Hungarian Historical Review 14, no. 3 (2025): 459–490

The Journalistic Activity of Rosika Schwimmer from the 1890s until her Death in a Transnational Perspective

Dóra Fedeles-Czeferner
ELTE Research Centre for the Humanities
Fedeles-Czeferner.Dora@btk.elte.hu

This paper examines the journalistic career of Rosika Schwimmer, a prominent Hungarian feminist and pacifist, from the 1890s until her death. It situates her work within the broader historical context of transnational feminist and pacifist movements of the early twentieth century. Schwimmer's career was shaped by a wide network of contacts in the international progressive women's movement. Her activism enhanced her visibility as a public intellectual, but her controversial pacifist stance later led to political isolation and negatively affected her professional opportunities after emigrating to the United States. Throughout her life, Schwimmer used the press as a tool for activism and as a platform for self-promotion. The paper also explores her qualifications, skill sets, and the range of publications she contributed to, which included liberal newspapers and feminist journals.

The paper also provides insights into the challenges women faced in journalism in the first half of the 20th century, contrasting two articles from 1912 and 1914 that present opposing views on women's prospects in the field. Schwimmer's career began with translations, which served as a gateway to international journalism. She published in Hungarian, German, and later English-language journals, often on topics like women's rights, peace advocacy, and international cooperation. Her controversial and eccentric personality led to conflicts with colleagues, which also shaped her professional image and legacy. The paper concludes with a case study of her articles from 1919–1920, which illustrate the fusion of her political and journalistic identities.

Key words: Rosika Schwimmer, journalism, feminist, pacifist, women's rights, activism, transnational, Hungary, international press.

Introduction

In October 1912, *A Nő és a Társadalom* (Woman and Society), a journal published in Budapest between 1907 and 1913 as the first official press organ of the Budapest-based Feministák Egyesülete (Feminists' Association, or FE) and Nőtisztviselők Országos Egyesülete (National Association of Female Clerks, or NOE), included a short article in its *Szemle* (Review) column. According to the

 DOI 10.38145/2025.3.459

author of this article, who wished to remain anonymous, "the new phenomenon in the occupation of female labor is the employment of women in the field of political journalism." The author could not, of course, undertake an analysis of the general trends in this phenomenon in such a short article, but (s)he did provide a number of examples in support of his/her arguments. In addition to journalists from Budapest, the article shares the names of female reporters living and working in Timişoara (or Temesvár by its Hungarian name; today a city in Romania).[1] Because the text emphasized the importance of Timişoara, we might suppose that it was written by the leader of the FE's Political Committee, Rosika Schwimmer, who had grown up in the city and was obviously familiar with local conditions. By that time, she had emerged as an internationally well-known progressive feminist activist and pacifist. She would have been a logical choice as author, as she was the editor-in-chief of *A Nő és a Társadalom*, which by the early 1910s had a nationwide circulation in Hungary. The article also mentions the women editors of a political daily in the southern regions of Hungary and in Transylvania. Furthermore, it lists a few women from the membership and supporter circles of NOE and FE who were employed by various daily newspapers published in Budapest. At the end of the text (which is only 15 lines long), the author expresses his/her wish that "we do hope that professional women journalists will replace the sports journalists who are damaging through the amateurism and imitation of male writers."[2]

This was not the only time that *A Nő és a Társadalom* devoted attention to women journalists. However, after a series of articles was published in this organ encouraging women's empowerment in journalism, reporting, and editing, *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* (Woman. A Feminist Journal), which was the successor to *A Nő és a Társadalom*, began to deal with the issue. In one article, it reported on journalism courses that were organized for women in Budapest. The author of the article is identified merely as "A woman reporter." The relatively detailed and long article approaches the issue from several different aspects and argues that "Hungarian journalism is closed to women's contributions." After discussing the

1 For example, a member of FE leadership, Count Mrs. Sándor Teleki, née Júlia Kende (1864, Pest–1937, Budapest), who published her works under the pseudonym Szikra [or Spark], is mentioned in an editorial in the journal *Világ* [World] (Budapest, 1910–1949). Four other women journalists are mentioned: Mrs. Géza Antal, who also published in *Világ*, Lydia Kovács (?–1918, Budapest), who was employed as a reporter by the journals *Az Est* [The Evening] (Budapest, 1910–1939) and *A Nap* [The Day] (Budapest, 1904–1922), and Mrs. Hollós née Nandin de Grobois, who was "secretary of the editorial office of the [newspaper] *Budapesti Hírlap* [Budapest News] [Budapest, 1883–1939]." "Nők a sajtóban," 185.

2 Ibid.

reasons for the "male domination" of newspaper editorial offices, the author explains that, "with a few exceptions […] the situation and living conditions of women writers and journalists are dire […], their position is uncertain, and their success is sometimes dependent on petty considerations." The author therefore warns women who are about to embark on a career in journalism not to do so. She claims that even if they succeed, they will almost certainly fall victim to the exploitative attitudes of male editors.[3]

While the article published in 1912 is entirely optimistic about women's prospects in journalism, the article which appeared two years later is negative. This can be interpreted in several ways. The interpretations can be linked to the structural characteristics of the two journals and the editorial motivations behind their publication. Like many of the short news items in the two periodicals, which share many similarities in terms of structure, content, and style, the earlier text seems to have been intended to inspire the readers with propagandistic elements. The author of the 1912 text clearly wanted to convey the message that women were able to succeed in careers in journalism and editing that had previously been almost entirely dominated by men. The 1914 article, in contrast, is a longer, analytical piece. In its structure and length, it is a problematic article that uses every possible argument and rhetorical device to dissuade women from pursuing careers in journalism. Of course, the author of the article may have been several reasons for writing this. However, given her identity (a "female reporter" who chose to keep her name secret), she may also have sought to discourage other women from becoming journalists, as they might have been competition for her.[4]

The reality is roughly halfway between the claims made in the two articles. As early as the 1880s, a few Hungarian women were able to make a living from journalism and editorial work.[5] At the turn of the century, Rosika Schwimmer was one of these women. She made an unparalleled contribution as a journalist,

3 Egy női reporter [A female reporter], "Laptudósítói tanfolyam," 244–45.

4 Ibid.

5 Compare with Janka Wohl (Pest, 1843–Budapest, 1901) and her sister Stefania Wohl (1846, Pest–1899, Budapest), who worked as authors for different journals and editors of various fashion magazines. They published articles in Hungarian and also in German, English, and French in several foreign press organs. In addition to their work as journalists, they published independent volumes, ran a popular salon in the center of Budapest, and worked as translators. For more details on their lives, work, and international reception, see Mészáros, "Wohl-nővérek munkássága."

author, and periodical editor in Hungary, western Europe, and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.[6]

This paper explores the key turning points in Rosika Schwimmer's journalistic career, situating her work within the broader historical context of early twentieth-century transnational feminist and pacifist movements. I argue that from the outset of her career, Schwimmer benefited from substantial support from prominent figures in the international progressive women's movement, particularly in Austria, the Netherlands, and the United States. This network of allies significantly shaped her trajectory as both a journalist and editor. Drawing on the growing historiography of transnational feminism and the role of the press in women's activism,[7] I show how Schwimmer's involvement in the women's and peace movements intersected with and influenced her professional path. During the formative years of her career, her activist engagement enhanced her visibility and credibility as a public intellectual. However, this relationship became ambivalent following her emigration to the United States, where increasing political isolation, amplified by her controversial pacifist stance, negatively affected her professional opportunities and public reception.

Throughout her life, Schwimmer sought to utilize the press not only as a tool for activism but also as a platform to construct and maintain her own public persona. Her self-branding strategies can be understood in light of recent literature on women's authorship and media,[8] which underscores how women navigated public discourses through journalism. At the same time, her strong and eccentric personality led to frequent conflicts with colleagues and collaborators, and these tensions shaped her professional image and legacy. This paper also investigates Schwimmer's qualifications and the specific skill sets that made her well-suited to a journalistic career. What kind of formal or informal

6 On this, see Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*.

7 E.g. Offen, *European Feminisms*. This foundational text maps out transnational feminist networks and contextualizes the work of figures similar to Schwimmer. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, which discusses the emergence of an international feminist movement and the key role played by women like Schwimmer in shaping its discourse.

