# MAKING A PARTISAN:

## Founding Narratives on the Participation of Women in the People's Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to the growing body of scholarly work on the relationship between state socialism and feminism in Yugoslavia. It focuses on the wartime development of the image of female partisans (*partizanke*) and the postwar construction of memory about them. Sources central to this project are the editions of the official monthly magazine of the women's organization Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia (*Antifašistička fronta žena Hrvatske*, AFŽH). The time frame is the period from June 1943, when the magazine was first published under the guidance of the AFŽH, until the dissolution of this organization in 1953.

This project departs from the premise that the communist leadership strongly influenced the official narrative about World War II and, *inter alia*, included women as agents of the People's Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba*, NOB), which allowed them to acknowledge women's temporary service to the war effort and to limit the scope of their representation in the official narrative. Building on this notion, the thesis first explores the circumstances in which the organization emerged, its wartime development and changes that postwar period introduced. Then it analyzes the official journal *Woman in Combat* (*Žena u borbi*) and elucidates how the goals of the organization and the pursuits of AFŽH officials during World War II influenced the wartime presentation of the narrative about the women who contributed to the struggle as well as postwar remembrance of *partizanke* in the journal. The major finding of the thesis is that the officials of this women's organization did not act as representatives of the experiences of all women who actively participated in the war. In their publication they favored the women who, organized by the AFŽH, worked in the homefront while the *partizanke* remained on the margins of their interpretation of the war narrative. In consequence, this publishing policy influenced and modified the collective memory about the women partisans.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFŽ - *Antifašistički front žena* (Antifascist Front of Women)

AFŽH - *Antifašistički front žena Hrvatske* (Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia)

AFŽJ - *Antifašistički front žena Jugoslavije* (Antifascist Front of Women of Yugoslavia)

AVNOJ - *Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije* (Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia )

CK - *Centralni komitet* (Central Committee)

DFJ - *Demokratska federativna Jugoslavija* (Democratic Federal Yugoslavia)

FNRJ - *Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija* (Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia)

GO - *Glavni odbor* (Main Committee)

HSS - *Hrvatska seljačka stranka* (Croatian Peasant Party)

KPH - *Komunistička partija Hrvatske* (Communist Party of Croatia)

KPJ - *Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* (Communist Party of Yugoslavia)

NDH - *Nezavisna država Hrvatska* (Independent State of Croatia)

NF - *Narodni front* (People's Front)

NKOJ - *Nacionalni komitet oslobođenja Jugoslavije* (National Committee of Liberation of Yugoslavia)

NOB - *Narodnooslobodilačka borba* (People's Liberation Struggle)

NOO - *Narodnooslobodilački odbor* (People's Liberation Committee)

NOP - *Narodnooslobodilački pokret* (People's Liberation Movement)

NOV – *Narodnooslobodilačka vojska* (People's Liberation Army)

NR - *Narodna republika* (People's Republic)

OK - *Okružni komitet* (District Committee)

OZNa - *Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda* (Department for Protection of People)

SBOTIČJ - *Savez bankovnih, osiguravajućih, trgovačkih i industrijskih činovnika*

*Jugoslavije* (Union of Banking, Insurance, Trade and Industry Clerks of Yugoslavia)

SKOJ - *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* (Communist Youth Union of Yugoslavia)

SKJ - *Savez komunista Jugoslavije* (League of Communists of Yugoslavia)

SSRN - *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda* (Socialist Alliance of Working People)

SUBNOR - *Savez udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslavije* (Federal Association of the Veterans of People's Liberation War of Yugoslavija)

SUZOR - *Središnji ured za osiguranje radnika* (Central Office for the Insurance of Workers)

SŽD - *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women Societies)

SŽDH – *Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske* (Union of Women Societies of Croatia)

UDBA - *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (Administration of State Security)

ZAVNOH - *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske* (State Antifascist Council of People's Liberation of Croatia)

# INTRODUCTION

According to official numbers, as many as two million Yugoslav women actively supported partisan units in Yugoslavia during World War II in a broad range of functions, and approximately one hundred thousand women joined the partisan resistance as fighters. A quarter of them died during the war and another forty thousand were wounded.[1] Women joined the partisans for a variety of reasons. Some followed their brothers or husbands to the front, while others were motivated by a desire to defend the country and destroy the Yugoslav monarchy. Some felt the partisan struggle was their last refuge from the atrocities inflicted by the armed forces of the newly established Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska*, NDH), while others sought liberation from the patriarchal social system. Resistance to the occupying forces unfolded into a social revolution which sought to establish a postwar political system similar to that of the U.S.S.R. This system promised to provide women with the opportunity to leave social positions traditionally ascribed to females and actively participate in the construction of the new state. Following the establishment of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia in Jajce in 1943, women were granted full personal legal and political rights and were, therefore, considered equal to men.

Furthermore, the state's official narrative concerning the events of World War II and the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB) evolved to include the important role played by women in the liberation of the country, and their participation was glorified as equivalent to that of male partisans. Female partisans were portrayed as political and social vanguards amongst women in Yugoslavia and gained a special place in the historical narrative of the country. In

[1] Barbara Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*. (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), 46.

other words, communist party members defined the narrative of women's participation in World War II.

My main argument is that male and female state officials alike, albeit for different reasons, engaged in and contributed to the construction of the collective memory of a female partisan. The official narrative included women as agents in the struggle and allowed the communist leadership to acknowledge women's temporary service to the war effort. I focus my attention on female members of the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia (AFŽH) who in the immediate postwar period respected the emerging image of the female partisan and concentrated on projects that focused on helping to consolidate the power of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) and demonstrating that women could contribute to the well-being of the country in peacetime as well as during the war. This thesis will show that women of the AFŽH harbored a vested interest in the image of women who actively participated in the AFŽH projects, while women partisans remained on the margin of their interest. Therefore, through their journal AFŽH officials helped engrain into the collective memory of its readership an alternative narrative about the role of women in the war and postwar society.

In my thesis I research the AFŽH, the most important women's wartime group in Croatia and the main postwar organization in existence from 1941 until 1953 when it was replaced by the *Savez ženskih društava* (Union of Women Societies, SŽD). I explore the way in which the AFŽ of Croatia positioned itself through its journal Woman in Combat (*Žena u borbi*) in relation to the official historical narrative, which sought to commemorate women partisans as "troopers, bombers, and fighters."[2] My goal is to reveal the ways in which, and to what extent, this women's organization adhered to guidelines of the official narrative concerning female

[2] Vladimir Bakarić, "Žena u borbi," in *Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi, vol. 1*, ed. Marija Šoljan (Izdanje glavnog odbora Saveza ženskih društava: Zagreb, 1955), ix.

partisans. Furthermore, I will demonstrate the reasons why this organization participated in and did not openly challenge the collective memory of women partisans and its influence in solidifying the image of female partisans in the memory of Yugoslav people.

***Sources and Methods***

My project engages the methodological approach of Edward Gibbon's concept that a historian "is obliged to consult a variety of testimonies, each of which, taken separately, is perhaps imperfect and partial."[3] Therefore, in my research I examine a range of primary and secondary sources that enable me to analyze World War II and the postwar period in Yugoslavia from different perspectives.

The majority of my primary source material consists of articles from the journal *Žena u borbi*, which was published both during and after World War II. It was the first, and by the end of the war, only journal published by and for women in Croatia featuring articles that specifically addressed women's issues, from topics on personal and children's hygiene to articles on political issues concerning the "woman question." *Žena u borbi* was published during the World War II in partisan "free territory" carved out in NDH territories, and after the war it was published by the Croatian branch of AFŽ primarily for women of the People's Republic of Croatia (*Narodna Republika Hrvatska*, NR Hrvatska). Therefore, in my research I predominantly focus my attention on sources dealing with the territory of the Independent State of Croatia during the war and on the territory of the People's Republic of Croatia in the postwar period.

I also utilize the official records of the Antifascist Front of Women, many of which are available in the collection of wide array of documents published in two volumes entitled

[3] Robert Levy, "Introduction," in *Ana Pauker, The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University California Press, 2001), 12-13.

*Women of Croatia in People's Liberation Struggle* (*Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*). These sources provide indispensable information on the roles and activities of female partisans and, more importantly, on the contribution of the writers and editors of *Žena u borbi* in shaping the collective memory surrounding female partisans. I also examine diaries and memoirs written by women and men who participated in the NOB.[4] While some of these diaries were published in the immediate postwar period, and still others published decades later, they remain under-utilized but extremely important sources in understanding women's wartime experiences. These sources bring forth personal narratives that further elucidate women's experiences and recollections available in the primary sources.

Due to the advanced age of women participants in the People's Liberation Struggle and the inability to arrange personal interviews, this project relies on available written sources. In examining the literature I used quantitative textual analysis, more precisely the close reading technique. Close reading is "thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's form, craft, meanings."[5] Hence, it is a mindful interpretation of text with special focus on the vocabulary used by the author, namely individual words and phrases, then syntax, text structures and features through which sentences and ideas unfold.[6] Through such an analysis of the journal *Žena u borbi* I uncover which topics regarding women's participation in the armed struggle the journalists of the magazine selected to write about and promote, which aspects they ignored, and finally, the aims of their narratives.



[4] Marija-Vica Balen, *Bili smo idealisti: uspomene jedne revolucionarke* (Zagreb: Disput, 2009.); Saša Božović, *Tebi, moja Dolores* (Beograd: 4. Jul, 1981); Eva Grlić, *Sjećanja* (Zagreb: Durieux, 1997); Mitra Mitrović, *Ratno putovanje* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1953), Nada Sremec, *Iz partizanskog dnevnika* (Zagreb: Izdanje Glavnog odbora AFŽ Hrvatske, 1945); Vladimir Nazor, *S partizanima: dnevnik* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1958); Ivan Šibl, *Partizanski dnevnik* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1960).

[5] Beth Burke, "A Close Look at Close Reading: Scaffolding Students with Complex Texts," accessed November 14th, 2014, http://nieonline.com/tbtimes/downloads/CCSS_reading.pdf, 2.

[6] Ibid, 4.

***Literature Review***

Following the end of the Second World War and the establishment of Yugoslavia, the People's Liberation Struggle and the final victory over the Fascist and Nazi forces became the foundational myth of the emerging regime. Therefore, contemporary Yugoslav historiography is dominated by published primary and secondary sources portraying different aspects of the partisan struggle, including significant documentary and historiographic literature featuring exclusively the participation of women in the People's Liberation Struggle. This literature was influenced by the communist leadership who strongly encouraged Yugoslav historians to focus on projects that promoted the idea of progress towards socialism and the achievement of "brotherhood and unity." That is, the historian's task was to interpret and rewrite the history of the Yugoslav peoples in accordance with the wishes of state leaders, including establishing an ideologically acceptable version of the events of World War II.[7]

Women's participation in the People's Liberation Struggle has been researched by only a handful of scholars. The first comprehensive analyses of the published primary documents and at the same time the first historical examinations written in English on this topic were published between 1980 and 1990. In 1980, Mary E. Reed wrote her doctoral dissertation and published an article, both of which focused on women's activities in World War II Croatia, with special emphasis on the relationship between the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia and the Communist Party during the war.[8] Soon after Barbara Jancar-Webster published two



[7] Ivo Banac, "Historiography of the Countries of Western Europe: Yugoslavia," *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 4 (October 1992), 1086. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2165494?seq=1 (accessed November 15, 2013). Writing of Yugoslavia's twentieth-century history was closely supervised. Pero Damjanović, Jovan Marjanović, Pero Morača and Vlado Strugar were the most prominent historians writing about the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ). The regime also "had" suitable historians who wrote about earlier periods of the Yugoslav peoples, for example Vaso Čubrilović, Dragoslav Janković, Ferdo Čulinović and Jaroslav Šidak. The historians whom the state and the party approved of cooperated in state-inspired projects such as the two-volume *History of the Peoples of Yugoslavia* (*Historija naroda Jugoslavije*) and *Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia* (*Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*).

[8] Mary E. Reed, "Croatian Women in the Yugoslav Partisan Resistance, 1941-1945" (PhD diss.,

articles analyzing the roles of women soldiers in the Yugoslav NOB and conducted in-depth research on the participation of women in the partisan struggle.[9] Both Mary E. Reed in her dissertation and Barbara Jancar-Webster in her book emphasized that their work laid a foundation for future researchers to build upon.

Jancar's work has been influential to my project as it facilitated the process of precisely distinguishing who my research would focus upon. In her article, "Women Soldiers in Yugoslavia's National Liberation Struggle," she asserts that there is "a distinction between women who joined 'by instinct' and the more ideologically oriented women who volunteered in the first partisan units."[10] In her book she elaborates this claim further by dividing women participants in the NOB into three groups: women fighters, women in the rear, and women leaders.[11] Among the three possibilities, women leaders are the group I am focusing on in my research. I base my project on the analysis of the official journal of the AFŽH, specifically on the activities of women members of the KPJ from the prewar period and the highest ranked members of the AFŽH, in short, women leaders, who had a principal influence on the creation of *Žena u borbi*. In addition, I found the information that Jancar acquired through interviews with some of the most prominent women of the NOB, including Croatians Marija Šoljan, Milka Kufrin, Anka Berus and Savka Milana Javorina, to be of great importance for my project. The information these former wartime AFŽ officials and women partisans shared with Jancar helped my analysis of the journal *Žena u borbi*. Their statements improved my understanding of the meaning of the war for women, and the changes it bestowed upon them



University of California, Berkeley, 1980); and idem, "The Anti-Fascist Front of Women and the Communist Party in Croatia: Conflicts within the Resistance," in *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Tova Yedlin (New York: Praeger, 1980).

[9] Barbara Jancar-Webster, "Yugoslavia: War of Resistance," in *Female Soldiers: Combatants or Non-Combatants? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Nancy L. Goldman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 85-105; idem, "Women Soldiers in Yugoslavia`s National Liberation Struggle 1941-1945," in *Women and the Military System*, ed. Eva Isaksson (New York: St. Martin`s Press, 1988), 47-67; and idem, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945* (Denver: Arden Press, 1990).

[10] Jancar-Webster, "Women Soldiers in Yugoslavia," 49.

[11] See further in: Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 41-74.

because it became apparent to me that World War II to them was primarily an opportunity for proletarian revolution and the subsequent achievement of the KPJ's political goals. Their dedication to the resolution of the "woman question" was secondary. Therefore, they never attempted to undermine the Party's authority or tarnish the image of women partisans in *Žena u borbi*.

The first Yugoslav scholar to openly confront the official, ideologically infused version of women's history was feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky. Sklevicky devoted her career to researching women's history in Yugoslavia with an emphasis on women in the NOB. For example, Sklevicky conducted pioneering research of the archival sources on the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia during the Second World War and the postwar period. She published several articles on the topic, and began writing a doctoral thesis, all with the goal to examine in-depth the extent and importance of women's agency which, Sklevicky argued, had been ignored or erased from the official historical narrative. Although Sklevicky did not complete her doctoral dissertation because she was killed in a car accident in January 1990, her supervisor Dunja Rihtman Auguštin edited the dissertation and published it posthumously in 1996.[12] It remains the most thorough analysis of the AFŽ.

Sklevicky distinguishes four phases in the AFŽ's existence. The first phase began with World War II from the foundation of the organization at the end of 1942 until the end of the war in 1945. This period was followed by the educational phase of the AFŽ over the next two years. The commanding/directive model was the third phase and lasted for two years during the height of the crisis caused by severe disagreements between the Yugoslav leadership and Stalin and the Soviet led Communist Information Bureau. The final phase was the dualistic



[12] Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, ed. Dunja Rihtman Auguštin (Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 1996).

period between 1950 and 1953. During this phase occurred the transition to the new women's organization, Union of Women Societies.[13]

Since women who participated in the work of *Žena u borbi* were also members of the AFŽ, changes in the function of the organization influenced the process of editing the journal, which stories were published, and the language and rhetoric used in the articles. In the third chapter I will demonstrate how the political changes between 1948 and 1950 following the Tito-Stalin split directly influenced the way in which the AFŽ operated and, consequently, the way in which women wrote about the Second World War and women partisans. In addition, although Sklevicky focused her research on the agency of women in the organization and in relation to the Communist Party, the conclusions she made through the analysis of the archival data were an important foundation that informed my analysis of the articles from the journal *Žena u borbi*. Sklevicky points to the difference between two common types of discourses she called "critically informative discourse," and "representative." The first one, Sklevicky explains, "tends to present a particular situation in a most authentic way, it is self-critical, tends to minimize ideological dimension and enable the regulation and the best possible functioning of the daily practice." On the other hand, the representative discourse "is self-referential, relies on unquestionable/totalitarian speech from the authority position, and the mobilizing Eros with which it represents/legitimizes itself is focused on direct execution of its ideas."[14] I use this methodological approach in my analysis of the articles published in *Žena u borbi*. The fact that the articles were intended for a wider audience, according to Sklevicky, entailed two things. First, the authors tried to use language suitable for the intended audience, but secondly, their discourse was informed by a specific hierarchical position they believed they had with regard to the audience, which also had an effect on the language the writers employed.

[13] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 63-138.
[14] Ibid, 72.

Female participants in the Second World War in Yugoslavia and their lives and work in the postwar period have been increasingly researched in recent years, both in the countries of former Yugoslavia and elsewhere.[15] For instance, Jelena Batinić wrote both her master thesis and her doctoral dissertation on different aspects of women's participation in the NOB.[16] The author's asserts in her dissertation that during World War II traditional gender norms were influenced and changed through three different aspects, on the level of political rhetoric and institutions, and through the daily practice. Batinić examined the Communist Party wartime rhetoric concluding it was double-sided. From one side, the Party drew on the profoundly patriarchal heroic imagery of South Slavic folk traditions to legitimize the existence of female soldiers within its ranks. On the other hand, to increase the number of women recruits, Partisan leaders emphasized that the end of the war would bring about the end of women's inequality within Yugoslav society.[17] AFŽ and *Žena u borbi*, similar to a number of other journals issued in different regions of Croatia during the war, were a central component of the communist propaganda machine. Through my research I demonstrate the degree to which members of the AFŽ who were involved in the publication of the journal reproduced one or another aspect of Party rhetoric, and, more importantly, following the end of the war, which aspects they continued to use and why.



[15] See: Renata Jambrešić Kirin, "The Politics of Memory in Croatian Socialist Culture: Some Remarks," *Narodna umjetnost* 41 (2004); idem, "Moderne vestalke u kulturi sjećanja Drugog svjetskog rata," in *Dom i svijet* (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije, 2008); Gordana Stojaković, "Rodna perspektiva u novinama Antifašističkog fronta žena u periodu 1945-1953" (PhD Diss., University of Novi Sad, 2011); Ivana Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke* (Evoluta: Beograd, 2011); Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Revolutionary Networks: Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957)" (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2012); idem, "Women's Political and social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia, The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 8 (2014). There is also a German-language monograph on women partisans. See: Barbara Wiesinger, Partisaninnen: Widerstand in Jugoslawien 1941-1945 (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008).

[16] Jelena Batinić, "Proud to Have Trod in Men's Footsteps: Mobilizing Peasant Women into the Yugoslav Partisan Army in World War II" (MA thesis, The Ohio State University, 2001); and idem, "Gender, Revolution, and War: The Mobilization of Women in the Yugoslav Partisan Resistance during World War II" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2009).

[17] Batinić, "Gender, Revolution, and War," 4.

Additionally, Batinić dedicated the final section of her dissertation to the analysis of the development of the collective memory of women partisans during the existence of Yugoslavia. She interpreted several Yugoslav movies to depict a degradation of the image of woman partisan "from the revolutionary icon par excellence in the early postwar years to the oblivion of the present."[18] The journey, Batinić suggests, unfolded through four phases and the AFŽ during its existence, and its successors after 1953, always acted as the guardians of the official image of women partisans.[19] Although she concurs with this position, Renata Jambrešić Kirin also points out that:

> the mass media in the socialist politics of memory (…) played a far more complex, 'shifting and transient' role than merely as a means of indoctrination and ideological censorship which, allegedly, erased the problematization of interethnic conflicts from documentary as well as artistic representation of the war. (…) Therefore the role of the media-newspapers, cartoons, film, television-as dominant cultural forms with the help of which the past and the recent reality is reworked and represented was not to impose an image of the past 'as it should have occurred' but to offer a construction of history 'as it could be imagined' in codes of popular culture.[20]

On the one hand, the AFŽ performed the function of official promoter and keeper of the memory of the female partisan. On the other, as Jambrešić Kirin points out, among the mass media, AFŽH journalists also worked towards their own interpretation of the role of the partisan woman. My goal is to demonstrate that journalists and editors of *Žena u borbi* were not just transmitting ideas and images imposed upon them by the higher echelons of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but that they displayed agency when they selected and presented stories that they personally deemed desirable in a particular period and situation. In other words, although one of the most important tasks of the journalists and editors of *Žena u borbi* was the encouragement and coordination of wider support for certain ideas, including the imagery of the memory about the Second World War and the role of women in it, I

[18] Batinić, "Gender, Revolution, and War," 6.
[19] Ibid, 297-305. Renata Jambrešić Kirin expressed the same idea in the article "The Politics of Memory in Croatian Socialist Culture: Some Remarks," 129-130.
[20] Jambrešić Kirin, "The Politics of Memory," 131.

believe the journal was still written from a position of individuals who informed the transmitted ideas with their own, subjective memories and notions of what World War II meant to them.

