Yugoslav Revolutionary Legacy: Female Soldiers and Activists in Nation-Building and Cultural Memory, 1941-1989

Maja Antonić
Western Kentucky University, maja.antic@topper.wku.edu

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YUGOSLAV REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY:
FEMALE SOLDIERS AND ACTIVISTS IN NATION-BUILDING AND CULTURAL MEMORY, 1941-1989

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
Western Kentucky University
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Master of Arts

By
Maja Antonić

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YUGOSLAV REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY: FEMALE SOLDIERS AND ACTIVISTS
IN NATION-BUILDING AND CULTURAL MEMORY, 1941-1989

Date Recommended: 04/10/2019

Dr. Marko Dumančić, Director of Thesis

Dr. Dorothea Browder

Dr. Marla Zabel

Cheryl O. Davis  4/10/19
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research  Date
Za mog Didu Hasana Hadžihalilovića i sve Jugoslovenke,
*Smrt Fašizmu, Sloboda Narodu!*

To my grandfather Hasan Hadžihalilović and all Yugoslav women,
*Death to Fascism, Freedom to People*
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While women are often excluded and/or portrayed as victims in the historical scholarship on war, this research builds on recent scholarship that shows women as active agents in warfare. I focus on Yugoslavia’s WWII Partizankas, female soldiers and activists, who held visible positions in the war effort, public consciousness and, later memory. Using gender as a category of analysis, my thesis explores Partizankas’ legacy and their contributions in the National Liberation Movement (NLM) in WWII (1941-1945) and post-war nation building. I argue that the organizational framework of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front (AWF) under the guidance of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) emphasized women’s ethnic/religious identities along with distinct social standings and geographic locations to motivate them to fight for the common cause and subsequently forge a shared South Slavic identity. This emphasis on ethnic/regional/class differences paradoxically led to the creation of a common Yugoslav national identity. Women’s involvement, therefore, becomes central to the nation-building in the post-war period while establishing the legacy for future feminists. I characterize NLM as a Marxist guerrilla movement with the intent to contextualize the organizational tactics and ideological efforts of CPY and showcase the commonalities and differences the Yugoslav resistance movement had vis-à-vis other revolutionary movements that actively recruited women. Furthermore, the thesis focuses on the representations of Partizankas in popular culture and official rhetoric from WWII to the
demise of Yugoslavia in 1991 in order explore the fluidity of gender roles and their perceptions. This research is meaningful because NLM, as an organized Marxist guerrilla movement, stands out in its size, success and legacy. The Yugoslav experience broadens the understanding of why women go to war, how gender norms shift during and after the conflict, and how female soldiers are remembered.
INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s, Lepa Brena (Fahreta née Jahić Živojinović), a pop-folk singer and Yugoslav cultural icon, catapulted to the fame in then Yugoslavia. She became a symbol of Yugoslav womanhood with her long legs, blonde hair, and blue eyes which she invokes in the now classic song Yugoslav Woman (Jugoslovenka). In the music video, Lepa Brena flies over Yugoslavia as she playfully responds to male singers who are amazed by her beauty. One of those male voices, a rock singer Alen Islamović’s, flirtatiously asks her where she comes from. She retorts that her eyes are the Adriatic Sea, her hair the “ears of the Pannonian wheat” and her sister is the “Slavic soul,” she is a Yugoslav woman.¹ On a personal level, Lepa Brena who is originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, raised by Muslim parents, and married to a Serbian, embodied the supranational Yugoslav identity. This fusion of ethnic/religious/regional characteristics in her both public and private personas suggest the success of a national formation, at least at the cultural level. Almost two decades after the Yugoslav dissolution, she referred to herself as Yugo-nostalgic while proclaiming: “If someone has the right to declare

¹ Jugoslovenka was released on the eve of the Yugoslav Wars in 1989, suggesting that Yugoslav idea continued to resonate. Here, she refers to the ancient Pannonian Sea which stretched from Central Europe all the way to Serbia, now covered with plentiful ears of wheat. Alen Islamović, a member of a legendary Yugoslav band White Button (Bijelo Dugme) joined her in this song which continues to be both contested and popular song. Jugoslovenka is still in Lepa Brena’s repertoire. More recently, in 2018 she started using the Yugoslav flag in her music videos and at her concerts. More on the subject: See Mirjana Narandžić, “Why is it still important how we sing?” BalkanInsight, (2008). https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/14/why-is-it-still-important-how-we-sing-05-11-2018/

The song lyrics in Serbo-Croatian:
“Oči su mi more Jadranško
Kose su mi klasje Panonsko
Sestra mi je duša Slovenska
Ja sam Jugoslovenka.”

* Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Serbo-Croatian are my own.
oneself as a Croat or a Serb, I have the right to declare myself as a Yugoslav woman.”

Her song symbolized a full transformation into a “New Woman” started by the socialist Yugoslav Partizanka and Partisans under the guidance of Marshall Josip Broz Tito during their revolutionary efforts in World War II and onward. Despite the breakup of Yugoslavia, some still adhere to the Yugoslav idea suggesting the continuity of its cultural relevance while others see Lepa Brena as the last of Yugoslav women.

However, the female representations in the post-World War II Yugoslav collective memory, with which Lepa Brena grew up, did not show their legs or blonde hair. Instead the image of Partizanka in the uniform wearing a cap with the red star and carrying a gun became engrained in the public consciousness as symbols of a successfully executed revolution and strong, willful Yugoslav women. The Yugoslav national project therefore appears synonymous with the women’s advancement within the socialist framework. After Partizanka start to wane from public memory in 1970s and on, the Yugoslav idea begins to weaken in 1980s and 1990s. This interconnectedness between female and the fate of the Yugoslav national project suggests that women became crucial actors in nation-building process as they actively engaged, participated, agitated around the Yugoslav cause as soldiers, activists, nurses, care takers, couriers, gunmen, clandestine operatives, etc. Furthermore, in their roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, and independent women, they continuously improved women’s and children’s conditions within Yugoslavia, first guided by the Anti-Fascist Front of Women (AFW) (1941-1953) as an umbrella organization of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY).

\[2 S.C., \text{“Lepa Brena: Nisam ni Hrvatica ni Srpkinja, ja sam Jugoslavenka!” Index, 12/08/2008}\]
and later, as individual scholars and feminists in loosely defined organizations such as SKOJ or Praxis in the 1970s and 1980s, establishing their own, unique, Yugoslav feminism. Those same women will become pacifist voices during the Yugoslav wars of 1990s.

This research resurrects the memory of Partizankas while addressing a series of questions: Did war, as a moment of crisis, help in reforming a patriarchal society? How did AFW, as an extension of CPY, manage to reconcile religious/ethnic and geographic distinctions among its female members? Were they successful in the post-war period and what was their legacy? How were these female soldiers and activists remembered in the post-war collective memory? How do we situate Yugoslav women’s experience during World War II within the international context considering their unprecedented achievements? Was their participation exclusively a (East) European phenomenon? Can the Yugoslav female experience deepen our understanding of post-colonial and post-socialist spaces? Or was their experience simply unique designed by circumstances of the Europe’s backyard – the Balkans? What can the Yugoslav example inform about the women’s involvement in the revolutionary movements? While answering these questions, I emphasize the continuity and showcase that women’s movement and Yugoslav idea continues to inform the societies of post-Yugoslav states.

**Scholarship and Methodology**

The same year when Lepa Brena came out with her song *Yugoslav Woman*, Yugoslav sociologist Lydia Sklevicky highlighted the lack of female figures in Yugoslav textbooks which contradicted the established myths of a successfully completed women’s emancipation. Sklevicky went further to argue that animals, particularly horses, appeared
in higher numbers than women in history textbooks designated for the fifth through eighth grades. High school textbooks showed lower numbers of female figures totaling six female names from 1918-to 1970. This pioneering work *Horses, Women, Wars* (Konji, žene, ratovi) intended to start the conversation about AFW achievements and showcased the importance of women within the Yugoslav project, while illuminating their erasure. Coincidentally, during the same year in the West, Barbara Jančar-Webster published her monograph *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945* which illuminated women’s efforts in Yugoslavia during and after World War. Jančar-Webster concludes that “the women who sacrificed their lives to defeat the invaders and protect their homes were in a very real sense victims of the Party that called them to its standard.” Furthermore, she informs that change for women in Yugoslavia can come through the democratic reforms alone. However, further discussion had to wait for more than a decade since the Yugoslav wars erupted (1991-1995) and women came to be portrayed as victimized actors in the war-torn regions of a “tribal and backward” Balkans. The WWII legacy seemed to have almost entirely vanished.

In 2015, however, historian Jelena Batinić published the monograph on Yugoslav Partizankas in which she examined gender as a mobilization tool utilized by CPY in rhetoric, Partisans’ institutions and daily practices to analyze the impact on gender norms. Although this monograph offers invaluable insights on Partizankas and explores previously omitted areas of research, Batinić leaves the Jančar-Websters’s approach unchallenged. In her dissertation, a precursor to the monography Batinić refers to “so

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called National Liberation Army”\textsuperscript{5} which reflects her skepticism of CPY. An anthropologist Chiara Bonfiglioli, correctly posits that these scholars “ultimately undermine women’s roles as organizational and political leaders, and their different degrees of agency in promoting new gender imaginaries that attempted to establish a ‘universalizing’ discourse of women’s equality across classes, geographical locations and ethnicities.”\textsuperscript{6} Although the Jančar-Webster and Batinić offer cautionary insights into the remarkable organizational activities of AFW and Partizankas, they nevertheless fail to contextualize Yugoslav women’s experience within the parameters of war and Titoist socialism and ultimately underestimate Yugoslav women’s agency. In this thesis project, I situate Partizankas in their rightful historical place while emphasizing the continuity of Yugoslav women’s movement which became an inspiration to female activists in the post-socialist era in ex-Yugoslav republics. Removing the communist regime did not bring about improvements for women as Jančar-Webster suggests. Instead the post-Yugoslav societies, supposedly democratic, often downplay women’s issues and focus on re-traditionalizing of gender roles with the help of religious institutions.

Since Partizankas pushed for changes for both their country and their gender during World War II, it is necessary to treat war as a transformative state. In times of crisis, previously unavailable opportunities opened up to women and revised the relationships vis a vis the authorities and citizenship itself. Additionally, this approach debunks theories among gender and war scholars which portray women and children


\textsuperscript{6} Chiara Bonfiglioli, “AFŽ Activists’ Biographies: An Intersectional Reading of Women’s Agency,” In The Lost Revolution: AFŽ Between Myth and Forgetting, Andrea Dugandžić and Tijana Okić, eds., (Sarajevo: Association for Culture and Art CRVENA, 2018), 22.
solely as victimized actors during wars, who suffer the most under the violent circumstances. A growing scholarship on women’s involvement in war shifts the perspective on wartime violence’s effect on women; in Yugoslavia World War II “restructured women’s lives and allowed for some women’s increased participation in public, political spaces.” This thesis presents war as a transformational experience in some women’s lives debunks stereotypical views of women exclusively as victims and portrays them as agency-driven subjects.