8 E.g. Delap et al., *Feminism and the Periodical Press*, 1. This book offers insights into how early twentieth-century feminist writers used the press as a tool for activism and self-fashioning. It also highlights that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the periodical press became "a crucial vehicle through which women's movements debated and disseminated ideas, developed organizations and networks, and connected readers across social and geographic lines." Ibid xxvii. See also Lake, *The History*. Though it focuses on Australia, this analysis of feminist political agency and public engagement through the media is conceptually relevant to the discussion here. On the advancement of women's journalism in the Austro-Hungarian context, see Klaus and Wischermann, *Journalistinnen*, 66.

training did she have? What editorial or rhetorical techniques characterized her work? I map the types of publications she contributed to, which ranged from liberal newspapers to feminist journals, and I examine the scope and reach of these press outlets within and beyond Hungary. In terms of content and genre, Schwimmer wrote primarily on issues related to women's rights, peace advocacy, and international cooperation. Her work spanned various formats, including editorials, news reports, and opinion pieces, reflecting a deep commitment to both activism and professional journalism.

The article concludes with a close reading of a three-part series of articles published by Schwimmer at the turn of 1919–1920. I interpret this series as a form of ars poetica for her activism, or in other words as a reflection on her political ethos and the challenges of sustaining idealism amid disillusionment and exile. This case study illustrates the fusion of her political and journalistic identities and sheds light on the intellectual and emotional foundations of her lifelong struggle for peace and women's emancipation.

Sources

In addition to meticulously preserving her correspondence and documents related to her personal life and political activism, Schwimmer also archived her journalistic writings, organizing them as a distinct section within the Rosika Schwimmer Papers in the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division.[9] Her extensive documentation practices, driven by a tendency toward graphomania, a growing compulsion for systematization, and a persistent need for self-vindication following her unsuccessful diplomatic mission in Switzerland as envoy of the Hungarian government in 1918, are especially evident in Series 2 of the collection, which comprises twelve boxes. In this section, carefully sorted and catalogued published and unpublished articles can be found from the period between 1896 to 1948. These articles are supplemented with notes and research materials, partly produced by Schwimmer herself. Her secretaries also included the different references/reactions Schwimmer received to her articles between 1899 and 1940. Regarding the correspondence she carried on with the editors of the journals she published in, however, only a small fraction can be found here.[10] The archivists who organized the collection have integrated the vast majority

9 NYPL RSP.

10 Writings and speeches, 1896–1948. NYPL RSP II.

of these materials into the 465 boxes of Schwimmer's general correspondence (Series 1).[11]

The six publication indexes, which have also been preserved in this series of the collection, contain Schwimmer's articles published in Hungarian, German, English, and French, as well as references to her early writings. The indexes include her writings published in Hungary, further regions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Europe, and the United States of America in chronological order.[12] Schwimmer's short articles are also included here, the majority of which had been published anonymously or under pseudonyms. These were submitted to the review sections of various Austrian and German journals, and most of them appeared in the early 1900s. A tremendous amount of manuscripts can also be found here, partly with notes made by editors and proofreaders.

Schwimmer's Journalistic Career within the Context of Women's Intellectual Work

It is essential to begin with an examination of Rosika Schwimmer's journalistic career within the broader context of women's intellectual labor at the fin-de-siècle. After this, I briefly analyze the particular situation of Schwimmer and her family background. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century was a period marked by profound social and cultural transformations in East Central Europe.[13] It can be characterized as one of the most turbulent periods in the economic, social, and cultural development of the region, including Austria and Hungary. Vienna was at the forefront of the adaptation of modern Western culture within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but Budapest also played an important role.[14]

The innovations of the industrial revolutions, the development of transport, communications, and the press, as well as the gradual expansion of institutional education greatly expanded the world of traditionally closed communities.

11 General Correspondence 1890–1948. NYPL RSP I.A.

12 The indexes, written initially in Hungarian and German and later in English, include the title of the article, the name of the newspaper or journal, the place of publication (country and city), and occasionally information on the honoraria received by Schwimmer. Publication index volumes, 1899–1914. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10; Publication index volumes, 1906–1915. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467.1; Publication index notes (incomplete), 1903–1940. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467. 2–3.

13 Hanák, *A dualizmus korának*, 47.

14 E.g., various political conflicts, recurrent economic crises and the debates related to ethnic minorities. Ibid.

Distances that had seemed unbridgeable in previous decades were shortened, and the flow of ideas and information accelerated rapidly, alongside the flow of products. However, it was not until the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867 that Hungary began to experience a major economic boom. The social and economic changes, the growing "surplus of women," and the increasing number of widows even before World War I forced more and more women into the world of paid work. This was exacerbated by the economic crisis of 1873 and the subsequent recurrent recessions. Marriage was therefore no longer a "solution" for all women in society, as the example of Rosika Schwimmer also illustrates.[15]

The increased participation of women in the labor market began in the late 1880s, i.e. around the time of Schwimmer's birth. In 1900, more than a quarter of women (27.6 percent) were already working to earn an income in Hungary, with a higher proportion (36.1 percent) in the capital. The general trend was for girls to start working at a very young age, but the majority of them stopped working after they got married. In 1910, 70 percent of working women were unmarried.

After the turn of the century, the structural transformation of the economy in the Dual Monarchy led to the feminization of certain professions. In many cases, this led to the reduction of the prestige these professions had enjoyed.[16] Until World War I and in many respects even in the interwar period, a large part of public opinion, still dominated by men, considered women unfit to do work requiring serious concentration. Nevertheless, even before 1914, the number of women employed in certain intellectual jobs in agriculture, industry, and the service sector had begun to increase gradually.[17] Importantly, however, a significant proportion of women did not "rush" into the world of labor of their own free will, but in response to overwhelming pressures. The postponement of marriage compelled women to support themselves financially. Over time, these multifaceted social transformations contributed to a growing recognition that the role of a wife could be reconciled with participation in the paid labor market.[18]

The Budapest-born and, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, internationally renowned Rosika Schwimmer was a women's rights

15 On these trends, see Gyáni and Kövér, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete*, 19.

16 See Appelt, *Von Ladenmädchen*, 212–16.

17 Ibid.

18 Gyáni, *A nő élete*; Koncz, *Nők*.

and peace movement activist and also editor-in-chief and author for the first Hungarian feminist journal, *A Nő és a Társadalom*. She was born into a middle-class Jewish family as the oldest of three children. After her father's bankruptcy, the family had to leave Budapest. From the age of six, Schwimmer grew up in parts of Transylvania and also in the cities of Timişoara in the region known as Banat and Subotica in the region known as Vojvodina. She moved back to Budapest in the middle of the 1890s and lived there until 1920. She attended primary school in Budapest and Transylvania. For a while, she was educated in a convent school that she later criticized harshly, and she graduated from a public school for girls. She also enrolled in a special school for commerce. She became proficient in several languages aside from Hungarian: German, English, and French, and she was able to communicate in Dutch, Italian, Swedish, and Norwegian. In the capital, she worked as a governess and later as a female clerk, meaning she became well aware of the troubles faced by working women.[19]

Schwimmer's journalistic activity has to be examined within the context of women's paid work for several reasons. First, she could not rely on her impoverished father for financial support, and she thus had to support herself from a relatively young age. From the sources on Schwimmer's income and expenditures, it is clear that she could not or did not want to rely on her husband Béla Bédy's support during their comparatively brief marriage. Bédy was also a journalist, but their marriage only lasted from 1911 until 1913. Thus, Schwimmer needed money, which may explain why, in addition to progressive, feminist journals, she also published in the organs of social democratic women's organizations and even in several fashion magazines. Schwimmer needed the money she earned from journalism throughout her entire life, including the decades she spent in emigration in the United States. Even a few weeks before her death, she noted among her medical records that "it would be much more useful if I wrote my article [instead of these notes on the state of my health]. Everyone reads articles, but no one will read these…"[20]

Schwimmer did not remain, however, at the level of the average female journalist. By the eve of World War I, she had become a celebrity about whom the world's leading newspapers and journals published. This popularity did not change from the period of her isolation beginning in the 1920s. And even though she became persona non grata in certain groups of the women's and

19 This paragraph is an extract from my book on the life and career of Rosika Schwimmer. Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*, 117–18.

