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Disrupted Expectations: Female Mobility and Political Displacement in the Case of Atena Milunić?

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Abstract

This paper examines female mobility under socialism through the case of Atena Milunić, a medical doctor whose trajectory was shaped by Cominform-related displacement after 1948. Moving beyond a purely biographical approach, the paper situates her experience within broader structures of socialist governance, transnational mobility, and gendered expectations.

Drawing on archival sources, particularly the surveillance file compiled by the Yugoslav State Security Service (SDS), the analysis explores how Milunić's position was shaped by the intersection of gender, political stigmatization, migrant status, and professional role. After working in the Yugoslav health-care system, she undertook professional specialization in the United States, a form of mobility initially aligned with socialist expectations. However, the 1948 Cominform Resolution transformed this trajectory: return became politically impossible, and she continued her life in Czechoslovakia as part of the Cominform emigration.

As a woman marked by political rupture, her mobility was neither fully voluntary nor entirely controlled, but unfolded within a space of constrained choices and shifting opportunities. While she participated in émigré political and media activities, her experience was also shaped by limited visibility, continuous surveillance, and long-term separation from her children.

By focusing on the gap between official narratives of socialist internationalism and lived experiences of displacement and adaptation, the paper highlights how forms of agency emerged within constraint. The case demonstrates how female mobility was structured through the intersection of gender, politics, and family, illuminating the complex interplay between structure and agency in socialist transnational contexts.

Keywords: Female Mobility; Atena Milunić; Cominform; Yugoslavia; Socialism