To situate Yugoslav Partizankas in the international context, I compare them to Vietnamese and Latin American (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas) female revolutionary soldiers and activists, who like Partizankas, engaged in their respective nation-building projects while transforming local gender norms. To do so, I borrow Karen Kampwirth’s approach to define revolution not only as a stage when war erupts but as a more comprehensive term (la revolución) which includes a “period of political, economic and social transformation” that comes after the armed conflicts traditionally labeled as “post-revolutionary period.” Viewing revolution as an ongoing process allows me to track the continuity of women’s involvement as is evident in the case of Yugoslav Partizankas. This thesis adds to the debates among revolutionary studies scholars and reconceptualizes the comparative framework across time and space. The comparison illuminates a unique Yugoslav position as an “in-between” actor on the international

10 Karen Kampwirth, Jocelyn Vintema.
stage as the only European country in the Non-Aligned Movement which allows for comparative analysis with other women despite of their temporal, geographical and historical positioning in the world. Global sisterhood, like Yugoslav sisterhood, informs the ways in which women organize, agitate, and transform their respective spaces while allowing for shared experiences among women in the revolutionary movements. These transnational links based on common goals can expand the conceptualization of international contexts when viewed from the feminist lens.

Remembering and preserving the collective memory becomes crucial, particularly in the post-Yugoslav setting when the past appears brighter than the future. Rampant ethnic nationalisms, fascism, and intolerance enabled by kleptocracies and encouraged by religious institutions, call out for examples from the past when brotherhood, unity and, yes, sisterhood, served as ideals in the multi-ethnic Yugoslav society. The majority of current scholarship on cultural memory focuses on Yugo-nostalgia, a term derived from a positive sentiment toward the socialist project. As sociologist Ivana Spasić suggests in her exploration of contemporary Serbian society: “the majority remembers socialist Yugoslavia in laudatory tone, with the feeling of loss and nostalgia.”\textsuperscript{11} Collective memory formation in the Yugoslav context acquires a specialized meaning devoid of ideological impetus. Svetlana Boym coins two tendencies of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. The former centers on the efforts to “rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps,” the latter focuses on the reconstruction of monuments of the past to commemorate “the dreams of another place and another time.”\textsuperscript{12} This reflective nostalgia

in the Yugoslav context proves the continuity of collective memory about socialist Yugoslavia.

The main source of primary evidence comes from an online Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia (AFW Archive) which includes AFW documents, reports, publications, audio interviews, research and other archival collections. Established by Andreja Dugandžić and Adela Jušić in 2015, the archive aims “to motivate our new struggles—on fronts that we need to identify, in numerous battles that we need to win. The revolution has taken place. Let’s start another one!” The fact that younger generations engage in this AFW Archive showcases that Partizankas’ legacy endures. Particularly, among women who encourage trans-ethnic tolerance, improvement of women’s status and the preservation of Yugoslav history, Partizanka’s inheritance gains renewed significance.

**Organization**

In Chapter One I trace the development of Yugoslav national idea from the 19th-century Illyrianist movement to the supranational Yugoslav identity by World War II. I argue that the CPY and AFW created hybrid identities by fusing women’s diverse ethnic and religious identifiers along with distinct class identities. This emphasis on ethnic, regional, and class differences paradoxically led to the creation of a common supra-national identity. Partizankas’ contribution to identity creation becomes inseparable from the larger Yugoslav project. While fighting and supporting the war effort, I emphasize the unprecedented achievements made by AFW activists for both their country and their gender. Again, with a focus on continuity, I suggest that on the institutional level, women

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13 Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, stated on the main page of the archive, http://afzarhiv.org/da-zivi-afz
superseded those of their western counterparts who underwent “second wave” feminism only in 1970s.

Chapter Two concerns itself with the international context in order to showcase how Yugoslav Partizankas fared against other revolutionary women who occupied marginal positions within their respective regions. Here, I employ cross-temporal, geographical, and historical comparisons to emphasize women’s shared experiences within the revolutionary movements. I explore women from Vietnam (1970s), Nicaragua and El Salvador (1970s-1980s) to demonstrate the parallels that these women shared without undermining their idiosyncrasies. Surprisingly, Yugoslav women had more in common with indigenous women from Chiapas than those who followed the same Marxist ideologies. I situate Yugoslav women in post-socialist and post-colonial spaces to emphasize how in many respects, these Balkan women from the Europe’s backyard have more in common with women from Latin American and Asia. This chapter positions Yugoslav women in a unique place in Europe and the rest of the world thanks to the historical developments (internal, regional and global).

In Chapter Three I focus on Partizankas’ representations in Yugoslav cinema, Yugoslav historiography and Yugoslav public spaces from 1945 to contemporary times. The exploration of popular culture and official imagery reveals the depth of Partizankas’ penetration into public consciousness and memory. Partizankas became symbols of trans-ethnic nation building, a victorious revolution, and indicators of progressive politics in action. These achievements appeared in popular culture and official imagery and rhetoric to testify to the visibility of female fighters and activists in public memory.
When taken together, these chapters explore historical legacy of Partizankas in then Yugoslavia and position them as crucial actors in the NLM and post-war nation-building process cemented in the Yugoslav collective memory. In the international context, their achievements during World War II and later in postwar Yugoslavia, stand out as Partizankas and subsequent generations of Yugoslav women continued to advocate for women’s rights within the socialist framework. The following pages situate socialist women as agency driven individuals who when presented with opportunities rallied around to improve the conditions for both their gender and their respective nations. This research adds to the current scholarship on Yugoslav women and focuses the attention on Partizankas themselves and their activities in AFW. More broadly, the transnational comparisons provide a conceptual framework which allows cross-temporal and cross-geographical analysis.
CHAPTER ONE

PARTIZANKAS’S LEGACY: NATION-BUILDING AND FEMINISM

During World War II, Partizankas, or female soldiers and activists, mobilized in unprecedented numbers to contribute to the anti-fascist fight on the territory of former Yugoslavia. In an interview, a 90-year-old Partizanka, Lucija Mavrić, reflects on her mindset at the time of war: “Do not treat me differently than men, if they can do it I can do it, too. I did not want to be anything else than a fighter. I could have been a nurse, but I was brave, I wanted to be a solider.”\(^\text{14}\) Commemorated for courage, Lucija Mavrić, along with approximately 100,000 other Partizankas, resolved to join the National Liberation Movement\(^\text{15}\) (NLM) led by the communist leader Josip Broz Tito.\(^\text{16}\) Under the directives of Anti-Fascist Women’s Front (AFW), a branch of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), female activists and soldiers mobilized to rid the country of the enemy while simultaneously advancing women’s rights, which suffered during the royal Yugoslavia. Up to two million women joined the movement in some capacity under the AFW directives. This means that out of approximately seven million women, 28.7 percent, or roughly a third, engaged in a war effort in a multitude of ways.\(^\text{17}\) Unlike the


\(^{15}\) Narodnooslobodilačka Borba or NOB in Serbo-Croatian language. This liberation movement under the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) emerged during World War II as Marxist guerrilla movement to fight against the German, Italian and Hungarian occupations and against the collaborators such as Ustašas in NDH (Independent Croatian State). Partisans and Partizankas as NLM soldiers also fought Četniks who supported the Kingdom of Yugoslavia’s exiled government with King Peter at its head and who also collaborated with Italian fascists and Nazi Germans. NLM went from a marginal group to a full-fledged standing army by the end of the war and it became the most important founding element in newly created Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia.


Ustaša and Četnik movements,\textsuperscript{18} the CPY tapped into women’s demands for education and emancipation in return for their support during the war. In this chapter, I argue that the CPY and AFW created hybrid identities by fusing women’s diverse ethnic/religious identifiers along with distinct class identities.

This emphasis on ethnic/regional/class differences paradoxically led to the creation of a common supra-national identity. Or, as cultural historian Andrew Wachtel points out: “…the Yugoslav Communists tried to create a supranational culture that would overarch rather than link the separate national cultures.”\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, I reveal female presence in armed conflicts as normal rather than exceptional and portray them as individuals who not only chose to pick up arms when presented with opportunities but also fully engage in nation-building as active participants. Partizankas embraced the promises made by CPY that would solve women’s question after the war and readily contributed to the NLM as activists, nurses, medics, gunners, soldiers, suppliers, etc. The reciprocal relationship between women and communist authorities furthered women’s status in Tito’s Yugoslavia and allowed for drastic changes in post-war era for women in particular and Yugoslav society in general.

Viewing war as a transformational experience in some women’s lives debunks stereotypical views of women as victims and portrays them as agency-driven subjects. Traditionally victimized actors during wars, such as women and children, suffer the most,


at least according to some scholars.\textsuperscript{20} However, treating war as a transformative process which provides previously unavailable opportunities to women, allows for gender specific inquiries to uncover the ways in which women navigate relationships vis-à-vis the authorities and citizenship itself. A growing scholarship on women’s involvement in war and the effects of war, shifts the perspective on wartime violence’s effect on women; in Yugoslavia WWII “restructured women’s lives and allowed for some women’s increased participation in public, political spaces.”\textsuperscript{21}

The state of war opened new channels for Yugoslav women to confront pre-war injustices of economic and political inferior status. NLM therefore set the female Yugoslav experience apart from other movements around the globe, as Yugoslav women not only gained the constitutional rights and special protections in the post-war period, but they also contributed to the creation of a newly defined state and Yugoslav supranational identity. Their gendered identities became a crucial component in the creation of a supranational Yugoslav project as CPY continuously emphasized their gender, and ethnic/regional/religious belonging to normalize relations among the diverse Yugoslav population and to establish the perception that their ethnic differences were compatible and synonymous with each other and with Yugoslav identity. On an individual level, Partizankas promoted ethnic unity and incorporated it in their daily interactions with diverse group of women. Their struggle also defied patriarchal norms of the pre-war era. New socialist women and men came to embody all Yugoslavs as equal


citizens based on gender and ethnicity with women standing out as symbols of progress in the post-war collective memory. The consequences of Partizankas’ organizing, activist work, agitation and direct participation during World War II led to the establishment of an anti-fascist female legacy that solidified women’s movement within the socialist state’s framework. The participation of women in war and later in new Yugoslav society depended on the success of the Yugoslav project as a whole.