20 Rosika Schwimmer's diary note in English. June 21, 1948. NYPL RSP X. Box 586.

peace movement during the last two decades of her life, stories about her still frequently appeared in the papers, and she gave interviews regularly.

Influences, Challenges, and Rewards: How Schwimmer's Relation to her Journalistic Profession Altered over the Years

How did Rosika Schwimmer's family background, her childhood in southern Hungary, and her involvement in both the Hungarian and international women's and peace movements shape her development as a journalist? To what extent did her determined, passionate, yet markedly egocentric and at times confrontative personality facilitate or obstruct her professional advancement? I consider additional aspects that require further exploration in order fully to understand the intersections between her personal history, activism, and journalistic career. Schwimmer graduated from a state school for girls. After her graduation, she enrolled in a special trade school. From an early age, her parents and teachers recognized her talent for languages and writing. This talent proved invaluable in her later career. Within the family, they spoke not only Hungarian but also German, and she learned French at school. This likely explains her ability to master English and a few other languages as an adult. At around 16, she already had ambitious career plans, envisioning herself as a journalist, which was rather unusual in contemporary Timişoara. Her maternal uncle, Lipót/Leopold Katscher, who made a living as a writer and journalist, certainly served as an inspiration in this respect.[21]

Schwimmer had no qualifications of the type that would have predisposed her to a career as a journalist. At that time, however, this was not a problem, as very few female journalists had any qualifications in this field. Schwimmer's ars poetica as a journalist may have been influenced, later, by the work of her husband, the aforementioned journalist Béla Bédy, but we cannot be sure of this, as their marriage lasted only two years. When Schwimmer began to build her career as a journalist and activist in the early 1900s, her first mentor was her uncle. In addition to his valuable professional and practical advice, he provided her with ongoing financial support and publication opportunities in Hungarian

21 Leopold Katscher studied at the Academy of Commerce in Pest and Vienna and also attended medical and law courses. He was interested in literature. He studied literature and economics in Vienna, Budapest, and London. The fact that he was addressed as "Dr. Katscher" in the letters preserved in his papers may indicate that he had a doctorate. Leopold and Berta Katscher Papers 1866–1939, NYPL LBKP MssCol6318.

and foreign (German-language) periodicals.[22] As Katscher was also the head of Magántisztviselők Országos Szövetsége (National Association of Private Officials, Budapest, 1893–?) at the time, he presumably influenced Schwimmer's future activism and political agency.

Within the frames of FE, Schwimmer was responsible for the associations' international relations, from which it continued to benefit even after Schwimmer left Hungary permanently in 1920. Until her emigration in 1920, she was also responsible for monitoring the international women's movement press and promoting the achievements of the FE and the NOE in the official organs of women's associations in Hungary and abroad.[23] The development of Schwimmer's career as a journalist went hand in hand with the gradual broadening of the FE's scope of activities. The 1905 working program of FE merits consideration here, as the objectives of the association were primarily related to women as individuals existing and functioning within families, rather than to women as separate entities.[24] This strategy was certainly adopted by the FE leadership in the hope of reaching more supporters in different layers of the society. According to the minutes of the board meetings, the number of FE members, and thus the number of subscribers to *A Nő és a Társadalom* and subsequently *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat*, increased from 319 to 5,312 between 1906 and 1918, and the association gained more and more press coverage in Budapest and the rest of the country.[25] The number of FE members, however, decreased to around 500 in the interwar period, a tendency which continued during and after World War II. At the same time, the number of people who followed FE's official organ declined dramatically. *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* finally ceased publication in 1928.[26]

At the time of FE's foundation in 1904, Schwimmer, who was barely 30 years old, was increasingly strategic in her efforts to build her international career. Partly as a result of this, by 1905, she was publishing in several Austrian,

22 One of the first German-language journals to which Schwimmer sent an article was *Ethische Kultur: Monatsblatt für ethisch-soziale Neugestaltung* (Berlin, 1893–1936).

23 The association did not pay for the press products, which were compiled in the FE documentation in the Hungarian National Archives. Most issues are complimentary copies, which Schwimmer received because they contained her articles. For a series of correspondence with the editors of these press products, s. NYPL RSP I.A.; for an index of articles, s. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10; Box 467.1–3. S. also the notebooks in which Schwimmer kept her receipts and expenditures. NYPL RSP I.A.

24 Feministák Egyesülete, "Tájékoztatás."

25 Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*, 138–48.

26 Ibid.

German, Swiss, and Western European journals. Related her lecture tours first in Western and Eastern Europe (after 1907 yearly) and then in North America (1914–1915, 1916), she gradually became a widely published journalist, writer, and popular speaker. She also became an encouraging role model for a growing number of young middle-class women. Her persuasiveness and speaking style won the sympathy of large audiences. A form of celebrity culture began to coalesce around her, illustrated by the many "fan letters" addressed to her, which offer testimonies to the personal admiration she inspired among her contemporaries.[27] However, her commitment to her ideals, her eccentric personality, and her impulsiveness made daily life increasingly difficult for her and got her embroiled in professional and private debates and irreconcilable conflicts.[28]

As a result of her writing and journalistic activities in Hungary and abroad, as well as her lecture tours in Europe and the United States, Schwimmer built up a wide network of contacts, corresponding and collaborating with a wide range of women's rights and peace activists, politicians, church leaders, intellectuals, and artists. She benefited greatly from these contacts throughout her life. She became increasingly isolated after going into emigration, however, and also came into conflict with her former coworkers at various journals. She never regained her role in feminist and pacifist organizations in the United States, although she continued to write, publish, and hold public speeches and lectures. Even in the last weeks of her life, she remained active writing articles.

From a Town in Southern Hungary to the Top of the Journalistic Profession: Schwimmer Path towards a Career as a Professional Journalist

Rosika Schwimmer started her career not by publishing articles but by doing translations. This work laid the foundation for her knowledge of and interest in the international world of ideas. In the early 1900s, she translated several works on the women's emancipation movement from German into Hungarian. Among her first translations were articles published by Leopold Katscher in

27 I studied the celebrity cult around Schwimmer within the frameworks of the FWF project "Frauen schreiben an Frauenbewegungsaktivistinnen, ~1870–1930" at the University of Vienna under the direction of Corinna Oesch. Between 1902 and 1930, Schwimmer received a total of 303 "fan letters" from unknown women and men in Hungarian, German, English, and French. 74 of these letters are related to her journalistic and editorial activities.

28 On this, see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*.

the German periodical *Ethische Kultur: Monatsblatt für ethisch-soziale Neugestaltung* in 1896–1897.[29] From the late 1890s onwards, she began to build her journalistic career intensively. She sent her first contribution to a well-established Budapest periodical, *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News), in April 1898. The editor, however, refused to publish her article for the following reasons:

> The article submitted bears the character of a woman so impressed by her reading that a man […] cannot be judged from it. The essay itself, regardless of its author, is superficial and breezy, and […] lacks thoughtfulness and substance. I would have liked to have said something kinder and more positive.[30]

Schwimmer's first articles in Hungarian finally appeared, with the support of Leopold Katscher, in *Magántisztviselők Lapja* (Journal of Private Officials), the official organ of Magántisztviselők Országos Szövetsége.[31] The issues addressed in these articles can be reconstructed from letters written by Katscher, which are part of the Rosika Schwimmer Papers. Schwimmer usually reported on the activities and general board meetings of NOE and the exploitation of working women.[32] She soon began to publish in several Hungarian journals, including *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century), *Független Magyarország* (Independent Hungary), *Nemzeti Nőnevelés* (National Education of Woman), *Az Újság* (The News), and the aforementioned *Budapesti Hírlap*.