### *Theoretical Considerations*

My thesis focuses on three main concepts: the personal narrative, collective memory, and the totalitarian paradigm approach to researching state socialist systems. With regard to the personal narrative, my research principally draws upon theories developed by Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett in their book *Telling Stories, The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*. According to the authors, the agency of a person can always be expressed in two ways, individual and social, and personal narrative is always a witness to (re)construction of the self and to the social action taken.[21] Moreover, an individual who writes a personal narrative takes part in a certain historical situation and influences its development, he or she is also conditioned by the historical circumstances. Furthermore, personal narratives also have a dual nature and can be analyzed from two different points of view. Namely, personal narratives determine the historical period, and they are also contextualized by historical situations.[22] In the words of Paul Eakin, although self-narration is the process of individualization, which is directed toward the definition of the self, it is also deeply rooted in the cultural and social practices of the surrounding community. Therefore, although "[w]e tend to think of autobiography as a literature of the first person, (…) the subject of autobiography to which the pronoun "I" refers is neither singular nor first, and we do well to demystify its claims. We so easily forget that the first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origins and subsequent formation."[23]



[21] Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories, The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 45.
[22] Ibid, 45.
[23] Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories, Making Selves* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University

With regard to their dual representation, personal experience as a primary involvement of the individual in societal events commonly as a secondary axis of the development of personal narratives, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett warn that the researcher should be alert when analyzing them because public narratives are usually overpowered by intimate ones.[24] However, in the case of the journal central to my research, since it was not intended to be written and published explicitly as a personal narrative, the situation is more complicated. Private opinions and personal attachments of the women writing for the journal were suppressed, and I am analyzing *Žena u borbi* precisely in order to find indications of the personal attitudes and pointers to individual stories behind the mandatory rhetoric and duty to the state authority. As the third chapter will show, historical context played an important role in the accessibility of personal narratives in the journal as well as in the types of narratives that journalists and editors presented to the wider audience or the topics they determined better to ignore.

A second important concept in my project is memory. Memory became an object of academic research at the turn of twentieth century. Following the end of World War I memory became interesting to social scientists, the most prominent among them being Maurice Halbwachs. In his most renowned book, *On Collective Memory*, he argues that, similar to language, memory formation is founded on the social relationships of the individual and has no meaning outside them. In my thesis I use a similar approach, the memory in a manner described by Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka in the article "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity."[25] The authors focus their discussion on the formation of cultural memory, which they term the "concretion of identity."[26] They assert that cultural memory relays three notions,



Press, 1999), 43.

[24] Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, *Telling Stories*, 43.

[25] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133, accessed March 25, 2014, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/488538.

[26] Ibid, 128.

the memory, the culture, and the community. Memory is connected to a set of events from the past that the particular social group deems momentous to its development. Therefore it is perpetuated through a set of customs, texts and monuments, the "figures of memory," through which memory is closely intertwined to the objectified culture of that separate social group.[27]

An important characteristic of cultural memory, according to Assmann and Czaplicka, is its role in the reconstruction of the past or, in other words, methods and means through which it "always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation."[28] Of course, there are always individuals whose "expertise" is crucial to the accurate and proper dissemination of knowledge, while the rest of the group participates through personal presence and appropriation of knowledge.[29] In my analysis, I connected this idea to Jambrešić Kirin's previously mentioned contention that the Yugoslav mass media constructed images about the past as it "could be imagined." Hence, while examining the journal *Žena u borbi*, I devote special attention to the memory of women partisans and try to differentiate the degree to which this particular memory of war owed to notions that individual women had about it and shared in the journal, and how much it owed to the imposed master narrative, Yugoslav cultural memory in the making, of the Second World War in Yugoslavia.

Finally, a third concept that is important to my research is the top-down strategy of studying socialist countries. Sheila Fitzpatrick explained the totalitarian paradigm using the example of Soviet Union scholarship. She states that historians who interpreted the history of the U.S.S.R. using this approach described the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as the predominant social power in the country which, often by using brutal measures, paralyzed and



[27] Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory," 128/129.
[28] Ibid, 130; see also: Jan Assman, "Kultura sjećanja," in *Kultura pamćenja i historija*, ed. Maja Brkljačić and Sandra Prlenda (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2006), 64-65.
[29] Assman, "Kultura sjećanja," 66-68.

destroyed any other autonomous social action.[30] In the 1970s and 1980s the so-called "revisionists" challenged this approach to the research of Soviet Union. On the premise that even in the U.S.S.R. "society had to be more than a simple object of regime control"[31] revisionist historians recast a new image of Soviet history recognizing the importance of grassroots social movements.

In the introduction to the book *State Society Relations in Yugoslavia, 1945-1992* Jill A. Irvine exemplified the development of scholarship on Yugoslavia with regard to the totalitarian paradigm. The author asserts that, because of the Tito-Stalin split, this paradigm was challenged much earlier in the Yugoslav case than in other socialist countries.[32] Until the 1960s Western historians, Irvine claims, researched Yugoslavia as an example of "deviation from the totalitarian model [with] occasional backsliding towards it."[33] In the later period emphasis was directed toward the modernization framework, which was described as a rivalry between the different factions within the elite, and only in the 1980s did researchers begin to attribute significance to social pressures from the bottom. Irvine then continues with the depiction of the relations between state structures and society. From her description it is clear that the development of scholarship approximately followed the development of the social and political situation within the country. "The particular way in which regime elites approached the problem of generating support," Irvine argues, "fundamentally shaped the interaction between state actors and social forces."[34] Thus, although Yugoslavia had comparatively stronger legitimacy strategies than other Eastern European countries, its strongest weapon of legitimacy, the Partisan myth, became over time the focal point of dissention. During the Second World War communist leaders proclaimed that under their

[30] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007), 80.
[31] Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 81.
[32] Melissa K. Bokovoy, Jill A. Irvine, and Carol S. Lilly (ed.), *State-society relations in Yugoslavia, 1945-1992* (New York: St. Martin`s Press, 1997), 3.
[33] Ibid, 4.
[34] Ibid, 6.

direction the national question, unresolved throughout the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, would be justly resolved in the postwar period. However, according to the perceptions of many members of individual nations within the country, this question was never truly resolved, and the legitimacy of the regime was thus undermined. An evolving problem on this front, the author concludes, was paired with the weakening of the influence and power of Party elites and the growing power of the masses.[35]

Notably, Irvine adds that despite its dominance and largely undisputed popularity in the immediate postwar years, the regime was even then unable to eradicate autonomous factions, both within the political elite or throughout the society.[36] Still, it is important as Nannete Funk warns, to "distinguish the who, when, and what – Who could be agents? When could they be agents? And what kind of agents could they be?"[37] In the case of women's organizations, Funk claims that they "both were and were not agents on behalf of women, and also prevented women's agency."[38] Funk touches upon the case of Yugoslavia and the AFŽ writing that, although it was initially mostly independent from direct Party influence, this organization was restructured after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, subjected to more severe control by the Communist Party in 1950 and then disbanded in 1953.[39] Hence, although the totalitarian paradigm cannot explain all of the nuances of the Yugoslav state socialist system in its early years, it does capture the overall balance of power, which rested heavily on the side of the Party. Even though some differences of opinion and disagreements existed, members of the political elite usually voiced complaints through official channels. Finally, as Sklevicky notes, the most prominent women of the AFŽ were loyal Party members who, although dedicated to



[35] Bokovoy, Irvine, and Lilly (ed.), *State-society relations*, 7-9.
[36] Ibid, 10.
[37] Nannete Funk, "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism," *European Journal of Women Studies* (June 2014): 1, accessed August 24, 2014. URL: http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/06/27/1350506814539929.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 4.

women's liberation, saw its development in a similar or same way male Party members did, and therefore did not try to jeopardize their or the Party's existence.[40]

My thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter I provide a summary of World War II in Yugoslavia and the immediate postwar period until approximately 1953, the year when the AFŽ of Yugoslavia was disbanded. While writing about the Second World War, I focus particularly on the role and importance of the Communist Party in the outcome of the war. In the postwar period, I emphasize the circumstances of the Tito-Stalin split and the impact it had on Yugoslavia. Specifically, the Split directly impacted the political and economic sphere by stimulating the development of self-management socialism, a form of socialism characteristic to Yugoslavia. The Split also greatly influenced the social sphere through purges of potential Stalin supporters and the Soviet style of communism within Yugoslavia. In the second chapter I analyze the role of women partisans in the war effort, with special emphasis on the Party's mobilizing strategy and the importance of the notion of "political education" and emancipation for the mobilization. I demonstrate how "political education" was designed and executed throughout the war and after, and how it affected women, particularly wartime partisans. I dedicate the majority of the chapter to the development and the role of the AFŽ during the war and the postwar period, in order to exemplify (dis)continuities in its duties and roles in the period under analysis. The third chapter is dedicated to the detailed analysis of the journal *Žena u borbi*. I will demonstrate the ways in which the narratives in the journal evolved and discuss the possible reasons. First, I will demonstrate what topics the editorial board prioritized and how those topics connect to the political situation and, second, I will relate the described publishing policy to the role of the narratives about memory of women partisans.



[40] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 113.

# CHAPTER 1 - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Below I provide a short overview of history of socialist Yugoslavia from her emergence in the World War II until the early 1950s in order to illustrate political and social climate in which Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia (AFŽH) was created and functioned until its dissolution in 1953. I first present general facts about the wartime situation in Yugoslavia. I dedicate a significant portion of the chapter to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), and its role in the war of resistance. I briefly analyze the Party's relationship with the Soviet Union during the war and in the immediate postwar period. In the second portion of the chapter I explain self-management socialism, a form of socialism specific to Yugoslavia that was introduced in 1950, and its scope and consequences.

## *1.1 The Second World War in Yugoslavia*

To implement his plan "to tidy up the Balkans"[41] before launching an attack on the U.S.S.R., Hitler pressured the regent Pavle Karađorđević to sign the Tripartite Pact on March 25, 1941. Just two days after the signing seventeen-year-old heir Petar was proclaimed the new king of Yugoslavia in a military coup. Showing no desire to speak with the representatives of the new government, Hitler ordered an attack on Yugoslavia. Without declaration of war, the attack began in the morning of April 6 with the bombing of Beograd. The Yugoslav army was completely unprepared for the German offensive, all battles of the so-called "April war" were over in eleven days and Yugoslavia was subsequently partitioned and occupied.



[41] Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 12.

However, what started as an act of securing the region usurped both political and social forces within Yugoslavia. As Barbara Jancar-Webster notes, the disintegration and occupation of Yugoslavia and the creation of the new country in part of the territory, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), resulted in three separate wars in Yugoslavia. First and foremost, there was a war to repel the German, Italian and Bulgarian invaders. Secondly, there was a bitter conflict between different Yugoslav nations, primarily Croats, Serbs and Muslims. Finally, this period was marked by the conflict between the old, royalist Yugoslavia and the new, republican one.[42]

At the outset of World War II in Yugoslavia the KPJ, formed in 1919 and banned under the Law on the Protection of the State in 1921, was a small political party counting no more than twelve thousand members.[43] Many of them perished in prisons of the newly established NDH in the first weeks of its existence.[44] However, the Party "had an all-Yugoslav if as yet imperfect underground, network, leadership, discipline, indoctrination, determination and faith."[45] Already in the autumn of 1941 the KPJ achieved one of the first notable military successes, the establishment of the Užice Republic in the western Serbia. In November 1941, in the first enemy offensive,[46] German troops occupied the territory, and the majority of partisan forces fled to re-group again at the river Foča in southeast Bosnia. During that same period in the territory of the NDH, Slavko Goldstein states, the Ustasha policies contributed significantly to the uprising of communist-led peasants. Rebellion in the NDH, he argues,

[42] Jancar-Webster, "Yugoslavia: War of Resistance," 89.

[43] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 75; Slavko Goldstein, *1941.: godina koja se vraća*, (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2007), 425; Hrvoje Matković, *Suvremena politička povijest Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske, 1995), 178.While Jancar-Webster states that the KPJ had twelve thousand members, Slavko Goldstein claims there were approximately nine thousand, and Hrvoje Matković eight thousand members.

[44] For touching account of executions of communist by the Ustasha see: Balen, *Bili smo idealisti*, 191, 206, 216, and Goldstein, *1941*., 206-209.

[45] Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 57.

[46] Yugoslav historiography records seven major offensives between autumn of 1941 and spring of 1944. Axis powers undertook these military maneuvers, some in collaboration with the Chetniks, in order to destroy the core of the partisan army.

emerged on the basis of mutual necessity. Namely, because of the persecution and killings of Serb peasants, males and females, old and young alike, many in the territory of Kordun and Banija escaped "to the woods." They were completely disorganized and readily accepted the leadership of Croatian communists whose lives in the NDH were also threatened and many of whom also chose the partisan existence.[47]

It is important to note that communist policies in this early period helped turn the people in the territory of Užice Republic against them. In addition to the introduction of communist symbols, their rhetoric dramatically emphasized the struggle against the class enemy, which was implemented through the confiscation of private property and the execution of individuals accused of treason.[48] The policies of the KPJ became harsher in the winter of 1941-1942 because they now interpreted the partisan struggle exclusively in terms of a class struggle and proletarian revolution. To secure its ideological aim the Party orchestrated both a purge of its own ranks of "ideologically unreliable" elements and the mostly peasant population of "class enemies" and "fifth columnists." In this manner communists influenced the radical narrowing of the Partisan support base among peasants, the backbone of the uprising.[49]

Furthermore, KPJ's haste to begin the revolutionary changes in Yugoslavia infuriated Stalin, whom Yugoslav communists considered their Soviet mentor. Therefore, in the spring of 1942 communists accepted Stalin's advice and considerably tempered their hard-line revolutionary rhetoric. The revolution was temporarily forgotten and partisans began presenting themselves as the best organization capable of repelling the occupiers. According to Goldstein, communist insurgents in Croatia had already modified their rhetoric by the end

[47] Goldstein, *1941.*, 257, 326-328.

[48] Melissa K. Bokovoy, "Peasants and Communists: A Dubious Alliance," in *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941-1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 8-12; and Pawlovitch, *Hitlers New Disorder*, 95.

[49] Bokovoy, "Peasants and Communists," 14-17.

of 1941, which was evident in the slogans they employed. During the summer partisans used phrasing such as "Long live Soviet Union and the heroic Red Army," and "Long live comrade Stalin" most often. They soon realized that exiled peasants, who comprised the majority of the partisan force, embraced slogans such as "Death to fascism-Freedom to the people," and ones dedicated to the "brotherhood and unity of Croats and Serbs in Croatia," and to "our heroic partisans."[50]

Changes in rhetoric, which now pledged cooperation and mutual consideration between the nationalities and strict discipline in behavior of communists toward peasants of all ethnic groups, brought increased support for the partisans and made them the most successful resistance movement in the country. They earned a reputation as freedom fighters, and by 1942 the People's Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret*, NOP) had taken root in Banija, Kordun, and parts of Lika with Bihać in northwestern Bosnia as its center.[51] Terror against the civilian population by the NDH and the simultaneous anarchy in administering the country contributed to the development of the NOP, and Italian capitulation in September of 1943 provided the impetus for the quick amassment of the People's Liberation Movement.[52]

The partisans were not only fighting for freedom. They also had the future governmental organization of Yugoslavia in mind. As Jancar-Webster argued, they waged war on two fronts simultaneously, politically as well as militarily.[53] Their rhetoric accentuated "brotherhood and unity" of all Yugoslavs regardless of their nation and religion. The implementation of this policy officially began on November 26th and 27th 1942 when the founding meeting of the Antifascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašističko vijeće narodnog*



[50] Goldstein, *1941.*, 328. Croatian versions of the slogans written above, in the order of apearance, are: "Da živi Sovjetski Savez i herojska Crvena armija! Da živi drug Staljin! Smrt fašizmu-sloboda narodu!," te "bratstvu i slozi Hrvata i Srba u Hrvatskoj" i "našim junačkim partizanima."

[51] Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 129.

[52] Ibid; and Goldstein, *1941.*, 356.

[53] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 47.

*oslobođenja Jugoslavije*, AVNOJ) was held in Bihać. AVNOJ was proclaimed as "the representative body of the liberation movement that harnessed all true patriots."[54] The establishment of AVNOJ was authorized by Stalin himself who agreed with Tito's idea of the necessity for an organization that would gather all antifascists willing to fight against the occupiers.

Interestingly, Tito only informed Stalin about the agenda of second session of AVNOJ held on November 29th 1943 in Jajce (Bosnia) after the meeting was complete and withheld some of the conclusions the Council reached. The most important decisions were the establishment of the National Committee of Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Nacionalni komitet oslobođenja Jugoslavije*, NKOJ), the provisional government, and the inauguration of Democratic Federative Yugoslavia (*Demokratska federativna Jugoslavija*, DFJ) "on the basis of the right of every people to self-determination, including the right to secede, or to unite with other nations, in compliance with the true will of all nations of Yugoslavia, confirmed in the course of the three-year long common peoples' liberation struggle which has forged the inseparable brotherhood of nations of Yugoslavia [who wish to] remain united in Yugoslavia."[55] In addition, although the final decision on whether to re-establish the monarchy or to create a republic was to be made in elections following the war, king Peter was forbidden to return to Yugoslavia at any time, and the prewar government was stripped of its rights.[56] At this point the Allies still supported the king and the government in exile as the legal representatives of Yugoslavia, so Tito neglected to mention the decisions related to them. However, the decisions made did not influence Stalin's relationship with Winston



[54] Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 131.
[55] As cited in: Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 211.
[56] Ibid, 210-211.

Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt or the course of Teheran Conference, which was in session at the time, Stalin allowed the political changes Tito suggested.[57]

In addition to large liberated areas in Bosnia, the NOP held significant territories in Croatia. Therefore, AVNOJ councilors who were from Croatia established an agreement with the AVNOJ Executive Committee to institute the State Antifascist Council of People's Liberation of Croatia (*Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske*, ZAVNOH).[58] The first session of ZAVNOH was held in Otočac and in Plitvička jezera (Lika, Croatia) on June 13th and 14th 1943. This council assumed the function of the highest political body of the NOP in Croatia, and poet Vladimir Nazor became its president. In the second session held in mid-October 1943, Nazor proclaimed Istra, Zadar and the islands, which after the signing of Rome treaty in 1941 had been under Italian occupation, returned to Croatia. Finally, in its third session held in Topusko (Kordun, Croatia) in May 1944, ZAVNOH declared the plan for Croatian accession to the DFJ on the basis of the right of self-determination.[59]

In addition to establishment of these institutions, one can discern the extent of preparations for the future seizure of political power by communists in Yugoslavia throughout the war by the manner in which they functioned. For example, in ZAVNOH almost half of the members of the Council were not members of the KPJ, including the Council president. However, these men did not have the authority to make political decisions. Vice president Andrija Hebrang, a member of the KPJ since its creation, secretary Pavle Gregorić and Šime Balen were the most



[57] Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 211-212.

[58] Hodimir Sirotković, "Konstituiranje ZAVNOH-a," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 5, no. 3 (1973), 41, 43. AVNOJ councilors from Croatia were: Pavle Gregorić, member of KPJ since 1921, partisan fighter and a doctor, Stanko Ćanica Opačić, commander of Kordun group of partisans, Šime Balen, political commissar of the Fifth brigade of Kordun, Pavao Krce, parliament representative of Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS), Branko Zlatarić, communist official from Zagreb, and Nikola Grulović, member of the provincial committee of KPJ for Vojvodina. In addition to six of them, Đoko Jovanović, assistant commander of the People's Liberation Army (*Narodnooslobodilačka vojska*, NOV), and Vlatka Babić, a teacher from Crikvenica, also worked on establishment of ZAVNOH.