In Yugoslavia, the struggle for political, social and labor protections for women that animated 1970s wave of feminist activism in the West had already been resolved in the 1946 Constitution. Rather than viewing women’s movements through diametrically opposite ideologies (capitalist/socialist or western (democratic)/eastern (undemocratic)), it is important to evaluate women’s actions within the spaces they navigated to advance their rights and privileges. Western, liberal feminists and revisionists often dismiss socialist projects “to resist reading the complexity of women’s lives in the WW2 and immediate post-war era through simplified narratives about the success or failure of socialist emancipation, or through the presence of absence of authentic agency.” In accordance with Zaharijević claim, I show how Partizankas became crucial components of the Yugoslav nation building project while simultaneously launched their own “second

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22 Yugoslav Constitution 1946, Articles 23 and 24.
23 Adriana Zaharijević in “Footnote in a Global History: On Histories of Feminisms,” points to the feminist scholar Nancy Fraser who dismisses any discussion about the Balkan region since “the second wave feminism emerges only after 1989 as a political force in the former communist countries” (Nancy Fraser, “Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History,” in New Left Review, No. 56, (2009): 97-117)
I designate the second wave feminism in the Yugoslav context to the duration of AFW (1942-1953) which resulted in unprecedented institutional changes. Rather than defining historical processes through waves only, it is pertinent to show the continuity in women’s movements in order to fill the gaps in historical narratives and uncover connections. Scholars of US feminism such as Nancy Hewitt problematize the “wave” metaphor and instead look for continuous connections between different women’s movements in the American context.
wave feminism;” they aimed to lift every Yugoslav women from the patriarchal constraints and ultimately become equal socio-political actors in the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia on the institutional level.

The most recent monograph on Yugoslav Partizanks by Jelena Batinić fails to challenge earlier assertions about Yugoslav women which portray them as manipulated by the regime. Barbara Jančar-Webster concluded that “the women who sacrificed their lives to defeat the invaders and protect their homes were in a very real sense victims of the Party that called them to its standard.”25 As Chiara Bonfiglioli, correctly posits, these scholars “ultimately undermine women’s roles as organizational and political leaders, and their different degrees of agency in promoting new gender imaginaries that attempted to establish a ‘universalizing’ discourse of women’s equality across classes, geographical locations and ethnicities.”26 Although Jančar-Webster and Batinić offer valuable and cautionary insights into the remarkable organizational activities of AFW and Partizanks, they nevertheless fail to contextualize Yugoslav women’s experience within the parameters of war and socialist framework.

Contextualizing Yugoslav women’s achievements and organizational efforts through female lens, I focus on the period of AFW operations (1942-1953). By employing the inter-generational approach, I establish Partizanks’ legacy as the foundation of Yugoslav feminism that linked women of various social, ethnic and religious backgrounds together and continues to create a common legacy despite the physical borders. To do so, I examine the emancipatory talk and rhetoric of unity

employed in organization’s publications, documents, and speeches, and Partizankas’ oral interviews, memoirs and biographies that show how women succeeded in bringing together all Yugoslavs through dedication to their country and the pursuit of gender equality. Looking at the Yugoslav project through from a female perspective, wartime and initial state-building period uncovers the significance of women’s participation in the political sphere and shows that Partizankas became crucial components of nation-building and that without their support, the success of the socialist revolution would have been uncertain. Then I turn to the recollections from the participants of 1978 international conference “Comrade Woman. The Women’s Question: A New Approach?” (from now on Drugar-ca)\textsuperscript{27} in Belgrade, then Yugoslavia, to ascertain the inter-generational connections among Yugoslav women. The legacy of Partizankas’ movement on the post-Yugoslav feminist women emphasizes important connection that requires further research. Also, this re-examination of feminist ideas in the socialist context advances the knowledge within gender studies.

**Defining Yugoslavia through Partizankas**

The idea of Yugoslav unity dates back to the early 19th century when the Illyrian Movement emerged as a response to the cultural Magyarization in the Balkans, particularly in Croatia. In order to counter Hungarian cultural policies, Croatian intelligentsia started a national revival or “awakening” with the central conviction that all

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\textsuperscript{27} In Serbo-Croatian: “Drugarica Žena. Žensko Pitanje – Novi Pristup?” The title for the conference becomes “Drugar-ca” which could be interpreted as an indication of gender divisions since drug stands for a male comrade while drugarica refers to a female comrade. The emphasis, therefore, is symbolic as it suggests the masculine root and shows that female part had been tagged onto rather than accorded equal status. The hyphen further implies the gender distinctions with hopes to shorten the distance between the genders.
South Slavs (Yugoslavs) share “ethnic, linguistic and cultural unity.” As historian Aleksa Djilas points out, the occupying powers (Italian, German, and Hungarian) differed from South Slavs linguistically and culturally, which allowed the South Slavs to view each other as closely related people since their differences were insignificant in comparison to the occupiers. Earlier proponents of the Illyrian movement concentrated around a small group of Croatian intellectuals, including Ljudevit Gaj, who launched The Morning Star (Danica) newspaper and rallied for an establishment of the national language. Or as Gaj summed it up: “Let’s stop each strumming on his own string, and tune the lyre to a single harmony.” This “single harmony” led to the founding of a common language for both Croats and Serbs where Croats ultimately “sacrificed a large part of their regional cultural heritage to what they considered to be the true national interest,” Djilas concludes, since they opted out of their own dialect to use the same one as Serbs. The Illyrian movement eventually turned into the Croatian nationalist movement in the late 19th century when Ante Starčević, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, revoked his earlier sympathies with Illyrians. Nevertheless, the movement became a cultural turning point as it challenged the legitimacy of the Habsburg monarchy and for the first time, promoted “the language and culture of the common people.” “Tribal” rather than ethnic/religious differences appeared as the dividing line among South Slavs suggesting closely related kinship.

29 Djilas, The Contested Country, 47.
On the eve of World War I, the idea of South Slavic unity or Yugoslavism became a fixture in the cultural sphere throughout the Balkans. Ksaver Šandor Gjalski, a Croatian writer and politician, provides a fitting analogy for the Yugoslav project as he shows the divide between the Illyrian and Magyaron ideologies with obvious sympathies for the former in “My Neighbour Dobromir Bosiljković” (1913). In the conversation between male friends, Gjalski focuses on Bosiljković, “an ardent Illyrian patriot,” as a main character of this short story to illustrate his attempts to equate being a Croat to being a Yugoslav. While Illyrianists envisioned Yugoslav’s boundaries from the Slovene Alps to the Black Sea, later realities forced for a smaller-scale vision of South Slavic unity. When the Unionist (Magyar sympathizer) Batorić responds to Bosiljković’s talk about Slavic unity between Russians and Poles, while defining Hungarians as foreigners, Batorić agrees to the natural similarities between Croatia and other Slavic areas, “but not Illyria.” To this, Bosiljković responds: “It is the same thing, my dear illustrious! The only difference is that Croatia, Croatia alone, may serve as all sorts of aims, including non-Croat ones, whereas Illyria or Jugoslavia can only serve the idea of our freedom.” Therefore, the quest for freedom from Austria-Hungary represented a liberating act by removing a common enemy, which allowed the fusion of individual national identities under a supranational Yugoslav identity. Or as Gjalski’s Bosiljković exclaims:

“Again I must say: the same world, the same folk. How, then, can you lose faith in the future? How can our Illyrian days fail to stir hopes in your heart? How can you then fail to perceive, with triumphant joy, that we are the same, one and the same; that we belong together, and must dance the same kolo?”

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33 Ibid.
34 Gjalksi, “My Neighbour Dobromir Bosiljković,” 36-37. Kolo is a Slavic dance performed in a circle.
After World War I, the success of the formation of the Kingdom of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, the Illyrianist legacy translated into the idea of South Slavic unity.

However, both royal Yugoslavia and nationalist movements that emerged during World War II, failed to galvanize the support of women. Like Gjaski’s account, which lacks female presence, the Ustaša and Četnik Movements failed to include the platform that would improve women’s circumstances in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and in the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia.\(^{35}\) Illyrians and royalists also missed out by failing to include women into their movements. The only organization that took an active interest in women’s demands before and during the war was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The CPY had previously lacked any public legitimacy since it had been banned by King Aleksandar I in 1929. Nevertheless, the CPY started establishing women’s and youth organizations such as SKOJ\(^ {36} \) to promote their ideology which appeared attractive to urban female activists who found a common ground with the Communists. The majority of the leadership in women’s organizations came from female Communist cadres despite of the organization’s interwar marginalization. The efforts to pull in women into the movement were initially rudimentary or limited to educated women. However, once WWII broke out, the CPY and Tito’s Partisans turned to women more broadly for logistical support. In terms of national identity, the Communists advocated for united Yugoslavia and minimized ethnic distinctions between the people and by the inclusion of women, gained ground in the nation-building process.

In 1942, when Germans and Italians had already occupied the area, National Liberation Movement employed guerilla warfare tactics and operated in remote areas

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\(^{35}\) See Rory Yeomans.  
\(^{36}\) League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia.
around the country, attracting the local populations. In mobilizing the support for Tito’s Partisans, CPY in general, and AFW in particular, turned to women employing an effective rhetoric in mobilizing efforts. The role of the organization served to mobilize women in all areas of Yugoslavia (Serbia, Croatia, B&H, Slovenia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro) in order to grow the partisan ranks. Women’s participation, however, extended into the NLM in which AFW members not only delivered clothing, food and other materials but also focused on the expansion of their rights in the formation of a new Yugoslav society. By choosing the sides in the conflict between domestic factions, women exercised their agency by selecting whom to support. Because NLM unified all ethnic groups under the Yugoslav umbrella which attracted women. This suggests that women were aware of the Yugoslav idea and started to embrace the Yugoslav identity side by side with their own individual ethnic belonging. This familiarity with emphasis on a Yugoslav identity is evident in the speech by AFW activist Mitra Mitrović given during the First Congress in 1942 in a liberated territory of Bosanski Petrovac:

“I will talk about the female anti-fascist movement in Yugoslavia within the framework of National Liberation Movement. I am not talking, therefore, about the AFW organization, but about women’s contributions to the movement for the national liberation, in the fight against the occupier and about the achievements that women have attained in the last 18 months. I will talk about how we entered this fight, what are the results of our fight and what else we need to attain through it.”

Mitrović reflects the AFW stance and signals to the importance of women’s work for Yugoslavia as well as for women. In this sense, war created opportunities for both the nation and women. On a personal level, one Paritzanka, Jelena Lazić, a wounded medic, states her motivation for joining the fight: “I wanted us to be the same, to be equal. That

is what pulled me in to fight.” The primary goal of female’s involvement was to rid the
country of the common enemies. In return, women vocalized their demands and
navigated within the NLM to envision their emancipated position in the post-war era.
These female activists and fighters deliberately utilized new political spaces opened by
the war circumstances while simultaneously propagating the call for Yugoslav unity.

They were confronting the patriarchal structure that, in the interwar Kingdom of
Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-39), dominated both
public and private spheres in women’s lives. Women’s economic and social conditions
compared unfavorably to those of their male counterparts. Yugoslav women were
underpaid, lacked in educational opportunities and were economically dependent in most
cases. The recorded illiteracy rates indicated that up to 95% of women did not read
and/or write in certain regions. While some regions showed lower rates, the average
illiteracy rate was 56.4% among women and 32.3% among men, as shown in the 1931
Census. Although some urban women organized and formed feminist organizations
sympathetic to the Yugoslav ideal, women in the rural areas remained “backward” and
“inferior” in both education and social standing. Further divisions along the
ethnic/religious and geographic (rural and urban) lines made the lives of female citizens
difficult and complicated.