At the same time, she also began to send articles to German and Austrian periodicals. She first posted an article for the Berlin monthly journal *Die Frau* in August 1901,[33] but it was rejected for publication. The first stage of her international journalistic endeavors was the Austrian bourgeois women's movement journal *Frauenleben*, which was published out of Vienna between 1894 and 1901 and which was edited by Austrian women's movement activist Helene Littmann.[34] *Frauenleben* published a submission by Schwimmer a mere month after her rejection by *Die Frau*. Its readership included members of

29 Schwimmer's translations of works by Leopold and Berta Katscher, 1896–1897. NYPL RSP II. Box 467.8.

30 Letter from Jenő Módos to Rosika Schwimmer. April 21, 1898. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 1.

31 Letter from Leopold Katscher to Rosika Schwimmer. December 14, 1900. Ibid.

32 Letters from Leopold Katscher to Rosoika Schwimmer. December 1900. Ibid. Schwimmer's outgoing letters from this period are not in the collection.

33 Postcard of the editorial office of *Die Frau* to Rosika Schwimmer. August 23, 1901. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 2.

34 Rosika Schwimmer first published in the journal in September 1901. Postcard from the editorial office of *Frauenleben* to Rosika Schwimmer. September 7, 1901. Ibid.

women's associations outside the Monarchy, as indicated by a letter by Aletta Jacobs to Schwimmer in 1902.[35] In the following years, Schwimmer published articles in several German and Austrian journals (they were mostly women's periodicals that focused on the women's movement), including the following: *Die Zeit*, *Wiener Mode*, *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung*, *Neues Frauenleben*, *Illustrierte Frauen-Rundschau*, *Etische Kultur: Monatsblatt für ethisch-soziale Neugestaltung*, and *Dokumente des Fortschritts*.[36] The titles of these papers reveal two things. First, Schwimmer did not publish exclusively in the journals of progressive, bourgeois-liberal women's associations, since the *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung*, to which she sent articles relatively frequently for a few years, was the most important official organ of the Austrian social democratic women's movement. Second, alongside the various periodicals that focused on the women's movement, Schwimmer also published in women's magazines and even in fashion magazines and newspapers.[37]

Schwimmer reported on the activities and achievements of women's associations in Hungary, at first exclusively in German periodicals. After 1902, the aforementioned Aletta Jacobs helped her translate her articles into English and publish them in western and northern European journals.[38] Schwimmer did not speak any English until the mid-1900s. This lack of knowledge of English had not been a major problem, since Schwimmer had corresponded almost exclusively with German, Austrian, French, and Swiss activists. Jacobs was the only exception, but she spoke German relatively well.[39] After this point, however, Schwimmer began to correspond with Carrie Chapman Catt, founding president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, which was established in Berlin in 1904 and then renamed the International Alliance of Women in 1926. This correspondence was only possible in English. Because of their inadequate knowledge of English, Schwimmer, internationally renowned progressive women's rights and peace activist Vilma Glücklich, and a few other FE members hired a native English-speaking tutor to give them evening classes

35 In her letter, Jacobs made several references to the *Frauenleben*. Letter from Aletta Jacobs to Rosika Schwimmer. August 1, 1902. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 2.

36 For the correspondence with the editorial offices of these journals, see NYPL RSP I.A. Box 1–11. For the articles, see NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10.; Box 467. 1–3. For the notebooks, in which Schwimmer kept her receipts and payments, see NYPL RSP I.A.

37 Publication index volumes, 1899–1914. NYPL RSP II.A.

38 E.g. letter from Aletta Jacobs to Rosika Schwimmer. March 5, 1904.

39 General Correspondence. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 1–5.

several times a week in the association room of FE and NOE.[40] Schwimmer's talent for foreign languages enabled her to master English within a short period of time, to the extent that within a few years, she was able to convey her ideas eloquently in what was for her a fourth language after Hungarian, German, and French.

One salient feature of Schwimmer's personality was her apparently constant yearning for conflict. There are numerous signs of this in her journalistic oeuvre. In her correspondence, one finds regular traces of her conflicts with periodical editors from Hungary and other countries, of which I briefly outline one typical case below. Schwimmer published articles in *Neues Frauenleben* (Vienna, 1902–1918), the successor to the periodical *Frauenleben*, from the moment it was launched. She had a good collegial relationship with Auguste Fickert (1855, Vienna–1910, Maria Enzersdorf, Austria), editor of the periodical and a leading figure of the Austrian progressive women's movement. Their good relationship, however, was overshadowed in 1908 by a dispute over Fickert's editorial practices. The disagreement erupted because Fickert had entirely rewritten a news item sent by Schwimmer on the Hungarian women's movement. He had published the rewritten piece without Schwimmer's permission.[41] After this conflict, Schwimmer did not publish in *Neues Frauenleben* until 1910, and no further letters from Fickert are found in her correspondence.[42]

By the 1910s, Schwimmer was able to express her ideas in English with relative fluency. By this time, she was publishing in several English-language journals and attending IWSA congresses every two years, where German and French were also used as official languages, though English became the major language of communication.[43] By this time, she had become a well-established member of the international women's movement, and her articles originally written in German were translated into English by the editorial offices of the

40 These courses were open to all FE members. Courses were held in small groups in the evenings after working hours and came to an end with an examination, after which participants received a detailed assessment of their performance and a certificate. On this, see e.g. "A Feministák Egyesületének éves jelentése," 89.

41 Fikcert's revisions as a proofreader clearly reveal that she frequently shortened the paragraphs in the articles, in addition to making minor stylistic changes. Sometimes, she restructured and rewrote entire sections of articles, changing or simply removing important elements of their original content. Konvolut von Artikeln über die Frauenfrage. WR NF. B-77991; Tagebuch von Auguste Fickert. WR NF. H.I.N.-70494.

42 In spite of this conflict, she remained in close collegial contact with other leaders of the Austrian progressive and bourgeois women's movement. On this, see Fedeles-Czeferner, *Progressive Women's Movements*, 16–173.

43 See Gehmacher, *Feminist Activism*.

papers. In 1910, the editor of the journal *Englishwoman* asked her permission to publish a translated version of one of her articles originally written in German.[44] A few months later, the editor of *Englishwoman* again commented on Schwimmer's knowledge of English and criticized the article she had sent to the journal:

> Your article on the women's movement in Hungary is very interesting. If I may say so, the English still sounds of a bit foreign flavour, and the article is very short. […] We cannot offer payment for the articles, as we consider them propaganda, […] but if it is in the interest of the cause, we are happy to publish them.[45]

Schwimmer did not stop writing propagandistic articles proclaiming the success of progressive women's associations in Hungary. She continued, however, to work hard on her English. As a result of her efforts, she was capable of writing longer texts and giving relatively long lectures in English. During her lectures, she spoke freely without using notes. She was increasingly strategic in the steps she took to build her career as an international journalist and activist, from which both NOE and FE benefited greatly. Almost from the beginning, the IWSA leadership was open to her innovative ideas. It was Schwimmer who initiated the creation of the organization's badge and who, at the Copenhagen Congress in 1906, proposed the launch of the organization's official monthly journal, *Ius Suffragii* (1906–1924), which was also published in English.[46] Schwimmer's efforts were finally crowned with success. Her articles were published in the most prestigious Western European and North American journals after 1914. Editors of the most outstanding papers (e.g. *The New York Times*) continued to publish her writings even after her political influence had dissipated.[47]

Thus, as the discussion above has shown, for Schwimmer, translation was a gateway of sorts to the world of international journalism.[48] From the early 1910s, she published not only in women's journals but also in renowned Western European and North American newspapers and periodicals, as I discuss in greater detail below. The interest taken by the international press in her personality and

44 Letter from E. M. Goodman to Rosika Schwimmer. August 24, 1910. NYPL RSP I.A. Box 23.

45 Letter from E. M. Goodman to Rosika Schwimmer. July 1, 1910. Ibid.

46 "A Feministák Egyesületének éves jelentése," 89.

47 NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466.10; Publication index volumes, 1906–1915. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467.1; Publication index notes (incomplete), 1903–1940. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 467. 2–3.

48 On the different translation practices in women's movements, see Gehmacher, *Feminist Activism*.

her articles was further stimulated by the IWSA Congress in Budapest in 1913, as well as by her peace movement activities after the outbreak of World War I.