[59] Matković, *Politička povijest*, 187.

influential decision makers. Similarly, although AVNOJ comprised all antifascists who wanted to participate in people's government, committees composed exclusively of members of the KPJ oversaw the activities of the participants who were not declared communists.[60] Finally, after the capitulation of Italy on September 8th 1943 and rapid strengthening of the NOP, the Party leadership introduced conscription for all adult males residing in the liberated areas. In the event that someone refused to perform their military duty, specialized partisan units, so-called Anti-Fifth Column units, were dispatched to arrest them.[61] These units were supervised by a newly emerging intelligence organization that once again started the process of clearing their ranks of real, potential or imaginary collaborators as well as other categories of "enemy of the people" and prepared lists to do the same when they reached larger urban centers.[62]

### *1.2 End of the War and the Immediate Postwar Period*

In October 1944 the Red Army entered Yugoslavia and helped partisans liberate Belgrade. The Yugoslav army worked its way westward from Serbia, and Zagreb was liberated on May 8th 1945. The army soon left Zagreb and continued its liberation march toward Slovenia, and the members of the newly founded People's Government of Croatia (*Narodna vlada Hrvatske*), which would for the next eight years be chaired by Vladimir Bakarić, came from Split to stabilize their power in the capital of Croatia. The government based its legitimacy upon the two-year existence of ZAVNOH which, in July, was renamed the People's Parliament of Croatia (*Narodni sabor Hrvatske*).[63]



[60] Goldstein, *1941.*, 425-426.
[61] Ibid, 360.
[62] Ibid, 426. These intelligence centers gradually evolved into unified service for security and information entitled Department for Protection of the People (*Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda,* OZNa) that was established in May 1944 as a department of NKOJ. In 1946 it was reorganized and renamed as the Administration of State Security (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*, UDBA), and its tasks to monitor enemies expanded as it kept an eye on "internal enemies," emigrants and foreign intelligence services.
[63] Igor Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma, Hrvatska u desetljeću poslije 1945. godine," in *Refleksije vremena (1945.-1955.),* ed. Jasmina Bavoljak (Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2012), 11.

Encouraged by Churchill's policy of compromise, which sought to connect members of the Yugoslav refugee government still residing in London with leaders of the NOP, Tito met Ivan Šubašić, *ban* of prewar autonomous province (*banovina*) Croatia. They conducted negotiations first time on the island of Vis in August of 1944, and then in Belgrade immediately after the liberation. The two agreed that AVNOJ would remain the supreme legislative body of the DFJ until the first elections, and the king would not return until the people of Yugoslavia decide whether he was allowed to do so. Additionally, the temporary government composed of members of the NKOJ and members of the refugee government called for elections for the constituent assembly that would decide the final political structure of Yugoslavia.[64] However, as Pavlowitch notes, these concessions were only temporary and were a deceptive ploy to appease the Allies until the Party could seize power completely.[65]

Just prior to the first elections, held on November 11th 1945, the People's Front (*Narodni front*, NF) was formed. This political body was the successor to the People's Liberation Front (*Narodnooslobodilački front*, NOF) and was composed of several communist-led organizations, as well as some non-communist but antifascist groups. Due to the elaborate machinations and obstructions of work of non-communist politicians and political parties, the People's Front headed by Tito was the only voting option and won 90% of the votes. In the first session the Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy and declared a republic under the name Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (*Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija*, FNRJ). Finally, in January 1946, the elected Constituent Assembly developed a Yugoslav Constitution that was based on the 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union.[66]

Socio-political organizations that comprised the People's Front were principally dedicated to ways to better control all social groups and social life in postwar Yugoslavia. As Éva Fodor

[64] Matković, *Politička povijest*, 196-198.
[65] Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 253.
[66] Matković, *Politička povijest*, 212.

remarks, when becoming subjects of a socialist country, men, women and children were assigned membership in one of the predefined social groups as, for instance, "workers," "peasants" or "women." Members of certain groups, the political leadership assumed, had similar needs and were trusted with similar tasks.[67] Thus, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia established branches of the same organizations in every state and province of the federation with the goal to involve as many people as possible, but without the obvious involvement of the Party. The organization for high school and university students was the Communist Youth Union of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*, SKOJ), and its subsection, the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia (*Savez pionira Jugoslavije*), was for elementary school children. The most prominent organizations that adults could join were the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije*, SSRN) and the Federal Association of Veterans of the National Liberation War of Yugoslavia (*Savez udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslavije*, SUBNOR). Both organizations were open to male and female membership, but the organization that attracted the majority of women was the Antifascist Front of Women (AFŽ).

During the occupation and war Yugoslavia experienced enormous losses, both human and material, and by the end of the war "Yugoslavia's production capacity had been all but destroyed by war damage, dislocation, chaos, rampant inflation and loss of trained personnel."[68] Still, enthusiasm for victory spilled over into enthusiasm directed toward reconstruction of the country. Factories that were functional, worked at full capacity, and people, largely young and those organized by SKOJ, enthusiastically participated in volunteer activities advocated by the slogan "No rest while renewal is going on."[69] Reconstruction activities were primarily aimed at the elimination of war damage and were followed by

[67] Éva Fodor, "Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (April 2002): 243.
[68] Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 272.
[69] "Nema odmora dok traje obnova."

attempts to normalize the economy through the restoration and rebuilding of the infrastructure, industrial and cultural facilities, and, finally, the creation of resources for the transition to planned production.[70] The process of building an industrial economy unfolded parallel to the reconstruction of the country. In order to modernize a society that was still mainly agrarian, the communist leadership cooperated with the U.S.S.R. and structured its plans on the basis of Soviet economic experience. The KPJ embarked on a project of confiscation of property from the business owners who worked during the war and were thus labeled war profiteers. Agrarian reform, particularly the colonization of estates once belonging to the members of German national minority, was followed by rapid industrialization, with an emphasis on heavy industry, the energy sector and mining, and electrification that would transform the Yugoslav economy from agrarian to industrial. The process of industrialization was planned and directed mainly by wartime revolutionaries who distinguished themselves throughout the NOB and supervised by Soviet experts.[71]

### *1.3 Introduction of Self-management*

In April 1945, Tito traveled to Moscow where he signed an agreement of friendship and mutual assistance between Yugoslavia and the U.S.S.R. In the following years Tito concluded similar contracts with the other countries of the Eastern Block, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, and conducted negotiations with Georgi Dimitrov, the secretary of the Third Comintern from 1934 until its dissolution in 1943 and the first postwar Bulgarian communist leader, which were intended to lead to the establishment of a Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation. In addition, Tito encouraged political rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Albania with a possibility to include Albania in the Balkan federation.



[70] Goldstein, *1941.*, 438; Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Naknada Pavičić, 2003), 293.
[71] Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 286, 294-295.

In 1947 the Communist Information Bureau, the so-called Cominform, was founded. In essence, it was a Soviet-dominated organization through which Stalin aimed to obtain more comprehensive political and economic influence over Eastern Block.[72] The first member state to be disciplined should have been Yugoslavia. During the war, a variety of disagreements between the communist leadership of Yugoslavia and the U.S.S.R. had begun to emerge. According to Sabrina P. Ramet, the most unsettling of KPJ's characteristics was its tendency to take independent action, and Stalin did not appreciate nor did he have the intention to encourage Tito's independence, especially his ventures in foreign politics. While Yugoslav communists attempted to be Stalin's most loyal allies on the Balkan peninsula, their actions opened an opportunity for Yugoslavia to become unexpectedly strong and highly independent of Stalin's influence, which was far removed from the plan of complete subordination Stalin intended for all European communist countries.[73]

Tito's refusal to immediately establish the federation with Bulgaria, which would weaken the KPJ, triggered Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform in June 1948, and the withdrawal of Soviet experts from the country resulting in a complete economic blockade by all Eastern Block countries.[74] The KPJ was characterized as a sectarian organization that was not willing to acknowledge its anti-Party mistakes, namely, allowing "quiet in-growth of capitalism into socialism," and its "hostile policy toward the Soviet Union, discrediting the Soviet Army, and equalizing of the Soviet foreign policy with the foreign policy of the imperialist powers."[75] By employing this kind of rhetoric, Stalin wanted to set in motion the overthrow of the current leadership from within the KPJ.



[72] Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 301.

[73] Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias, State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), 175-176.

[74] Bruce McFarlane, *Yugoslavia: Politics, Economics and Society* (London-New York: Pinter Publishers, 1988), 14-15.

[75] As cited in: Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma," 22; and Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 302.

The leadership of the KPJ reacted in unexpected manner. First, they published all of the materials related to the dispute with the Soviet leadership and Cominform. Subsequently, between July 21st and 28th 1948 the Party held its Fifth Congress. Moreover, the sessions were broadcasted live on the radio, and newspapers extensively covered activities at the Congress. This deviation from the usual practice of secrecy in state affairs, Goldstein claims, produced a widespread sense of common purpose in Yugoslav public for the first time since the end of the World War II. The Party and the people felt that once again they had to resist foreign domination.[76]

From June 1948 until the beginning of the 1950, the climax of Tito-Stalin split, the economic situation in the country worsened at a dramatic pace. The economic blockade halted exports, which decreased to one third. Imports of equipment from Eastern Block countries were suspended, and, subsequently, many industrial reconstruction projects were stopped. For military security, the locations of some industrial facilities were relocated. Finally, agricultural production decreased, mostly because the rapid collectivization had not adjusted to the capabilities or needs of peasants throughout Yugoslavia. Matković contends that, despite the crisis the communist leadership held on to its positions by virtue of Western economic assistance, which began to arrive early in 1950, and state apparatus, specifically the police.[77]

KPJ leadership employed "Stalinist methods to suppress to Stalinism prone minority and various other hesitations within their own ranks."[78] Dissenting individuals or those who could perhaps develop in that direction were registered and prosecuted by the Administration of State Security (UDBA) and often sent to one of the notorious penitentiaries. The vast majority of political prisoners, at least fifteen thousand of men and women, were sent to prisons on the

[76] Goldstein, *1941.*, 427-428.
[77] Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 306.
[78] Goldstein, *1941.*, 428.

island *Goli otok* or to neighbouring *Sveti Grgur*, which were from 1949 designated precisely for them.[79] For instance, in her memoir Eva Grlić notes that the Party organizations were the initial theater for discussions about "Tito's no" to Stalin. Reportedly, many were interested in the issue and the polemics were initially quite animated. However, it was enough to express mild criticism of the KPJ or to not report to the competent authorities, the UDBA, that someone had criticized the ruling Party and to be expelled from the KPJ, lose one's job or to be imprisoned.[80] Eva's husband, Danko Grlić, among the first experienced all three because someone reported to the UDBA that he asserted that, although he rejects the Resolution in whole, he concurs that there could be more democracy in the Party.[81] Because she was his wife, Eva Grlić spent a short period in prison in Zagreb in the same period he was on *Goli otok*. And because of comparing an employee of the UDBA to former Ustasha authorities, she herself spent another two years on *Goli otok*.[82] Another victim of the purges, Milka Žicina, wrote the memoir *Everything, Everything, Everything* (*Sve, sve, sve*) about her imprisonment in the women's camp in Stolac. In the memoir she recorded the words "Dante knew nothing."[83] This sentence, uttered by an anonymous victim who briefly shared the cell with Žicina, sums up tragic experiences of victims of the purges triggered by the Tito-Stalin split.

Although the political showdown with the Cominform initiated a period of harsh political dictatorship, in the long term Yugoslav domestic and foreign policies gradually distanced themselves from the Soviet model of socialism.[84] Already at the Fifth Congress Edvard



[79] In 1949 the Party leadership ordered the establishment of the political camp *Goli otok* that was chosen because it was inhabited and because it was virtually impossible to escape from it. The civilians who were accused of collaboration with the Cominform were sent there by an administrative decision and military personnel have been tried in staged processes. After the meeting of Tito and Nikita Khrushchev in 1955 the majority of political prisoners were released, but the penitentiary on *Goli otok* operated until 1986.

[80] Eva Grlić, *Sjećanja* (Zagreb: Durieux, 1997), 167-168.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid, 186-188.

[83] As cited in: Ivana Pantelić: "Dante ništa nije znao," *Dnevnik*, September 30, 2011, accessed April 4, 2015, http://www.naslovi.net/2011-09-30/dnevnik/dante-nista-nije-znao/2846603.

[84] Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma," 23; and Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion, Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944-1953* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 21.

Kardelj, who was active in the KPJ since 1926 and became one of the leading figures of the Party both during and after World War II, articulated a new outlook on communist ideology in Yugoslavia: "the forms of expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat (…) are not and cannot be the same in all countries and conditions."[85] Declarative opposition to Stalin and Cominform soon developed to theories about the practical possibilities of liberalization and "a new path into socialism."[86] The idea of the decentralization of the highly centralized and bureaucratic country as a prerequisite to the anticipated withering away of the state was formulated through a new interpretation of Marx and Lenin. Eventually, state leaders opted for abandoning the system of total state control over the economy, and, thus, a new form of socialism was adopted. With unavoidable slogans such as "Factories to the workers!" it introduced self-management. In June 1950 the first federal law, entitled the Fundamental Law on Management of the State Economic Enterprises and Higher Economic Associations (*Osnovni zakon o upravljanju državnim privrednim poduzećima i višim privrednim udruženjima*), was passed in favor of assigning the management of businesses to the workers and soon worker's councils were formed in enterprises and factories thorough the country.[87]

According to Bruce McFarlane, changes in economic organization of the state that the KPJ leadership introduced profoundly influenced the social sphere and politics.[88] For example, to demonstrate its commitment to reform the leadership renamed KPJ as the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunista Jugoslavije,* SKJ) in 1953, and the People's Front became the Socialist Alliance of Working People (SSRN) the following year. At the same time, the government passed a new Constitutional Law. It was a number of amendments to the Constitution of 1946 and sought to introduce self-management into the Constitution. Among other changes, the central government of the federation was relieved of controlling

[85] As cited in: Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 183.
[86] Goldstein, *1941.*, 428-430.
[87] Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma," 23; and McFarlane, *Yugoslavia*, 32.
[88] McFarlane, *Yugoslavia*, 45.

the four ministries, Economy, Budget, Home Affairs, and Administration, which were from that point forward managed on the republic level.[89] Furthermore, the government reduced pressures in the field of culture and in everyday life. For example, during this period groups of students visited Western countries for the first time, and the first passports required for travel abroad were issued. Publications from Western Europe, such as *Guardian* and *Corriere della Sera*, became available to the broad audience. Additionally, a group of young authors launched the magazine *Circles* (*Krugovi*), and a group of intellectuals from the University of Zagreb created the magazine *Views* (*Pogledi*).[90]

The culmination of the period of liberalization is captured in a speech given by Miroslav Krleža, a Croatian author and encyclopedist, at the Congress of Yugoslav Writers Association in 1952. Although a communist, he avoided involvement in active politics, refused to join the partisans during the war and to become vice president of AVNOJ after its institution. He also harbored distaste for social realism in art and refused to create his works according to the canons of that artistic style. Hence, in his famous speech he called for the liberation of literature from the constraints of ideology, and advocated for the exploration of innovative literary practices that would integrate historical avant-garde and modern Western art and gradual lead to the fading of taboos with regard to discussed topics.[91]

However, the KPJ permitted the liberalization of public life only to a certain point. The first period of liberalization ended abruptly at the beginning of 1954 precisely because certain individuals, Milovan Đilas is the most striking example, crossed the line of allowed freedom of thought.[92] Đilas was one of Tito's closest associates, a leading Party ideologue, and

[89] McFarlane, *Yugoslavia*, 33.
[90] Goldstein, *1941.*, 428.
[91] "Govor na kongresu književnika u Ljubljani," Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, accessed December 12th, 2014. http://krlezijana.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=373.
[92] See more in: Mario Kevo, "Odjek Đilasovih teoretskih priloga *Borbi* u hrvatskom tisku," *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 31 (1998), 159-162.

secretary of the Central Committee (*Centralni komitet*, CK) of the KPJ (and SKJ after 1952). Between October 1953 and January 1954 he published nineteen articles in *The Fight* (*Borba*), the official Party newspaper and four in the journal *The New Thought* (*Nova misao*) with which, notably, Miroslav Krleža also collaborated. In his first articles, for example in the "Contents" ("Sadržine"), Đilas describes recent political developments in terms of the fight of socialism and democracy against capitalism and bourgeoisie.[93] However, his position evolved and, for instance, in the "Little Election Themes" ("Male izborne teme") and "The General and the Particular" ("Opšte i posebno") he advocated in favor of the complete democratization of political life and considered the introduction of a multi-party political system.[94] He crossed the line of "dosed freedom" and was severely punished by expulsion from the Party, discharge from all political functions, conviction and imprisonment.[95] Reform of the state was abruptly stopped, and the liberalization of culture and public sphere was interrupted. Further developments in reforming the political sphere and economy did not occur until four years later, after the Seventh congress of SKJ in 1958.[96]

Of the approximate nine to twelve thousand original members of the KPJ prior to the outbreak of World War II, only three thousand survived the war. Still, by the war's end, the KPJ had more than one hundred and forty thousand members, the majority of them fighters and revolutionaries. By 1952 it had more than six hundred thousand members. However, many of them were opportunists and careerists with a taste for power. Furthermore, thanks to the sheer number of members and focus on personal advancement by many of them, it became easier to implement "directives from above," suppress grassroots movements that



[93] Kevo, "Odjek Đilasovih teoretskih priloga," 155.
[94] Ibid, 155-156.
[95] Goldstein, *1941.*, 429-431. Interestingly, Đilas initially had to serve one and a half years in prison, but served nine in period between 1955 and 1966. He was sentenced to seven years of prison for his work *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, and for another five for *Conversations with Stalin*. On December 31, 1966 he was amnestied and freed.
[96] Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma," 25, 33.

became overly libertarian, and maintain the desired level of freedom in public life for decades to come.[97]

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I provided a short historical background for the period in which the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia emerged, developed and dissolved. Broader political, economic and cultural context contributes to a better understanding of the changes in the organization's duties and goals. First, development of the organized resistance to the Fascist and Nazi forces into the People's Liberation Movement under the communist leadership proved to be a crucial cause for the establishment of the AFŽ. Furthermore, KPJ's foreign policy and close cooperation with the Soviet leadership influenced the relationship of the Party and the AFŽ both during the war as well as in the immediate postwar period. Finally, conflict with the Cominform, subsequent social purges and the introduction of self-management which initiated the process of decentralization in Yugoslavia, led to the dissolution of the AFŽ and the formation of a new women's organization.



[97] Goldstein, *1941.*, 425, 429, 431.

## CHAPTER 2 - ORGANIZING WOMEN

The Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia (AFŽH) was founded in December 1941 by an initiative of the Communist Party of Croatia (KPH). The Party saw an opportunity for the further development of an already existent women's activism and initiated the mobilization of masses of peasant women for the benefit of the emerging People's Liberation Army (NOV) and, more broadly, in the interest of the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB). AFŽ leaders, who were also Party members, adjusted their rhetoric to include the concerns and needs of peasant women and successfully mobilized their traditional skills in the service of the struggle. According to Barbara Jancar-Webster, in November 1943, after almost two years of the existence of this organization, 243,000 women were recorded as members of the AFŽ of Croatia. Furthermore, by the end of the war two million women throughout Yugoslavia officially joined the organization.[98] Women's participation in the AFŽ of Yugoslavia depended on the wartime conditions in particular areas and was unevenly distributed. Thus, in territories that were occupied throughout the war, such as Serbia, there were no branches of the AFŽ. The first branch in Serbia was established after the liberation of Belgrade at the end of 1944. On the other hand, liberated territories within Croatia, such as Lika and Gorski kotar, saw the emergence of a highly autonomous and well-organized women's group in the beginning of the war.

AFŽH united the efforts of women who were in the interwar period active both in the leftist and "bourgeois" organizations. Therefore, I initiate this chapter by outlining the activities of women's organizations in the interwar period. Due to the fact that women's organizations, nationalist and leftist alike, originated predominantly in urban centers, I briefly

[98] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 144.

address the intensity and quality of communication between women belonging to these organizations and women living in the rural areas of Croatia. Furthermore, I explore the emergence and development of the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia throughout World War II. In order to determine the tasks and goals of this organization, I will analyze the speeches that Josip Broz Tito and Spasenija-Cana Babović delivered at the First Yugoslav Conference of the AFŽ in December 1942, which reflect the most important features of the AFŽ and its activities during the war. In the final section of the chapter I examine several speeches delivered at the First Congress of the AFŽ of Croatia in July 1945 by the most prominent figures of the KPJ and the AFŽH, such as Josip Broz Tito, Maca Gržetić and Kata Pejnović, in order to exemplify changes in the tasks and roles of the AFŽ of Croatia in the postwar period.

