

Reproductive Politics in the Atlantic Space:

Advances (and
Reversals) from
the Postwar Period
to the Present

Institute of
Contemporary
History (INZ)

A two-day
international
conference

Ljubljana,
24–25 September
2026



INSTITUTE
OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY



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Reproduktivne politike v atlantskem prostoru:

Premiki naprej (in
nazaj) od povojnega
obdobja do danes

Inštitut za novejšo
zgodovino (INZ)

Dvodnevna
mednarodna
konferenca

Ljubljana,
24–25 September
2026

INTRODUCTION

“On both sides [‘anti-choice’ vs. ‘pro-choice’], the same arguments keep recurring; the signs are therefore turning into a symptom – although not in as extreme a form as in Poland, where demands for a legal ban on abortion go hand in hand with calls for compulsory religious instruction in schools – a symptom of the closing down of the new political space? Is this already an ‘abortion of democracy’? The citizens of a democratic country, equipped with ample experience from the recent past and well prepared to resist all forms of propaganda, will be able to form their own judgment on this.”

The quotation above comes from the editorial introduction written by the philosopher Eva Dolar Bahovec for the 1991 volume *Abortion – The Right to Choose?!*. The publication was part of a broader initiative during Slovenia’s transition to independence and multi-party democracy. Through it, organized women successfully defended the right to freely decide on childbearing, explicitly including the right to abortion. They did so through parliamentary advocacy, interventions in professional and public debate, and mass demonstrations, securing the right in Article 55 of the new Constitution, adopted in December 1991 with an explanation to that effect.

The quotation is notable because it places controversies over abortion within a broader reflection on the political ruptures and expectations of the time, while setting Slovenian debates alongside developments in other countries. Whereas prominent representatives of anti-choice discourse justified attacks on abortion rights as a necessary break with the values and arrangements of the previous socialist regime, Dolar Bahovec reads them in precisely the opposite way: as a slide into a new form of authoritarianism and a rejection of the principles of the newly won democracy (“abortion of democracy”). The passage also offers insight into the rhetorical strategies of feminist activism. Together, these dimensions make it a useful point of departure for the broader questions we hope the conference will address.

There is broad awareness that shifts in access to abortion and other reproductive health and sexual rights respond to both domestic specificities and transnational trends, and the weight of global actors such as the United Nations and the International Planned Parenthood Federation in these shifts is widely recognized. However, few studies compare how reproductive politics has developed (or receded) “on the ground” in the trans-Atlantic space from the postwar years to the present.

Many questions remain. Some relate to scope: how was access to abortion tied to other health and sexual rights in countries of the area since 1945? What did the struggle for reproductive agency encompass in each context, and how did different actors define reproductive rights? Others have to do with official discourses on reproduction and who conceived them: what were the stances of political actors – state authorities, parties, movements, courts etc. – and how did they interact? What was the role of the medical establishment and healthcare professionals, as well as other professionals (social workers, psychologists etc.)? Did religious organizations play a relevant part? Besides women and their bodily autonomy, what other subjects (“the nation,” parents, children) were evoked in these debates? Set against these, there is the role of women’s movements and feminist organizations: how did they fit into the picture, and how did their practices circulate across borders?

Then there are the questions of formal regulation and what it meant on the ground. How did legislation develop, and how did it differ across countries? How can the gap between progressive legislation and inadequate implementation be assessed? How did changes in formal regulation and implementation affect women’s lived experiences? What part did changing abortion technologies play in widening or narrowing access? Across all of this, what factors led to decisive shifts – both advances and reversals? Finally, is it truly possible to draw clear and coherent distinctions between “Western” and “Eastern” trajectories in the legalization of abortion, or between “capitalist” and “socialist” approaches to reproductive politics in general?

The conference aims to consider these questions in comparative perspective, bringing together researchers from various disciplines working on reproductive politics across the Atlantic. It sets out to confront and compare findings within a limited yet diverse set of country case studies, covering South America, Western and Eastern Europe, as well as the Eastern Mediterranean, with attention to the continuities and ruptures running from the postwar era into

the 1990s and beyond. Our goal is to contrast how reproductive rights were framed, fought for, institutionalized and contested in very different – albeit connected – contexts: under state socialism, liberal (and illiberal) democracies, right-wing dictatorships and in the transitions between them; in secular, predominantly Catholic and Protestant, as well as majority Muslim countries; in the centers of global capitalism and in its (semi-)peripheries. Invited scholars and organizers cover the following (present and former) countries: Argentina, Brazil, Croatia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, USSR and Yugoslavia, as well as the transnational networks among them and relevant international organizations. The cases have been chosen for the cross-border resonance of their reproductive struggles and policies, and for their particularities according to the criteria above.

UVOD

»Tako na eni kot na drugi strani [»anti-choice« vs. »pro-choice«] se isti argumenti kar naprej ponavljajo; znamenja se torej spreminjajo v simptom – čeprav ne v tako zaostreni obliki kot na Poljskem, kjer zahtevajo zakonsko prepoved abortusa hkrati z obveznim veroukom v šolah – simptom zapiranja novega političnega prostora? Je to že »splav demokracije«? Državljeni in državljanke demokratične dežele, z obilnimi izkušnjami iz polpreteklega obdobja in dobro opremljeni za boj z vsakršno propagando, si bodo lahko o tem ustvarili svoje mnenje.«

Navedek je iz uredniškega uvoda, ki ga je filozofinja Eva Dolar Bahovec napisala za zbornik *Abortus – pravica do izbire?! iz leta 1991*. Publikacija je bila del širše pobude v času slovenskega prehoda v samostojnost in večstrankarsko demokracijo. V njenem okviru so organizirane ženske uspešno ubranile pravico do svobodnega odločanja o rojstvih otrok, izrecno vključno s pravico do splava. To so dosegle s parlamentarnim zagovorništvom, posegi v strokovno in javno razpravo ter množičnimi demonstracijami, pravico pa zavarovale v 55. členu nove ustave, sprejete decembra 1991 z ustrezno obrazložitvijo.

