

Vera (Popović) Šnajder



Vera Šnajder was born on the 2nd of February 1904 in the town of Reljevo, near Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Reljevo was a home of an Orthodox Christian Seminary which was directed by Vera's father. She died on the 14th of February 1976 in Sarajevo. Vera completed her elementary education, followed by high school ("Classical Gymnasium") in Sarajevo, graduating in 1922, and then enrolled at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, division of theoretical and applied mathematics and experimental physics. Because of interruptions due to illness, she graduated in 1928. From then until 1929 she was a professor of Women's Gymnasium in Sarajevo when, as one of the best students and young mathematicians of her generation, she earned a fellowship that enabled her to go to Paris for further study.

Vera spent the 1929/30 season doing research at the famous Institute Henri Poincaré in Paris. Having excelled at the Institute, she is offered a position of a research associate at the Laboratory for Hydrodynamics at the Sorbonne, which she accepts. She remains at La Sorbonne until her return to Sarajevo in 1932. While in Paris, Vera Šnajder had published her first scientific work in *Comptes Rendus des Sciences de l'Académie des Sciences* [1]. Interestingly, this was also the first published work in mathematics by an author from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of Vera's experimental results were subsequently showcased at an exhibition in Paris. In addition, a document from that period survives indicating that Vera Šnajder was offered a position in the Ministry of Aeronautics (Ministère de l'Air).

On her return from Paris, near the end of 1932, Vera Šnajder becomes a professor at Women's Gymnasium where she enjoys great respect of her students, their parents, and her colleagues. As progressive intellectuals she and her husband Marcel Šnajder, one of the first doctors of Philosophy in BH and himself a professor of philosophy and mathematics, both belonged to a close-knit group of left-leaning Sarajevan intellectuals. However Marcel Šnajder was targeted by the Fascists not only as a distinguished intellectual but also because he was Jewish and, tragically, he perished in the early days of World War II. Despite great efforts to find out, Vera Šnajder never learned the details of how and where he was killed.

Marcel Šnajder's fate has almost been followed by that of the mathematics book he wrote with his colleague Stjepan Tomić. During the bombardment of Belgrade on Easter of 1941, copies of the book perished in a fire in the printing facility where the book was being produced. Fortunately, a single copy survived and the book saw light of day again after the war. The book has since become a standard reading in high schools across former Yugoslavia, educating generations of students and going through no less than 21 editions.

Despite the tragic events culminating in the arrest and murder of her husband, nagging health problems, and having to provide for her infant daughter Milica and her mother and brother, Vera Šnajder was an active participant in the war for freedom and a member of the People's Front for Sarajevo, a revolutionary organization. In December 1943 she was notified about her transfer to Imotski, and in June 1944 to Mostar (both towns in Heregovina). However because of her illness, and with the support of a noted Sarajevo medical doctor and humanist Bogdan Zimonjić, himself a progressive intellectual and member of the wartime resistance movement, she stayed in Sarajevo to undergo a medical treatment.

After the liberation (end of WWII), Vera Šnajder devotes her physical and intellectual powers to the rebuilding of her homeland. In June 1945 she is elected a director of the 2nd Women's Gymnasium, and in March 1946 she becomes one of the first professors of the College of Pedagogy in Sarajevo. In November 1947 she is elected an advisor in the Ministry of Education, where she tirelessly works on the reconstruction of the school system in BH and solving severe teaching personnel problems present at the time. In June 1948 she returns to the College of Pedagogy.

In 1950 Vera Šnajder participates in the founding of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo, in particular contributing to the creation of its Division of Mathematics. In March 1950 she becomes an associate professor, and in 1950/51 season, for the first time, the university-level study of mathematics is made available to students in BH. Professor Šnajder becomes a long-term head of the Division of Mathematics whose success and development are closely linked to her efforts, and which becomes the Department of Mathematics (as a part of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics) in 1960. She devotes most of her life to the Department, making scientific connections with domestic and international institutions, sending students for study abroad, and tirelessly and selflessly promoting and encouraging young scholars in their professional and personal development.