### *2.1 Women's Organizations in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941)*

The end of nineteenth century saw the emergence of the first Croatian women's associations that principally engaged in charitable, humanitarian and cultural work. While many women who participated in these organizations were members of the upper middle class, namely wives of wealthy merchants and noblemen, Sandra Prlenda reports that women teachers, nurses and nuns also figured highly in women's initiatives.[99] The first organization of politically left oriented women was established in 1895 within the framework of the Socialist Democratic Party of Yugoslavia (*Jugoslavenska socijaldemokratska stranka*). In 1919 this party split into several political factions, one being the Socialist Worker's Party of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička radnička partija Jugoslavije*), which was known as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) from 1920 on. In 1919 KPJ organized the women's section as a

[99] Sandra Prlenda, "Žene i prvi organizirani oblici praktičnog socijalnog rada u Hrvatskoj," *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 12, no. 3 (2005): 321-322. See also: Dubravka Peić Čaldarović, "Osnovne karakteristike profesionalne djelatnosti žena u Hrvatskoj između dvaju svjetskih ratova (1918-1941)," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 3 (1997): 491-503.

part of the Party.[100] At their first conference, female members of the KPJ accepted the Party's program according to which men and women should be legally guaranteed "full and unrestricted equality (…) regardless of religion, nationality or occupation, as well as the universal, equal and secret right to vote for all citizens of eighteen years and above."[101] In 1921 king Aleksandar banned the KPJ fearing the further destabilization of parliamentary politics and the possible spread of revolution or civil war inspired by the Bolsheviks in Russia. Thus, the KPJ became an illegal organization, and its modest capabilities for organized women's activities were henceforth severely hindered.

Only after the Fourth Congress, held in Dresden in 1928, did the Party formally articulate its policy on work with women and implemented the first organized actions. During the Congress members reported that between the years 1921 and 1927 the number of women workers had increased substantially even though male Party members had shown no inclination for supervision or support of the development of women cadres, had disregarded their duties to work with women and even gone so far as to refuse to aid female Party members with their tasks.[102] Despite the lack of willingness on the part of male Party members to support female members in their work or in training new women converts, female members who were active in trade unions, front organizations and "bourgeois" groups during the 1930s persistently worked with women workers, helped to familiarize them with their rights from a Marxist perspective, the importance of organized resistance to capitalist oppression and communist ideology in general. Moreover, students, especially in gymnasiums and universities in urban centers, exchanged Marxist literature amongst themselves and participated in the illegal work of the KPJ, predominantly as couriers.



[100] Sabrina P. Ramet, "In Tito's Time," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans, Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 92-93.

[101] Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* (Beograd: "Devedesetčetvrta," 1996), 102.

[102] Reed, "Croatian Women in the Yugoslav Partisan Resistance," 38.

For example, Marija-Vica Balen, a prominent Croatian communist of the interwar period, joined the communist cell in Gospić (Lika) in 1928. In her memoir she recounts that her expulsion from the gymnasium in Gospić in the winter of 1929 was a consequence of her illegal activity. She continued her education in Zagreb where, she wrote, "parallel with studying (I) also developed a political activity. Indeed, even more extensive than before because in Zagreb I gained new experiences and had a lot more Marxist literature at hand. (…) I created groups of sympathizers among the gymnasium schoolgirls (…) and connected with the group of the already organized communists."[103] Throughout her student years Balen distributed illegal literature and Party related material, and when she joined the workforce she became a member of the Union of Banking, Insurance, Trade and Industry Clerks of Yugoslavia (*Savez bankovnih, osiguravajućih, trgovačkih i industrijskih činovnika Jugoslavije*, SBOTIČJ) that, after its Eighth Congress in 1931 in Split, transferred its headquarters to Zagreb. Following her employment in the file office of the Central Office for the Insurance of Workers (*Središnji ured za osiguranje radnika*, SUZOR), a state-led institution where the work conditions were so miserable the employees referred to it as Sing-Sing, she conducted a campaign for joining the SBOTIČJ:

> in order to, with the help of our class union, win at least some rights. It was not easy because SUZNOR was a state institution, so it was "unthinkable," as some have said, that its employees join such a syndicate. Yet, with hard work and constant persuasion of people that we have nothing to lose if we organize I managed to enroll a goodly number of them in SBOTIČJ. This success was more important because it was the first SBOTIČJ organization in a state institution.[104]



[103] Balen, *Bili smo idealisti*, 90. "(…) usporedo s učenjem razvijala i političku djelatnost. Dapače, opsežniju nego prvi put jer sam u Zagrebu stekla nova iskustva i imala pri ruci mnogo više marksističke literature. (…) Među gimnazijalkama stvorila sam simpatizerske grupe (…) a povezala sam se i sa grupom organiziranih komunista."

[104] Ibid, 153. "(…) kako bismo uz pomoć svoga klasnog sindikata izborili bar neka prava. To nije išlo lako jer je SUZOR bio državna ustanoa, pa je bilo "nezamislivo" (kako su neki govorili) da se njegovi namještenici učlane u takav sindikat. Ipak, upornim radom i neprestanim uvjeravanjem ljudi da ništa ne možemo izgubiti pokušamo li se organizirati, u SBOTIČJ sam uspjela upisati lijep broj njih. Uspjeh je bio to značajniji što je to bila prva organizacija SBOTIČJ-a u jednoj državnoj ustanovi."

The activities that Marija-Vica Balen described in her memoir testify to the accessibility of Marxist ideology to students and young working-class people living in urban areas and to the type of work a female member of the KPJ might engage in during the late 1920s and the 1930s in the capital of Croatia.[105] As a motivated individual she sometimes initiated activities independently, that is, without the consent of the Central Committee (*Centralni komitet*, CK) of the Party, and implemented them vigorously.

On January 6th 1929 king Aleksandar proclaimed the royal dictatorship, which included the increase of political surveillance that continued long after his assassination in 1934, and frequent stays in state prisons for male and female members of the KPJ as well as members of all the political parties with ethnic or religious characteristic, such as Croatian Peasant Party (HSS). This practice was so widespread that Sonia Wild Bičanić, wife of a prominent HSS member Rudolf Bičanić who served three years in the prison in Srijemska Mitrovica, in her memoir commented "that the prisons of Yugoslavia had served the same function as the public schools in Britain in training the next generation of rulers."[106] However, neither Marija-Vica Balen nor Eva Grlić describe the abatement of Party activity during this period. On the contrary, their recollections testify to the dynamic atmosphere that culminated in the foundation of the Communist Party of Croatia (KPH) in April 1937 as a branch of KPJ.[107]

However, Balen's memoirs point to two limitations a female Party member could encounter prior to the end of World War II. First, her recollections indicate the strong

[105] Grlić, *Sjećanja*, 40-45. Eva Grlić recounted a similar narrative in her memoir. Although she never joined the KPJ, as a student in the gymnasium in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) she was exposed to Marxist ideology through her best friend and boyfriend. Like Marija-Vica Balen, she was expelled from school due to her connections with the communists. Namely, the police found her correspondence with a young man who was fighting in the Spanish Civil War at that time. In 1938 she moved to Zagreb with her family in order to start anew. Instead, she found a job with the help of employees of the SBOTIČJ and reinforced her communist activities.

[106] Sonia Wild Bičanić, *Two Lines of Life* (Zagreb: Durieux: Croatian P.E.N. Centre, 1999), 8. Nada Sremec, *Iz partizankskog dnevnika*, 36. While writing her wartime diary, Sremec noted the same thing about the communist leaders who led the partisan movement naming Tito, Moša Pijade, Andrija Hebrang, Pavle Gregorić, Šime Balen and Đuro Špoljarić as former prisoners of the penitentiary in Srijemska Mitrovica.

[107] Grlić, *Sjećanja*, 44-49; Balen, *Bili smo idealisti*, 99-102, 127-130.

presence of sectarianism within the Party.[108] Balen describes several occurrences her husband, Šime Balen, told her about. Šime Balen became a member of the KPJ in 1935 while he was serving a prison sentence in Srijemska Mitrovica accused by the State of being a Croatian nationalist after the introduction of the royal dictatorship. Once a member, he easily gained access to the upper echelons of the Croatian branch of the Party while Marija-Vica continued to play an auxiliary role. She testifies that in the prewar years she was unaware of many of her husband's tasks and assignments in the Party, that she, her sisters and children frequently spent time in front of their house or in the balcony keeping guard while male members held meetings or that she sometimes accompanied her husband to meetings in public places solely because he needed a cover.[109] In sum, notwithstanding her early joining the Party, her unwavering convictions and entrepreneurial spirit, Balen's case testifies that during the prewar period the KPJ was not easily conceding to the advancement of women members beyond auxiliary positions. Second, Balen does not mention instances of Party's work with women in the rural areas even once. Although she had numerous interactions with male and female communists of different ranks, no one was involved in work with peasant women.

As late as November 1940 Vida Tomšič, a Slovenian communist and People's Hero of Yugoslavia, spoke at Fifth State Conference of the KPJ in Zagreb about the work with women in her seminal presentation on the Marxist perspective of the role of women in contemporary society. Tomšič identifies work with women as "one of the most painful points of all our work,"[110] attributing such an unfavorable situation to the incessant neglect and ignorance of Party cadres. Within the larger issue of work with women in general, Tomšič spoke about the work with peasant women in particular. She pointed out that the KPJ has not extended its

[108] For more on sectarianism within the KPH see: Reed, "The Anti-Fascist Front of Women and the Communist Party in Croatia: Conflicts Within the Resistance."

[109] Balen, *Bili smo idealisti*, 180, 187, 198, 270-271.

[110] Vida Tomšič, "O radu sa ženama" ("On Work with Women"), in *Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi, vol. 1*, ed. Marija Šoljan (Zagreb: Izdanje Glavnog odbora Saveza ženskih društava Hrvatske, 1955), 2. "(…) jedna od najbolnijih točaka našeg rada."

activities into rural areas, which led to the greater influence of bourgeois women's organizations of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS).[111] Moreover, according to Mary Reed, in addition to the rather limited influence of cultural and educational groups based in towns, the HSS dominated rural areas of Croatia. On the one hand, the KPJ targeted urban, mainly working-class, women. On the other hand, peasants were distrustful of and even hostile towards outsiders, and the HSS actively worked to intensify these sentiments, particularly towards members of the KPJ.[112]

In spite of their ideological differences, the HSS and KPJ shared similar attitude regarding the role of women in society. Stjepan Radić, one of the founders of the HSS, wrote that "men and women have in everything completely equal rights," which in his "peasant republic," would be realized beginning with universal suffrage "without differentiation according to sex from age eighteen."[113]According to historian Suzana Leček, Stjepan's wife Marija Radić was devoted to work with peasant women. Working with the organization Peasant Concord (*Seljačka sloga*), which was founded by the HSS, she aimed primarily at the "advancement of a woman socially and culturally," and then to "raising awareness of equality of women and men."[114] In other words, in practice the HSS opted for a mitigated variant of Stjepan Radić's original program. The improvement of the position of women was defined within the framework of the extremely conservative and backward territory, thus, mainly through the organization of choirs, acting troupes, illiteracy, hygiene and cooking courses, but without political education. These activities corresponded with the conception of women as guardians



[111] Tomšič, "O radu sa ženama," 6.
[112] Reed, "Croatian Women," 29-30.
[113] As cited in Suzana Leček, "Seljačka sloga i uključivanje žena u seljački pokret (1925-1929)," *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 32-33 (1999-2000): 295. "[M]uškarci i žene imadu u svemu posvema jednaka prava," "bez razlike spola od navršene osamnaeste godine."
[114] As cited in: Leček, "Seljačka sloga," 296.

of the national inheritance, which they then passed on to their children. Members of the HSS and peasants shared this philosophy.[115]

Leček and Reed agree that, regardless of the source or persistence of the reformist attempts, advances in improving the living conditions and opportunities for peasant women were mild. For instance, while illiteracy courses were well attended in all towns and villages where there were branches of the Peasant Concord, most participants were men and in many cases women refused to join, reportedly not to infringe upon their duties as mothers and housewives.[116] Leček contends that a strongly traditional social system, with a surprisingly high number of elements corresponding to the peasant culture of the interwar period, persisted in the rural areas of Croatia until the 1960s.[117] Therefore, women's organizations and activities addressing specifically women's interests as workers, mothers and wives in the interwar period had almost exclusively influenced women living in urban areas.

### *2.2 The Antifascist Front of Women - Formation and Development*

An organized struggle gradually developed in the territories of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), first in Kordun and Banija followed by Gorski kotar and Lika, throughout the second half of the 1941. During this time the first partisan camps were organized. Communists who served in the Spanish Civil War distinguished themselves by organizing the defense against Ustasha armed forces and formed the core of the partisan military command in Croatia, while Većeslav Holjevac, a Party member since 1939 who was awarded the title of People's Hero of Yugoslavia for his service, organized the smuggling of weapons.[118]



[115] Leček, "Seljačka sloga," 295-296.
[116] Ibid, 296.
[117] Suzana Leček, "Seljačka obitelj u Hrvatskoj 1918-1960. Metoda usmene povijesti (oral history)," *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 29 (1996): 256.
[118] Goldstein, *1941.*, 326.

Peasants who were living in these areas, especially women, contributed greatly to the everyday functioning of the camps. Responding to the newly created circumstances in late summer of 1941 the District Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia (*Okružni komitet Komunističke partije Hrvatske,* OK KPH) for Lika issued a directive which ordered the establishment of a network of local committees responsible for assisting partisan fighters and refugees by collecting food, clothes, shoes and other material. This organization was named the People's Assistance (*Narodna pomoć*) and it initiated its first organized actions during September and October of the same year. The committees of People's Assistance were soon established throughout the liberated territories as well as in some of the occupied territories, in Zagreb and Split for example. Many members of these committees were women. In Zagreb Marija Šoljan, who became a distinguished AFŽ member during World War II, held a prominent position. In Split, almost all members in management positions were women, and Anka Berus and Ružica Turković, also future influential AFŽ members, were leading members of the committee in charge of the entire territory of Croatia.[119]

Furthermore, women in the People's Assistance in the occupied territories worked with a large number of non-affiliated individuals, again mostly women, by raising funds and other goods in order to send them to the camps and prisons established and led by the NDH government. Women from the Split branch of People's Assistance worked together with the peasants, especially milkmaids, who lived in nearby areas. Specifically, milkmaids, who by their own initiative began providing food for partisans in their area, came to Split with buckets of milk for sale, and at the end of the day returned to their villages carrying weapons or medical supplies for the partisans.[120] The Journal of the United Croatian People's Liberation Struggle, one of the many newsletters printed during the war, published an article

[119] Marija Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi, vol. 1* (Zagreb: Izdanje Glavnog odbora Saveza ženskih društava Hrvatske, 1955), f.n. 2 and 3, 48-49.

[120] Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 1*, f.n. 2, 49.

in December of 1941 about women in Lika who used the traditional female form of socializing, *prelo*, to organize a constant supply of food and clothing for their men in the partisan army.[121] Prominent communists from Lika, such as Kata Pejnović and Jela Bičanić, attended these gatherings and used them to inform other women about current events, talk about the political situation and discuss communism.[122] Finally, women began organizing courses for female volunteers who wished to become army nurses, and began organizing illiteracy courses shortly thereafter.[123]

Among several political and military factions operating in the territory of Yugoslavia during World War II only the communist leadership of the People's Liberation Struggle launched an all encompassing and successful initiative with the goal of mobilizing women for their cause.[124] The aforementioned particulars provide insight into the voluntary, localized activity of women before the AFŽH was created. Hence, women, particularly those living in the numerous local communities in liberated territories, initiated a process of self-organization to help men from the same villages who had joined the partisans in order to protect them. Members of prewar women's organizations, particularly female representatives of the HSS, but also female members of the KPJ, provided peasant women with guidelines and directed their efforts. Men in leading positions of the KPH eventually realized the potential for large scale organized women's work, and on December 6th, 1941 the Central Committee of Communist Party of Croatia (*Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Hrvatske*, CK KPH) issued a circular thereby establishing an umbrella organization with the goal of absorbing



[121] *Prelo* is a type of gathering that took place in private homes. A housewife invited girls and women from her village to help spin wool, knit, or prime feathers for bed linen. Sometimes, girls and women gathered and knitted, embroidered or spun their own piece of work. Young men and husbands could also be present, but not necessarily. Dinner was prepared for those present and singing and playing was usually a part of passing time.

[122] "O ličkim prelima" ("About *Prela* in Lika"), in *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 1*, 28.

[123] Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 1*, f.n. 2, 39.

[124] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 47-48; Batinić, "Proud to Have Trod in Men's Footsteps," 23-24.

women currently active in the NOB and attracting more women to its ranks.[125] Thus, the Communist Party merely harnessed the sprouting pockets of active women's assistance to their own benefit.

In the case of the AFŽ, just like in the case of ZAVNOH and other political bodies of the People's Liberation Struggle, the KPH followed the policy of Andrija Hebrang, the wartime leader of the Croatian communists who envisioned the NOB in Croatia as a coalition of left-oriented groups willing to fight against fascist forces. Hence, regardless of their prewar rivalry with the HSS, the KPH incorporated women who had been members of the HSS and worked for the Peasant Concord prior to the outbreak of war into the emerging mass organization. However, similar to the way in which high ranking members of the Communist Party governed ZAVNOH and AVNOJ, the Party appointed its own members who were already active elsewhere, like Kata Pejnović, Marija Šoljan and Anka Berus, into leading positions of the AFŽH. According to the circular, the goal of the AFŽ was "to activate and connect a broad strata of women and pull them into the People's Liberation Struggle" and to handle its activities with the objective to "by all means aid the fight of the people's liberation partisan detachments."[126] With regards to the definition of peasant women as passive and the most backward segment of Yugoslav society, that was prominent in Party rhetoric since the interwar period, the AFŽ's task was also political in nature. The organization sought to "conduct antifascist propaganda, (…) popularize the Soviet Union and its leading role in the fight for destruction of fascism, (…) and to lead the fight for the equality of women and men."[127] Thus, KPH launched an initiative to establish a supportive women's organization for

[125] "Iz okružnice broj 4. CK KPH od 6. prosinca 1941. O organizaciji i zadacima Antifašističkog fronta žena" ("From the Circular No. 4 by CK KPH from December 6th, 1941. About the Organization and Tasks of the Antifascist Front of Women"), in *Žene Hrvatske vol. 1*, 57.

[126] Ibid, "Da aktivira i poveže široke slojeve žena i da ih povuče u Narodnooslobodilačku borbu. (…) Da svim sredstvima pomaže borbu Narodnooslobodilačkih partizanskih odreda."

[127] Ibid, "Da vodi antifašističku propagandu, (…) [D]a populariziraju SSSR i njegovu vodueću ulogu u borbi za uništenje fašizma, (…) [D]a vodi borbu za ravnopravnost muškaraca i žena (…)."

practical reasons, to provide the partisan army with necessary supplies, excluding weaponry, and for ideological purposes, to educate women in order to enable them to become active participants in the emerging communist state.

The Communist Party advocated equality between men and women. However, the Party's leadership hesitated to include women in combat units until the summer of 1942. In *Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* editor Marija Šoljan includes women participating in the NOB not as providers of auxiliary services but as fighters as early as 1941. For instance, Šoljan lists a small number of women members of the Split branch of the KPH who during the winter of 1941 had already operated within the communist task forces and participated in sabotages and bombings in the city.[128] According to the lists of women partisans available, four out of seven women continued to participate in the NOB as fighters when the First Dalmatian Proletarian Brigade was formed in 1942. Two of them, Flora Jeličić and Mara Kuzmanić-Hajduković, died in 1943, while Milka Šimić-Duvnjak and Jelica Bagat, who was decorated with the medal *Spomenica 1941*, survived the war.[129] In addition, Narandža Končar, political commissar of the First Women's Partisan Unit, in her recollection of the war in Lika mentions Slava Blažević, Janja Hrženjak, Desa Marunić, Boja Tišma and Nevenka Grbić who served as fighters and nurses in the partisan army in 1941.[130]

The women Šoljan and Končar pointed to represent an exception to the practice established by the Party at the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia. Conduct of the Party leadership reflected both the traditional biases characteristic of rural Croatia and the same indecisive attitude that leading figures of the U.S.S.R. demonstrated towards the notion of women fighters. Finally, the U.S.S.R. authorized the mobilization of women volunteers to

[128] Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske, vol 1,* 25, 50.
[129] Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 2*, 102-176.
[130] Narandža Končar-Rodić, "Prva ženska partizanska četa u Lici," in *Druga lička proleterska brigada: zbornik sjećanja* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1988), 125.

combatant positions, specifically in positions as snipers, riflemen, machine gunners, tank crews and pilots, in March and April of 1942.[131] Following the Soviet lead, in August the KPH established the first all women partisan unit in the village of Trnavec in Lika. During the autumn three other similar units were formed within the same territory. However, soon thereafter the Croatian communist leadership decided to disintegrate these units and incorporate small numbers of women into various male detachments.[132] This became the standard practice until women were demobilized from combat positions in the final months of the war. The principal reason for breaking up the all-female units was the excessive mortality rates among female fighters. Of course, not all Soviet female soldiers were located in all-female units, but women pilots served in such detachments. The reason why Soviet women who volunteered for military service in combat positions could be placed in all-women units was that they were young urban women educated in a system that promoted the equality between men and women that, consequently, included practice at the shooting range. Military training was an integral part of school curriculum in the Soviet Union from 1932 on, and was carried out from the first grade. In the mid-1930s Komsomol, a youth organization controlled by the Soviet Communist Party, introduced mandatory special defense training for all high school students, which took place independently of the school curricula, in the national paramilitary bases. Therefore, female Soviet recruits experienced a type of education that



[131] Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: a History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 110-120, 156. Following the outbreak of conflict between Germany and the U.S.S.R. a significant number of women volunteered for the army, and, although the state claimed equal opportunities for men and women, that did not imply that women would be allowed to freely join the army. In September 1941 when the state issued the Decree on the Universal and Obligatory Military Training of the Citizens of the U.S.S.R., the decree demanded all male persons undergo military training, while women were not mentioned. Furthermore, during public appearances state officials often addressed the public in non-gendered terms. They did not advocate women`s participation in military training, but they also did not speak about the exclusion of women. In the U.S.S.R. the period immediately before and after the beginning of the war was accompanied with utter silence on the possibility to enlist women in combat positions in the army.