The most Common Subject-Matters of Schwimmer's Articles

Schwimmer's articles, which were written between the turn of the century and 1948, cover a relatively wide range of topics and almost all aspects of womanhood. In terms of genre, they range from news articles consisting of only a few lines (with or without titles) to glosses and reports on various women's rights events and congresses. They include a wide range of editorials, interviews, and reports. Before 1914, most of her writings were on women's work and education, the women's movement, and suffrage, but she also authored many writings on child labor and the various approaches to providing support for mothers. Between 1914 and 1918 and before World War II, the subject of pacifism dominated her articles. After 1920, she started to discuss the motivations behind her political agency. In the 1920s, she also began to reflect on the situation of Jewish people.

From the outset of her journalistic career, Schwimmer wrote on the advancements of women's emancipation from a transnational perspective. She also published numerous biographical articles on the activities and achievements of various politicians (including Hungarians), women's movement activists, and artists. This can be interpreted as a career building strategy. I offer here only a few examples as illustrations. Schwimmer regularly published articles on leading figures of the Hungarian and international women's movement. She wrote several articles on the aforementioned Vilma Glücklich (1872, Vágújhely [today Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Slovakia]–1927, Vienna) after Glücklich's death in 1927. At the time of FE's foundation, she regularly published biographical articles on the aforementioned Aletta Jacobs and Carrie Chapman Catt, who also served as a role model for Hungarian progressive women's activism. The lecture tour held by the two women in Hungary in 1906 was covered in detail not only in *A Nő és a Társadalom* but also by the Hungarian dailies.[49] In addition to her organizational work before the 1913 IWSA Congress in Budapest, she found time and energy to write articles on the event.

49 These events were covered, for instance, by *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation), *Budapesti Hírlap* (Budapest News), *Új Idők* (New Times), *Az Újság* (Journal), *Pesti Napló* (Journal of Pest), and *Pester Lloyd*. Among women's periodicals, *Nemzeti Nőnevelés* (National Women's Education) reported on the news. For the articles written by Schwimmer, see e.g. Bédy-Schwimmer, "Két kiváló asszony," 383–84.

Schwimmer also published only on those activists with whom she had personal working or friendly contacts. Thus, the list of activists on whom she wrote offers a clear index of her growing international network of contacts. She wrote several pieces on Helene Stöcker, leader of the radical wing of the German bourgeois women's movement. Like Schwimmer, Stöcker also emigrated to the United States after World War I. Schwimmer also wrote on Gina Krog, a Norwegian women's movement activist and one of the founding members of the IWSA. After the death of Marianne Hainisch, president of Bund österreichischer Frauenvereine (Vienna, 1902–), the umbrella organization of the Austrian bourgeois women's associations for more than three decades, she wrote several obituaries for American newspapers. From the years of World War I until the mid-1940s, she published numerous articles on Count Mihály Károlyi (1875, Fót, Hungary–1955, Vence, France), president of the Hungarian Democratic Republic (acting between November 16, 1918–March 121, 1919), and his wife Katinka Andrássy, both in Hungarian and international journals.[50]

In autumn 1914, Schwimmer interviewed US President Woodrow Wilson. This interview brought her international recognition. In the months following the outbreak of World War I, in part thanks to the efforts of the aforementioned Catt, Schwimmer undertook a determined campaign to persuade President Wilson to assume the role of neutral mediator in hopes of bringing the war to a swift conclusion. In September, President Wilson received Schwimmer at the White House and granted her a formal interview. Schwimmer's efforts were not crowned with success, however, in spite of the fact that she met Wilson for a second time in 1915 and that both presidential audiences were widely covered by the media. Schwimmer herself also reported on the events in the international press.[51]

Probably most of Schwimmer's articles after 1916 were written on her dispute with US magnate Henry Ford.[52] After the unsuccessful negotiations with President Wilson, Schwimmer finally managed to persuade Ford in November 1915 to finance the (in)famous Peace Ship. This became well-known in world history under the name of the Ford Peace Expedition. Most of the participants in this mission were influential Americans, including, of course, Schwimmer and Ford, as well as a number of journalists. The ship carrying them sailed from

50 For the Hungarian-, German-, and English language articles, see Manuscripts and drafts, 1896–1948, n.d. NYPL RSP II.A. Box 466–478.

51 See Rosika Schwimmer's literary work on Ford & Wilson. NYPL RSP IX. Personal Press Clippings. Box 511.

52 Ibid.

Hoboken (New York harbor) on December 4, crossing the Atlantic and arriving in Oslo. Its primary aim was to draw attention to the importance of immediate peace negotiations. However, the world press and later Schwimmer herself reported only on the disputes among the passengers, who quarreled with one another during the voyage. During the cruise, Schwimmer's and Ford's earlier conflicts became irreconcilable differences.[53]

The failure of the Ford Peace Ship and the conflict between Schwimmer and Ford was partly caused by Schwimmer's eccentric personality and aggressive attitudes. This failure led to the collapse of Schwimmer's carefully nurtured political influence in the United States in 1914–1915. This was exacerbated by a barrage of derisive, disparaging articles and cartoons in the international press, which deeply undermined Schwimmer's earlier popularity.[54] This was the reason why, during the three decades of her exile in the United States, Schwimmer published a large number of articles criticizing Henry Ford and excusing herself in the most popular American and Hungarian American periodicals. Numerous articles appeared, for instance, in *The Day*, *The New York Publisher's Weekly*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Buffalo News*, *The New York Times*, *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* (American Hungarian People's Word), and *Az Írás* (The Writing), in which she sought to clarify Ford's political role in 1918. It is important to keep in mind, as an important element of the backdrop of these disputes, that Schwimmer never received US citizenship on account of her pacifist beliefs, and her documents thus always labeled her as "stateless."[55]

Even in the 1940s, editors of well-established periodicals were still happy to publish Schwimmer's articles and other writings or interviews with her, despite the fact that she was no longer part of the leadership of the Hungarian and international peace and women's movement organizations. Why did the press take such a strong interest in her work and ideas? I argue that this was partly because Schwimmer remained in relatively close contact with a number of influential politicians, public figures, artists, and activists in the United States and Europe. This fact, together with her eventful life and controversial personality, made her interesting to the press. Her previous involvement in domestic political affairs in the United States only made her more interesting to the press, as did her unsuccessful years-long fight for US citizenship, not to mention the (false) accusations according to which she had served as a Soviet during her diplomatic

53 Ford Peace Ship. NYPL RSP IV. Box 486–490.

54 Ford Peace Ship. NYPL RSP IV. Box 486–490.

55 For Schwimmer's official documents relating to her emigration, see NYPL RSP X. Box 554, 555.

mission in Switzerland. These various factors made her an interesting figure for broad readerships.[56]

"The Grievances of Feminism during the Proletarian Dictatorship":[57] *A Close Reading of Two Articles by Schwimmer*

In the discussion below, I analyze two editorials written by Schwimmer in December 1919 and January 1920. I argue that these articles offer insights into her journalistic ars poetica, her values, and her political orientation. In these texts, Schwimmer problematizes FE's and her own controversial relations with the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the social-democratic women's associations. The texts thus offer indirect explanations for her decision to emigrate. They also provide insights into FE's views on women's employment and women's labor activism, which differed from the views of the abovementioned groups. Finally, in these two texts, Schwimmer lists the alleged crimes committed by the Hungarian Soviet Republic against women and the discriminatory practices of the Republic against women when it came to paid work. Her journalistic ars poetica, her values, and her political orientation changed very little during her lifetime, including the period of nearly three decades that she spent in exile. The texts also reveal her views on the regime changes after World War I and on the short-lived Soviet Republic. Finally, the texts also give an impression of the image Schwimmer wanted to convey of herself to the public immediately before she emigrated from Hungary in January 1920. The texts are important in part simply because the political, economic, and social shifts (and upheavals) that took place over the course of the few months covered in the articles had a profound impact on Schwimmer's later life and career. It became evident at the time that her active political involvement as an envoy of the Károlyi government in Switzerland had made her *persona non grata* for the authorities in Hungary. Due to these factors, she decided to leave her home country and live in exile.[58]

With regard to the historical moment in which these texts were published, it is important to note that, in the wake of the Great War, the heretofore relatively stable situation of FE and the positions of the entire progressive feminist movement in Hungary weakened. The Soviet Republic and the subsequent regimes (during what is known as the Horthy Era after Regent Miklós Horthy)