Navedek je pomenljiv, ker umešča spore o splavu v širši razmislek o političnih prelomih in pričakovanih tistega časa, hkrati pa slovenske razprave postavlja ob bok dogajanju v drugih državah. Medtem ko so vidni predstavniki diskurza proti pravici do izbire napade na pravico do splava upravičevali kot nujen prelom z vrednotami in ureditvijo prejšnjega socialističnega režima, jih Dolar Bahovec bere ravno nasprotno: kot drsenje v novo obliko avtoritarizma in zavračanje načel na novo pridobljene demokracije (»splav demokracije«). Odlomek obenem omogoča vpogled v retorične strategije feminističnega aktivizma. Vse to ga skupaj napravi za koristno izhodišče za širša vprašanja, ki jih bo, upamo, obravnavala konferenca.

Splošno znano je, da se premiki v dostopu do splava ter drugih reproduktivnih zdravstvenih in spolnih pravic odzivajo tako na domače posebnosti kot na nadnacionalne trende, prav tako pa je široko priznana teža globalnih akterjev, kot sta Organizacija združenih narodov in Mednarodna zveza za načrtovano starševstvo (IPPF), pri teh premikih. Malo študij pa primerja, kako se je reproduktivna politika razvijala (ali nazadovala) »na terenu« v transatlantskem prostoru od povojnih let do danes.

Odprtih ostaja veliko vprašanj. Nekatera se nanašajo na obseg: kako je bil dostop do splava od leta 1945 povezan z drugimi zdravstvenimi in spolnimi pravicami v državah tega prostora? Kaj je boj za reproduktivno

samostojnost zajemal v posameznem kontekstu in kako so različni akterji opredeljevali reproduktivne pravice? Druga zadevajo uradne diskurze o reprodukciji in njihove snovalce: kakšna so bila stališča političnih akterjev – državnih oblasti, strank, gibanj, sodišč itd. – in kako so se med seboj prepletala? Kakšna je bila vloga medicinske stroke in zdravstvenih delavcev ter drugih strokovnjakov (socialnih delavk, psihologov itd.)? So imele verske organizacije pri tem pomembno vlogo? Kateri drugi subjekti (»narod«, starši, otroci) so bili poleg žensk in njihove telesne avtonomije priklicani v teh razpravah? Temu nasproti stoji vloga ženskih gibanj in feminističnih organizacij: kako so se vpisala v to sliko in kako so njihove prakse krožile prek meja?

Tu so še vprašanja formalne ureditve in njenega pomena na terenu. Kako se je razvijala zakonodaja in kako se je razlikovala med državami? Kako je mogoče oceniti razkorak med napredno zakonodajo in pomanjkljivim izvajanjem? Kako so spremembe formalne ureditve in njenega izvajanja vplivale na živete izkušnje žensk? Kakšno vlogo so imele spreminjajoče se tehnologije splava pri širjenju ali oženju dostopa? Kateri dejavniki so ob vsem tem vodili do odločilnih premikov – tako napredkov kot nazadovanj? In končno: je res mogoče potegniti jasne in dosledne ločnice med »zahodnimi« in »vzhodnimi« potmi legalizacije splava ali med »kapitalističnimi« in »socialističnimi« pristopi k reproduktivni politiki nasploh?

Konferenca želi ta vprašanja obravnavati v primerjalni perspektivi in v ta namen združuje raziskovalke in raziskovalce iz različnih disciplin, ki se ukvarjajo z reproduktivno politiko v atlantskem prostoru. Njen namen je sočiti in primerjati izsledke znotraj omejenega, a raznolikega nabora študij primerov posameznih držav, ki zajemajo Južno Ameriko, Zahodno in Vzhodno Evropo ter vzhodno Sredozemlje, s pozornostjo do kontinuitet in prelomov, ki tečejo od poveljne dobe v devetdeseta leta in naprej. Naš cilj je primerjati, kako so bile reproduktivne pravice uokvirjene, izbojevale, institucionalizirane in izpodbijane v zelo različnih – čeprav povezanih – kontekstih: pod državnim socializmom, v liberalnih (in neliberalnih) demokracijah,

desničarskih diktaturah in v prehodih med njimi; v sekularnih, pretežno katoliških in protestantskih ter večinsko muslimanskih državah; v središčih globalnega kapitalizma in v njegovih (pol)obrobjih. Vabljeni raziskovalci in raziskovalke ter organizatorji pokrivajo naslednje (sedanje in nekdanje) države: Argentino, Brazilijo, Francijo, Hrvaško, Irsko, Italijo, Nemčijo, Poljsko, Romunijo, Slovenijo, Srbijo, Španijo, Turčijo ter nekdanjo ZSSR in Jugoslavijo. Zajemajo tudi nadnacionalna omrežja med njimi in relevantne mednarodne organizacije. Primeri so bili izbrani zaradi čezmejnega odmeva njihovih reproduktivnih bojov in politik ter zaradi njihovih posebnosti v skladu z zgornjimi merili.



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Before Legalization: The Politics of Abortion and Women's Health Advocacy in 1970s Turkey

Scholarship on the legalization of abortion in Turkey in 1983 has largely credited it to the ruling conservative National Security Council, which came to power after the military coup of 1980, and its interest in limiting rapid population growth and asserting state regulatory control over reproduction. This paper, in contrast, focuses on the abortion debates already occurring in the 1970s, mapping the evolution of the struggle for the legalization of abortion in Turkey and outlining its main actors: the women's movement, and advocates in institutions such as the Family Planning Association of Turkey and the Turkish Medical Association.

Drawing on parliamentary minutes, news reports, and publications by medical experts and women's rights activists, it shows how these pro-legalization actors framed abortion as a women's health issue and built momentum for its legalization. The analysis of such actors' evolving positions reveals the emergence of a women's health agenda in 1970s Turkey, and highlights the key role played by pro-legalization activists and practitioners, their attention to the social contexts of abortion, and their wider concerns with women's and family welfare. By demonstrating the collaborations among different pro-legalization actors and the synergy created by their initiatives, the

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paper sheds light on the broad coalition that emerged around women's health advocacy in 1970s Turkey.