[132] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 82.

provided them with the basic skills for successful training for combat and also for successful performance in the armed conflicts.[133]

On the other hand, Yugoslav women who volunteered to serve as fighters were predominantly very young peasant girls with no education. In her recollection about the establishment of the First Women's Proletarian Unit, Narandža Končar recounts that out of one hundred and twenty five girls who were accepted in the women's unit less than ten girls had attended school prior the war and many were completely illiterate. Therefore, in addition to political courses that were required for all recruits, they also had to undergo elementary literacy courses.[134] Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, women living in rural areas of Croatia were constrained by the conservative society and the traditional upbringing, which offered little alternatives to marriage and motherhood and most often withheld even rudimentary education of women. Moreover, due to the lack of military personnel and weapons, Croatian partisan forces were not able to provide women recruits with a quality training, which increased the risk of death in battle.

Despite the opening of Soviet military units to women, the KPJ leadership was not convinced that soldiering was the correct direction for women's liberation. Two prominent members of the Party gave speeches that testify to their vacillation in regard to the status of women soldiers, *partizanke*, at the First Yugoslav Conference of the AFŽ. Following the circular issued by the KPH the year before, the KPJ issued a directive in November 1942 establishing the Antifascist Front of Women of Yugoslavia (*Antifašistička fronta žena Jugoslavije*, AFŽJ). The directive was worded similar to the earlier KPH circular in that it

[133] Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 51-52.
[134] Končar-Rodić, "Prva ženska partizanska četa," 126.

located the organization within the People's Liberation Movement (NOP) and declared its main goal as the provision of food, clothes and shoes for the army.[135]

The First Yugoslav Conference of the AFŽ took place in Bosanski Petrovac in Eastern Bosnia on the 6th of December 1942. One hundred and sixty six delegates from all over Yugoslavia, liberated and occupied territories, attended the conference. Tito gave the opening speech, the famous speech in which he declared that he was "proud to stand in front of the army that has a huge number of women."[136] During this speech he spoke about the female members of the army who had contributed to the partisan struggle with a rifle in their hands, shoulder to shoulder with their male comrades. At the same time, he spoke to members of the AFŽ and the delegates of the conference about the nature of their fight stating "you met here and you will define your work in a more organized manner and with more method in order for our army to get the maximum which can be given. In you we see the main support in the background."[137] With the simple exchange of the first and third person throughout his speech Tito separated two factions of female members of his army. He referred to the women combatants in the third person, indicating that they had no representatives among the members of the AFŽ whom he addressed in the first person.

Spasenija-Cana Babović, one of the most prominent women in the KPJ and the member of the initiative committee for the establishment of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia, held a presentation on behalf of the CK KPJ at the same event. In her speech she made the distinction between women combatants and female members of the AFŽ even less ambiguous. At the beginning



[135] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 123-125.

[136] Tito, Josip Broz, "Govor na Prvoj zemaljskoj konferenciji Antifašističkog fronta žena Jugoslavije" ("Speech at the First Conference of the Antifascist Front of Women of Yugoslavia"), in *Ženama Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Centralni odbor AFŽ Jugoslavije, 1945), 6. "Ja se ponosim što stojim na čelu armije u kojoj ima ogroman broj žena."

[137] Ibid, 10. "Zato ste se vi ovdje i sastale, zato ćete postaviti svoj rad još organizovanije i sa više sistema, i usmjeriti ga na to da naša vojska dobije maksimum što se može dati. Mi u vama gledamo glavni oslonac u pozadini."

of her presentation she stated, "when the Communist Party urged people to revolt against the occupying forces, women responded to this invitation in large numbers. In the very beginning of the formation of partisan detachments many women went to fight with a rifle in their hand."[138] She continued by mentioning women who helped through traditional female tasks such as cooking, making clothes and caring for the wounded. In the latter part of her presentation she spoke about the future tasks of the AFŽ. She stated:

> AFŽ has to achieve full and comprehensive support of the front. Women have to assist fully in the organization of the background and to participate actively in the people's government. (…) Our husbands, brothers, sons are fighting against the bloody occupier and their servants Ustasha and Chetniks, our army fought for its own weapon shedding the blood of the best sons of its people, the army won from rifles to cannons for itself. And we women in the background have to do everything to give our military what it needs.[139]

Babović expressed more strongly what Tito only alluded to in his speech. In their eyes the Antifascist Front of Women was first and foremost an organization subordinated to the needs of the portion of the army actively fighting the enemy. Although they admitted that some women participated in the war as combatants, their speeches reveal that in their eyes men were the fighters. And female partisans, although courageous and undoubtedly devoted to the partisan cause, were not considered as pivotal to the People's Liberation Struggle as the women helpers.

Moreover, the women leaders of the AFŽ, those who had been introduced to communism through colleagues at leftist universities and through co-workers in worker movements during



[138] "Iz organizacionog referata Cane Babović" ("From the Organizational Presentation of Cana Babović"), in *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 1*, 177. "Kada je Komunistička partija pozvala narod na ustanak protiv okupatora, u velikoj mjeri su se tom pozivu odazvale i žene. U samom početku formiranja partizanskih odreda mnoge žene polazile su u borbu sa puškom u ruci (...)."

[139] Ibid, 178-179. "AFŽ treba da ostvari punu i svestranu pomoć frontu. Žene treba da daju punu pomoć u organizaciji pozadine i da učestvuju aktivno u narodnoj vlasti. (…)Naši muževi, braća, sinovi bore se na položaju protiv krvavog okupatora i njihovih slugu ustaša i četnika, naša vojska je izvojevala sebi oružje lijući krv najboljih sinova svoga naroda, ona je sebi izvojevala od puške do topa. A mi žene u pozadini moramo učiniti sve da našoj vojsci damo ono što njojzi nedostaje."

the 1930s and who were the very core of the AFŽ, did not join combat units of the partisan army nor did they have any desire to do so. On the contrary, Marija-Vica Balen, who worked for the Lika branch of the AFŽ during the war, described courageous women fighters in her memoir, but also stated that she refused to even carry a gun after weapons became readily available for all organizers of partisan struggle.[140] Mitra Mitrović, a member of the Central Committee of AFŽJ and a member of AVNOJ, confessed in her memoir that, watching a battalion comprised of SKOJ members where girls were in majority and one of them was a battalion commissar, she thought "they should be disbanded as soon as possible."[141] However, being a disciplined soldier and a believer in the equality of men and women, she did not attempt to argue with the military leadership for the disbandment of the unit.[142] Interestingly, Lydia Sklevicky reports that AFŽ members often discouraged girls from joining the army as *partizanke*. She quotes *partizanka* Draginja Metikoš who described several situations where girls who were performing tasks for the AFŽ ran away in order to be able to join partisans as fighters.[143]

Instead of carrying a rifle and participating in the armed combat, the leading cadres of the AFŽ showed remarkable concern for what they called "the political education" of women who joined the AFŽ. They considered a proper education as a prerequisite for the achievement of the anticipated equality between women and men, which was the second goal of the AFŽ. According to Lydia Sklevicky, the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia exerted a lot of effort to organize activities that would satisfy the various educational needs of women. For illiterate women, AFŽ cadres organized literacy courses and courses in the general culture, such as health, hygiene and historical courses. These were followed by courses in political education, which focused on the nature and importance of the NOB, the

[140] Balen, *Bili smo idealisti*, 249.
[141] Mitrović, *Ratno putovanje*, 117. "U dnu svesti mi je jasno da ih što pre treba rasformirati."
[142] Ibid.
[143] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 39, 60.

significance of women's contributions to the war effort and the role of the AFŽ. Finally, the AFŽ of Croatia published several journals that had primarily an educational purpose.[144] Thus, contributing to these journals and propagation of reading was interpreted by KPJ and AFŽ leadership as an important first step to the creation of an activist identity among women.[145]

The importance and role of education was, therefore, the reason why Spasenija-Cana Babović, in her speech in front of the assembly gathered for the First Yugoslav Conference of the AFŽ, dismissed the role of female combatants and devoted closer attention to women organized by the AFŽ. According to the Party program, women could achieve equality with men only through the legal regulations of the communist state. And according to the convictions and activities of the prewar communist women's organizations, only ideologically conscious and active working-class women could accomplish that goal and, consequently, participate in political life on equal footing with men. Thus, although the contributions of *partizanke* were noteworthy without question, their personal development through education and the possibility to pass on that acquired knowledge to other women was impaired by their choice to join NOV as combatants. In other words, neither men nor women in the partisan army joined civilian organizations of the NOP. Such activity was considered a violation of the unity of the army.[146] Therefore, the future Babović envisioned for women partisans could not benefit from the education provided by the AFŽ. Upon closer analysis of her presentation it appears that, although she emphasized the importance of assistance to the partisan army repeatedly, it was solely because she thought that the women of the AFŽ were most efficiently helping in their own victory through their work on the homefront. That is, that the



[144] In addition to *Žena u borbi* throughout the war different branches of AFŽ in Croatia published seventeen other journals aiming specifically female audience. Compare with: "Bibliografija članaka objavljenih u listovima Antifasističke fronte žena Hrvatske u razdoblju Narodnooslobodilačkog rata i socijalističke revolucije 1941-1945," in *Žena u borbi: glasilo Antifašističke fronte žena Hrvatske*, ed. Marija Šoljan (Zagreb: Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena Hrvatske, 1974), 61-156.

[145] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 30-32.

[146] Reed, "Croatian women," 120.

victory of the KPJ would solve "the issue of participation [of women] in the building of our people's government."[147] Thus, perhaps *partizanke* thought that "equality was in the *četa*,"[148] but *afežejke*[149] were certain that it was in the Party organization.

### *2.3 Postwar Development of the Antifascist Front of Women (1945-1953)*

Numerous historians agree that, since its establishment, the KPJ accepted Soviet mentoring. Ivo Banac argues that "[a]s long as they were incapable of effecting revolutionary change in their country, the [Yugoslav] communists were reduced to bondage to Moscow."[150] Notwithstanding the success in World War II and the seizure of power in Yugoslavia, during the immediate postwar period communist authorities continued their efforts to adopt the Soviet model of social and political organization as a template to reconstruct postwar Yugoslavia.[151] Therefore, they approached the issue of women's equality in Yugoslavia by thoroughly adhering to the Soviet script, which included "women's equality in the public sphere" and "'social motherhood' in the private sphere."[152] This was evident in the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution, which was closely modeled according to the Soviet Constitution of 1936. According to Article 24 of the new Yugoslav constitution, women were guaranteed equality with men in all aspects of public life. The Article specifically addressed the role of mothering women, and in particular, women workers, as a sphere where the state was obliged to intervene.[153] Furthermore, the Constitution confirmed women's active and passive right to

[147] "Iz organizacionog referata Cane Babović," 180. "(…) pitanje učešća u izgradnji naše narodne vlasti."

[148] As cited in: Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 99. *Četa* is a small military unit.

[149] A colloquial expression for the members of the AFŽ.

[150] As cited in: Bokovoy, "Peasants and Communists," 5.

[151] Ramet, "In Tito's Time," 90; Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 286-287; for a general account of the adoption of the Soviet model see: Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma," 11-18; for the link between Stalin's and Tito's personality cult see: Stanislav Sretenović and Artan Puto, "Leader Cults in the Western Balkans (1945-1990): Josip Broz Tito and Enver Hoxa," in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorship: Stalin and the Eastern Block*, ed. Balázs Apor, Janc C. Behrends and Polly Johnes (Chippenham-Eastbourne: Palgrave, 2004), 208-212.

[152] Chiara Bonfiglioli, Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia, *Aspasia* 8 (2014), 8.

[153] As cited in: Sabrina P. Ramet, "In Tito`s Time," 94. Article 24 of the Constitution of 1946: "Women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of state economic and social life. Women are entitled to a salary equal to that of men for the same work, and enjoy special protection in the labor relationship. The state particularly

vote obtained in February 1942, and authorized universal access to education, health and childcare.[154] Hence, the end of World War II brought about numerous changes for women, foremost in the domain of law, paid labor and education.

Despite the proclaimed gender equality, the end of the war saw a withdrawal of women from armed conflict. During 1944 Party leadership introduced conscription for all adult males in the liberated areas, and in October of the same year Red Army detachments provided armed assistance in several battles including the liberation of Belgrade. As soon as the necessity for *partizanke* ceased, they were demobilized, and the number of female personnel within the army was reduced to a minimum. Women who remained in the army were predominantly medics and nurses, while others found employment either in civil medical institutions or the numerous associations organized to eliminate the consequences of war.[155] Also, wartime nurses, who passed an elementary course in nursing within liberated territories, underwent additional training following demobilization.[156] Towards the end of the war, in addition to nursing courses, the economic department of the ZAVNOH began organizing additional courses including typing, accounting, home economics and teacher training for women who had already passed basic courses organized by the AFŽ.[157] Hence, the ZAVNOH assumed the role of training women for specific types of work "for the sake of their own people and people's government."[158]

In the First Congress of the AFŽ of Croatia, held in Zagreb in July 1945, Tito addressed the gathered women saying:



protects the welfare of mother and child by the establishment of maternity hospitals, children`s homes and day nurseries, and by ensuring the right to paid leave before and after confinement."

[154] Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, 163.

[155] Božinović, *Žene Srbije*, 141.

[156] Ibid.

[157] "O daktilografskim kursevima" ("About Typewriting Courses,"), "Domaćinski tečajevi na oslobođenom teritoriju" ("Housekeeping Courses in the Liberated Territory"), in *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 2*, 15, 33.

[158] "Domaćinski tečajevi na oslobođenom teritoriju," in *Žene Hrvatske*, 33.

> this congress is not only a manifestation of solidarity of women of Yugoslavia, a manifestation of brotherhood and unity, a review of your strength, overview of our work, but a key meeting where you, the women of Yugoslavia, have to determine the guidelines of your work, to determine what will be most important in your future work, your assignments.[159]

Although he stated women should decide on their future activities by themselves, he clearly expressing that future women's activities had to be devoted "to the issue of consolidation of our government."[160] Other speakers at this conference, including newly appointed Croatian Prime Minister Vladimir Bakarić, the president of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia Spasenija-Cana Babović, the president of the AFŽ of Croatia Maca Gržetić, and the vice-president of the same organization Kata Pejnović, reiterated similar sentiments. For example, Maca Gržetić began her speech by celebrating the success of women in the People's Liberation Struggle saying "we, women of Croatia, as well as of the whole Yugoslavia, are proud and happy because in this fight we won full equality, freedom and rights."[161] However, the promising and quite optimistic introduction to the speech came with certain conditions specified only at the end of her presentation. Gržetić concluded the speech by saying:

> we must never and by no means forget that only our people's government is a guarantee of true freedom, democracy and equality. Also we cannot forget that we will more and more use and enjoy this freedom if we remove economic misery, ruin, desolation, nakedness and barefootness as soon as possible-in a word, if we build the homeland as soon as possible.[162]



[159] Tito, "O novim zadacima žena" ("About Women's New Tasks"), in *Ženama Jugoslavije*, 36. "Ovaj kongres nije samo manifestacija solidarnosti žena Jugoslavije, manifestacija bratstva i jedinstva, smotra vaših snaga, pregled našeg dosadašnjeg rada, nego je to važan sastanak na kome vi, žene jugoslavije, treba da odredite smjernice svoga rada, da odredite ono što je najvažnjie u vašem budućem radu, vaše zadatke."

[160] Ibid, 37. "[P]itanju učvršćenja naše vlasti."

[161] Maca Gržetić, "Iz organizacionog referata Mace Gržetić" ("From the Organizational Presentation of Maca Gržetić"), in *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 2*, 89. "[M]i žene Hrvatske, kao i cijele Jugoslavije, ponosne smo i sretne i zato što smo u toj borbi izvojevale punu ravnopravnost, slobodu i prava.

[162] Ibid, 92. "Ne smijemo zaboraviti nikada i nikako da nam je samo naša narodna vlast garancija istinske slobode, demokracije i ravnopravnosti. Ali isto tako ne smijemo zaboraviti da ćemo sve više i više koristiti i uživati tu slobodu ako što prije odstranimo ekonomsku bijedu, ruševine, pustoš, golotinju i bosotinju-jednom riječju, ako što prije izgradimo domovinu."

Kata Pejnović explained in more detail the responsibilities of the AFŽ. She delegated them to five areas: in consolidation of the values of brotherhood and unity and in consolidation of people's government, in construction and restoration of the country, in care for the young, the elderly, and the war invalids, and, finally, in combating illiteracy and ignorance by organizing illiteracy courses and courses of political education.[163] The organization's broad area of responsibilities transformed into a lengthy list of new assignments that AFŽ activists immediately engaged in after the end of the Second World War. These included visiting, gift giving and caring for veterans and war invalids, working in the orphanages and babysitting the children of working mothers, participation in mass labor actions as well as agitation among the youth to do the same, organizing reading groups and new illiteracy and political courses, logging women on voter registration lists and the preparation of women for the first elections, assistance in the newly formed state administration offices and even the donation of blood.[164]

As Sklevicky points out, the AFŽ's postwar tasks were dual in nature. Just as during the war, the courses were the base through which the AFŽ attracted women to the organization and educated them. The education provided, however, was not merely an exercise in social equality with men or preparation for the labor market, but a way in which to expose large numbers of women to Marxist ideology, politically indoctrinate them and integrate them into the Popular Front.[165] During the war AFŽ members tried to gauge the level of ignorance and the needs of peasant women and then to meet them through the organization's activities. In the postwar period, political education and indoctrination were secondary to the requirements of education in general and the training of women capable of work. However, the emphasis

[163] Lydia Sklevicky, "Prvi kongres AFŽ-a Hrvatske: putovi integracije u novo društvo," in *Oslobođenje Hrvatske 1945* (Zagreb: Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, 1986), 360-365.
[164] Renata Jambrešić Kirin, "Žene u formativnom socijalizmu," in *Refleksije vremena (1945.-1955.)*, ed. Jasmina Bavoljak (Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2012), 185.
[165] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 118.

changed. While the AFŽ was still in charge of various campaigns and courses that targeted women, some of the course organization was transferred to the ZAVNOH, while the AFŽ was primarily in charge of political education and ideological indoctrination.

In this situation, the Yugoslav Communist Party acted as its Soviet mentor and assigned the AFŽ with tasks that mirrored the key activities performed between 1919 and 1930 by *Zhenotdel*, the Soviet Women's Department of the Central Committee Secretariat and its committees for agitation and propaganda among women. According to Mary Buckley, the meetings *Zhenotdel* organized throughout the U.S.S.R. were the main and often sole way of educating women as well as a vehicle for "the party [to] pass 'its will to the working class.'"[166] The meetings that *Zhenotdel* organized changed in emphasis over time. In the first half of the 1920s education was focused on Marxist ideology, women's rights and Party work. After the promulgation of the first Five-Year Plan in 1928 the emphasis of *Zhenotdel's* activities were put on the participation of women in the realization of Plan requirements.[167] Similarly, Sklevicky notes that after the proclamation of the first Yugoslav Five-Year Plan in April 1947, which was designed to transform the country into an industrial force, the AFŽ was assigned with the development and implementation of activities that sought to integrate women into the labor force on a large scale. The AFŽ reformulated its goals according to Party directives and outlined its activities in accordance with the economical demands of the industrialization process.[168]

Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform in June of 1948 after a prolonged series of disagreements between Tito and Stalin. The so-called Tito-Stalin split was followed by purges of the Party ranks within Yugoslavia, as well as "a general and wide-ranging social purge

[166] Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 75-76.
[167] Ibid, 77.
[168] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 124-127.

which was aimed with equal or even greater ferocity at all ranks of society."[169] Svetlana Slapšak observes that during this period no members of mass organizations, including the AFŽ, were considered immune to the threat of the imminent "ideological deviation" by the KPJ leadership.[170] Hence, the Party leadership strove towards complete control of the entire Yugoslav community and practiced extensive monitoring of all spheres of society and mass organizations until the early 1950s. During this time the AFŽ of Croatia, the organization that during the war had already gained a bad reputation due to its tendencies towards autonomy and independence from the supervision of the Party, was under strict scrutiny. The Party acted to remove it from the public role and in 1953 the AFŽ ended its existence with voluntary dissolution.[171]

***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have discussed the development of women's organizations with the emphasis on the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia during and after the Second World War. I reviewed the activities of women in the "bourgeois" and leftist organizations during the interwar period and then turned my focus to the AFŽH, which was, according to Lydia Sklevicky, the successor of both prewar traditions.[172] With regard to AFŽH, I analyzed its creation, its goals and its evolving relationship with women partisans.