At the Division (and later Department) of Mathematics, Vera Šnajder taught Differential Geometry, Classical Mechanics, and occasionally and especially early on, Linear Algebra and Introduction to Algebra.

The activities of Vera Šnajder were not limited to the Department of Mathematics. In the 1951/52 and 1958/59 seasons, she served as the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, and in 1952/53, 1957/58 and 1959/60 she was the Vice-Dean. Her election to the position of Dean was of historic significance, as she was the first woman elected to this position not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in all of Yugoslavia.

Since the founding of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in 1960, Vera Šnajder served at the University Senate for many years, and also served on the Educational Board of BH, was president of the Committee of the Board of National Library, member of the Committee for Election of Scientific Associates, and president of the Committee for Professorial Exams. She was also a long-term president of the Yugoslav-French Society.

Vera Šnajder was particularly active as a president of the Society of Mathematicians, Physicists and Astronomers of Yugoslavia, and a principal organizer of the Fourth Congress of the Mathematicians, Physicists and Astronomers of Yugoslavia held in Sarajevo in 1965.

Šnajder's research was focused on the study of the Riemann and Finsler geometry in classical mechanics, and giving geometrical interpretation to the integral principles of classical mechanics. She laid out important results in two publications ([2] and [3]) which have been influential and highly regarded in the mathematics community. She also wrote a book [4] for the Classical Mechanics course that she taught for many years.

Without emphasizing Vera Šnajder's qualities as a humanist and pedagogue, the picture of her would be incomplete. She was an excellent teacher, organizer, and a distinguished intellectual. She was known as a very strict and righteous teacher, equally demanding to herself as to others, and an exemplary leader of young talent and mentor of future professors. Behind her strict professorial demeanor was a soul of a woman with warm love and care for all members of the Department and all of her students. Students as well as colleagues would address her with a certain sense of fear or, more to the point, veneration. With time, each of her students would find that their professor's attention to detail, e.g. pointing out the errors sometimes apparently not even related to the subject they are studying, is done with a far-sighted intention of bringing their overall knowledge and skills to perfection. This way the young generation would be best positioned to serve the homeland as well as enjoy personal and professional success, all of which were Vera's first priority and ahead of her personal interests.

I especially emphasize Vera Šnajder's altruistic and selfless life, as well as her rigor and creative energy, all of which have made her very highly respected by her students and peers. She had devoted her life to the development to the Division of Mathematics (and later the Department of Mathematics), nurturing its students and advising the professional staff. She has made major contributions in making mathematics become a fundamental area of study, and a known and respected program at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at the University of Sarajevo.

Older grandson of Vera Šnajder, Dragan Huterer, followed the steps of his grandmother. This young scientist has a PhD in Physics from the University of Chicago and does research in the fields of cosmology and astrophysics, and has already made a name for himself in the world of science.

It is very sad to note that no members of the distinguished Popović-Šnajder family any longer live in Sarajevo.

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(translated to English by Dragan Huterer)

Vera Šnajder's selected publications:

[1] *Sur l'extension de la méthode de Hale Shaw aux mouvements cycliques*, Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, Paris, T. 192 (1931), 1703-1706

[2] *Hamiltonov princip u racionalnoj mehanici i njegova geometrijska interpretacija*, Beograd, 1957.

[3] *Quelques remarques sur le principe de Hamilton dans la Mécanique classique*, Publication de l'Institut mathématique de l'Académie Serbe des Sciences et des Arts, Beograd, T. XIV (1960), 67-82.

[4] *Predavanja iz racionalne mehanike s uvodom u tenzorski račun*, Univerzitet u Sarajevu, Sarajevo, 1963, 287 str.

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ⁱ Much information in this text comes from Milica Šnajder, daughter of Vera Šnajder and a personal friend of the author. Milica Šnajder was a professor (and, for a while, Dean) at the Music Academy in Sarajevo. Since 1992, she has lived and worked in Ljubljana, Slovenia.