Sevgi Adak is associate professor at the Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, London. She holds a PhD in Middle East Studies from Leiden University (2015), specializing in women's history, the politics of secularism, and Turkish politics. She is the author of *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society and Gender in the Early Republic* (I.B. Tauris & Bloomsbury, 2022) and co-editor of *Tek Parti Dönemini Yeniden Düşünmek: Devlet, Toplum ve Siyaset* [Rethinking the Single-Party Period: State, Society and Politics] (Tarih Vakfı, 2022) and *The Enduring Legacy of the Habsburg Islam Policy: Muslim Communities in Central and Southeast Europe* (Edinburgh University Press, 2025). Her chapter "Women's Health Advocacy and the Struggle for the Legalization of Abortion in 1970s Turkey" is forthcoming in *From Rights to Justice: Global Reproductive Politics Since 1945* (University of California Press).

Abortion Policies in Practice: Abortion Commissions in Socialist Slovenia (1954-1977)

This paper examines women's petitions for abortion as a source for writing the history of reproduction "from below" in socialist Slovenia. It draws on petitions and related records produced at the Maternity Hospital in Koper between 1954 and 1977, when access to legal abortion in socialist Yugoslavia depended on approval by abortion commissions. Although operating within a state-regulated institutional framework, these records provide rare insights into how women themselves described unwanted pregnancies and justified their decisions to terminate them.

The petitions reveal significant changes in these arguments over more than two decades. In the 1950s, women's accounts frequently centered on poverty, poor housing, ill health, physical exhaustion, repeated pregnancies, and the difficulties associated with unmarried motherhood. Medical and social arguments often overlapped, reflecting a system in which social hardship could initially become legible through medical categories. Over time, however, women increasingly articulated their requests through changing expectations of family life, paid employment, relationships between partners, and family planning. Petitions from later decades reveal discussions of contraception, husbands' attitudes towards birth control, marital conflict, and women's attempts to reconcile employment with

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domestic and reproductive responsibilities. They also increasingly invoked the idea of the "unwanted child," linking reproductive decisions to the well-being of existing children and families.

These petitions therefore illuminate broader transformations in understandings of motherhood, work, marriage, gender relations, and reproductive responsibility in socialist Slovenia. At the same time, they require careful criticism of sources. They were not private testimonies but strategic narratives written to persuade abortion commissions. Rather than making them less valuable as sources, however, this rhetorical dimension reveals how women understood and negotiated changing institutional definitions of legitimate reasons for abortion. Read in this way, petitions allow us to examine reproductive governance from the perspective of those who had to navigate it.

Ana Cergol Paradiž is assistant professor at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, where she teaches general history of the nineteenth century and historical anthropology. She was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the CULTMIND center, ENGEROM department, University of Copenhagen, with the project *RETROCHILD: Children, Trauma and Political Violence in the Italo-Slovene Borderland (1945-1960)*. Her research interests are the social history of medicine, social history, the history of emotions, the history of childhood, and gender history. She has taken part in several projects, among them the ERC project EIRENE – Post-war Transitions in Gendered Perspective, and currently leads a project on maternity and reproductive politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the University of Ljubljana. She has published two monographs in Slovenian, *Eugenics in the Slovene Lands* (2015) and *"White Plague": Illegal Abortion and the Question of Fertility in Slovenia in the Interwar Period* (2023).

"Three Steps Back from Women's Emancipation": Abortion and the East German Feminist Movement in Unified Germany

This paper examines the debate over abortion regulation during the German reunification process, arguing that it provides a privileged lens through which to understand the marginalization of East German women's political experiences and claims in the construction of the unified German state. Rather than merely a legislative dispute, abortion became a key arena in which competing conceptions of women's emancipation and their role in post-socialist society confronted one another

Before reunification, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had fundamentally different legal frameworks. In 1972, the GDR adopted the Law on the Interruption of Pregnancy, allowing abortion on request during the first twelve weeks. In West Germany, abortion remained regulated by Paragraph 218 of the Criminal Code and was considered a criminal offence. Since the 1970s, §218 had been a central focus of West German feminist mobilization against restrictions on reproductive autonomy. Reunification extended most of West Germany's political, economic, and legal system to the eastern Länder, while abortion constituted a significant exception. The Unification Treaty required the Federal Parliament to adopt a common legal framework by December 1992, making abortion one of the most contentious issues of reunification. East German feminists

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strongly opposed the extension of §218 to the former East German territories. Emerging in the 1980s within Protestant Church spaces and entering the public sphere during the Peaceful Revolution, the movement had sought to build a democratic and feminist-reformed GDR. Through the establishment of the Independent Women's Association, participation in the Central Round Table, and contributions to the drafting of a new constitutional proposal, East German women claimed an active role in shaping the country's political transformation, embodied in the slogan "No State can be built without women." The rapid consolidation of reunification, however, transformed this ambition into a struggle to defend existing rights.

Drawing on public statements, Independent Women's Association records, feminist periodicals, and mobilization materials from 1990–1995, this paper shows how the abortion debate exposed the asymmetries of reunification and the delegitimization of East German women's experiences. East German feminists were not merely passive victims: despite a shrinking political space, they developed new mobilization strategies and forged networks of solidarity with West German feminist organizations.

Giulia De Carlini is a PhD candidate in Historical and Archaeological Sciences: Memory, Civilisation and Heritage at the University of Bologna, where she is a member of the MemoryLab research center. Her research project, *"Other" Memories: The Creation, Management and Preservation of the Documentary Heritage of the GDR Feminist Movement in Post-Reunification Germany*, focuses on memory politics in reunified Germany, with particular attention to the preservation and transmission of the documentary heritage of the GDR feminist movement in the post-socialist context. She has carried out research at Freie Universität Berlin and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Bonn within the international project ACTIVATE: The Activist, the Archivist and the Researcher.

Abortion Statistics in Late Socialist Romania

After 1966, the year when access to abortion was severely restricted by Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, the figures for abortion-related deaths started to grow. By 1989, when Ceaușescu fell, Romania registered the highest number of abortion-related deaths in Europe. It is estimated that more than 10,000 women died in late socialist Romania as a result of (illicit) abortion. The evolution of abortion figures and of abortion-related deaths was closely observed by the Romanian Ministry of Health (MoH), especially after 1970, as a decline in birthrates occurred after the initial explosion of 1967–68. These studies were undertaken to establish “the proportion of cases where the gynecologists could not find any objective sign [and background] that could have determined the spontaneous abortion, cases in which the women could be suspected to have undergone provoked abortions” (MoH, 1970, p. 14).