The AFŽH was a women's organization established in December of 1941 under the supervision of the KPH, and integrated in the AFŽ of Yugoslavia one year later. AFŽ and all of its republican branches were disbanded in 1953 and replaced with the Union of Women's Societies, which was integrated in the Socialist Alliance of Working People (SSRN). During

[169] Crampton, *Eastern Europe*, 267.
[170] Svetlana Slapšak, "Between the Vampire Husband and the Mortal Lover: A Narrative for Feminism in Yugoslavia," in, *Research on Russia and Eastern Europe: Women in Pot-Communism*, ed. Barbara Wejnert, Metta Spencer and Slobodan Drakulić (Connecticut: JAI Press, 1996), 217.
[171] Ibid, 217.
[172] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 79.

its existence, the Antifascist Front of Women changed its organizational structure, and to some extent its tasks and goals. Through the analysis of the documents it is clear that the most important goal of the organization was the education of women in order to facilitate their inclusion into the public sphere of the socialist society. Of course, the AFŽ was founded primarily to provide organized help to the partisan army during the war, and was tasked with a multitude of assignments for reconstruction following the war. However, during the war AFŽH members repeatedly stressed the importance of education and, therefore, launched innumerable courses and initiated several journals to educate as many women as possible. The trend continued into the postwar period as well and lasted for the duration of the existence of the organization.

Female fighters were first and foremost members of the People's Liberation Army. They owed their dedication to the army, and could participate in the activities organized by the AFŽ only if they had no other duties assigned by army leadership. This meant that as a rule *partizanke*, who were predominantly young peasant girls, could not benefit from educational programs AFŽ offered to women and were often excluded from AFŽ meetings and conferences. AFŽ continued to promote the importance of the education for women in the socialist Yugoslavia during the postwar period and, in connection, sought to introduce women to the paid work force, especially in the industrial sector. Women partisans, thus, remained on the margins of interest for AFŽ officials.

*Žena u borbi* was the first wartime journal in Croatia that targeted a female audience. The editorial office initially consisted of Kata Pejnović, Jela Bičanić, Dr. Slava Očko and Marija Šoljan, members of both the Communist Party of Croatia (KPH) and the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia (AFŽH), specifically, the District committee (*Okružni odbor*) of the AFŽH for Lika.[173] The journal was published for the first time in March 1942 in the liberated territory of Lika. In June 1943 *Žena u borbi* became the official publication of the AFŽH, and the District committee for Lika renamed the publication Woman of Lika in Combat (*Lička žena u borbi*). In addition to the changes of the responsible authority, the editorial board was also altered. From mid-1943 until the end of the war *Žena u borbi* had five editors in chief. In chronological order they were Olga Kovačić-Kreačić, Bosiljka-Beba Krajačić, Valika Pap-Kreačić, Nada Sremec and Veda Zagorac. During the interwar period all five women were active in the "progressive movement" led by the KPJ and interested in the "woman question" and during the war they were active members of the KPJ and the AFŽ.[174] From the end of World War II until 1953 the editors in chief were Marija Šoljan and Emilija Šeparović, with the exception of 1947 when Nada Sremec was once again the editor in chief. Both Šoljan and Šeparović were active in the AFŽH during the war and contributed articles to the journal, Šoljan from the very beginning and Šeparović from 1943, but neither was prominent like the wartime editors in chief. All the editors regularly contributed articles to the journal, primarily dealing with the topics related to the political situation in the country and the activities of the AFŽH.

[173] Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske, vol. 1*, 205.
[174] Šoljan, ed., *Žena u borbi*, 40-41.

While in Croatia there was not a single journal which would meet the same informative and educational role *Žena u borbi* aspired to fulfill, the same redaction that edited *Žena u borbi* in February 1946 started to publish Our Fashion (*Naša moda*). In January 1958 the Union of Women's Societies of Croatia (*Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske*, SŽDH), the successor to the AFŽH, renamed *Žena u borbi* as *Woman* (*Žena*), added the subheading Magazine for Family and Household (*List za porodicu i domaćinstvo*) and changed the concept of the journal.

It is commonly accepted in the contemporary literature that in the postwar Yugoslavia female partisan became the symbol of legitimacy of the communist regime and the prominent icon in the emerging collective memory.[175] In this chapter I analyze the content of *Žena u borbi* published from June 1943, when the AFŽH took the journal under its supervision, until September 1953, when the AFŽ of Yugoslavia decided to abolish the organization and its republic branches. I discuss the topics that dominated in the journal in order to expose the AFŽH's attitude toward the Yugoslav female partisan and the emerging collective memory. Wartime editions focused on armed struggles with the emphasis on the successes of the partisan army, women in the homefront, women partisans and the importance of education, and the postwar editions stressed the reconstruction of the country and the role of female shock-workers in it as well as the People's Liberation Struggle which became an unavoidable and frequently featured topic. Alongside featured topics, I will briefly address the topics editorial board avoided, wartime collaboration, enemy propaganda and the political prisons on *Goli otok* and *Sveti Grgur*. Furthermore, I demonstrate the ways in which the narratives in the journal evolved, with special emphasis, in the postwar period, on the narratives about the memory of women participating in the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB) in general and

[175] See more in: Batinić, "Gender, Revolution, and War," 281-343; Vesna Drapac, "Women, Resistance and the Politics of Daily Life in Hitler's Europe: The Case of Yugoslavia in a Comparative Perspective," *Aspasia, The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European women's and Gender History* 3 (2009): 55-78; Jancar-Webster, "Yugoslavia: War of Resistance," 85-105.

women partisans in particular. In the last section I focus on the extent to which the narratives about the women partisans were limited, and provide reasons for the imposed restrictions.

### *3.1 Official Narrative about the People's Liberation Struggle*

The People's Liberation Struggle in the territory of Yugoslavia evolved in the postwar period into the so-called Partisan myth that became the foundational legitimizing strategy of the communist leadership which constitutes an important step for every new regime in order to legitimize their control and create foundation to foster trust and support for the new government. The selfless struggle of all the peoples of Yugoslavia, the enormous loss of life and the innumerable personal sacrifices made in support of the resistance of the cruel enemy, Germans and Italians, and their collaborators was central to the postwar narrative and collective memory of the wartime efforts of Yugoslav citizens. Holm Sundhaussen notes: "A central element of the legitimization of the state and the regime was the revival of the sacrifices endured for victory." Moreover, "the dead were the proof of the right to live."[176] In other words, not only the participation in war effort but the willingness to sacrifice one's life or even lives of their children proved the moral worth of the partisan struggle.[177]

While writing about the commemorative practices that developed in connection to the Partisan myth, Jelena Batinić describes *partizanka* as one of the most prominent icons of World War II whose role in war was celebrated through commemoration services and holidays established by state leaders and remembered through memorial sites. Furthermore, the most outstanding among *partizanke* were honored by naming, for instance, streets and

[176] Holm Sundhaussen, "Jugoslavija i njezine države nasljednice. Konstrukcija, destrukcija i nova konstrukcija 'sjećanja' i mitova," in *Kultura pamćenja i historija,* ed. Maja Brkljačić i Sanja Prlenda (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2006), 247.

[177] Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, "Epilogue: Half-Hidden From History," in *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 245. Interestingly, in 1947 Stalin decided to abolish the celebration of the Victory Day, public holiday that glorified the victory over Germans. Roger D. Markwich and Euridice Charon explain that the Soviet Union experienced urgent need for heroes of labor in order to reconstruct the devastated country. Therefore, neither male nor female heroes of war were present in the Soviet collective memory until Khruschev's "thaw" when many veterans started publishing their memories and reinstitution of the Victory Day as a public holiday under Brezhnev.

schools after them. Less known and anonymous women partisans were immortalized in partisan songs and literature.[178] Moreover, a nameless girl in the photo entitled *A Girl From Kozara* (*Kozarčanka*) gave her face to the Yugoslav woman partisan (see appendix 1). The photograph was taken in 1943, after the Fourth Enemy Offensive, and the author, Georgije-Žorž Skrigin, added the caption: "As a young woman she was captured during the First Enemy Offensive. She succeeded in escaping-even from Germany-and reached Kozara (NW Bosnia) where she became a fighter of the Kozara forces."[179] In the postwar period this photograph was reproduced in war monographs, school readers and magazines as well as in posters for labor actions and commemoration parades. As Natascha Vitorelli notices, girl's smiling face that seems to exude self-confidence and belief in the upcoming victory coupled with the fact that she was a volunteer in the People's Liberation Army "makes the People's Liberation Struggle the cause of the whole nation."[180] Consequently, *partizanka* makes the indisputable source of legitimacy for the communist authorities.

The Federal Association of Veterans of the National Liberation War of Yugoslavia was tasked with the preservation of the memory of partisans in general. The Antifascist Front of Women and its successors were the official guardians of the memory of female partisans, and they had the duty to revise narratives related to *partizanke* and interpret them in compliance with Party ideology. Under the guardianship of these women's organizations the official



[178] Batinić, "Gender, Revolution, and War," 298.

[179] As cited in: Natascha Vittorelli, "With or Without Gun. Staging Female Partisans in Socialist Yugoslavia" in *Partisans in Yugoslavia: Literature, Film and Visual Culture*, ed. Miranda Jakiša and Nikica Gilić (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 127. Vittorelli adds that the author of the photograph did not know the girl (Milja Marin) before the event. Thus, in his description of the photograph he acknowledged the courage of women partisans as he imagined them. Furthermore, the girl on the photo was in reality a nurse who posed with a borrowed rifle. *Kozarčanka*, the embodiment of the female partisan, proved to be only a product of Skrigin's imagination.

[180] Ibid, 126-127.

image of women partisans became "a figure of memory" whose picture in the state narrative remained essentially unchanged throughout the communist period.[181]

However, next sections will show how the AFŽH officials used different aspects of the memory of *partizanke* to coordinate their contributions with the prevailing traditional worldviews. According to Renata Jambrešić Kirin, "Yugoslav ideologues did not practice a radical break with the cultural forms of the pre-revolutionary society based on the idea of gender difference and compatibility."[182] Thus, traditional values that implied the existence of a "woman's place" in society continued to exist uninterrupted long after high-ranking Party officials and distinguished AFŽ members proclaimed the institution of gender equality.[183] These circumstances strongly influenced the image of *partizanka,* which is clearly visible in the publishing policies of the editorial board of *Žena u borbi*, the choice of published topics and their presentation to the readership. Thus, the image of *partizanka* was in the official women's press affected by the traditional worldviews that affirmed the patriarchal order and tended toward the representation of patriotic motherhood.

Furthermore, the general political situation in Yugoslavia, especially the Cominform Resolution and ensuing Tito-Stalin split, have figured significantly in the publishing policy of the editorial board of *Žena u borbi*. Namely, the denouncements against the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Fred Warner Neal reports, caused psychosomatic illnesses among the most prominent members of the Party and psychological difficulties with coping with the charges among the rank and file.[184] Insecurity of the leadership in the loyalty of the Party membership reinforced the activities of the secret police and initiated the purges that

[181] Batinić, "Gender, Revolution, and War," 297.
[182] Jambrešić Kirin, *Dom i svijet*, 20.
[183] Mitrović, *Ratno putovanje*, 150. For instance, already in The First Yugoslav Conference of the AFŽ in November 1942, Mitra Mitrović said: "Indeed, I almost forgot the equality of women. This is because it already looks simple. Equality came as along the way, it is obtained, we already live in it (…)"
[184] Fred Warner Neal, *Titoism in Action, The Reforms After 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 4-5.

worsened the situation even more. Thus, individuals who had the possibility, like the journalists and editors of *Žena u borbi*, used the journal to publicly disclose their trust in the KPJ and its policies. Consequently, current events were strongly embedded in the narratives about the past and influenced the portrayal of the war and, hence, women who served in the army.

### *3.2 Wartime Publishing Policy of Žena u borbi*

Following Lenin's instructions on the most favorable methods of agitation and propaganda for the process of the mobilization of revolutionary consciousness of the masses, throughout World War II and thereafter, the KPJ considered the printed press as the most important means of conveying information. Through the printed media, the Party leadership believed they could inform a broad public audience about their struggle, aims and achievements. As Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Reana Senjković notice, the printed press was "the most popular, the most common and the most appropriate way for training the masses."[185] Furthermore, although the leadership of the KPJ did not hesitate to apply coercive methods to achieve the objectives of creating a communist state, they were firmly convinced that "communism could only be built with the voluntary cooperation and participation of the vast majority of the population."[186] In order to maximize support for the emerging system of government, Carol S. Lilly observes, "persuasion was a vital component of the Party's activities."[187] Finally, because women were attributed with gender specific backwardness related to their social status in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, female members of the Party and the AFŽ launched several journals for women in different parts of Croatia. Intertwined with the tasks of informing women about the NOB and propagating their participation in it, the women's press

[185] Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Reana Senjković, "Puno puta bi Vas bili izbacili kroz vrata, biste bila išla kroz prozor nutra: preispisivanje povijesti žena u Drugom svjetskom ratu," *Narodna umjetnost* 42, vol. 2 (2005): 111.

[186] Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, 2.

[187] Ibid.

had the additional duty of educating its audience by strongly emphasizing the role of women in the process of building the new socialist state.

During the war, different district committees of the AFŽ published local women's journals when they were under the control of the KPJ and ceased such activity when the partisans were driven away by the Germans, Italians or Ustashas. On the other hand, when AFŽH started to publish *Žena u borbi*, the journal was issued on a regular basis, almost every month, and was distributed throughout the occupied and liberated territories of Croatia. Following the end of World War II in Yugoslavia, most wartime women's journals ended publication and *Žena u borbi* became the official women's magazine of the AFŽH and the long-term, stable and consistent source of information for readers.

For the duration of the war, the editorial board of the *Žena u borbi* strongly focused on armed struggles and the political developments in Yugoslavia and abroad. The front cover and the leading article of the first issue set the tone for wartime editions of the journal. The front cover featured a woman in a tattered dress with her hair flying in the wind. In her left hand the woman was holding a toddler, and in her right hand, a rifle (see appendix 2). Vladimir Bakarić, who, at that time, was a political commissar of the main staff of the People's Liberation Army for Croatia, wrote the leading article. He began by paying tribute to the courageous struggle of the people of Yugoslavia against the fascist enemy, and then moved on to the women's merits.[188] Yugoslav woman, he wrote, "devotedly decided to sacrifice for the people's liberation-if necessary-herself and her children, her dear and beloved ones."[189] Bakarić continued to clarify the nature of women's sacrifices describing the tasks they carried out in the homefront and on the front and concluded by stating, "in the construction of our better and happier future" the role of women "will have to be taken into account as she will be

[188] Vladimir Bakarić, "Borba," *Žena u borbi* 1 (June 1943), 1.

[189] Ibid, "požrtvovno odlučila da za narodno oslobođenje žrtvuje-ako treba-i sebe i djecu svoju, svoje mile i drage."

the participant in that improvement of standard to the same extent she is now participant in our joint struggle."[190] Women's wartime efforts were the focus of the first edition, with women partisans appearing both on the cover design as well as in the article written by Bakarić. The rifle in the woman's hand in the cover illustration salutes women's advancements into traditionally male territory, i.e. the military. On the other hand, her attire, a dress instead of pants and boots, and a baby in her left hand demonstrate traditional concepts of women's role as both feminine and maternal. Similarly, Bakarić interpreted women's support of the partisan army as women's investment into their future improvement. He, therefore, emphasized the importance and the diversity of women's tasks in the supportive roles on the homefront. Surprisingly, he praised only the memory of *partizanke*, although he wrote the article in the middle of the war.

In the remaining articles of the first issue and in articles in future editions, the editorial board elaborated the types of contributions they considered more useful in the future construction of the socialist state with emphasis on topics that sought to educate women to become productive citizens of a socialist country. Thus, they dedicated a significant number of pages of every issue to the diverse examples of women's successes working in the homefront, for instance, caring for orphans who lost their parents in wartime atrocities or to their work as nurses. They also emphasized the accomplishment of literacy courses. In connection to the success of women in education, journal editors published numerous articles that focused on political content as an extension of "political education" courses AFŽ organized throughout liberated territories. Some articles simply explained the role and the importance of certain political bodies, particularly with regard to women's interests, some articles reproduced speeches by the communist leaders, while other articles described political events. For example, in the first edition of the journal Anka Berus authored an article that

[190] Bakarić, "Borba," 1. "U izgradnji naše bolje i sretnije budućnosti trebat će se to uzeti u obzir i ona će biti sudionikom tog boljitka u istoj mjeri kako je sada sudionikom naše zajedničke borbe."

explained the role and the tasks of the AFŽ within the framework of the People's Liberation Struggle, but also the importance of the organization for women's emancipation.[191] Following the First Conference of the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia, the editorial board published Marija Kreačić's report about the event, the Resolution adopted at the conference and the excerpts of Vladimir Bakarić's speech held at the conference.[192]

Editors were mindful of the prewar success of the HSS and its organization Peasant Concord in work with peasant communities throughout Croatia, and in several editions devoted space for articles about former HSS leader Stjepan Radić, whom they seemingly held in high esteem, and also about the switch of many HSS members to the People's Front (NF) and the KPJ over the course of war, which was intended to demonstrate the similarity of this political options and generate increased peasant support for the Communist Party.[193] They also published several articles about the final prewar HSS leader, Vladko Maček, whose political decisions they severely criticized. They resented the fact that, despite refusing the German invitation to head the puppet government, he urged the people of Croatia to obedience toward the Ustasha authorities. Furthermore, Bosiljka-Beba Krajačić reports that he spoke against the women's right to vote and argued in favor of restricting women to the private sphere.[194] Finally, they often wrote about the achievements of the U.S.S.R. and the Red Army that was assisting the partisan army in their struggle against the fascist forces and Soviet women whom editors presented as a model Yugoslav women should aspire to emulate.

While journal editors fervently advocated the social and political equality of men and women, traditional conservative values shaped the underlying attitudes present in many

[191] Anka Berus, "Za učvršćenje organizacije," *Žena u borbi* 1 (June 1943), 6-7.

[192] Marija Kreačić, "Prva konferencija Antifašističke fronte žena Hrvatske," *Žena u borbi* 2 (July 1943), 1-4; -, Rezolucija Prve konferencija Antifašističke fronte žena hrvatske," *Žena u borbi* 2 (July 1943), 18-20; Vladimir Bakarić, "Naša vojska nije kao druge-Ona je i vojska žena," *Žena u borbi* 2 (July 1943), 5-6.

[193] For instance, see: Nada Sremec, "Drugaricama u okupiranoj Hrvatskoj," *Žena u borbi* 5-6 (October-November 1943), 5-6.

[194] Bosiljka-Beba Krajačić, "Od obmane do izdaje," *Žena u borbi* 7 (March 1944), 5-6.

articles. Therefore, only a small number of articles spoke specifically about the actions of women partisans. One such article published in April 1944 by an anonymous author, titled "Three Bloody Years," described the development of the People's Liberation Army (NOV) and the simultaneous emergence of the People's Liberation Struggle. Towards the end of the article the author states:

> In these three years of brutal war, our women heroically, shoulder to shoulder with the comrades, carried the burden of the war on their backs. These three years have spawned a new type of woman-a woman fighter. We are proud of the Serbian and Montenegrin women who, immediately after the arrival of the occupier, rebelled together with their comrades. We are proud of the unprecedented heroism of the women of Lika, Kordun, Banija, Dalmatia, Slavonia and other parts of our country. We greet women of Slovenia who, with their comrades, fight heroically against the cruel invader.[195]

Unfortunately, the author did not include names of women partisans, their deeds or contributions, which are scarce in wartime editions.