Nevertheless, against the odds, both urban and rural women joined the NLM as
active participants. This “superhuman” achievement by females, therefore, became the
measurement of the success accomplished during the revolution which emphasized their

40 Jelena Batinić, Women and Yugoslav Partisans, 219.
41 Ibid.
plural and simultaneous identities as both Yugoslav and Serb, Croat, Slovene, Muslim, Albanian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian women. Indeed, Tito himself signaled their importance at the First AFW Conference in Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 6 of 1942, in a speech laying out the role of women in NLM and Yugoslav national-building:

“Today, women are fighting shoulder to shoulder with men for the freedom of Yugoslav nations, against animal-like occupiers and against domestic slaves. Women are fighting for freedom and independence of their nation, they are fighting against the fascist system, the system of slavery fit for Middle Ages, the one that exists in Germany. They are fighting for independence of their nation, and that is an integral part of a big fight for their equality which was disputed within the Yugoslav borders, not allowing them to vote, nor giving them the right to decide about the questions of social life.”

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Tito’s accent on nations in plural shows the official commitment to the Yugoslav idea where the employed rhetoric of both ethnic and gender equality appeared as one and the same. Tito’s rhetoric of Yugoslav unity became inseparable from the promotion and cultivation of the Yugoslav identity. Additionally, Tito’s short analysis of women’s role in the interwar Yugoslavia allows for envisioning the society in which women would play an integral part and attain all of the rights previously deprived. As soldiers, women raised themselves on the same footing as men and by achieving equal status in battle, they become “worthy” citizens of their country.

The political entry of women through the Communist Party opened channels for a broader appeal to Yugoslavism and eventually converted into the formation of supranational Yugoslav identity. While Illyrianists and later the inter-war Kingdom failed to coalesce the diverse nationalities into one, in the second Yugoslavia this ideal of Slavic

unity came closer to realization. Women became the connecting link of the multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional chain by playing a crucial part in nation building, identity creation, and the execution of successful revolution. As mothers, their reproductive roles within the Yugoslav society were understood to serve a utilitarian purpose as they produce not only potential soldiers, but all future Yugoslav citizens. The Communist Party utilized women to achieve political and cultural victory in the post-war era. In return, Partizanksas gained unprecedented rights enshrined in the 1946 Yugoslav Constitution.

Emancipatory Talk and Rhetoric of Unity

The Serbo-Croatian word naši (ours) came to encompass a synonym for the South Slavic identity or Yugoslav national belonging. Naš jezik, naši narod/i (our language, our nation/s) used with Serbo-Croatian language and various ethnicities, substitute the official names with colloquially employed possessive nouns to refer to the Yugoslav peoples as a collective. The rhetoric of unity during World War II emphasized the concept of naši instead of ethnic designations. This is particularly evident in Tito’s speeches where he continuously invokes different nations (narodi) under the Yugoslav umbrella. Not only are ethnic/religious/geographic differences omnipresent but Tito often refers to Yugoslav nations (Jugoslovenski narodi) in plural. This focus on plurality within the monolithic supra national-identity offered channels for the preservation of local/regional identities while allowing citizens to adhere to both. Yet, Tito’s critics

43 Particularly, pro-Serbian nationalists accused Titoist regime of undermining the interests of Serbs in Yugoslavia especially after his death. In 1986, The Memorandum of Serbian Academic Sciences protested the apparent abuses aimed at Serbs in then Yugoslavia which ultimately questioned the legitimacy of the Yugoslav project. (Ivan Mužić, Zoran D. Nenezić, Radovan Šamardžić, Pavle Ivić, Danko Popović)
often disregard this concept of ethnic multiplicity and instead argue that Tito denied Yugoslav peoples their ethnic belonging. One only needs to take a look at the Census of 1981 to see that 5.4% of surveyed identified as Yugoslavs which shows that Yugoslav peoples were allowed to identify as members of their respective ethnic groups.

For AFW this language of naši became especially powerful in unifying of the diverse groups of women. Not only were they empowered in their quest to bring together women of different ethnic/religious/geographic identities to support the war effort, these women also lacked socioeconomic privileges in their respective patriarchal societies. In the first publication of Nova Žena (1945), AFW’s primary magazine, the “old” times meant illiteracy, oppression, lack of opportunity. The new woman however, represented the opposite and “that is why (women) are united in the common fight, so the old will never occur again.”

One Partizanka, Razija Handžić, quotes Tito in saying that “unity is our greatest legacy” (Jedinstvo je naša najveća tekovina). Handžić also echoes other AFW officials: “We, Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina, will work more committedly so that in the day of freedom we do not stand ashamed. We will emulate our other sisters.”

The phrase “other sisters” refers to women from other ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina and/or Yugoslavia.

Simultaneously, aside from nation-building, the war served as a tool for “consciousness raising” among women as they started to view their sisterhood in gendered terms and organize. As much as the CPY officials concentrated on the rhetoric of brotherhood and unity of all South Slavs and by appealing to gender question, AFW

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successfully managed to emphasize their ethnic heritage of Partizankas while fulfilling the call for unity. The gender specific term brotherhood referred to the kinship between the Yugoslav peoples rather than individuals, including women. This masculinization of the relationships between different regions, however, did not necessarily mean the exclusion of women from any participation. In the socialist context, as Adriana Zaharijević suggests, “it was believed that to women—as an equal part of an equal society—the guarantees for their gender emancipation were [a] given,”\(^{46}\) after the war. To argue that all Yugoslav citizens and peoples were masculinized misses the point, and only in retrospect “the state becomes patriarchal, and patriarchy appears as intrinsic to social and political structure of the citizenship in the socialist regime…only when socialist systems cease to exist.”\(^{47}\) At the time of the war, and in the immediate aftermath, women owned the word brotherhood as equivalent to the Yugoslav unity and “sisterhood” as gender-specific mission to attain political and social rights. The women’s movement, through AFW, resolved the multiplicity of their ethnic identities through the Yugoslav brotherhood while creating a sisterhood that culminated into women’s emancipation.

Ahead of the First Yugoslav AFW Conference in 1945, Dušanka Kovačević sums up the meaning of gender specific Yugoslav unity: “For the lives of our children, for peace in our homes, to end slaughtering and killing, we united. The unity of Serb, Muslim and Croat women will explain to the entire world where we found the strength to fight, where we discovered the faith for victory.” Kovačević continues:

“Serb, Muslim, and Croat women will mention during the Congress their children who collectively are liberating the country, they will talk about their common jobs, they will talk about Serb women who collect hay for burned Muslim villages, about

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
Muslim women who bring the gifts to hospitals and who are dying in concentration camps for freedom. Our unity will be the prettiest present from women to our Congress, our young country, our happiness and future.”

Partizankas’ individual identities therefore, became inseparable from their collective, national identities while at the same time, they viewed themselves as members of their corresponding ethnic groups. This development suggests that Partizankas’ political consciousness during the war paved the way for the post-war public participation and opened up the channels for the advocacy for women’s rights.

While most of AFW leadership consisted mainly of urban, educated women with pre-war sympathies to the communist ideas, the fact that the majority of two million participants came from rural, illiterate areas suggests that these peasant women were familiar with the Yugoslav idea and ethnic differentiations. Also, dismissing AFW publications as elitist misses the point as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was predominately rural and uneducated. One Croat Partizanka from Banja Luka describes her visit to a rural area during the war: “From Banja Luka to Rujiška we came dirty and hungry. We considered ourselves unwelcomed, but people in the village accepted us as their own (rodjene). They did not ask us whether we are Serbs or Muslims. They fed us and around a bonfire they started talking about the fight, about their children who were officers and soldiers [in NLM].”

The fact that Partisans penetrated deeply into the rural circles suggests that peasants came to understand the conflict in both domestic and foreign

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49 Razija Handžić, “Nekoliko Slika sa Sjednice oblasnog odbora AFŽ-a za Bosansku Krajinu,” In Nova Žena (February 1945), No. 1, 9.
contexts (i.e. inter-ethnic fight and Nazi/Fascist invasions) since often all war participants would come through the cities and villages. A 97-year-old Partizanka Milka Jašić, who came from a rural area, remembers how she joined the NLM: “Ustašas came to our house to look for me…At one point, one of them started to take his clothes and belt off and locks the door in order to rape me…I jumped out from a five meter high window and ran for the woods where I spent three years occasionally sleeping under the maple tree nearby our house.”\textsuperscript{50} As a result, Ustašas killed Jašić’s father and she joined the NLM in the woods. In the postwar period, Jašić became a mother of four children and a 30-year-old widow who nostalgically reflects on “that unity, when we respected one another…but now that old fascism is returning and there is no unity anymore,”\textsuperscript{51} referring to the most recent situation in ex-Yugoslavia. Partizankas in particular, and Yugoslav women in general, incorporated the rhetoric of unity within their own lives and emphasized ethnic tolerance as the crucial component of being a Yugoslav woman. In their oral interviews, women nostalgically reminiscence about the Yugoslav unity that disappeared during the latest wars and fondly remember the socialist Yugoslavia in comparison with the post-Yugoslav, transitional realities they currently live in.\textsuperscript{52}

The focus on inter-marriage, which became encouraged by the authorities in the post-war era, emerged as a motivation to fight, at least for some women. In the \textit{Croatian Women in the National Liberation Movement} the 1955 collection of AFW reports and documents offer accounts of women intermarrying before the war. In one case, a woman


\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Partizankas Ankica Djurić, Jelena Lazić, Stana Nastić, Nasiha Porobić, et al., in their oral interviews fondly remember Yugoslavia and their youth and often make comparisons to contemporary situation while elevating the past. www.afzarhiva.org}
referred to as comrade Vujasinović, narrates her pre-war life story emphasizing her marriage to a Serb. She posits during the Third AFW Conference in Banija:

“When the enemy came into Glina our life became very difficult. I am a Croat who married a Serb who was later killed. Even before the war many women had asked me why I married a Serb. I admitted that my school years had the effect on the decision to marry a Serb. We wanted to live together, Serbs and Croats… I felt bad for that nation (Serbs) since they have always been persecuted…these sympathies for Serbs led me to spread the unity (jedinstvo) by marrying a Serb. I think that in the future there will never come the time when Croat women would despise Serb women again.”

This account signals the presence of coexistence among Yugoslav nations by emphasizing the unity among females. Not only does this account show a sense of unity through the act of marriage, but it also points to the sisterhood between Croat and Serb women. Women as wives, mothers, and sisters symbolize the commitment to transethnic unity while depicted as active agents able to freely choose whom to marry. At the same time, unity (jedinstvo) becomes an ideological impetus and priority in the execution of NLM efforts and in this case it suggests continuity of the Yugoslav idea that emerged prior to the war. This official rhetoric of unity became part of their own vocabulary as well as their life choices. This further shows that women became the key to the Yugoslav national question. The emphasis on female courage and bravery in Partizankas’ representations, who often die by enemy’s hand, remains a lingering image in the public consciousness. The source of this tendency appears in the AFW rhetoric abundant in the first publication of New Woman (Nova Žena) in 1945. These recognitions of women fallen in fight legitimizes them as serious national actors while elevating them as the ideal of Yugoslav womanhood by sacrifices they made for brotherhood and unity.