The abortion studies coordinated by the MoH thus provided not simply collections of numbers but qualitative explanations, which made use of studies and data published abroad for the purpose of comparison and interpretation. They also discussed international classifications and definitions, and the ways in which these could be employed to reflect Romanian realities. These interpretations were not value-free, contributing to the construction of categories of suspicion and of presumed guilt. In order to comply with the requirements of reporting to the WHO, the conclusions of Romanian abortion studies focused not on the percentage distribution of incomplete abortions according to women's occupation (where housewives represented the largest share), but on their incidence (which was highest among single women), even though the authors warned that existing data were not accurate enough to build on this composite indicator (MoH, 1970, p. 23).

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By exploring the MoH statistical studies of abortion and abortion-related deaths, my paper brings fresh insights into the social categorization of women who died following an (illegal) abortion in late socialist Romania. I argue that the need to comply with international standards when reporting abortion-related deaths helped construct categories of suspicion and of presumed guilt for women admitted to medical units with signs of pregnancy loss. In the absence of conclusive physical evidence and testimonies to confirm an illicit abortion, these constructed categories of suspicion could function as indicators of guilt.

Corina Doboș is a senior researcher at the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism of the Romanian Academy and associate lecturer in history at the University of Bucharest. She holds an MA in Studies of Nationalism from the Central European University and has been a fellow of the New Europe College, Bucharest, and of the Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena, with research stays at the EHESS Paris, Freie Universität Berlin, the University of Freiburg, and Birkbeck College, London. Her research interests revolve around the history of biopolitics, the history of science, population theories and policies in the twentieth century, the formation of expert knowledge, and global history. She is principal investigator of the projects *Crafting Demographic Knowledge in the 20th Century: Population and Development in an Eastern European Periphery* and *Managing Productivity Challenges: A Glocal Story of Brașov in Late Socialism*, and between 2007 and 2010 coordinated a research project on Ceaușescu's pronatalist policies. Her publications include the chapter “No Country for (Poor) Women: Reproductive Rights, Conservatism, and Neoliberalism in Post-socialist Romania” in *Everyday Postsocialism in Eastern Europe: History Doesn't Travel in One Direction* (Purdue University Press, 2024).

Debates on Abortion and Demographic Decline in Serbia (1974-2000)

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Abstracts and Authors

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Between 1952 and 1969, abortion in Yugoslavia underwent a gradual process of liberalization. In 1974, the person's right to decide freely on the birth of children was included in the Federal Constitution and the constitutions of the republics and provinces. Following the constitutional amendments of 1971-72, each republic assumed responsibility for health and social policy and consequently adopted its own legislation regulating abortion. In Serbia, the relevant law was enacted in 1977. It established a woman's right to terminate pregnancy on request up to the tenth week of gestation. For pregnancies between the tenth and twentieth weeks, however, termination was subject to the approval of designated first- and second-instance commissions.

During the socialist period, the question of women's right to abortion was not itself the primary subject of public or political debate. Rather, in the context of Serbia's demographic challenges – including depopulation in certain regions and rapid population growth in Kosovo – the discourse surrounding abortion was largely framed in demographic terms. Abortion was therefore discussed in relation to broader concerns about population trends and the perceived need to influence demographic developments, while simultaneously maintaining the principle of an individual's right to determine the number of children freely. After

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the dissolution of the country and the Communist Party, a new abortion law was enacted in 1995. Although the government initially proposed limiting abortion services to hospitals, opposition MPs successfully introduced amendments allowing abortions to be performed in primary healthcare centers (*domovi zdravlja*). They argued that restricting abortion to only sixty gynecological hospitals would effectively limit access and reflected an attempt to increase birthrates. As in other former Yugoslav republics, abortion was debated in Serbia during the 1990s. Calls for its restriction, however, came primarily from the Serbian Orthodox Church rather than from political parties. Given the Church's limited influence and abortion's longstanding role as a method of birth control, these views did not significantly shape official policy.

Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić is a principal research fellow at the Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade. She graduated from the Department of History of Yugoslavia at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, where she defended her master's thesis, *State Repression during the Dictatorship of King Alexander, 1929-1935*, and subsequently received her doctorate for the dissertation *Village and City: The Transformation of Serbia's Agrarian Society, 1945-1955*. Her research focuses on state repression in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the industrialization of socialist Yugoslavia, the living standards of ordinary people, rural-urban migration, the lives of young people in socialist Yugoslavia, and family planning. She has been a visiting researcher at the Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena, the Institute for the Study of the History of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Regensburg, and the Institute for the History of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Graz. She is the author of three monographs and of more than eighty articles published in Serbian and international journals.

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The Politics of Reproductive Rights in Croatia: Continuity, Contestation and Institutional Change

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Reproductive rights in Croatia present an interesting puzzle for institutionalist accounts of policy stability and change: while the foundational legislation inherited from the socialist period has remained stable for almost five decades, the institutional conditions under which these rights can be exercised have changed substantially, deepening inequalities in access along territorial and socioeconomic lines. Building on previous research documenting the growing financial, organizational, and socio-cultural barriers to reproductive rights, this paper shifts attention from changes in these rights to the politics underlying their peculiar combination of formal continuity and declining effective accessibility.

The paper situates the development of reproductive rights within the broader post-1990 trajectory of the Croatian welfare state, shaped by the interplay of socialist institutional legacies, market-oriented welfare-state restructuring, and the individualization of social “risks,” alongside the growing political salience of conservative ideas about family, gender, and reproduction. Within such a setting, reproductive rights have become an increasingly contested policy field, shaped by the competing demands of conservative and religious actors, feminist organizations, political parties, and institutional actors, including the Constitutional Court. Yet this contestation has not translated into a straightforward liberalization or retrenchment of reproductive rights: changing the foundational legislation has remained politically unattainable, and conflict has instead been absorbed and redirected into the terrain of implementation.