Captain Desa Miljenović wrote one of the few articles about women in military units, "The Women Heroes." Miljenović provided several examples of women who joined the NOB in 1941 and then moved into the partisan ranks as soon as the KPJ granted permission for women to mobilize. Interestingly, she felt compelled to clarify why women felt such a need to participate in fighting during the war. She wrote that women fight so "that [their] children have a happy youth, that they do not live in fear of the knife, that [their] family has a bright, cheerful future."[196] The author concluded the article by stressing once more her belief that what had been traditionally considered a woman's natural inclination, that is, the wellbeing of



[195] -, "Tri krvave godine," *Žena u borbi* 8 (April 1944), 3. "U ove tri godine surovog rata naše žene su herojski, rame uz rame sa drugovima, nosile breme rata na svojim leđima. Te tri godine izbacile su novi tip žene – ženu borca. Ponosni smo na srpske i crnogorske žene koje su se odmah po dolasku okupatora zajedno sa svojim drugovima digle na ustanak. Ponosni smo besprimjernim junaštvom žena Like, Korduna, Banije, Dalmacije, Slavonije i ostalih dijelova naše zemlje. Pozdravljamo žene Slovenije koje se herojski bore sa svojim drugovima portiv okrutnog zavojevača."

[196] Desa Miljenović, "Žene junakinje," *Žena u borbi* 17-18 (June-July 1945), 10. Da joj djeca imaju lijepu mladost, da ne strepe od noža, da sva njezina porodica ima svjetlu, vedru budućnost.

her offspring and her family in general, was also the motivation for women to join the partisan army as fighters.

The notion that women had a natural affinity for tasks related to the care for others was highlighted in other articles as well. Dr. Grujica Živković, a major in the NOV, wrote an article, "Fight for the Public Health-Important Women's Task," where this traditional worldview was most obvious. Živković claims that "women can and must contribute in a particularly large proportion to the resolution of the health issues."[197] Živković explicates her claim by adding that men who are capable have joined the NOV and perform duties that correspond to their strength and competence. Moreover, because of their physical characteristics, Živković argues, men cannot be as devoted medical personnel as women. Women, because they are not as strong as men, but are more sensible than men, are perfect for the various tasks medical personnel perform, especially nurses.[198] Finally, Živković touches on the issue of equality between men and women in the army claiming that women who join the partisans as nurses are, despite the supposedly physically less demanding tasks, equal in status to their soldier comrades.[199]

Ivan Šibl, a partisan and a political commissar of several brigades in Slavonia during the war, expressed in his memoir the concern and confusion that women who served in the NOV as *partizanke* raised. Namely, Šibl worried that *partizanke* could become rough like men and that their participation in armed conflict could "deprive [them] of the wonderful properties that make a woman a woman and that we want to feel from the women we love."[200] Similarly, in 1945 the newsletter *Woman soldier* published by the Main Committee of the AFŽH



[197] Grujica Živković, "Borba za narodno zdravlje-važan zadatak žena," *Žena u borbi* 8 (April 1944), 16. Naročito velik udio u rješavanju zdravstvenih pitanja mogu i treba da doprinesu žene.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid," 17.

[200] Ivan Šibl, *Partizanski dnevnik* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1960), 271. "(…) lišiti divnih svojstava koja ženu čine ženom i koja želimo osjetiti kod žena koje volimo."

contained a letter written by the political commissar of the Nineteenth partisan division in which the author praises the stamina and bravery of women soldiers. He continues his report by writing that women soldiers are not just fighting in battles, but also voluntarily wash and mend clothes and oversee the hygiene of soldiers in the division. Thereby *partizanke* are also mothers and sisters to the soldiers and "in their tender concerns preserved all the traits of women."[201]

Due to the prevalence of traditional definitions of women's role within society, the journal featured articles more often that highlighted the actions of partisan mothers and widows rather than texts about the *partizanke*, who brought traditional concepts about femininity into question. Women who the AFŽ organized did not raise such doubts because they often contributed to the war effort in a supportive capacity by performing traditional women's tasks such as cooking for the army, mending soldiers' clothes, caring for the war orphans and teaching in the partisan schools, while their children served in the army. Thus, these women became the most prominent figures in stories about wartime sacrifices offered by Yugoslav women for the better future of the country.

In contrast to articles focusing on women partisans, texts that emphasized the importance of education for all Yugoslav women and its significance to both the war effort and the future of the country, were published more regularly with each edition featuring at least one article, but often several such articles on the topic. In September 1944 *Žena u borbi* featured the article "Education is the Foundation of Any Progress" by Professor Anica Rakar. In the article Prof. Rakar asserts that during the NOB it became usual to have women participating in the struggle as members of the People's Liberation Councils (NOOs) and fighters in the NOV.

[201] "Dopis političkog komesara XIX. divizije Glavnom odboru AFŽ Hrvatske o ženi vojniku" ("A Letter by the Political Commissar of the Nineteenth Partisan Division to the Main Committee of the AFŽH about the Female Soldier"), in *Žene Hrvatske vol. 2*, 136. "(…) i u svojoj nježnoj zabrinutosti očuvala je sve osebine žene."

Rakar then expresses the conviction that this trend will continue until the aftermath of the war because "not only men but also women work for the progress and raising of people, and with their harmonious work we will achieve the progress of the entire people."[202] In order to achieve the goal, the proper education of women is of paramount importance and "we cannot even think not to create all the opportunities for women to really gain the necessary education."[203]

In the article "New Tasks," Anka Berus expressed similar thoughts, but taking them one step further. Not only should women be allowed to participate in the construction of the new socialist community, they are obliged to do so because the KPJ trusted them with the right of social and political equality.[204] Furthermore, Berus asserts, antifascist women who actively participated in the NOB should use their "resourcefulness and vigor, unbreakable energy and thrilling enthusiasm (…) to fulfill all the tasks placed in front of our people's community, as well as the obligations to maintain the main achievements of the struggle because it is a prerequisite for building a happier future."[205] In this process, the education women obtained was the most valuable asset for their future success. Of course, Berus observes, a happier future could only be reached through the fulfillment of various tasks on the construction of the war-ravaged country and through the preservation of the memory of wartime atrocities in order to appreciate the present possibilities that are attainable only within the framework of



[202] Anica Rakar, "Prosvjeta je temelj svakog napretka," *Žena u borbi* 10 (September 1944), 12. "(…) da za napredak i podizanje naroda ne radi samo muškarac nego i žena i da ćemo njihovim skladnim radom postići napredak cijelog naroda."

[203] Ibid. "I ne smijemo ni pomisliti da ženi ne stvorimo sve mogućnosti da zaista stekne potrebno obrazovanje."

[204] Anka Berus, "Novi zadaci," *Žena u borbi* 16-17 (June-July 1945), 7.

[205] Ibid, "(…) snalažljivost i neumornost, nesalomljivu energiju oduševljavajući elan (...) za ispunjenje svih zadataka koji se postavljaju pred našu narodnu zajednicu, kao i obaveze čuvanja osnovnih tekovina borbe jer je to preduslov za izgradnju sretnije budućnosti."

the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia, that is, under the leadership of the KPJ and mentorship of the AFŽ.[206]

Besides favoring some topics, the editorial board hesitated and even avoided to address some issues like collaboration and enemy propaganda. The circular that Central Committee of Communist Party of Croatia (CK KPH) issued with the aim of establishing AFŽH clearly states that this organization was required to "lead the antifascist propaganda, prevent women and female youth to become fascists, to destroy existing fascist organizations and prevent the formation of the new ones."[207] This circular indicates women had the possibility to join the Female Lineage of Ustasha Movement (*Ženska loza ustaškog pokreta*), the only official women's organization in the Independent State of Croatia. Ante Pavelić, leader of the Ustasha, established it in November 1941 encouraging Croatian women to join the organization in order to become "mother[s] (…) of a great national family."[208] However, in *Žena u borbi* there is not a single article dealing with the Female Lineage of Ustasha Movement or its membership.[209]

Furthermore, editorial board approached the topic of the enemy propaganda with extra caution.[210] The articles addressing this issue are very scarce and written by individuals who represented a moral authority. For instance, in the article "Knighthood, Sisterhood and the Idealism of People's Fighting Woman," Msgr. Dr. Svetozar Rittig, priest in the parish of Saint



[206] Berus, "Novi zadaci," 7.

[207] "Iz okružnice broj 4. CK KPH od 6. prosinca 1941. O organizaciji i zadacima Antifašističkog fronta žena," in *Žene Hrvatske vol. 1*, 57. "Da vodi antifašističku propagandu, da sprečava fašiziranje žena i ženske omladine, da uništava postojeće fašističke organizacije i sprečava stvaranje novih."

[208] Jambrešić Kirin and Senjković, "Puno puta bi vas bili izbacili kroz vrata," 114.

[209] Similarly, in the postwar period, there are no articles featuring possible women supporters of the Cominform or about the penitentiary for the female political offenders on the island of *Sveti Grgur*.

[210] About the nature of Italian propaganda against woman partisans see: Gloria Nemec, "Un altro essere, che non è un animale, vive nei boschi. Percezione del partigianato e memoria collettiva in una comunità contadina dell' Istria interna," in *Donne guerra politica: esperienze e memorie della Resistenza*, ed. Dianella Gagliani et al. (Bologna: Clueb, 2000), 337-350. About the Ustasha anti-propaganda see: Rory Yeomans, Militant Women, Warrior Men and Revolutionary Personae: The New Ustasha Man and Woman in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 4 (October 2005): 725-726.

Marko in Zagreb from 1917 until 1941 and a supporter of the People's Liberation Movement (NOP) from its inception, wrote that "the image of a woman in combat in great liberation movement of the Yugoslav peoples came out distorted and often smirking."[211] Msgr. Dr. Rittig did not elaborate further on "the vile suspicions of the opponents," but reassured the readership in the modesty, chastity and patriotism of *partizanke* comparing their activities with the examples of biblical story about Judith and Holofernes and Jeanne d'Arc, French martyr and saint.[212]

### *3.3 Postwar Development of War Imagery in Žena u borbi*

The immediate postwar period was marked by the processes of the consolidation of power of the KPJ and the simultaneous implementation of the control over all citizens of Yugoslavia. The KPJ resorted to all means of agitation and propaganda in order to successfully complete their seizure of power, such as "museums of the revolution," monuments and memorials in public spaces, commemoration services, movies, comics, journals, memoirs, and, of course, the Party press.[213] Holm Sundhaussen argues the KPJ leadership attempted to exploit the political turmoil, traumatic experiences of the people as well as the death toll of World War II in order to construct a founding myth and a homogeneous tradition common to all citizens of the state. Although the Party acknowledged ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural differences, during the first two decades of Yugoslavia's existence it strongly emphasized unity based primarily on the shared experiences of the People's Liberation Struggle.[214] The construction of a common political and cultural identity resulted in the creation of the shared



[211] Msgr. Dr. Svetozar Rittig, "Viteštvo, posestrimstvo i idealizam narodne borbene žene," *Žena u borbi* 12-13 (December 1944-January 1945), 4. "(…) je slika borbene žene u velikom oslobodilačkom pokretu jugoslavenskih naroda izišla iskrivljena i često iscerena."

[212] Ibid.

[213] Renata Jambrešić Kirin, *Dom i svijet: O ženskoj kulturi pamćenja* (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije, 2008), 8.

[214] Sundhaussen, "Jugoslavija i njezine države nasljednice," 248, 250.

collective memory which provides trust and orientation.[215] In the reality of postwar Yugoslavia, the social obligation to the group that shared a common memory entailed the obligation of forgetting or, at least, modifying personal memory to the official version. The Party leadership criminalized the expression of competing memories that were not otherwise suppressed[216] and over the course of 1945 introduced the Law on Press (*Zakon o štampi*), which legalized censorship in the country.[217]

The end of the war influenced the organization and operation of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia as well as Croatia. Both Lydia Sklevicky and Renata Jambrešić-Kirin agree that the end of World War II brought an even stronger concentration by the AFŽH on social work, which was carried out in the interest of the renovation and reconstruction of socialist Yugoslavia.[218] The journal *Žena u borbi* reflects changes happening within the state and in the AFŽH. Thus, the NOB remained a recurring topic in journal articles and "women's sacrifices in the defense of their own homes, successes in organizing the background and their engagement in the front were not forgotten, but absorbed into the grand narrative of heroic victory of the united people under the leadership of its vanguard-the Communist Party and Josip Broz Tito."[219]

In the immediate postwar period *Žena u borbi* exuded enthusiasm for the wartime victory and transformed it through articles into constant invitations for further voluntary work in the reconstruction of the country. However, authors relied upon the same as the language used during the war. In July 1947 *Žena u borbi* featured the article "We are not Giving up the Fight" signed by the Main Board (*Glavni odbor*, GO) of the AFŽH. The article discussed the option for changing the name of the journal because, since the conclusion of the war, some of readers no longer considered "woman in combat" an appropriate name for the journal.

[215] Assman, "Kultura sjećanja," 64-65.
[216] Sundhaussen, "Jugoslavija i njezine države nasljednice," 246.
[217] Duda, "Uhodavanje socijalizma," 16.
[218] Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, 122; Jambrešić Kirin, "Žene u formativnom socijalizmu," 185.
[219] Jambrešić Kirin, *Dom i svijet*, 30.

However, the members of the main board and several branches argued in favor of the name because "[i]t is not yet time to give up the fight because the fight is not completed."[220] Although the war is over, the author resumes, the realization of the Five-Year Plan requires continuation of the fight because "without the struggle we will not achieve the Five-Year Plan, and without that there is no happy future for us or our children."[221] In the initial postwar years "the fight" and "fighter" remained repeated key words in articles devoted to politics and especially economics published in *Žena u borbi*. In the postwar period, the term fight and related concepts were used to channel enthusiasm over the victory in the war and the hope for a bright future into economically beneficial activities. Carol S. Lily argues that in Yugoslavia the armed struggle did not end in May 1945, but was only transferred from partisan units into workers' brigades.[222]

Under the described circumstances, the woman fighter was no longer deemed as a woman of the new time. In the second half of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the new woman was the female shock-worker. Workers were the foundation of the new socialist society in Yugoslavia and the tradition of competition in the workplace and the image of the shock-worker that originated in the U.S.S.R. were considered by the communist leadership a prerequisite for the socialist transformation of Yugoslavia and defined as a legal obligation of every worker.[223] Thus, instead of the *partizanke*, the front covers of the journal featured women such as Josipa Planinc, a resident of Zagreb who won a golden badge for voluntary work on the construction project of the new highway "of brotherhood and unity,"[224] and



[220] GO AFŽ, "Mi se borbe ne odričemo," *Žena u borbi* 41 (July 1947), 16-17.
[221] Ibid, 17.
[222] Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, 75, 87.
[223] Tomislav Anić, "Junakinje i junaci rada," in *Refleksije vremena (1945.-1955.)*, ed. Jasmina Bavoljak (Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2012), 41.
[224] *Žena u borbi* 42 (August 1947), front cover.

Danica Kosijer, the tractor driver and one of the champions "in the fight for high labor productivity."[225]

Virtually every issue of the journal brought new information about the successes of women in the workplace, particularly in factories, but also in peasant cooperatives and, to a lesser extent, in areas such as education and health care. Following the end of the war, the editorial board devoted a significant portion of space in every issue to articles detailing the reconstruction of the country, and praising women's participation in these projects as well as the cooperation and assistance women provided in those projects and to people affected by war. *Žena u borbi* also featured numerous articles devoted to women who participated in the construction of socialism in Yugoslavia and hailed their achievements. Journalists of *Žena u borbi* drew inspiration from the Soviet example, which they also proposed as guidance for the Yugoslav readership. Given that the first Yugoslav Five-Year Plan was adopted in the spring of 1947, female workers came to the focus of the journalistic attention during that year in the Soviet Union as well as in Yugoslavia. For instance, in August 1947 *Žena u borbi* featured the article "Great Strength" which described a peasant woman, Hana Denisovna, who, despite her old age, became the Soviet Hero of Socialist Labor.[226] In November of the same year the journal featured a similar article about the agricultural successes of Paša Angelina, the first tractor operator in Donetsk and a convinced supporter of the kolkhoz system,[227] and another article about the accomplishments of female Soviet factory workers whose experience was presented as precious help to Yugoslav women factory employees who were just beginning work on the first Five-Year Plan.[228]



[225] *Žena u borbi* 12 (December 1949), front cover. "U borbi za visoku produktivnost rada."
[226] Evgenij Ratner, "Velika snaga," *Žena u borbi* 42 (August 1947), 6-7.
[227] Ada Stahova, "Traktoristkinja iz Donjeckog sela," *Žena u borbi* 45 (November 1947), 19-20.
[228] Nada Sremec, "Sovjetske žene su nam pokazale put," *Žena u borbi* 45 (November 1947), 11-12.

Following the Tito-Stalin Split, Soviet women, their successes in the collective farms or factories notwithstanding, no longer appeared on the pages of *Žena u borbi.* For the next four years, until the introduction of self-management socialism and the consequent diminishment of the role of the shock-worker in the Yugoslav economy, the work and accomplishments of the Yugoslav women factory shock-workers and of peasant women in agricultural cooperatives were the most publicized topics. In comparison between the March issues of *Žena u borbi* from the first postwar issue in 1946 until March 1953 there is a marked transformation in ideological rhetoric. In honor of International Women's Day, first established in 1911 by Klara Zetkin, a renowned German Marxist and women's rights activist, the editors of *Žena u borbi* published numerous articles dedicated to the accomplishments of prominent Yugoslav women in celebration of the date. The development of the economic and political situation in Croatia and Yugoslavia is evident in these articles.

In March of 1947, one month before the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan, the article "Women-Representatives of the People," which featured particularly successful women, presented to the readers information about women who performed various duties within the People's government of Croatia. This article was followed up by an interview with Anka Berus, who was Minister of Finance at the time. The following year, instead of politicians, the focus of interest was on the accomplishments of women scientists. The anonymous author of the article "Work Efforts of Women in Science" stressed that the victory of the partisan army had allowed women to participate in the efforts of the "working intelligence" to elevate Yugoslavia to a higher economic and cultural level.[229]

As the Five-Year Plan gathered pace, so did the number of successful industrial workers and peasants in agricultural cooperatives represented on the pages of *Žena u borbi*. At the

[229] -, "Radni napori žena na polju nauke," *Žena u borbi* 3 (March 1948), 8.

height of the conflict among the Yugoslav leadership and the Cominform, between 1949 and 1951, the trend of highlighting well-educated and, thus, outstanding women who worked in fields that had been previously inaccessible to them was altered. In this period the March issues were saturated with articles about women who excelled in various redevelopment projects. For example, in March 1949, when it became clear that international relations between Yugoslavia and Eastern Block countries were irreparably damaged and that the country was in a precarious economic situation, the feature article of *Žena u borbi*, "We are Building Socialism," discussed the achievements of women in the implementation of the first Five-Year Plan. Similar articles were published over the next two years.

Through these articles two things became clear. First, this period marked the initial stage of Party rule. Party leadership carried out a series of social purges deemed necessary to eliminate potential political threats and established "correctional facilities" for political offenders on *Goli otok*. Thus, journal articles reflected concepts of proper political and social behavior and provided concrete examples that time and again substantiated the ideologically correct attitude women workers should adopt. For example, in a March 1950 article, "Women of Croatia greet March 8 with the Series of Major Successes in Building Socialism," Soka Krajačić wrote:

> March eight, international fighting women's day, we celebrate again this year in the sign of heavy exertions and immense victories of the working people in the execution of the Five-Year Plan. (…) all slanders, political and economic pressures of the CC of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the countries and parties of Cominform have shattered on the steel unity of the working masses of our country gathered around the Communist Party, and the CK KPJ headed by the comrade Tito. In this situation our women have demonstrated their high level of political consciousness and again on this occasion proved that the new socialist Yugoslavia is a homeland they love above all else and that in the struggle for the construction of socialism and in the struggle for the equal relations between the socialist countries they will persevere until the end.[230]

[230] Soka Krajačić, "Žene Hrvatske dočekuju 8. mart nizom krupnih uspjeha u socijalističkoj izgradnji,"

The second point that journalists and editors of the journal considered important was, in accordance with the promotion of the notion that women were as equally capable as men to work, articles attempted to demonstrate that women were willing and able to meet the economic needs of underdeveloped and devastated country. Therefore women's accomplishments, especially in industrial professions, were often emphasized. Women, such as Sonja Erbežnik, a textile worker who was decorated several times as a shock-worker, were represented multiple times over a short period in *Žena u borbi* articles as counterparts to heroic male shock-workers such as Alija Sirotanović, a miner who beat the world record in the coal mining by topping Aleksei Stakhanov's Soviet record. [231]

In the eyes of the Yugoslav communist leadership the People's Liberation Struggle was always a desirable topic to write about and articles about successful women often contained short stories related to their prewar and wartime life. For example, in the article "We are Building Socialism" the anonymous author recounted five biographies of women who experienced misery and poverty in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and then became involved in the NOB. Since the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia they diligently worked on the reconstruction of the country and the development of a socialist society. Through the five biographies the author presented some of the common representations present in the official narrative of the Second World War on the territory of Yugoslavia. According to the author, Matilda Papo, although Ustashas shot her husband and her son died serving in the partisan army, she did not grieve over her losses but "in the partisans became a mother not to one, but



*Žena u borbi* 3 (March 1950), 4. "Osmi mart, međunarodni borbeni dan žena, proslavljamo i ove godine u znaku teških napora i ogromnih pobjeda trudbenika naše zemlje u izvršenju Petogodišnjeg plana. (...) sve klevete, politički i ekonomski pritisak CK SKP(b) i zemalja i partija informbiroa razbili su se o čelično jedinstvo radnih masa naše zemlje okupljenih oko Komunističke partije i CK KPJ na čelu sa drugom Titom. Naše žene u takvoj situaciji pokazale su svoju visoku političku svijest i dokazale i ovom prilikom da je nova socijalistička Jugoslavija takva domovina koju vole iznad svega i da će one u borbi za izgradnju socijalizma i u borbi za ravnopravne odnose među socijalističkim zemljama istrajati do kraja."