The case of Muslim Partizankas is particularly illustrative of this dynamic. Under the title of “Those who have fallen for freedom,” the author D.K. mentions Vahida Maglajlić, a national hero and a Muslim woman, while singling out her contributions: “When Ustaša’s knife threatened Serb children and women, when Serb families were forced into concentration camps and exile, she resolutely and tirelessly helped them. Covered by a niqab, Vahida transports the munition, food, medicine for Partisans.”

(Figure 1) Not only does the author point to her courage but more importantly reflects Vahida’s dedication to the shared Yugoslav identity. Vahida’s use of niqab is two-fold: first, it refers to her Muslim identity and second, by carrying materials for Partisans she is liberated from the “oppressive” covering which becomes a disguise rather than a symbol of religious practice. Ultimately, Vahida lays down her life for the Yugoslav cause and earns the recognition for her martyrdom. For Vahida, the goals of CPY converged with her own as she deliberately pushed for changes; first in her own home, and then in the fight for her country. Although this publication is motivated by the excitement for the end of war, it still shows the enthusiasm for the newly created Yugoslav nation through a female lens and sets the stage for the glorification of fallen Partizankas.

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54 Niqab or burka refers to the full body and facial covering in Muslim tradition. Figure 1.
For some Muslim women who decided to bear arms or actively participate in the war effort, the choice to remove the *niqab* (zar) appeared as a liberating act or as a rite of passage. The account of Vahida Maglajlić, a commemorated national hero, shows that her personal drive for advancement led her to cut her hair and shun the *niqab* or rather, appropriate it for alternative uses. As a strong-willed young woman who often pointed out injustices in the treatment toward her compared to her brothers, Vahida slowly convinced her father to allow her to do as she wished. Alija Maglajlić, Vahida’s brother, recollects how she persuaded their father to get rid of *sofra* and instead opt for table and chairs. This “modernizing” transformation allowed Vahida to employ her acumen during the war as she was not allowed to go to away for school like her brothers did. One AFW Muslim activists, Šemsa Galijašević, an ethnic Muslim herself, explains: “We encouraged women to uncover, to get educated. Life in villages was especially difficult for women since men had always been in a more favorable position. Those who followed

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56 *Sofra* refers to a low table used for dining in Ottoman and Turkish traditions.
Sharia laws [refers to Muslim women] found themselves in a more difficult position.”  
Although AFW leaders and activists suggested the removal of niqab which made some Muslim women uncomfortable, the fact that some Partizankas willingly removed niqab or opted for a less modest covering exemplifies the break with patriarchal and traditional norms. Scholar Chiara Bonfiglioli tackles the contradictions between women’s progress and religious curbing as she points out that some Muslim women viewed these encouragements as a “specific threat against their community, reinforcing the separation between Muslim women and AFŽ activists of different ethnic origin.” However, Bonfiglioli specifically highlights Partizanka’s biographies in order to illuminate the attained achievements in the socialist state. Rather than viewing Muslim women’s “uncovering” exclusively as an attack on religious liberties, it is important to note that Muslim women themselves in their testimonials often referred to unveiling as a liberating act.

Šemsa Galijašević remembers how some prominent Muslim men often exerted influence in her city of Tešanj. She mentions one such Ahmet Hodžić who allowed his wife to take off her niqab and soon after neighboring women followed. “Many women,” Galijašević points out, “said that they were in the dark all their lives and now finally they can see” after they decided to shun the niqab (zar). Freedom of choice and exposure to education became a determining factor in taking off a niqab, according to Galijašević. Muslim women, therefore, transformed into “new Muslim women – fighters, councilors,


59 Chiara Bonfiglioli, 22.

60 Andreja Dugandžić i Adela Jušić, “Intervju sa Šemsom Galijašević.”
public servants, attendants of literacy courses” as a result of their resistance to the occupiers. This way, Muslim women finally caught up to all Yugoslav women since they were in “the toughest position” during the interwar period.

The curtailing of religious custom aside, the war improved the social station of all Yugoslav women and children regardless of their ethnic or religious background. If positioned in the European context, the removal of head covering followed a larger trend of modernization, as it did in Ataturk’s Turkey. Although the removal of niqab specifically did not motivate women to join the conflict, it became a side effect of a larger emancipatory framework to symbolically challenge the patriarchy. The state’s objectives, therefore, overlapped with desires of some women and fused together making both the Yugoslav project and women’s progress inseparable. In this sense, Muslim women led the way to more radical changes through their personal transformations. As long as the Yugoslav idea survived, Yugoslav women challenge the limitations imposed by tradition and patriarchy during and after the war.

AFW focused on educating women around the country during the war, thus continuing the efforts of pre-war women’s movement led by female communists. Literacy courses became an important element in aggregating support for the NLM. On an individual level, the importance of literacy became an integral part of a new woman and a sign of progress. As one female writer to the AFW publication posits: “Literacy became a responsibility on the front and in the background. An illiterate medic, writing

62 Ibid.
63 This is not to say that all of the religious coverings became illegal. Older generations continued to wear hijabs (“modest” head covering) or different types of covering in public and private spheres. (I know this first hand, since both of my great-grandmothers wore head covering—more like scarfs then hijab but they still covered their hair.)
her first letters exclaims: ‘I thought that this is a lot harder, that I will never learn…’ A woman from Podrmeča is learning how to write on her son’s board and often old women from the same area say: ‘It is a pity to remain illiterate today.’”

On a collective level, the progress in women’s status thanks to the achievement of equality produced tangible improvements. For example, the war created mobility within the army structure alongside men which would later translate into the establishment of a socialist society after the violence ended. In aforementioned report by Mitra Mitrović, she highlights the process which women underwent:

“In this fight, we gained more achievements, more victories. Throughout this struggle we achieved equality…In freed territory, women are in the NLM committees…They are equal everywhere to their comrades [emphasis on male comrades], in every aspect of life that is starting to expand on our young liberated territory…A young girl from the 3rd Sandžak Brigade, who entered the fight as a regular servant, in a few months she became a stand-in for the brigade’s commissar. The door is opened for us everywhere, especially when our country becomes liberated the door will be wide open. And these historical achievements, which we dreamt about and fought for for years, are materializing and becoming the reality.”

The fight for emancipation dates before the war and suggests that the war itself opened up the new opportunities for women to finally elevate their status within Yugoslavia. This newly acquired position foreshadowed women’s continued advancements in the postwar period. In order for women to attain equality, it became necessary to enlighten them by raising their level of political consciousness. Mitrović points out that through the fight “women uncovered great political knowledge by finding out what is happening in the world.” She refers to the understanding of NLM goals against fascism within and

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64 *Nova Žena*, Vol 1, No. 2, Sarajevo, (April 1945), 7.
66 Ibid.
without Yugoslav borders. Women’s progress therefore depended on the comprehension of socialist ideology and its modernizing discourse.

Aside from advocating for their own rights, women turned their efforts as mothers and activists to enhance the protections for children. Already in 1942, the orphanages hosting children who lost their parents in the war started forming. An unknown author in AFW publication asserts that “in the village of Jasenica, where the orphanage operated, every woman became a mother to one of the children.” At the same time, women were encouraged to become teachers or nursery governesses (vaspitačice) to not only educate but also alleviate the trauma these children suffered and pay “the debt to their parents who sacrificed their lives for the country.” In the post-war era, these “progressive people’s teachers” extended their services and reshaped “the state-operated system of mass primary education in which the new type of teacher was constructed.” The feminization of teaching profession transformed a “progressive people’s teacher…into the figure of the great selfless mother who is supposed to raise a new generation through the process of compulsory primary education.” Although, the notions of sexism are evident in this encouragement of putting women in certain professions, this still opened up new opportunities to tackle the shackles of patriarchy in the long run.

The promise of CPY to emancipate women once the war ended came to fruition. Not only did women become equal members in a constitutional sense, they also gained

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68 Ibid.
70 Demiragic, 71.
special protections. In the post-war period AFW continued to function as a re-building force in the new Yugoslavia by organizing women to join labor brigades, enroll in literacy courses, and enter the general workforce. Women’s task shifted from a soldier and activist to “raising of our children, our youth.” Or as Tito posits: “mothers and sisters have a task to raise our children in a new spirit, in a spirit of love toward our new country, toward our Yugoslavia, in love with our big achievement of brotherhood and unity and love toward our government, etc.” The reversal to traditional nurturing roles overlooked women’s role as soldiers since mandatory military conscription after the war pertained only to Yugoslav males. Only in post-war Yugoslav mythmaking did Partizankas live on as brave soldiers and fearless activists. The dissolution of AFW in 1953 ended the woman question in a sense of women as a special group and instead fused women’s issues with the general class struggle. The Second wave feminism in the Yugoslav context occurred during the war and in the most immediate aftermath, only to demote the women’s question to the background in the coming decades in both cultural and political spheres. The double burden imposed on women uncovered deeply rooted patriarchal tendencies within Yugoslav society and challenged the notion that the revolution liberated women fully. This fusion of gender with class therefore limited women to the well-being of the entire nation, making their interest no different than those of the rest of society.

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71 Article 24, Constitution 1946.
72 “Ggovor Druga Tita na I. Kongresu antifašistkinja Jugoslavije,” in Nova Žena, Vol 1, no. 4, (July 1945).
73 Ibid.
After the war, Yugoslavia underwent a remarkable industrialization and by the 1970s, a third of the workforce consisted of women workers.74 By 1960, the labor demand for men superseded those of females since women “lacked qualifications, inequality in education and general situation in employment tactics”75 signaling that the “woman question” had not been resolved, despite the authorities’ claims to the contrary. However, the growing participation in the labor force also suggested that “women seek the security for their existence in employment rather than marriage.”76 On a national level, the turn to self-management policies in Yugoslavia allowed regions and localities to prioritize the economic production and social policies according to the needs of their area. This, however, created regional gaps as the degree of economic development varied and the Constitution of 1974 further decentralized the government. In the 1970s, localities, particularly in rural areas of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, began to promulgate their own “family codes, health and welfare provisions, education” and other social policies that influenced women’s status negatively.77 This political fragmentation translated into disconnect between women’s organization in Yugoslavia such as Conference for the Social Activity of Women (CSAW). The success depended on participation by women from various other organizations and regions, and paved the way for inconsistencies in the Yugoslav project. On the one hand, women’s continuous inclusion into the labor force made women independent financially. Nevertheless, the overall progress in women’s status measured by education and labor inclusion, particularly for those in urban areas, improved drastically over the post-war decades.

74 Chiara Bonfiglioli, ma thesis, 40.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Still, de-centralizing policies weakened the Yugoslav project and by the late 1980s, the rise of nationalism extended into de facto fragmentation with the final breakup of Yugoslavia taking place in 1991. However, the first post-war generation of women educated in the socialist framework continued to voice their grievances, first within the socialist state and later in the newly formed ex-Yugoslav countries while preaching for unity and anti-nationalism echoing their predecessors, Partizankas.  