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From this perspective, reproductive policies emerge as a particularly revealing case of gradual institutional change: rather than through the formal retrenchment of rights, change has largely occurred through mechanisms such as altered financing and provision, uneven implementation, and conscientious objection. This has resulted in a hybrid reproductive policy regime in which liberal rights “on paper” increasingly coexist with stratified access. Political conflict has thus been consequential even where it has failed to produce fundamental legislative change, reshaping the institutional and implementation context through which existing rights acquire their substantive meaning. The Croatian case thereby illustrates how reproductive rights can be transformed without being formally dismantled, and how the absence of reform can itself become a powerful vehicle of policy change.

Ivana Dobrotić is professor of comparative social policy at the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, and an associate member of the University of Oxford’s Department of Social Policy and Intervention. Her research focuses on comparative social policy and gender, social, and territorial inequalities. She co-coordinates the International Network on Leave Policies & Research and serves on the board of ESPAnet – The Network for European Social Policy Analysis, and she served on the executive committee of the ECPR Standing Group on Gender & Politics (2021–2026). She is principal investigator of the PRAVOBI project on migrant workers’ family and social rights (NextGenerationEU), was principal investigator of the rEUsilience project (Horizon Europe), and held a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship (Horizon 2020). She sits on several journal editorial boards, has published widely in leading social policy journals including the *Journal of European Social Policy*, *Social Politics*, and *Social Policy & Administration*, and co-edited the *Research Handbook on Leave Policy: Parenting and Social Inequalities in a Global Perspective* (Edward Elgar, 2022).

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From the Green Wave to Javier Milei's Government: Feminist Governance of Reproductive Health Policies in Buenos Aires Province

In 2018, in Argentina, amid the country's first parliamentary debate over a bill granting legal access to abortion, a broad sector of society mobilized in support of the proposal: taking to the streets, sharing personal experiences, and wearing the green scarf, the symbol of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion. From then on, and in tune with transnational processes, feminism gained increasing visibility and popularity and, during the government of Alberto Fernández (December 2019–December 2023), became institutionalized through the creation of government agencies and public policies. In this context, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Law on Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy was passed on December 30, 2020. Following Javier Milei's electoral victory in late 2023, gender policies were dismantled, curtailed, and defunded, while feminism came to be blamed for an alleged moral decline – epitomized in expressions such as “the green-scarf murderers” – as well as for declining birthrates and their adverse economic consequences. This presentation traces the main antecedents of the process that led to the legalization of abortion and examines the current state of reproductive policies under a far-right national government. From a perspective that brings together global and local dimensions, it focuses particularly on the experience of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina's most populous jurisdiction, with approximately 17.6 million

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inhabitants. As a political opponent of the national government, the province has pursued a feminist approach to the development and implementation of sexual and reproductive health policies since December 2019.

Karina Felitti holds a PhD in History from the University of Buenos Aires, where she completed her doctoral dissertation on the reception of the birth control pill and the first family planning programs in Argentina during the 1960s. She is a researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina (CONICET) and is affiliated with the Instituto de Investigaciones en Estudios de Género (IIEGE) at the University of Buenos Aires. Her research focuses on policies, activism, and experiences related to sexual and reproductive health; the political and subjective articulations among women, feminisms, religions, and spirituality; and contemporary transformations in intimacy, love, and sexuality. She has been a visiting professor at CERI/Sciences Po and at the Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine (IHEAL), Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, and has held fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University, El Colegio de México, Université Paris Diderot, the Universidad de Granada, and the Fulbright Summer Institute. Her recent publications include the monograph *Promesas de la revolución sexual: Mercado del sexo y del amor en tiempos feministas* [Promises of the Sexual Revolution: The Market for Sex and Love in Feminist Times] (Prometeo, 2024), co-authored with Mariana Palumbo, and the article “Trayectorias anticonceptivas de varones que se practicaron una vasectomía sin bisturí en el sistema público de salud de la Provincia de Buenos Aires a fines de 2023” [Contraceptive Trajectories of Men Who Underwent No-Scalpel Vasectomy in the Public Health System of Buenos Aires Province in Late 2023] (*Revista de Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos*, 2025).

Abortion, Reproductive Autonomy, Women's Agency and Politics of Social Reproduction in post-1945 and post-1989 Poland

This presentation traces the trajectory of reproductive politics in Poland, focusing on two key periods: after 1945 and after 1989. I argue that structural struggles over the economy and reproduction intersected in 1956, when abortion was legalized under a productivist approach; in 1993, when abortion was restricted during the transition to capitalism and formal democracy; and between 2016 and 2023, when issues of biological and social reproduction, amid debates over abortion and unpaid activist reproductive labor, proved decisive in “re-democratization” processes, producing the phenomenon of “illegitimate care” (Rawłuszko and Grabowska 2026).

Drawing on my past research on democracy and abortion and current work on the political economy of reproduction, I delve into how biological reproduction can be made functional for different political formations: from state socialism to a post-state socialist form of capitalism combining neoliberal marketization, socialist productivization, and conservative moral regulation. Building on preliminary research on biological and social reproduction in intersectional contexts of migration, generational differences, and gender, I argue that debates on abortion, frequently framed as cultural value conflicts or “culture wars,” need to be reformulated – namely, within a political-economic analysis of social and biological reproduction, drawing on debates within Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) and pluralizing approaches to SRT (Mezzadri et al. 2024). Following Rai’s concept of depletion, I demonstrate how the fact that costs of reproductive work are reproduced across

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intersecting social positions – while the individual experience of this labor remains systematically undervalued and politically unprotected (Rai 2024) – coexists in Poland with a relative sense of individual autonomy and agency. Using Mezzadri’s notion of subsumption, I argue that informal provisioning becomes indispensable to capitalist accumulation, which relies on unpaid reproductive labor while externalizing its costs (Mezzadri 2019). Building on Premilla Nadasen’s analysis of the care economy, I further argue that care is increasingly incorporated into capitalist accumulation as a profit-driven and exploitative system rooted in racial capitalism; as a result, vulnerability and social reproduction turn into sites of extraction while relying on undervalued care labor. This is what Marta Rawłuszko and I call “illegitimate care.”