[231] For example: Nataša Popovicki, "Sonja Erbežnik," *Žena u borbi* 11 (November 1949), 12-13.

to hundreds of children."[232] Anka Matić had been in France when the war began. There she became the secretary of the communist emigration organization in order to help the partisans. Following the end of the war she returned to Zagreb where, as a professor of psychology, she taught her students "to become good experts and conscious builders of socialism like herself." [233] Furthermore, Marija Ivanec, although a mother of two young children and pregnant with the third, decided to leave the territory under the control of the Ustasha in order to give birth to her baby in a partisan hospital. Although her newborn soon died of frostbite, she did not surrender. Instead, she joined the local AFŽ branch where she was the most active member responsible for the initiation of reading groups and various educational courses. Milica Karas, a machine gunner during the war, became a factory worker and, according to the author, remained fighter in peacetime in the construction of socialism. Finally, the author described the life of Cvita Glišić who during the war was active in many roles as "courier, nurse, sister and mother of the fighters."[234] The author stressed the diversity of life stories of women who participated in the NOB. Besides underpinning political and economic articles with stories about the NOB, *Žena u borbi* featured full-lenth articles, short literary works and poems about the Second World War in Yugoslavia and women's participation in it. Despite the ostensible variety of genres and the diversity of the personal narratives, the experiences of mothers constitute the dominant trope of women's wartime narratives. The other is the experiences of *partizanke*.[235]

For the first time after three years the leading article in the edition of March 1952 did not feature women workers. Instead, the date was used as a pretext to recall the wartime celebration of the International Women's Day and expose the hardships women endured on

[232] -, "Gradimo socijalizam," *Žena u borbi* 3 (March 1949), 17. "je u partizanima postala majka ne jednom već stotinama djece."
[233] Ibid, "da postanu kao i ona dobri stručnjaci i svijesni graditelji socijalizma."
[234] Ibid, 16. "kurir, bolničarka, sestra i majka boraca."
[235] Jambrešić Kirin, *Dom i svijet*, 58.

the island of Brač (Dalmatia) in 1944 because they had written slogans on the walls of the town on the occasion of March 8.[236] While the event of writing slogans describes the six women as willing to destabilize the German authority in any way accessible to them and to help their comrades, the article is set up in the way that the women's activity seems to merely provide the background to detailed narrative about their distress in captivity. The article about Nada Dimić was similar in tone and reported how this eighteen-year-old SKOJ member withstood several months of torture in Karlovac and Zagreb prisons without disclosing even her name,[237] and in the article "The Memories About the Atrocities Committed by Italian Fascists are Still Living" the author described the different ways in which women partisans were tortured in Italian prisons. Unfortunately, the author did not include the names of all the women mentioned or what they did in the NOB or how they survived the ordeal.[238]

In the early 1950s the editorial board of *Žena u borbi* did not feature more articles about women's participation in the Second World War than in previous years, these kind of articles were still habitually published to mark the establishment of the AFŽH or important dates such as the Day of the Uprising of the People of Croatia and the Day of the Army, but the emphasis of the articles changed. The ways in which women contributed to the war effort ceased to be of the primary interest and instead, articles began to stress the level of suffering women experienced as a result of their involvement, both emotionally, due to the loss of family members, or physically, while in enemy captivity. The editors seemingly resort to the exploitation of women's personal wartime traumas in an effort to counter fading interest in shock-workers and in an effort to muster support and vigilance against the external and internal threat of political enemies of the state. For instance, they were attempting in part to stir the emotions of the people who lived through the Italian occupation in order to attract

[236] -, "8. mart," *Žena u borbi* 3 (March 1952), 1.
[237] -, "Nada Dimić," *Žena u borbi* 3 (March 1951), 12-13.
[238] -, "Još su živa sjećanja na zlodjela talijanskih fašista," *Žena u borbi* 5 (May 1952), 2-3.

their interest and support in resolving the issue of the Free Territory of Trieste (*Slobodni teritorij Trsta,* STT)[239] which gained importance during this period. Thus, the destinies of women who were involved in the NOP and served in NOV were used to manipulate public support for political needs.

In the postwar period only rarely did articles about women in war clearly reflect the past experiences of the authors themselves. The clearest examples are the article "Our Work-Our Response," published in August 1948, and the article "July 27th-The Day of The Uprising of the People in Croatia" published in June 1949. The former article appeared shortly after the Yugoslav leadership publicly disclosed information about the disagreements between Stalin and Tito and allegations surfaced against Yugoslavia and only days after the KPJ's Fifth Congress. "Our Work-Our Response" appeared in the journal immediately following a presentation given by Tito on the first day of the Fifth Congress on the history and the importance of the KPJ.

Although the author of "Our Work-Our Response" ostensibly wrote on behalf of all the women of Zagreb who participated in and contributed to the struggle against the enemy, she started the article by denominating exclusively the "progressive women" of Zagreb, a small group of the prewar members of the Party who had already before the war followed the ideologically correct path led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Subsequently, she continued, these women provided the foundation for the establishment of AFŽH in Zagreb at the end of 1941 and "via their organization most actively cooperated in the NOP."[240] Thus,



[239] Under the auspices of the United Nations all the victorious powers of World War II met in February 1947 and signed the peace agreement with Italy. This treaty sanctioned the establishment of the STT as a temporary solution to the territorial dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav government administered the southern part of the STT, the so-called "Zone B," and the northern part which included the city of Trieste, known as "Zone A," was under the military rule of the United States and Great Britain. After a series of negotiations the London Treaty confirmed full integration of the "Zone B" into Yugoslavia and most of "Zone A" into Italy.

[240] GO AFŽH, "Naš rad-naš odgovor," *Žena u borbi* 8 (August 1948), 12. "(…) preko svoje organizacije najaktivnije sarađivale u NOP-u."

from her narrative she left out the women who were supporting the endeavors of the AFŽ branch in Zagreb, but did not have contact with the "progressive women" before the war, or who acted on their own. For example, Diana Budisavljević kept a detailed journal and card index that testify to her endeavor to save more than fifteen thousand children from the Ustasha camps. Since she was a native Austrian who managed so much with the help of a small number of nonaffiliated individuals, immediately after the war secret police appropriated all the files related to her wartime activities and her success remained unknown until the publication of her journal.[241]

Finally, the author concluded the article "Our Work-Our Response" by expressing the love that the women of Zagreb felt for the KPJ and for comrade Tito.[242] This article was an instant response to the Resolution of the Cominform and expressed the personal testimony of the author who was, undoubtedly, a member of the Zagreb branch of the AFŽH, a participant or organizer of numerous listed activities and an idealist who believed, like many others, in the better future of Yugoslavia. At the same time, this article was not only an expression of belief but of fear, too. Instead of writing, for example, about the first AFŽH district in Lika and the work that women members conducted in the midst enemy occupation and terror, or about an extraordinary individual like Diana Budisavljević, the author choose to write specifically about the AFŽH in Zagreb. Thus, it is most likely she was a part of it during as well as after the war. That way she attempted to prove that her activism, as well as activities of women working with her, was always in compliance with the interests of the Party.

Similarly, Mitra Mitrović wrote in her memoir, the biography of a comrade can be written in four points starting with the time of acceptance to the Party, followed by a description of the person's activities in the Party and Party organizations and their demeanor in jail, if he or

[241] See more in: Diana Budisavljević, *Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević: 1941-1945.* (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv; Jasenovac: Javna ustanova Spomen-područje, 2003).
[242] GO AFŽH, "Naš rad-naš odgovor," 13.

she had been imprisoned. The final point refers to person's life during the Second World War, that is, whether the NOB makes a part of his or hers biography or not.[243] After 1948, attitudes toward the Resolution of the Cominform marked another point vital to the life of a Yugoslav communist, and it was of utmost importance for the author of the article to keep their personal resume unstained and, hence, their future secured.

The second very interesting article is "July 27th-The Day of The Uprising of the People in Croatia" published in June of 1949. Unlike the previous article, which was written in the name of the Main Council of the AFŽH of Zagreb by an anonymous author, this article was authored by Milka Kufrin. She was a member of the Socialist Youth Union of Yugoslvia (SKOJ) from 1938, and a member of KPJ from June 1941. In October 1941 she left Zagreb to join the partisans in Kordun where she worked as a member of the SKOJ and participated in armed combat. She was one of the first women to receive permission to go "to the woods" and the very first who served as a commissar of the *četa*. She became famous for her audacity throughout the partisan army as well as in the enemy ranks and was thus declared a national hero in 1953.[244]

Kufrin began her article by criticizing the leadership of the U.S.S.R. and the cosignatories of the infamous Resolution who, she claims, "cannot erase the sufferings and the sacrifices women made for the liberation of our country from the memories of our peoples or from the memories of our women."[245] To illustrate women's sufferings and sacrifice, Kufrin provided several examples of women whom she considered the most deserving of recognition for their contributions during the war, *partizanke* and nurses who served in the combat units.



[243] Mitrović, *Ratno putovanje*, 223-224.

[244] -, *Heroine Hrvatske odlikovane ordenom Narodnog heroja* (Zagreb: www.deseti-korpus.com, 2011), 26.

[245] Milka Kufrin, "27. jula-Dan narodnog ustanka u Hrvatskoj," *Žena u borbi* 6 (June 1949), 11. "(…)ne mogu izbrisati iz sjecanja nasih naroda, iz sjecanja nasih zena stradanja i zrtve koje su dali za oslobodjenje svoje zemlje."

Comparing areas where she worked throughout the war with places where the women she mentioned served, it is most likely that she personally knew the women she mentioned in the article. Similar to the anonymous author of the former article, Kufrin writes about aspects of the war she was most familiar with. However, in contrast to the first author's focus on herself and the relatively isolated group with which she associated, Kufrin highlights the actions of other women who she felt deserved recognition and commendation rather than drawing attention to her own actions. Furthermore, she wrote her article at the height of the conflict between Tito and Stalin and related it to that context which restricts the breadth of collective memory about women who served in the NOV. Nevertheless, she acknowledged them and emphasized the significance of their actions even though the trend of articles in the journal marginalized women's wartime experiences in favor of detailing the success of workers and peasants who were now considered more significant because they actively contributed to the construction of socialism in the particular moment when many felt vulnerable and when longstanding loyalty and past successes did not always count.

***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I strove to demonstrate the range of topics the editorial board of *Žena u borbi* selected, at the same time differentiating between the publishing policy that originated under wartime circumstances from that shaped in the postwar period. Furthermore, I sought to contextualize choices made by the journalists and editorial board by connecting them to the wider political and social currents in Yugoslavia. In the last section of the chapter I introduced the personal dimension of the wartime narratives presented through two contrasting articles published in the journal.

After presenting the essentials of the official image of the women partisans, in the second section I analyzed several wartime articles that give the impression of restraint of the AFŽH

officials towards the *partizanke*. The number and choice of articles published about women partisans suggests that the members of the AFŽH were trying to understand why they were fighting in the NOV in the first place. The solution capitan Desa Miljenović proposed in the article "The Women Heroes" points to a prevalent fear of women who chose killing instead of caring and an attempt to define them through the traditional concept of protective motherhood.

In the third section, I presented the development of the editorial publishing policy throughout the postwar period until 1953. While World War II and the NOB were recurring topics present in many articles that were not primarily devoted to the war, the editorial board preferred articles about current activities and achievements of women. Thus, they first focused on women who participated in voluntary labor actions, and then, after the implementation of the first Five-Year Plan in 1947 and even more after the Tito-Stalin split in summer of 1948, they strongly emphasized the accomplishments of women in the agricultural cooperatives and of industrial workers, especially the shock-workers.

Throughout the postwar period the editors implemented a practice of publishing articles exclusively on the People's Liberation Struggle only when commemorating important anniversaries. In the early 1950s, when publishing the articles about women in NOV, the editorial board developed a new trend that tended to disregard women's contributions to the struggle and their achievements in order to emphasize their, especially physical suffering. The article "The Memories About the Atrocities Committed by Italian Fascists are Still Living" is an exemplification of such practice.

In sum, AFŽH officials who edited *Žena u borbi* stressed through their publishing policy the importance of women who exercised political equality performing the duties and contributing to the activities organized by the AFŽH. Therefore, the overall image of

women's contributions and accomplishments is skewed in the journal in favor of women who worked during the war on the homefront under the guidance of the AFŽH. Furthermore, in the circumstances where every article seems to have been connected to the wider political situation in the country and carrying a particular message, only rarely did published articles present personal recollections of the *partizanke*. Milka Kufrin had the authority to have such an article published, and hers was one of the few articles that appeared in the postwar period that plainly spoke about her comrades in arms without exploiting their successes or sufferings for political or personal gain.

## CONCLUSION

In the final section of this project, I am revisiting the very beginning. One hundred thousand women who supported the partisan struggle as fighters make an unparalleled example to any other war in the history of Yugoslavia. What happened to all those women partisans after the war? Similarly to both U.S.S.R. and the Western Allies, the vast majority of women were expelled from the army. While AFŽH arranged their further employment, a few that remained served in clerical positions and medical corps.[246] Moreover, Jelena Batinić reports that in the early 1950s women were excluded from all professions where they were obliged to carry weaponry, i.e. from the People's Militia (*Narodna milicija*).[247] Although professional opportunities for women significantly expanded with the establishment of the socialist Yugoslavia, the gender division of labor continued to influence the government's employment policies. As Batinić notices, wartime women partisans no longer served in the army, but "moved to the realm of cultural representation and memory. In the first postwar decades, [they were] a ubiquitous symbol of the new state-a revolutionary icon par excellence."[248]

This project focuses on the officials of the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia (AFŽH) and the manner in which they managed the legacy of the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB). More precisely, it discusses the solutions they utilized when adapting the memory of *partizanke* to their more conservative worldview and political interests. While the state ideologues and historians who were favored by the Party leadership shaped the official narrative about the NOB, different organizations had the task of guarding the memory of the war. Thus, one of the AFŽ's numerous duties was the preservation of the memory of women's participation in the war including the memory surrounding the activities of female partisans.

In order to reveal the ways in which, and to what extent, the Antifascist Front of Women of Croatia followed the guidelines of the official master narrative concerning female partisans,

[246] Batinić, "Gender, Revolution and War," 294.
[247] Ibid, 293.
[248] Ibid, 294.

this thesis focuses on the organization's official journal *Woman in Combat* (*Žena u borbi*). Analysis of the journal shows that the AFŽH's officials who edited *Žena u borbi* reformed the collective memory of women partisans as it was perceived by the leadership of Yugoslavia and formulated in a vast body of state-sponsored literature that dealt with the partisan struggle. The editorial board and authors who contributed to the journal did not simply duplicate the official narrative. They re-interpreted it in a way meaningful to them by focusing on the aspects they experienced and considered important, predominantly through the narratives about the contribution of women organized by the AFŽ and their sacrifices as mothers and wives of partisans who died during the war, thereby emphasizing their understanding of the war and promoting concepts relevant to them.

The first chapter of the thesis provides a short analysis of World War II in Yugoslavia with emphasis on the performance of the Communist Party as a decisive factor in the outcome of the war of resistance in the country. While discussing the postwar period, the chapter focuses on the Tito-Stalin split, which proved to be a turning point in the history of Yugoslavia. This conflict prompted the Party leadership to revamp their interpretation of communist doctrine and from firm adherents to the Soviet-type socialism evolve into architects of "the new way into socialism"[249] through the institution of self-management. This historical context in which AFŽH emerged and developed conditioned the goals and policies of the organization. For the communist leadership AFŽH was primarily envisaged as an organization in charge of coordination of women's activities on the homefront. However, during the war, as well as in the immediate postwar period, AFŽH officials strongly emphasized their role as educators of the masses of uneducated women.

The second chapter, predominantly based on the published primary sources available in the collection *Women of Croatia in the People's Liberation Struggle* (*Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*), demonstrates the ways in which AFŽH officials prioritized the education of women as a means of creating favorable preconditions for their future in socialist Yugoslavia. In other words, education coupled with interventions in law was supposed to

[249] Goldstein, *1941.*, 430.

bring about the desired equality of women and men. However, during the war, as a rule women partisans could not participate in the activities of the AFŽH due to restrictions imposed by military service. Hence, they were prevented from obtaining the necessary education that AFŽH officials considered essential for their future accomplishments.

The editions of *Žena u borbi* indicate that members of the Antifascist Front of Women were under the influence of the traditional Yugoslav worldview that defined women primarily through motherhood and femininity and assumed that there is an *a priori* "women's place". *Afežejke* were fully prepared to educate women who were, in turn, expected to use their newly acquired knowledge to redefine the "women's place" through entry into the workforce, i.e. in the way their teachers conceived the process of emancipation. At the same time, AFŽH officials were not prepared to admit that service in the army was one possible avenue to a successful emancipatory process. Therefore, when they published articles about, for example, women industrial workers, the authors reported new opportunities that had opened up for women and women's great achievements. On the other hand, when they published the articles about female partisans, they seemed to justify women's presence in the military service as if they did not belong there.

Furthermore, due to political currents in the country, the great need for reconstruction and the conflict with Cominform, AFŽH officials considered it opportune to emphasize current rather than past successes of women. Moreover, since women partisans experienced a side of war that AFŽH officials had not known firsthand, the officials wrote about successes that were familiar to them as organizers of the homefront. Consequently, personal memories about the women partisans could competently retell only a person like Milka Kufrin. She was herself a partisan, but, similar to during the war, she was courageous enough to point out the achievements that her female comrades-in-arms accomplished during their military service, instead of writing of her own actions.

While conducting my research, I encountered some limitations. First, *Žena u borbi* was an official journal of a state organization and, therefore, all the narratives presented in the journal had the same goal. The editorial board made sure all the articles, fragments from literature,

poems and reader's letters they published contributed and testified to the successes of the communist leadership and the socialist system in Yugoslavia. This publishing policy limited the findings of this thesis on the dominant narrative about the NOB as AFŽH officials interpreted it, while leaving out the silenced voices. Second, although I intended to diversify by introducing published personal narratives, I did not discover any published diaries or memoirs written by female partisans. Therefore, I was unable to address all the issues I originally intended to, principally, how the recollections of female partisans differ from the narrative presented in *Žena u borbi.*

Finally, AFŽH regularly communicated with the Antifascist Front of Women of Yugoslavia (AFŽJ), as well as the Party. Renata Jambrešić Kirin points out that both the Party and the AFŽJ sometimes criticized the publishing policy of the editorial board in Zagreb, but does not elaborate further.[250] Since AFŽH was an organization that operated on the republic level, this thesis fills a void in the historiography that discusses the collective memory of women's wartime activity in the People's Republic of Croatia and provides ground for future research that would widen the scope to the federative level and explore the publishing politics on the level of Yugoslavia as well as the relationship of the AFŽH and the center of the organization in Belgrade. Another interesting direction of research can delve into the development of the collective memory related to the People's Liberation Struggle in the official press after the dissolution of the AFŽ and the emergence of poorly researched and largely neglected successor organization Union of Women Societies (SŽD).



[250] Jambrešić Kirin, "Žene u formativnom socijalizmu," 196.

## APPENDIX 1.

Geogrije-Žorž Skirgin's Kozarčanka (Milja Marin)

## APPENDIX 2.

Front Cover of the First Issue of *Žena u borbi*

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