**Riding the Waves: Intergenerational Connections**

The problematic model of “waves” in reference to feminism assumes periods of calm which often undermines histories of resistance against patriarchy and other oppressions by non-white women and/or working-class women. Nevertheless, second wave feminism emerges as the critique of contemporary capitalist and democratic western societies and women’s role within this economic and political framework. This crucial philosophical reconfiguring of feminist theory in the 1960s and 1970s enlarged feminism(s) and opened discourses on methods and approaches to tackling of the woman question. Concerned with issues such as equal opportunity, institutions of marriage, special protections, abortion, maternity leave to name a few, second-wave feminists criticized the lack of women’s representation both legally and socially. For Yugoslav

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78 In an article published in *Globus* in 1992 with a headline “Croatia’s Feminists Rape Croatia!” five prominent feminists were singled out and personally attacked for their anti-war stance.  


*These feminists were invited to attend the first international conference “Drugar-ca” in Eastern Europe in 1978 that took place in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.
women, these legal questions have been resolved after World War II and based on this context, they rode their “second wave” much earlier than their western counterparts. Although apolitical in theory, western feminism(s) operated within the liberal approach to political and economic life, which often othered those women who navigated different realities. Western feminists who incorporated revised Marxist theory in their theoretical approaches failed to grasp the context in which Yugoslav women operated. Cristine Delphy, a French Marxist feminist, acknowledges this in her observation of Yugoslav women during the international conference held in Belgrade in 1978:

The reasonings on the tone “self-management as a response for all,” they sounded to us as biased, then dishonest. In fact, not only are the Yugoslavs sincere – they believe in it – but in a way they do not have the choice. It is not a political line, it is political fact. We did not take seriously enough the problem of a society where one cannot do the revolution, one cannot even talk about it, because it has already been done.80

In this context, Yugoslav women critiqued social repercussions of embedded patriarchy rather than the socialist system itself. Instead they posed following questions:

What is the real position of women in socialist society, what are achievements in emancipation and what are the problems that are still unsolved? Does the existing emancipation of women lead to her actual liberation when we know that she still goes on about her traditional family duties and that she is not present there where the decisions are being taken?...What are the possible ways for the consciousness raising and action of women in the transformation for their role? What is the way in which the human being of the female sex is formed in our midst, and in what framework does she see her realisation?81

Rather than tackling legal issues, Yugoslav women had to contend with social change on a micro-level. Patriarchal and traditional pressures undermined institutional rights and instead pushed women into the double burden. Gender expectations remained unchallenged in some respects, yet women continued to contest the authority in order to advance their status.

In 2006 in Sarajevo, BiH, under the name “78 Revisited” female activists who participated and organized the conference “Drugar-ca Žena” in 1978 came together to reconstruct the event which is considered to be “the first autonomous second wave feminist event” in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. This event included feminists from “the West, who narrated the same story, but about the West that glorifies their democracy, the democracy without women”82 along with Yugoslav women who organized and hosted this event. 83 One of the participants and a director of the organization Women and Society in Sarajevo, Nada Ler Sofronić explains:

I am still struggling to comprehend how in one communist country, in Tito’s Yugoslavia, such conference actualized, although I have some explanations. Where did we find that courage and strength, I still cannot comprehend because during that conference there was no pressure exerted on journalists, the heads were not flying, no one was fired. Simply, to be a feminist was not an easy task, not even today…After the conference, nothing was the same. The newspapers around Yugoslavia…started to publish our critiques: not in the sense that if it fails, we will be punished. That was the biggest jump that 78 gave us.84

The re-visitation of the conference that took place in 1978 symbolizes the intergenerational continuity of the legacy left from AFW. The participants of the actual conference belonged to a post-war generation exposed to the collective memory of the

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
Yugoslav Partizankas. They reaped the institutional benefits of the achievements that Partizankas fought for and attained in the Constitution of 1946. By organizing this conference, these women such as Nada Ler Sofronić, Vesna Pusić, and Dunja Blažević, just to name the few, continued to push against the patriarchal, provincial elements in their society and challenged women’s status in the socialist society. The fact that feminist scholars and activists in all the former Yugoslavia refer to the event as a landmark conference suggests presence of the bond of Yugoslav sisterhood that continues to connect women in the area regardless of the physical borders. More notably, these female participants of Drugar-ca took an anti-nationalist stance during the Yugoslav wars and came together almost 30 years later to re-live the event hosted by a new generation of post-Yugoslav feminist activists.

Although the participants of Drugar-ca belonged to Students’ Cultural Centre in Belgrade and they were not political actors or some not even the CPY members, they, like Partizankas, opened up venues for a public discourse in regard to the woman question as part of the new left. During the conference “78 Revisited” in 2006 women disagreed on the post-Yugoslav situation in regard to feminist activism but in retrospect, they came to an agreement based on their memories about Drugar-ca in 1978. However, their reminiscences could not be divorced from the realities of the most recent Yugoslav wars. Vesna Pusić offers a commentary on the contemporary state of affairs:

We live in time of re-traditionalizing of values, we see a tendency to return women to the house, the tendency to further marginalize women from public and political life. We are in the middle of fascist indoctrination of our society and

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women in the transitional countries, including BiH, are confronted with innumerous tasks.  

Pusić’s words echo the rhetoric of Partizankas and AFW activists during World War II in reference to patriarchy and fascism. The challenges that Partizankas fought against during World War II take on a new form and present new obstacles to women in the post-Yugoslav setting. Like Partizankas, who contended with patriarchal, traditional structure that dictated every aspect of their lives, CURE and other women in ex-Yugoslavia have to confront similar issues. The fact that minority questions fuse with women’s rights along with the re-traditionalization of women’s role within the society, only obliterates women’s position in the post-Yugoslav spaces. But since “the ethnic minorities became the central theme,” women’s concerns have taken the back seat in a transitional period. According to Pusić, the religious organizations influence the governments and act as “partners who define the state’s criteria” which poses the biggest threat to the rights of all people, not just the ethnic minorities, or women. Or as an attendee Nada Ler Sofronić wonders:

Where did we lose ourselves, where did we allow the stupidity to take the lead, so that CURE (feminist group) today, to whom I apologize for giving this legacy, since we did not preserve what our mothers and grandmothers had given us…now, they have to pay attention to both activism and theory, so down the line the same thing does not happen to them, to let stupidity reign.

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87 A Bosnian feminist group that hosted “78 Revisited.”
The fact that they met in Sarajevo, BiH while the original conference in 1978 took place in Belgrade, suggests that the sisterhood among Yugoslav women continues to live in some shape or form. Although the discussion or mention of AFW did not occur during this meeting, this omission reflects the preoccupation with the last war and its consequences. However, selecting the AFW and its activities as a founding moment in Yugoslav feminism and beyond, allows scholars and activists to re-situate the women’s movement in different contexts while ensuring the continuity of feminism in the Balkans. \(^{90}\)

**Conclusion**

In 1989 sociologist Lydia Sklevicky highlighted the lack of female figures in Yugoslav textbooks which contradicted the established myths of women’s emancipation. Sklevicky went further to argued that animals, particularly horses, appeared in higher numbers than women in history textbooks designated for the fifth through eighth grades. High school textbooks showed lower numbers of female figures totaling to six female names from a covered period (1918-1970). \(^{91}\) Sklevicky attributes these statistics to the invisibility of female actors in the Yugoslav context while borrowing Eric Hobsbawm term of “invented tradition.”\(^{92}\) The laudatory repetition of Partizankas’ contributions in NLM during WWII with the help of symbols and official rhetoric added to the creation of the tradition which according to Sklevicky does not reflect the reality. Sklevicky wrote at a time when nationalistic fervor the appeal of the Yugoslav idea weakened. The

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\(^{90}\) Yugoslav feminism, as a loosely defined term, for the purposes of this discussion, includes post-Yugoslav feminist activists and theorists because they are tightly correlated with one another as they share common beginnings during World War II. This is not meant to undermine separate national identities but rather to show how Yugoslav or South Slavic women dealt in the past and continue to deal with women’s question.


\(^{92}\) Sklevicky, 19.
correlation between the emancipatory promises to women and the trans-ethnic unity among Yugoslavs points to the fragmentation based on both ethnic and gender lines. The dissolution of Anti-Fascist Front of Women (AFW) in 1953 symbolized the completion of women’s emancipation and their full integration into the socialist society as equal members. The creation of different women’s alliances led to decentralization of a unified organization such as AFW while diluting the continuous efforts to improve women’s standing in Yugoslav society.

On the national level, the abandonment of cultural policies in the 1960s and the enforcement of self-management economic policies deviated from the centralized Yugoslav idea which placed brotherhood and unity as its priority. Instead, power resided with the localities whose interests superseded those of national priorities. As was the case with AFW, the fragmentation into civil women’s organizations deviated from a more aggressive approach aimed at the tangible results of women’s advancement. The publications such as A Woman Today (Žena Danas) or Taste (Ukus) became independent publishing houses concerned with women’s fashion and other cultural happenings deviating from the newspapers such as Nova Žena which largely dealt with female’s participation in the workforce after the war. The organizational fragmentation among women and later within larger Yugoslav society based on ethnic and regional lines symbolize the weakening of commitments to woman question and the Yugoslav idea simultaneously. Partizankas, as the embodiment of a successfully executed revolution and symbols of emancipated women, disappeared with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Gender equality took a backseat to political and economic crises during the war period in the
1990s and the current post-socialist transition in all of the ex-Yugoslav countries is still facing the effects of Yugoslavia’s downfall.

However, with the “re-enactment” of the conference Drug-ca Žena, the historical legacy of AFW and feminists within the socialist framework served to provide a framework for new feminist generations in post-Yugoslav setting. In the post-socialist, transitional period women rely on community organizing rather than governmental institutions to make themselves count. By organizing “78 Revisited,” the relevance of female activists in ex-Yugoslavia continues, at least in activists’ circles. The lessons for female activists, such as CURE, can be informed form Partizanka’s legacy. First, Partizankas took the advantage of war in order to advocate for their rights. Secondly, as second wave feminism swept the United States and Western Europe, Yugoslav women launched the second chapter of second wave feminism within the socialist framework. Rather than determining historical events solely in waves, the emphasis ought to be on the continuity of women’s movements and social/political/historical consistency of female involvement. Only then can historical accounts expand and include previously excluded actors and give a fuller story. In the post-Yugoslav era, the legacy of Partizankas and their achievements cannot be separated from post-Yugoslav feminism regardless of ethnic and national affiliations. This shared women’s history among women on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia solidifies a long-standing tradition of women’s movements and provides a reference point to the sisterhood which successfully organized to advance national and women’s conditions. Yugoslav feminism therefore contends with western feminism since the achievements attained by Partizankas in 1946 included equal pay, maternity leave, child benefits, special workers’ benefits which are still being
negotiated in the developed world, particularly in the United States. Furthermore, by looking at the war as a transformational event in women’s lives, broadens the inquiry into women’s role during the conflicts and presents them as agency driven individuals. The Yugoslav project also illuminates the ways in which women exercise their citizenship and actively participate in nation-building. As viable sociopolitical actors, Partizankas and Yugoslav feminists, became crucial components to both Yugoslav supranational identity and the continuous fight for resolution of the “woman question.” For women living in post-Yugoslav societies, this shared legacy of the women’s movement can become a source of inspiration from within.
CHAPTER TWO

REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN: PARTIZANKAS COMPARED

In recent news, Kurdish women attracted worldwide attention by joining the fight against ISIL. The international press describes them as unusual, awe-inspiring apparitions as they courageously joined their male compatriots under the guidance of Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK). One of the female Kurdish fighters explained why she joined the conflict: “Along with defending our Kurdish land we are also fighting for women’s rights. Like a man, I can fight in the mountains and the desert.”93 These words echoed among Yugoslav women who at one point in time decided to take up the arms to fight for their land and gender. Likewise, these women felt compelled to protect and create a new country where women would achieve equality. The war became a platform to prove their worth by aiding and actively participating in various capacities during World War II. Partizanks, or female soldiers and activists, mobilized in unprecedented numbers to contribute to the anti-fascist fight during World War II in Yugoslavia. Similarly, like Kurdish women in the new millennium, a 90-year-old Partizanka, Lucija Mavrić stated: “Do not treat me differently than men, if they can do it I can do it, too. I did not want to be anything else than a fighter. I could have been a nurse, but I was brave, I wanted to be a solider.”94 The 20th century proved to be the women’s era. Female soldiers and activists seized the opportunities created by crises to improve the sociopolitical positions within their societies. However, in the Yugoslav case, women with the help of Anti-Fascist

Front of Women (AFW) and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) shook the interwar patriarchal and traditional order by establishing not only a new national entity but a reformed Yugoslav society in which women played a crucial role. The AFW as “an exceptional organizational societal formation”\textsuperscript{95} provided a platform for tackling of woman’s question during and after the war. Although Yugoslavia disintegrated into six republics by the early 2000s and later Kosovo, Partizankas’ legacy continued to inform the following generations as they challenged the patriarchal and traditional limitations imposed by their larger society. They dared to defy these restrictions and continued to criticize the forgetting of female contributions within the socialist state framework.

Despite the supremacy of Marxist class analysis, educated Yugoslav women continued to question the state’s relationship vis a vis woman. No system in the world has successfully eradicated patriarchal constrains; women still lack basic needs, such as the access to universal healthcare, prolonged maternity leave, accommodation for children, equal pay or other special protections. The Yugoslav Constitution of 1946 guaranteed all of these protections. Although the country does not exist anymore and ethnic question overpowers that of women’s, post-World War II generation reaped socioeconomic benefits as women enjoyed the elevated status compared to the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Partizankas’ legacy continues to inform current generations of feminists from which they draw their inspirations. The sisterhood that these Yugoslav women created in the post-war spaces within the framework of \textit{brotherhood and unity} continue to resonate and serve as a connecting intergenerational link in the post-colonial and post-socialist times. How

do we then situate Yugoslav women’s experience during World War II within the international context considering their unprecedented achievements? Was their participation exclusively a European phenomenon? Or Eastern European? Can Yugoslav female experience deepen the understanding within the post-colonial and post-socialist spaces? Or was their experience simply unique designed by circumstances of the Europe’s backyard – the Balkans? What can the Yugoslav example inform about the women’s involvement in the revolutionary movements?

While the legacy of Partizankas, faded from public view during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, Chiapas indigenous women rallied to improve the conditions of their gender within the revolutionary platform of EZLN. Comparisons to Vietnamese and Latin American women (1970s-1980s) within their respective revolutionary movements situate Yugoslav women in an unusual spatial location or “in-between,” neither belonging nor excluded from the wider international framework. In order to measure the remarkable achievements of Yugoslav Partizankas and other revolutionary women without overt glorification, it is necessary to relativize their experience to the Marxist-led guerrilla movements during the Cold War period in Asia and Latin America. After I turn to the first post-modern guerrilla movement i.e. women from Chiapas in Zapatista movement (EZLN), to highlight how post-Cold war realities influenced the ways in which revolutionary movements organize and secure women’s support. By employing the comparative methodology considering temporal, geographical and historical distances, I situate Yugoslav women in the international context and illuminate women’s

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96 Acronym for Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN. In English, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation.
involvement in revolutionary guerrilla movements. Furthermore, I highlight Partizankas’ unprecedented efforts and achievements which stand out in size, legacy and success.

This comparison illuminates the evolution of revolutionary efforts and female engagement in revolutionary movements. Technology, for an example, plays an important role in increasingly connected world which enabled Zapatistas to gain sympathy and support from the outsiders thanks to the advancement in communications (fax, journalists’ presence, and later the internet). In contrast, Yugoslav Partisans and Partizankas had to rely on couriers and/or word of mouth to spread letters and propaganda. Separated by decades and over six-thousand miles apart, these women seized the opportunity within larger struggle to push for better conditions for their gender. This gendered inclusion within the revolutionary studies enriches traditionally male-dominated interpretations and enhances general understanding of how women and men, as both individual actors and members of their respective groups, contribute to the revolutions i.e. the “explosions of the continuum of history.” By singling out the gendered other, scholars can complete, add and improve the interpretations of past events by further including previously omitted individuals, such as the racialized other, sexualized other, gendered other, disabled other etc. On a personal level, activism and

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97 Here I employ Walter Benjamin’s concept of non-linear time in order to compare two revolutionary movements with a gendered focus in order to illuminate their shared experiences without reducing their unique placement in history. These women represent the explosions in the continuum of history. In Benjamin’s own words: “The historical materialist cannot do without the concept of a present which is not a transition, in which time originates and has come to a standstill. For this concept defines precisely the present in which he writes history for his person. Historicism depicts the “eternal” picture of the past; the historical materialist, an experience with it, which stands alone. He leaves it to others to give themselves to the whore called “Once upon a time” in the bordello of historicism. He remains master of his powers: man enough, to explode the continuum of history.” Walter Benjamin, On Concept of History, http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses_on_History.html;
revolutionary efforts improved women’s lives within their communities and countries, making them more equal and providing them with more economic opportunities. I borrow Karen Kampwirth’s approach to define revolution not only as a stage when war erupts but as a more comprehensive term (la revolución) which includes a “period of political, economic and social transformation” that comes after the armed conflicts traditionally labeled as “post-revolutionary period.” The examination of the AFW activism during and after the war (1941-53) gives a unique dimension since Yugoslavia’s position during the Cold War-era shifts in the international context resulting in the exclusion from the Eastern Bloc. Furthermore, the East/West divide and the Cold War politics obscure the Yugoslav position in the regional spheres in the long run. Zapatista women emerge from groups in which they “normally lead extremely restricted lives” and in the Mexican context, they are confined to their communities. As “outsiders” in their respective regional contexts, predominately peasant Partizankas and female Zapatistas navigated spaces of exclusion both on gender and their ethnic/national basis in order to improve women’s conditions. The Chiapas rebellion occurs in the post-Cold war era devoid of Marxist-Leninist approach to guerrilla organizing, yet the influence of the ideology finds its way within the Zapatistas since some EZLN members belonged to the Maoist-inspired group Popular Politics in 1970s who hid in Chiapas. The intersection of influences (secular, radical Catholic and peasant unions) on indigenous people

99 In 1948, Josip Broz Tito ends diplomatic relations with Stalin’s Russia facing repercussions of expulsion from Cominform.
100 Women’s International Democratic Federation expelled Yugoslav AFW female delegates from participating in international conferences due to the drift between Josip Broz Tito and Josef Stalin in 1948.
101 Kampwirth, Women and Guerrilla Movements, 85.
culminated into the Zapatista rebellion attracting men and women from diverse ethnic/linguistic backgrounds. Chiapas women, like their Yugoslav counterparts during World War II, interjected into the Zapatista Rebellion in order to improve their conditions for their diverse, yet unified indigenous groups as well as to transform women’s role within their communities.

**Women in Combat**

Women have always participated in warfare in some shape or form. They often filled supportive roles following male soldiers in camps and often assuming male roles as fighters during conflicts. Sometimes as nurses, cooks, medics, helpers, or even as “nice girls” providing a moral support through sexual services, women engaged in wartime. Female participation, therefore, during armed conflicts, is nothing unusual, yet an image of female soldiers equipped with guns is still uncommon. Only in 2013, the US Congress rescinded Direct Combat Exclusion Rule, opening up the opportunities for women’s inclusion in combat, although their roles are still somewhat restricted. While the majority of scholarship on gender and war aims to correct traditional female victimization during armed conflicts and analyze the reversal of women’s roles in the aftermath, comprehensive analysis on women’s involvement in the revolutionary movements across time and space is still lacking. This examination can track the evolution of revolutionary movements, varied women’s organizing efforts and can

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104 Nicole Ann Dombrowski, ed., *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent,* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Also see Linda Grant De Pauw.
advance conceptual methodology on the subject and beyond. The edited collections that normalize women’s involvement in war include scholarly articles that do not necessarily talk to each other; instead they inform about their respective case studies and focus on traditional feminist issues dealing with range of inequalities. While feminist lens examines questions about social inequality, female sexualization and/or social/political activism, scholars elude analysis about shared or comparable female experiences in order to avoid being labeled as essentialists who minimize and/or flatten out the intersectional realities. Nevertheless, from a historical perspective gender serves as useful category of analysis in which “gender is, among other things, a position one occupies and from which one can act politically.”¹⁰⁵ According to this positionality of women in various societies, it is safe to make broader connections between revolutionary movements that have successfully drawn women’s participation in the armed conflicts. By approaching these parallels without diminishing women’s differences and idiosyncrasies, the comparisons highlight the continuous possibilities for women in social and political spheres opened up by the revolutions in their respective societies to varying degrees. Global sisterhood, like Yugoslav sisterhood, informs about the ways in which women organize, agitate, and transform their respective spaces while allowing for shared experiences among women in the revolutionary movements which aimed at both national and gender liberations. These transnational links based on common goals can expand the conceptualization of international contexts when viewed from the feminist lens.

The international women’s anthology *Sisterhood is Global* first published in 1984 featured the leading female voices of the time focusing on women’s role within their

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societies. In the same year Sandino’s Daughters from Nicaragua and Salvadoran women as part of their country’s national liberation movements, contended with patriarchal constrains, widespread violence and neo-liberal policies. “Long-haired” Vietnamese warriors continued to rebuild Vietnam after decades long national liberation fight and rallied around women’s rights via the Women’s Union formed in 1930s. At this time, Yugoslav women have completed their revolution and merged the gendered fight with that of class as they turned to feminist criticisms within the established socialist framework. In the article from the mentioned anthology, representing Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia, a feminist scholar trained in Buddhist philosophy Rada Ivenković and a sociologist Slavenka Drakulić-Ilić write in a support of Yugoslav neo-feminism while criticizing women’s position within the socialist framework. The maturity of the Yugoslav women in their criticism within the established socialist regime indicate the continuity of female emancipatory efforts empowered by both pre-revolutionary and revolutionary organizations. As Rada Ivenković sums up:

“…several groups were formed, joined by women (and by a few men as well) each with its own emphasis: research on women’s studies, or dealing with women’s practical problems, or concerns of women writers and artists. Homosexuals, both women and men, also joined to analyze the problems of oppression they face.”