Magdalena Grabowska is a professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research spans emancipation movements under state socialism, systemic transformation, and contemporary grassroots mobilizations for reproductive justice and social reproduction. She is a graduate of Rutgers University, where she earned a doctorate in Women’s and Gender Studies. She was a recipient of a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship and is principal investigator of two research projects on reproductive agency and on abortion perceptions among the “undecided” portion of Polish society. Her recent publications include, with Marta Rawłuszko, “Social Reproduction as Resistance: Abortion, Refugees, and Illegitimate Care” (*Social Politics*, 2026) and “Towards the New Political Subjectivity: Abortion Protests, Social Reproduction Theory, and Democratization Processes” (*Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 2023). She is the author of *Broken Genealogies: Women’s Social and Political Activism in Contemporary Poland* (2018), and has also authored and co-curated non-academic research on feminist and queer movements and on gender-based violence.

"Artificial" Miscarriage: "Old" and "New" Abortion Technologies in Communist Poland

My paper focuses on abortion technologies in communist Poland. Throughout the communist period, both the Party-State and gynecological elites labeled legal abortion a "necessary evil" and developed an abortion script (Ramsey 2021): abortion (leading to) – infertility – (meaning) disability. I analyze the expert representations of the dilation and curettage (D&C) technique, used to manage both spontaneous and "artificial" miscarriages, a term used to describe abortion throughout the communist period. The legalization of abortion in the 1950s materialized in its generalized provision through D&C in the public healthcare system. In expert and general media outlets, medicalized "artificial miscarriage" was presented as a remedy to maternal mortality and morbidity caused by unsafe abortions. By the 1970s, however, the medicalization of abortion care became problematic in itself: a risk in its own right to women who, due to complications resulting from terminations, would become infertile and unable to fulfill the gendered mandate of motherhood. In debates around abortion, health, and population in professional medical literature, improving

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abortion techniques was a minor issue, though not entirely absent, and some Polish doctors were interested in the "new abortion technologies" that changed the global abortion landscape from the second half of the twentieth century onwards: vacuum aspiration and prostaglandins. This paper explores some of these initiatives and concludes that their limited uptake in Poland was a result of converging religious, institutional, and medical ideologies ultimately not interested in challenging the abortion – infertility – disability script.

Agata Ignaciuk is associate professor at the Department of the History of Science, University of Granada. Her research focuses on gender and the history of sexual and reproductive health and rights from a transnational and comparative perspective, and is in dialogue with the history of technology, international studies, anthropology, and sociology. Her main expertise is in twentieth-century Spain and Poland. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Women's History*, *Gender & History*, *Social History of Medicine*, *Medical History*, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, *History of the Family*, *Journal of Religious History*, *East European Politics, Societies and Cultures*, *Signs*, and *Slavic Review*. She is currently working on her second book, on contraceptive technologies in communist Poland, and leads a project on the history of abortion trials in Spain funded by the Spanish National Research Plan.

Medication Abortion: (Co)productions of Knowledge at the Crossroads of Medical, Militant and Lay Practices (1980-2020)

Medication abortion is a method of terminating pregnancy that uses various drugs – mainly mifepristone and misoprostol – to induce an abortion. This technique, which began to develop internationally in the second half of the twentieth century, was described by the WHO in 2022 as having “revolutionized access to quality abortion globally.” However, while surgical abortion and reproductive rights movements have received considerable attention, the history of medication abortion remains a surprisingly unexplored field in historiography. While mifepristone was developed and marketed with the sole aim of inducing abortion, misoprostol was created to treat gastrointestinal conditions; both compounds, however, have been the subject of international controversy since they were first marketed, owing to their abortive effects. The use of misoprostol for self-induced abortion began to gain popularity in Brazil in the late 1980s, and from the 2000s onwards activist groups began to emerge in various parts of the world, using misoprostol either on its own or in combination with mifepristone to carry out abortions without medical supervision in

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restrictive legal contexts. This presentation will examine how the development and practice of medication abortion took place through a process of co-construction of knowledge among different transnational actors and at different levels: activists, women seeking abortions, scientists, pharmaceutical companies, international organizations such as the WHO, and private foundations such as the Population Council and the Rockefeller Foundation all participated in this process, which led to a transformation in abortion practices and access all around the globe.

María Mundi-López is a PhD candidate at the University of Granada under a joint supervision arrangement with the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Her thesis, *Medication Abortion: Co-productions of Knowledge at the Crossroads of Medical, Activist and Lay Practices (1980-2020)*, explores the transnational history of the development and practice of medication abortion. Her recent publications include “Different Aspirations: Medicine, Activism and Uterine Vacuum Aspiration Technology in Spain (1960s-1980s)” (*Medical History*) and “Mifepristona (RU486): ciencia y controversia en torno a la introducción de la píldora abortiva en España (1982-2000)” [Mifepristone (RU486): Science and Controversy surrounding the Introduction of the Abortion Pill in Spain (1982-2000)] (*Dynamis*). Both articles examine the different constructions, discourses, and uses of abortion technologies.

Bodies, Borders, and Technologies: Reproductive Politics in Ireland (2000-2026)

The legalization of abortion in Ireland in 2018 marked not only a change in law but a profound transformation in the politics, technologies, and infrastructure of reproductive healthcare. This paper examines the shifting landscape of abortifacient technologies in Ireland pre- and post-legalization. Prior to the overturning of the constitutional abortion ban, abortion pills began to expand access beyond the state, facilitating abortion through online information networks and feminist grassroots activism. Medication abortion also played a major role in the “social decriminalization” of abortion and eventually helped shift public and political debate away from moralizing judgment and towards the “unworkable status quo” of Ireland’s abortion laws.

Drawing on the concept of reproductive governance, this paper explores how medication abortion has been reconfigured inside the post-legalization medico-legal infrastructure in Ireland, reshaping institutional, social, and temporal norms surrounding early pregnancy termination in particular. It critically explores the growing reliance on medication abortion in Irish reproductive healthcare and the relational dynamics through which surgical procedures have become increasingly inaccessible. In

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Ireland, surgical methods of terminating pregnancy were largely absent prior to 2018, appearing primarily in the context of late gestation miscarriage management.