56 On news values, see Brighton and Foy, *News Values*.

57 Schwimmer, "A feminizmus sérelmei," 2–3.

58 C. McFadden, "A Radical Exchange," 494–504.

made every effort to marginalize feminists. There was also a radical attempt to limit the press activity and press coverage that the movement had established for itself over the course of the previous decade and a half. Publication of *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* was banned, first in 1919 and then temporarily in 1920. Through revisionist propaganda, the valorization of religious and nationalistic ideas, the glorification of women's (traditional) roles within the family, and the demonization of the belief systems of progressive feminists, the foundations of a whole new women's movement were finally laid. At the heart of this was the Magyar Asszonyok Nemzeti Szövetsége (National Association of Hungarian Women, or MANSz), founded in January 1919 by the writer and activist Cécile Tormay, which according to some sources managed to grow to approximately half a million members in Budapest and the rest of Hungary by the eve of World War II.[59]

As Rosika Schwimmer herself emphasized several times in the two texts, the new circumstances did not automatically bring an end to the feminist movement. This does not mean, of course, that the various organizations and figures at the vanguard of this movement did not suffer enormous setbacks, as Schwimmer notes in the texts. Beyond the specific examples mentioned by Schwimmer in the texts, it is worth noting that NOE, for instance, was unable to adapt to the challenges that arose in the new transitional period. Some members of NOE, which had been dissolved in the summer of 1919, joined the Communist Party, while others joined FE. FE could never regain its former position within the new right-wing women's movement of the interwar period. Nevertheless, in the early 1920s, it managed to redefine itself and its aims. Thus, although it was only able to operate within a narrower framework than before, it remained active until it was banned in 1942, and it then became active again between 1946 and 1949.

The two articles are the first two pieces in a series of articles that were to be published in the future. As I have already noted, Schwimmer wrote these texts for *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* right before she left Hungary. In the end, only the first part of the series of articles was published in December 1919 under the title "The grievances of feminism under the proletarian dictatorship."[60] The second part survives in the Rosika Schwimmer Papers, among the numerous unpublished manuscripts and draft speeches.[61] This handwritten text is in some

59 Szapor, "Who Represents"; Szapor, "Good Hungarian Women."

60 Schwimmer, "A feminizmus sérelmei," 2–3.

61 *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* was not published between January and June 1920, and the July issue was no longer devoted to the Hungarian Soviet Republic but to a much more current event for the FE, namely

places difficult to read, since Schwimmer almost invariably recorded her articles and drafts in pencil on poor-quality paper until she emigrated to the United States. Beginning in 1921, the handwritten notes, which were written for the most part in Hungarian, gradually disappeared, and most of the later texts were typed in English.

The two texts thoroughly clarify the relationship between the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the progressive feminist movement. They can, thus, also be interpreted as an indirect explanation of Schwimmer's decision to leave Hungary permanently. In addition, the writings reflect on a number of issues that were discussed on several occasions within the framework of FE, as well as the Magyarországi Munkásnő Egyesület (Hungarian Working Women's Association, or MME, Budapest, 1903–) and the broader labor movement. MME was headed by Marika Gárdos, with whom Schwimmer had had a rather complicated relationship since 1902. Their relationship was characterized as much by camaraderie as by conflict and rivalry. Although Schwimmer was actively involved in the establishment of MME and Gárdos followed the activities of FE, conflicts between the two associations were inevitable. The goals of feminist organizations and social democratic women's organizations differed dramatically, as did the ideal means with which these goals were to be achieved. This led to the two associations insulting each other in every possible way, for example at their official meetings, in their public protest events, and in the press.

This controversy ridden relationship was important for several reasons. Liberal and radical feminists at the time were often accused of campaigning exclusively for the extension of female suffrage and of being unconcerned about the social and economic problems faced by working-class women and women who belonged to ethnic minorities. These two articles, however, clearly show that this picture needs to be considerably more nuanced. In this context, the texts highlight the most important points of contention between feminists and contemporary Hungarian socialists on women's paid work, their position in the labor market, their organization, and their wages.

In addition to the abovementioned issues, the texts touch on issues that were on the agenda of FE from its foundation, including women's employment structures and the issue of equal pay, women's (vocational) education, the

the eighth Congress of the IWSA in Geneva. For more details on Hungary's participation in the IWSA Congress in Geneva, see Szapor, "Who Represents."

protection of mothers and children, the promotion of women's labor activism, the fight against prostitution and sex-trafficking, and sex education in schools. Considering the prominence of these issues in the texts, alongside other important points, it is evident that Schwimmer's reflections in the two articles refer not only to the Hungarian Soviet Republic but also to the nearly two decades of the history of FE and the cornerstones of the controversy between feminists and social democrats.

In the text, Schwimmer reveals the indirect insults made by the Soviet Republic against her and FE and also notes its direct attacks against feminist ideology in general and against FE in particular. In the first article, Schwimmer contends that FE managed to escape "violent dissolution" because of "its membership and representation in several international women's federations, and the People's Commissar's fear of protests from foreign feminists."[62] Since Béla Kun (1886, Hadad, Romania–1938–1939, Moscow), People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and War under the Soviet Republic, considered feminist ideology "a remnant of bourgeois ideology," the dictatorship mobilized all possible means against organized feminism. In addition to banning the secret meetings of FE's board, the authorities also made it impossible for the association to publish its official journal between March and August 1919. Schwimmer offered a detailed list in the article of the crimes allegedly committed by the regime against progressive feminist ideology and the feminist press.

At several points in the text, Schwimmer impresses upon the reader that the dictatorship had the characteristics of a medieval state: it was both anti-democratic and anti-feminist. She does not fail to mention that women who, like her, refused to join trade unions were not allowed to vote. Female suffrage had already been introduced by the government of Mihály Károlyi. In addition, the communist regime, which was in power for 133 days, had, according to Schwimmer, enacted legislation that would have continued the exploitation of working women in line with previous practices. She pointed out that the FE (along with other women's associations and trade unions) had been fighting against this kind of exploitation since 1904. Its main objectives included equal pay for men and women workers and the introduction of a complex system of health care, as well as support for working mothers. The Soviet Republic did not achieve any of this, and Schwimmer blames it for this failure. Towards the end of the first article, she discusses the situation of married women and the

62 Schwimmer, "A feminizmus sérelmei," 2–3.

problems of regulating prostitution. These ideas fully reflect the initial objectives of the FE, which were published immediately after its establishment in 1905.[63]

The second (handwritten and unpublished) part of the article focuses almost exclusively on discrimination against women in paid employment. Schwimmer provides precise statistics showing that, despite the regime's widely trumpeted principle of "equal pay for equal work," women workers were paid significantly lower wages than men. In my opinion, this is the most detailed and well-developed part of the article. These arguments are followed by a brief reflection on marriage, prostitution, and the centralized household (or *Zentralhaushaltung* in German).[64] After this discussion, the text ends abruptly. And although Schwimmer indicates at the end of the paper that the article will be continued, I have not found the third part in her collection.

Brand Building in the Press

Over the course of her career as a journalist, Rosika Schwimmer learned how to use the press as a tool to build her brand (in modern terms). The interviews that were done with her with by journalists who worked for world-renowned papers provided an excellent platform for this. Through these interviews, Schwimmer was (or wished to be) able to influence the public and the public's perception of her. She followed the same practice in her work as an author, of which I give an example at the end of this paper. Schwimmer's brand-building efforts offer insights into her strategic use of the media and personal connections to shape her public image in exile. In 1928, Schwimmer, who had been living in the United States for some seven years as an emigrant, published her first book, which was an illustrated children's book in English. *Tisza Tales*, which contains Hungarian stories, was published by Doubleday-Doran Publishing Company in New York.[65] Reviews of the book were published in American and American-Hungarian periodicals and newspapers between 1928 and 1931, and they were systematically archived in the Rosika Schwimmer Papers. From these reviews, it is clear that Schwimmer herself actively sought to influence the press response

63 Feministák Egyesülete, "Tájékoztatás."

64 The notion of the centralized household was a revolutionary model of urban housing development in which a large, centrally managed kitchen within a multi-apartment building replaced kitchens in individual apartments. The concept was based on the ideas of the German women's rights activist and social democrat Lily Braun (1865, Halberstadt, Germany–1916, Zehlendorf, Germany).

