018, February 6). Žene u SANU: Realno i trenutno. *Peščanik*. <https://pescanik.net/zene-u-sanu-realno-i-trenutno/>

Będąc (z) naukowczyniami

Artykuł jest recenzją książki *Naučnice u društvu / Women Scholars and Scientists in Society [Naukowczynie w społeczeństwie]* pod redakcją Lady Stevanović, Mladena Prelicia i Miroslava Lukicia Krstanovicia (Beograd: Etnografski institut SANU, 2020, 456 ss.).

Słowa kluczowe: recenzja, badaczki, naukowczynie, kobiety w nauce, Serbia, Serbska Akademia Nauk i Sztuk, feminizm, *Naučnice u društvu*

(With) Women scholars and scientists

This article is a review of the study entitled *Naučnice u društvu / Women Scholars and Scientists in Society*, edited by Lada Stevanović, Mladena Prelić, and Miroslava Lukić Krstanić (Belgrade: Institute of Ethnography SASA, 2020, pp. 456).

Keywords: review, women scholars, women scientists, women in research, Serbia, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, feminism, *Naučnice u društvu*

Zorana Simić (zorana_simic@hotmail.com) – pracuje na stanowisku asystenta w Instytucie Literatury i Sztuki w Belgradzie, studentka studiów magisterskich z zakresu politologii – gender studies na Wydziale Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu w Belgradzie. Doktorantka na Wydziale Filologicznym Uniwersytetu w Belgradzie w Katedrze Literatury Porównawczej i Teorii Literatury, gdzie uzyskała również tytuł licencjata i magisterium (odpowiednio w 2015 i 2016 roku). Pracuje nad rozprawą doktorską pt. *Women Periodical Editors in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia: Biographical, Literary-Historical and Typological Aspect*. W swojej pracy skupia się na serbskich i jugosłowiańskich czasopismach, literaturze i kulturze XX wieku, a także na współczesnych teoriach (literackich) i historii feminizmu.

Zorana Simić (zorana_simic@hotmail.com) – is a research assistant at the Institute for Literature and Arts in Belgrade, as well as a current student of the study program “Master academic studies of political science – gender studies” at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. She is also a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, at the Department for Comparative Literature and Literary Theory, where she also obtained her BA and MA degrees (in 2015 and 2016, respectively). She is working on her doctoral thesis, entitled *Women Periodical Editors in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia: Biographical, Literary-Historical and Typological Aspect*. Her work focuses specifically on Serbian and Yugoslav periodicals, literature and culture of the 20th century, as well as on contemporary (literary) theories and the history of feminism.