This paper argues that the institutionalization of medication abortion has produced both gains and constraints for reproductive rights. By critically examining the relationship between legal reform, technological innovation, and changing healthcare infrastructures, it highlights how reproductive governance in Ireland has been reconfigured rather than dismantled in the post-Repeal landscape.

Aideen O'Shaughnessy is senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Lincoln. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Cambridge and an MA in Gender Studies Research from Utrecht University. Her research areas include reproduction, health, technology, gender, and social movements. Her first book was *Embodying Irish Abortion Reform* (Bristol University Press, 2024), and her forthcoming book is *From Pills to Surgery: Abortion Methods and Reproductive Governance* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2028). She has published widely on abortion politics, sexual and reproductive health, and feminist activism in journals including *Body & Society*, the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, and the *Irish Journal of Sociology*. She is co-editor of *Sociological Research Online*.

From Self-Help to Self-Management: Transatlantic Feminist Circulation of Abortion Methods and the Struggle for Free Abortion in the 1970s

This presentation draws on key aspects of my book tracing the global history of Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA), published in French in August 2026. MVA is an early-term abortion procedure that evacuates the contents of the uterus using minimal equipment – typically a speculum, a cannula, and a manual syringe or pump. It is portable and can be performed with local anesthesia or without anesthesia. This technique goes by several names globally, including menstrual extraction, menstrual regulation, and mini-abortion.

In France, it became known as the “Karman Method” after Harvey Karman introduced his version of MVA – using flexible plastic cannulas and a syringe – during a visit in 1972. The Karman Method played a pivotal role in the French free abortion movement, as activist groups adopted it to perform clandestine abortions and challenge restrictive legislation. As a French historian, I took this as the starting point of my research: investigating where this method originated and exploring the background of the man who gave it his name. I also explored the circulation of the method from France to other European countries. My archival research primarily spans the United States and France, alongside digitized archives accessed from

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Australia. Within Europe, a network of colleagues studying the dissemination of the Karman method in Italy, Spain, and Germany helped illuminate how the technique was uniquely appropriated across different national contexts.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader collective effort to reintegrate transatlantic activist networks into the global history of reproductive technology. At the intersection of transnational protest cultures of the 1960s and 1970s and the history of abortion legalization, this paper defines the “Karman Method” as a specific European activist approach to MVA that advocated “self-managed abortion.” By focusing on these shared practices rather than on abstract theory alone, this work opens new perspectives for a polycentric, transatlantic “history from below” of feminisms.

Bibia Pavard is associate professor of contemporary history at Paris-Panthéon-Assas University. Her work lies at the crossroads of the history of mobilizations, of reproductive health, and of social change, with a particular interest in gender and feminism. She has published on contraception and abortion in France, on the movements of the long sixties, and on the history of feminisms. Her new book, *La douleur et le soin: Enquête sur Harvey Karman et sa méthode d'avortement* [Pain and Care: An Inquiry into Harvey Karman and His Abortion Method] (2026), focuses on the transnational circulation of the vacuum abortion technique during the 1960s and 1970s, with the aim of grasping a “global revolution of abortion” at the intersection of technical and political innovation.

Claiming Reproductive Dignity in the Late USSR

Anna Sidorevich

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Abstracts and Authors

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“But I beg you, do something, change something – we are human beings, even if we are women,” exclaimed a woman on the pages of *Rabotnitsa* in early 1989. The late 1980s saw the advent of *glasnost* and, with it, a broad discussion of a formerly taboo issue: Soviet women’s maltreatment in state reproductive care institutions. *Rabotnitsa* provided an explicit illustration of its audience’s sincere engagement with the subject, grounded in women’s lived experiences. Yet the period of *glasnost* was not the first time the issue had been the subject of a series of critical publications: almost a decade earlier, it had already been at the center of underground samizdat and tamizdat periodicals initiated by a group of Leningrad-based women. While critiques of material shortages in the healthcare system, as well as of the issues that can be defined through the notion of gynecological and obstetric violence, in the late 1970s and early 1980s likely contributed to the persecution of the women who raised these concerns in samizdat, the late 1980s saw the introduction of market incentives as a possible solution to the reform of the system.

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The present paper draws on the concept of reproductive dignity to analyze late-Soviet women’s critiques of the various forms of gynecological and obstetric violence they endured in state reproductive healthcare institutions. It situates these practices within the broader context of Soviet gender legislation and ideology, as well as within the structure and functioning of the Soviet healthcare system. At the center of this study is an examination of women’s critiques of their “inhumane” treatment in Soviet healthcare through the underground publications (samizdat and tamizdat) of Leningrad feminists, along with interviews conducted with some of the group members. Drawing on these primary sources, as well as on the Soviet women’s press of the *glasnost* period such as *Rabotnitsa*, the paper also explores the strategies that late-Soviet women employed to navigate the system’s rigidity and shortcomings in pursuit of more humane care, thereby exhibiting their agency.

Anna Sidorevich is *maîtresse de conférences contractuelle* at Sciences Po Strasbourg and affiliated researcher with the Centre for History at Sciences Po Paris. She holds a PhD in History from Sciences Po Paris (2024), specializing in women’s and gender history and the history of the USSR. Her doctoral dissertation, *The Leningrad Women’s Movement (1979–1982): Between Soviet Emancipation and Second-Wave Feminism*, explored the emergence of Leningrad feminism at the intersection of Soviet dissent, transnational feminist solidarity, and the Cold War. Her recent publications include “‘The Terrible Burden of Being a Woman’: Childbirth and Abortion in the Late USSR through the Prism of Leningrad Feminists’ Underground Publications (1979–1982)” (*Connexe*) and the chapter “A Christian Feminism in the USSR? A Historical Overview of the Religious Women’s Club ‘Mariia’ (1980–1982)” in an edited volume (Routledge, 2023).