65 Schwimmer, *Tisza Tales*.

to the book and, thus, to her own work as an author. Her efforts to influence the reception of *Tisza Tales* reveals her strategic use of branding principles in a literary context, highlighting the interplay between her various public roles. Furthermore, the mixed reception with which the book met and Schwimmer's responses to criticism offer insights into the challenges and complexities of her brand management.

Despite Schwimmer's efforts, the reception of the storybook on the US book market was mixed. In addition to the reviews, there were also several articles in both the American and the American-Hungarian periodical press which, while promising a review of the book in their titles, for much of their length focus on Schwimmer's political efforts and, more importantly, her active political involvement. The positive reviews praise the book's "fantastic," "elegant," and "charming" presentation, as well as the illustrations. According to several reviews, the stories are engaging for adults as well as children.[66]

Many praised the book's language and style, which according to the reviews are particularly charming and accessible to children. Schwimmer's American friends and acquaintances of Hungarian origin living in the United States also played a major role in organizing the publication of the reviews. Zoltán Haraszti, a newspaper editor and librarian who lived in New York for many years, Lola Maverick, Schwimmer's wealthy American patron, and women's movement activist Alice Park did much to help the cause. In October 1929, Park offered the following comments on her progress in promoting the book:

> I succeeded in getting a review of *Tisza Tales* in *Open Forum* of October 5. I sent a copy to the publisher and one to Franceska [Franciska Schwimmer (1880, Budapest–1963, New York), Rosika Schwimmer's younger sister, who also emigrated to the USA and worked as her elder sister's secretary]. I have tried in vain for other reviews. But have succeeded with libraries and their order lists.[67]

The review published in *Open Forum* also mentioned that Schwimmer's mother had told her daughter the stories in the book when Schwimmer had been a child. *Tisza Tales* was named one of the 50 most outstanding children's

66 Reviews of *Tisza Tales*. NYPL RSP Series VIII. Box 516.

67 Letter from Alice Park to Lola Maverick Lloyd. October 17, 1919. Reviews of *Tisza Tales*. NYPL RSP Series VIII. Box 516.

books of 1928 by the *Chicago Evening Post* and was included in the *New York Times* Christmas Booklist.[68]

In addition to the American English-language newspapers, the book also received a relatively large amount of attention in the American Hungarian press. This was due in part to Schwimmer's personal relationships with many journal editors but certainly also to the book's importance. *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* emphasized that the storybook introduced Americans to the "gems of Hungarian storytelling" and that it also offered Hungarian children born in the United States, who had become somewhat Americanized, an unforgettable reading experience in English that took them to the world of stories from their parents' homeland.[69] According to a columnist for the periodical *Az Írás*, published in Chigago, "the irredentism of the beaten track has not done Hungary as good a service as the book of the bowed down writer." In their view, the collection of stories was the biggest Christmas sensation in America's extremely rich book market.[70]

According to the article in *Az Írás*, the publisher had not been excessive when giving the book what was arguably a high price, since, "printed on 250 pages of molded paper, it was a book in the artisanal sense of the word."[71] Many, however, considered the storybook overpriced, and it was indeed quite expensive at the time compared to most books. *The New York Herald Tribune* was not far off the mark when it wrote that, for $5, the storybook would be a hard sell. The Public Library of the District of Columbia in Washington, D.C. claimed that the book was not on the American Library Association's book list because it was priced above the limit for which libraries could buy books.[72]

It should be pointed out that two rather negative reviews appeared in *The New York Herald Tribune* and the *New York World*, which Schwimmer and her circle of friends did not ignore. Schwimmer herself wrote an indignant letter to the editor of *The New York Herald Tribune*, accusing the author of the review of not having read *Tisza Tales*. In his reply, the editor of the newspaper said that Schwimmer's allegation was nonsense and that it was only natural that someone might not like a book. He also stressed that, as editor, he was not able to read

68 Christmas book recommendation of the *Chicago Evening News* and *The New York Times*. December 1928. Ibid.

69 Z. Sz, "Magyar mesék." Press clipping, page number is not given. Ibid.

70 "Karácsonykor." Press clipping, page number not given. Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 The Public Library of the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C. Ibid.

every book reviewed and that it was not his job to judge or overrule the opinions of reviewers. At the end of his letter, he added the following:

> These things are always happening, you know. If every author who did not agree with his reviewer were to reply we should have little room for new reviews. Personally, I am sorry, but one cannot let personal friendship dictate editorial action.[73]

Tivadar/Theodor Koppányi, a physician and university professor who was a confidant of the Schwimmer family and also Schwimmer's family doctor, responded to the other review, which was published in *The New York World*. According to this review, the main problem with Schwimmer's book was that a similar children's book had already been published in London by Nándor Pogány *(The Hungarian Fairy Book)*. Nevertheless, Koppányi insisted that Schwimmer was a pioneer in this field, if only because her book contained a completely different type of fairy tale from that of Nándor Pogány's book.[74]

Conclusion

This article has explored the defining contours of Rosika Schwimmer's journalistic career, with a particular focus on how her political activism and personal ambitions shaped and were shaped by her engagement with the press. I have argued that Schwimmer's political agency, rooted in the interconnected struggles for women's suffrage and international peace, was instrumental in launching her journalistic trajectory. However, the same qualities that made her a powerful public actor (her uncompromising stance, her self-promotion strategies, and her refusal to conform to conventional gender norms) ultimately contributed to her marginalization within increasingly conservative or male-dominated professional spaces.

To understand the mechanisms with which Schwimmer sought to assert herself as both journalist and activist, I turned to the rich collection of her papers: her diary notes, extensive correspondence (both official and private and both incoming and outgoing), and the vast body of journalistic texts and speeches that she carefully archived. These documents provide more than biographical detail. They reveal a methodical effort to shape her own public memory and to control the narrative of her life's work. Her archival practice

73 Letter from the editor of *The New York Herald Tribune* to Rosika Schwimmer. n. d. Ibid.

74 Letter from Tivadar/Theodor Koppányi to the editor of *The New York World*. n. d. Ibid.

itself can be interpreted as an extension of her political and authorial agency. It constituted a refusal to be misrepresented or forgotten and an assertion of her right to define her own legacy. This is especially evident in Series 2 of her papers, where she organized her articles.

In tandem with articles written about her and interviews she gave during different periods of her life, these self-curated materials illuminate a complex media strategy aimed at navigating gendered constraints on women's participation in public discourse. Schwimmer was acutely aware of the challenges facing women who sought intellectual and political authority in early twentieth-century Europe and North America. Her story thus exemplifies how women could and, in her case and others, did use journalism as both a platform for advocacy and a means of crafting enduring cultural capital.

From the perspective of gender history and feminist theory, Schwimmer's career invites us to reconsider the boundaries of political agency. Her case reveals how women in marginal or contested positions mobilized the tools of authorship, archiving, and self-representation not simply to "participate" in public life but also actively to construct the conditions under which their voices would be heard and remembered. In this sense, her biography challenges static understandings of women as secondary figures in the media or political history of the period. She emerged instead as a historical agent whose efforts to claim discursive spaces across borders, languages, and genres were both innovative and deeply reflective of the structural limitations she faced.

Finally, to put this issue in a larger context, I briefly compared the journalistic activity of Schwimmer with the leading female journalists, editors, translators, and authors of books in the region, i.e. with the aforementioned Austrian progressive women's activist Auguste Fickert,[75] and two important activists from

75 Fickert, the eldest of the four women, was a middle-class teacher, women's rights activist, and devoted pacifist. She was also founding president of the leading Austrian bourgeois-liberal women's association Allgemeiner österreichischer Frauenverein (General Austrian Women's Association), Vienna, 1893–1922) and editor-in-chief of its official organ *Neues Frauenleben* (New Women's Life, Vienna, 1902–1918). On her, see Hacker, *Auguste Fickert*, 131–33.

the region i.e. Slovenian feminist Zofka Kveder,[76] and German radical women's rights activist and later völkisch politician Käthe Schirmacher.[77]

Schwimmer, Fickert, Kveder, and Schirmacher each wielded journalistic platforms to advance different yet overlapping feminist agendas across diverse linguistic and cultural spheres before 1918. Each of these four women that they became central figures of their national women's movements through their journalistic activity. Schwimmer leveraged her international connections to report on every aspect of women's emancipation and peace activism. Kveder published on the situation of women wage earners and women's university education. Schirmacher's articles analyzed different aspects of transnational women's movement and issues related to legal reforms for women's rights, women's employment, and prostitution. As multilingual women, Schwimmer, Kveder, and Schirmacher published their articles in many countries apart from their home homelands. In contrast, Fickert focused her journalistic efforts primarily on Austria in her efforts to advocate women's suffrage and support women's rights in the field of education and on the labor market.