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Right to Health, Social Protection of Maternity, Reproductive Self-Determination: Social and Political Actors in Italy (1950s-1970s)

In the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the call for direct state intervention was explicit and carefully reasoned, bound up with medical arguments against birth control and the declared intention to produce a generation of soldiers and colonizers – as the Italian and French cases plainly attest. The discursive shift was thus complete, and the founding terms that Fascism would subsequently make its own came into being: race, number, and power. The theme of procreation thereby entered the public sphere, and demographic power became the central concern of the Italian Penal Code of 1930, most notably in Title X, dedicated to “the integrity and health of the race.”

Although not widely known to the general public, Title X remained in force in republican Italy until the approval of Law No. 194 of 22 May 1978, which decriminalized voluntary abortion under specific conditions and repealed Title X of the 1930 Penal Code. Law 194, unchanged and still in force today, was the result of careful political mediation, rooted in the “historic compromise” strategy pursued by Italian Communist Party secretary Enrico Berlinguer between 1973 and 1979. The final legislative stage unfolded against a dramatic backdrop: the kidnapping and murder of Christian Democrat

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leader Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, whose body was found in Rome on 9 May 1978. The abortion law would be one of the last reforms passed by the “national solidarity governments,” alongside the psychiatric reform and the establishment of the National Health Service.

This paper traces the origins and evolution of the Italian debate on abortion, from the squares to the Parliament, from the 1950s to the passage of Law 194/1978. I will capture the intertwined actions of different actors, both male and female, individual and collective, national and supranational. At the same time, I will focus on the related, crucial issues raised by abortion: demographic transitions, self-determination, health as a civil right, and the body as a public and mainly political “site.”

While institutions remain central to this account, I will not treat them as coherent, immanent structures bearing down on defenseless individuals from above. I will instead pay close attention to the complex mechanisms and social articulations of power, as well as to the resources that are nevertheless available to subjects who are legally vulnerable. The paper, finally, will reveal the polyphonic and long-lasting nature of the Italian debate, also contributing to highlighting its transnational dimensions

Paola Stelliferi is assistant professor at the University of Pisa. Her research explores the history of modern Italy from a gender perspective. She has studied women’s movements in 1970s and 1980s Italy, paying particular attention to the relationship between history, memory, and biography. Her most recent publication is *History of Abortion in Italy: From Fascism to the Present*, written with Alessandra Gissi (Routledge, forthcoming), a translation of *L’aborto: Una storia* (Carocci, 2023).

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Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc is a research associate at the Institute of Culture and Memory Studies of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), habilitated as assistant professor in cultural history. Her research focuses on memory studies, women's intellectual history, and gender equality in academia, especially in the post-Yugoslav and socialist contexts. She was awarded the 2015 Jean Blondel PhD Prize for the best dissertation by the European Consortium for Political Research. Recently she edited collection of biographies *How women co-created scientific development in Yugoslavia* (in Slovenian, Založba ZRC, 2023) and co-edited a compendium of primary sources *Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women's Rights: East Central Europe, Second Half of the Twentieth Century* (CEU Press, 2024).

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Victor Strazzeri is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary History – INZ, Ljubljana, with a secondment at the University of Bologna. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Freie Universität Berlin (2017) and has held postdoctoral positions at the Universities of Berne and Geneva and at the Federal University of São Paulo. His work examines the relationship between communist party politics and feminist movements in the 1970s, principally in Italy, Spain, and Brazil, as well as topics in Marxist thought and critical theory. His current project, REDFEM, extends this research to reproductive politics in post-1968 Italy and socialist Slovenia. He is the author of “Beyond the Double Blind Spot: Relocating Communist Women as Transgressive Subjects in Contemporary Historiography” (*Gender & History*, 2024) and “The Interweaving: Communist Women and Feminism in 1970s Italy” (*Contemporary European History*, 2024), and co-edited with Paola Stelliferi the special issue *Transnational Feminist Movements in History* (19th–20th Centuries) of the journal *Contemporanea* (2023).

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**Organizacijski in programski odbor /
Organizing and Scientific Committee:**

Victor Strazzeri, Ana Cergol Paradiž,
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**Oblikovanje in prelom /
Design and layout:**

Nina Turina

Fotografije / Images:

Igor Modic, Ženski protest pred skupščino za ohranitev
pravice do splava, 11. december 1991, notranja naslovnica /
Women's protest outside the Assembly in defense of the right
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Božo Štajer, Centralni ginekološki dispanzer, Ljubljana,
neznano leto, str. IX / Central Gynecology Clinic, Ljubljana,
year unknown, p. IX © Muzej novejšje in sodobne zgodovine
Slovenije / National Museum of Contemporary History of
Slovenia

Založila / Published by:

Založba Univerze v Ljubljani (University of Ljubljana Press)

Izdala / Issued by:

Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani
(Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts)

Za založbo / For the publisher:

Gregor Majdič, rektor Univerze v Ljubljani /
Rector of the University of Ljubljana

Za izdajatelja / For the issuer:

Mojca Schlamberger Brezar, dekanja Filozofske fakultete /
Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana



Co-funded by
the European Union



Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency

The conference and the program booklet were co-funded by the European Union through the REDFEM project* (Red Feminists: Communist Women Activists and Reproductive Rights Struggles in Post-1968 Italy and Slovenia, MSCA grant agreement No. 101209945) under the Horizon Europe programme, and by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) through the project Motherhood and Reproductive Politics in the 19th and 20th Centuries (J6-4602) and the research programmes Historical Interpretations of the 20th Century (P6-0347) and Slovene History (P6-0235-2022).

*Konferenco in programsko knjižico sta sofinancirali Evropska unija v okviru projekta REDFEM** (Red Feminists: Communist Women Activists and Reproductive Rights Struggles in Post-1968 Italy and Slovenia, MSCA, pogodba št. 101209945) iz programa Obzorje Evropa in Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS) v okviru projekta Materinstvo in reproduktivna politika v 19. in 20. stoletju (J6-4602) ter raziskovalnih programov Zgodovinske interpretacije 20. stoletja (P6-0347) in Slovenska zgodovina (P6-0235-2022).*

* Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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Reproductive Politics in the Atlantic Space:

Advances (and Reversals)
from the Postwar Period to
the Present

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