All four women engaged with contemporary feminist debates. Schwimmer's focus extended beyond national borders to global peace movements and pacifist activism. Schirmacher's work was deeply embedded in the specifics of German legal and social reform, while Kveder's journalism often took a more literary and regionally focused approach, highlighting the lived experiences of women in a multi-ethnic context. Fickert's idealistic views are reflected in her articles, as is her sympathy for the social-democratic women's associations. Their collective journalistic output reveals a diverse yet interconnected struggle for women's emancipation and social justice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After 1920, a different world emerged in the field of women's journalism. As Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe have argued in their edited volume,

76 Kveder (1878, Ljubljana–1926, Zagreb) was a journalist, editor, and author of fiction who became a central figure of the Slovene women's movements. She lived and published articles in Ljubljana, Trieste, Bern, Munich, and Prague. Through her journalistic activity, she had a broad network of contacts with women from various countries of Central and Southeastern Europe. Poniz, *Kveder, Zofka*, 282–84.

77 Schirmacher (1865–1930), the second eldest among the four women, was a writer, journalist, translator, and activist in the German left-wing women's rights movement before 1918. She traveled extensively, lectured internationally, and wrote and published on women's (higher) education, work, and suffrage in German, French, and Austrian papers. Her texts were also published in English translations. She later became involved in German nationalist politics. On her life and work, see Gehmacher et al., *Käthe Schirmacher*; Gehmacher, *Feminist Activism*.

although mainstream conservative newspapers typically preferred their female correspondents to cover exclusively "women's" issues, it is notable that certain right-wing women managed to secure column space to discuss political matters from a nationalist (or radical) viewpoint. Some established their strong patriotic stance by criticizing nationalist men for any perceived weakening of their ideological dedication. Others achieved this by completely disregarding their own gender while still advocating for conservative family values and a "natural" separation of roles between men and women, which communists, liberals, or feminists (or a combination thereof) were allegedly trying to dismantle. Hungarian journalist Cécile Tormay, who was also the leader of MANSZ, the most powerful right-wing women's association, offers a clear example of this.[78] By this time, however, Fickert had been dead for ten years, and Kveder and Schirmacher were struggling with worsening health. Schirmacher, however, was one of the founders of the right-wing Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party), and she briefly entered the National Assembly in 1919 as its deputy and representative for West Prussia. Schwimmer was practically forced to leave Hungary, and while she remained a widely-published publicist in the United States, she did not send articles to Hungarian periodicals except for the official organ of FE.

Archival Sources

Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Budapest [Hungarian National Archives] (MNL OL)

P999. Feministák Egyesülete [Feminists' Association]

New York Public Library (NYPL)

Manuscript and Archives Division

MssCol 6398 Rosika Schwimmer Papers (RSP)

MssCol 6318 Leopold and Berta Katscher Papers 1866–1939 (LBKP)

Wienbibliothek im Rathaus (WR)

LQH0003431 Nachlass Auguste Fickert (NF)

78 Sharp and Stibbe, "Introduction."

Bibliography

Printed sources

Schwimmer, Rosika. *Tisza Tales. Stories from Hungary: Retold for American Children, Illustrations by Willy Pogany*. New York: Doubleday-Doran, 1928.

Tájékoztatás a Feministák Egyesületének céljairól és munkatervéről [Information on the aims and work plan of the Feminists' Association]. Budapest: Márkus Samu könyvnyomdája, 1905.

Periodicals

"Annual Report of the Feminists' Association." *A Nő és a Társadalom* 1, no. 5 (1907): 89.

Bédy-Schwimmer, Rosika. "Két kiváló asszony [Two Outstanding Women]." *Új Idők*, October 14, 1906, 383–84.

Egy női reporter [A Female Reporter]. "Laptudósítói tanfolyam" [Course for newspaper correspondents]. *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* 1, no. 12 (1914): 244–45.

"Karácsonykor magyar könyvet olvasnak az amerikai aprószentek" [At Christmas, the American Altar Boys read a Hungarian Book]. *Az Írás*, January 6, 1929.

"Nők a sajtóban" [Women in the Press]. *A Nő és a Társadalom* 6, no. 10 (1912): 185.

Schwimmer, Rosika "A feminizmus sérelmei a proletárdiktatúra alatt" [The Grievances of Feminism during the Proletarian Dictatorship]. *A Nő. Feminista Folyóirat* 6 no. 6 (1919): 2–3.

Z. Sz. "Magyar mesék angol nyelven" [Hungarian Fairy Tales in English]. *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, December 14, 1928.

Secondary literature

Brighton, Paul, and Dennis Foy. *News Values*. London: Sage, 2007.

Delap, Lucy, Maria DiCenzo, and Leila Ryan. *Feminism and the Periodical Press, 1900–1918*. Vol 1 of the *Feminism and the Periodical Press, 1900–1918*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Fedeles-Czeferner, Dóra. *Progressive Women's Movements in Austria and Hungary. Conflict, Cooperation, Circulation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2025.

Gehmacher, Johanna, Elisa Heinrich, and Corinna Oesch. *Käthe Schirmacher: Agitation und autobiographische Praxis zwischen radikaler Frauenbewegung und völkischer Politik*. Vienna–Cologne–Weimar: Böhlau, 2018.

Gehmacher, Johanna. *Feminist Activism, Travel and Translation Around 1900: Transnational Practices of Mediation and the Case of Käthe Schirmacher*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.

Gyáni, Gábor, and György Kövér. *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig* [Social history of Hungary from the Reform era until the end of the Second World War]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

Gyáni, Gábor. *A nő élete – Történelmi perspektívában* [The life of the eoman – in historical perspective]. Budapest: Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2020.

Hacker, Hanna. "Fickert, Auguste" (1855–1910). In *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminism: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern European, 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Francisca de Haan et al, 131–33. Budapest: CEU Press, 2006.

Hanák, Péter. *A dualizmus korának történeti problémái* [Historical problems of the Dualist era]. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1971.

Klaus, Elisabeth, and Ulla Wischermann. *Journalistinnen: Eine Geschichte in Biographien und Texten 1848–1990*. Vienna–Berlin: LIT, 2013.

Koncz, Katalin. *Nők a munka világában* [Women in the world of labor]. Budapest: Kossuth, 1982.

Lake, Marilyn. *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999.

McFadden, H. Margaret. "A Radical Exchange: Rosika Schwimmer, Emma Goldman, Hella Wuolijoki and Red-White Struggles for Women." In *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Edith Saurer, 494–504. Cologne–Vienna: Böhlau, 2006.

Mészáros, Zsolt. "Wohl-nővérek munkássága: Irodalom, sajtó, szalon" [Activity of the Wohl sisters: Literature, press, salon]. PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd University, 2016.

Offen, Karen. *European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Poniz, Katja Mihurko. "Kveder, Zofka." In *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminism: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern European, 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Francisca de Haan et al, 282–84. Budapest: CEU Press, 2006.

Rupp, Leila J. *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Sharp, Ingrid, and Matthew Stibbe. "Introduction." In *Women Activists between War and Peace: Europe, 1918–1923*, edited by Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, 1–29. London: Bloomsbury Acaemic, 2017.

Szapor, Judith. "Who Represents Hungarian Women? The Demise of the Liberal Bourgeois Women's Rights Movement and the Rise of the Rightwing Women's Movement in the Aftermath of World War I." In *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923*, edited by Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, 245–67. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Szapor, Judith. "'Good Hungarian Women' vs. 'Radicals, Feminists, and Jewish Intellectuals': Rosika Schwimmer and the Hungarian Women's Debating Club in 1918–1919." *Women's History Review*, *Agency, Activism and Organization, Special Issue* 28, no 6 (2017): 1–19.