The ability to criticize, therefore is a direct, practical outcome of the AFW revolutionary legacy (1941-1953) that post-war generations reaped and the testament of continuity that tied generations of Yugoslav women together. In the post-Yugoslav spaces, this

connective link is still evident despite the presence of fascism, nationalism, sexism, and misogyny in the transitional spaces.

However, Yugoslav women during Royal Yugoslavia (1919-1941) experienced similar conditions as their Vietnamese and Latin American counterparts. The parallels between these women separated by time and space, reflect women’s positionality in political activism(s) and highlight the pre-revolutionary conditions that motivated these women to enter the fight and activist circles. Although the economic frameworks varied, these women operated within the conservative dictatorships and/or contended with foreign invaders which perpetuated traditional and patriarchal divisions and undermined women’s role in their respective societies. Young Yugoslav urban women found the social expression in SKOJ (League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) like their El Salvadoran counterparts in groups like the Young Communists which became “critical in channeling many women into opposition activism”\(^\text{107}\) in 1960s and on. Women’s Union in Vietnam “opened up new prospects for them in the conscious struggle at the national level.”\(^\text{108}\) These “preexisting networks – formed for nonrevolutionary and often nonpolitical purposes-were the ones who were most likely to become revolutionaries.”\(^\text{109}\) Fusion with the Marxist-Leninist ideology that supported gender equality provided breeding grounds for women’s mobilization into the activist circles.

During the revolutionary period, the similarities between the mentioned cases are striking from the gendered lens. The statistics in all of these cases show that

\(^\text{109}\) Ibid.
approximately a third of all participants in these national liberation movements consisted of young women in both active and supportive roles during combat.¹¹⁰ In the Yugoslav case, these numbers increased as the membership in AFW continued to rise putting the revolutionary activism to practice in times of peace. Since all of the women that actively fought during times of armed conflict demobilized in its aftermath, the degree of return to more traditional or rather non-combatant roles signify that women were never seen as serious actors in the military formation once the revolutions completed. Nevertheless, the significance of women’s participation in the revolutionary networks should not be underestimated when viewed in retrospect.

Family, as the most basic unit of organization, came to play a crucial component in the mobilization efforts. In the case of Vietnam, particularly from 1945 to 1975, “the conflict was a ‘family affair,’ not only a war for independence from foreign control, but a struggle that frequently included all family members.”¹¹¹ Alija Maglajlić in his interview talks about his sister, a commemorated Yugoslav national hero Vahida Maglalić, who along with three other brothers died during World War II Yugoslavia while fighting in the ranks of Partisans and Partizankas.¹¹² In the case of El Salvador, as Kampwritth

¹¹⁰ In Yugoslavia, 2 million women participated in the war effort as members of AFW. In Vietnam, the scarcity of statistics make it difficult to ascertain the numbers of female participation, nevertheless, historian Sandra Taylor concludes “it is clear that women were numerically important throughout the conflict” (Taylor, 61). Taylor uses NLF reports in which she approximates women’s involvement at roughly 30% while at some regions, she indicates as many as 50% of women participated in combat. Although the statistics vary in the Latin American cases and are often based on estimates, I concur Karen Kampwritth’s conclusion that “even if the percentage of female combatants was not exactly 30 percent, ‘a quantum leap occurred in women’s participation in Latin American revolutionary movements.’” (Kampwritth, Women and Guerrilla Movements 3; Wickham-Crowley 1992, 216-217).
suggests, “sometimes whole families joined the guerrillas, especially in the rural areas, where the government’s violence was less selective than in the urban areas.” These familial relations suggest that transformative influences within societies occur within the most basic of units. The male revolutionaries started to view women to varying degrees in different cases but nevertheless more equal than before the conflict. The role of Marxist-Leninist ideology links all of these movements together making it socially acceptable for women to join the military ranks regardless of the circumstances. This suggest a broader trend that change within smaller units or from the bottom can have lasting and transformative effects on the society at large. The intersection of personal (family), national (state), and gendered (sisterhood) is telling in discerning the motivations to join revolutionary movements from female perspective and informs about the movements concerning with the transformation of women’s lives while attempting to break down the barriers imposed by patriarchy and tradition.

The role of women within the organized movement during war and revolutionary activism in the aftermath is constrained by multiple burdens. The female revolutionaries echo one another when referring to the difficulties that women face in their respective organized movements. One AMES\textsuperscript{114} representative explains: “

For a woman to be active in sociopolitical organizations implies the assumption of a definite commitment...which .. will have repercussions on her activities as woman, wife, mother, and, in some cases a paid worker...This situation is aggravated by the fact that until now it has not appeared that men have the intention of truly assuming some of the responsibility which for centuries has been delegated to women,... to raise their consciousness concerning the privileges conveyed by

\textsuperscript{113} Kampwirth, \textit{Women and Guerrilla Movements}, 63.
\textsuperscript{114} Association of Salvadoran Women (AMES), an affiliate of the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front).
masculinity and to relinquish their role as the star members of the cast, becoming instead comrades who share daily life and struggle.”

These limitations mentioned by Salvadoran women suggest that women due to their “natural” roles have difficulties engaging in the political world without the understanding of their “special” status within the society. Similarly, Yugoslav AFW delegates often complained about women’s double burden. AFW delegate, Nevena Novaković, suggests that the double burden curtails women’s ability to commit to international outreach since domestic affairs in the aftermath of the war take precedence. At least at the leadership level, the efforts to involve, agitate and inform AFW activists about international affairs, particularly, about Spain, Vietnam and Greece, suggest that at least some work has been put forward to connect women abroad. What sets the Yugoslav women apart is the work that has been put forward in their localized activism and the attempts to connect international women’s movements. After World War II, AFW continued to actively engage women in literary courses, political participation and work force with a growing success in domestic realm. AFW emphasized the need for female participation in public life so women can “have a direct influence on the way of life and thinking of our people.”

In the rebuilding projects around the country in 1949, such as the improvement of roads, schools, housing, among others, 4,763,718 women participated. This is in comparison to roughly two million women who actively supported the war effort as AFW members. This suggests that the organization increased their activities in

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117 Ibid.
the postwar period and continued to aggregate the direct engagement of Yugoslav women. While the similarities between women in Vietnam, El Salvador and Nicaragua are abundant, Yugoslav women stand out in their achievements measured by the radical improvement of woman’s status within the Yugoslav society. By 1980s, the special protections guaranteed by the Yugoslav Constitutions (1946, 1974) guaranteed equal pay, right to abortion, free healthcare (including the contraception), protections of mother and child, possibility to volunteer for military service (1980). By 1980, women constituted 44.6% of university students.\footnote{\textit{“Yugoslavia,”} \textit{The International Women’s Movement Anthology: Sisterhood is Global}, edited by Robin Morgan, (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996), 733.} Although Yugoslav women still contended with patriarchal and traditional constraints like women elsewhere, the remarkable improvements showcase that Yugoslav society in general, and Yugoslav women in particular were radically transformed. Not until the late 20th century would Yugoslav women from 1940s find a match with indigenous women from Chiapas, Mexico.

**Chiapas**

In the late 20th century unprecedented rebellion by Zapatistas introduced new ways to execute a revolution. Technological advances in communication brought isolated corners of the world into the spotlight. Zapatistas from Chiapas became a symbol of a worldwide oppression by capitalist societies. The leaders of EZLN tapped into universal social and political issues. Subcomandante Marcos embodied the universality of minorities in his correspondence:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, a black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Isdro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, an indigenous person in the streets of San Cristóbal, a gang member in Neza, a rocker on campus, a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in the Department of Defense, a feminist in a political party, a communist in the post-Cold War period, a prisoner
Cintalapa, a pacifist in Bosnia...a housewife in any neighborhood in any city in any part of Mexico on a Saturday night, ...a sexist in the feminist movement, a woman alone in a Metro station at 10 p.m....In other words, Marcos is a human being in this world. Marcos is every untolerated, oppressed, exploited minority that is resisting and saying ‘Enough!’

The movement quickly gained international attention and with that sympathizers around the world showed solidarity through activism while others turned to the creation of cult heroes. Subcomandante Marcos, drawing on Mexican revolutionary tradition by reproducing imagery from Mexican collective memory: “that of Emiliano Zapata on horseback, dressed in traditional charro style, with his broad hat and his chest crossed with bands of bullets,” represented “the archetype of the good revolutionary.” At the same time, Zapatistas’ symbols emerged in shape of “T-shirts, dolls and even condoms” as “the rebels have found themselves struggling not to be trivialized by a frenzy of commercialization.” Yugoslav Partisans and Partizankas, in the initial stages of the war operated in isolation cut off from the rest of the world and surrounded by multiple enemies. One of the articles in NYT incorrectly states that “detachments of women guerrilla fighters are taking up the fight under General Draja Mikhalilovitch, leader of the revolt, according to the word received here yesterday from secret Yugoslav radio station.” While the article’s author correctly reports that women are joining the

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119 Quoted in C. Tello Díaz, La Rebelión de las Cañadas (Mexico y Arrena, 1995), 97-99.
resistance, he or she lists Mihajlović as the leader of revolt instead of Josip Broz Tito. Mihajlović led Četniks, the Royal Guard who fought against Tito’s “female guerrillas”. While the international media included number of articles about Zapatistas, female Zapatistas were mentioned mostly in passing. Like in Yugoslavia, third of Zapatistas came from the ranks of indigenous women to support and actively engage in armed activities.

While the aforementioned examples in Nicaragua and El Salvador share similar characteristics with Yugoslav women, the organizational effort of AFW during and after the conflict is closer to remarkable efforts of indigenous women from Chiapas. Like Yugoslav women, indigenous women had to deal with “ethnic, class, and gender identities” which “have determined indigenous women’s struggle, and these women have opted to incorporate themselves into the broader struggle of their communities.”123 In the Yugoslav case, the Marxist ideology fused with imminent danger from the Nazis and local groups (Četniks and Ustašas) dominated the revolution and women’s struggle became a part of a larger national liberation fight. Zapatistas took on a stronger enemy embodied in the Mexican government warped in corruption, patronage and self-interest, not interested in the establishment of a new government.124 Inter-war Yugoslavia was predominately peasant society with a few urban centers in which CPY operated. Prior to the establishing of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, people experienced imperialist intrusions as different empires ruled over their territory, i.e. the Turks, the Austrians, and the Hungarians. Although Yugoslav lands were not de facto colonies, imperial social and

cultural policies aimed to curtail local cultural expressions. Out of this context, the Illyrian cultural movement emerges in 19th-century Croatia with the intent to preserve South Slavic identity threatened by Margaryizing policies. As a result, Illyrianists unified the language between Croats and Serbs setting the stage for the cultural and political fusion in the 20th century. After World War I, Yugoslav Kingdom’s authority unconcerned with women’s rights relinquishes any attempts by CPY or more progressive parties to improve women’s conditions. CPY, since its existence, included gender equality in their platform. Yugoslav women in inter-war Yugoslavia lacked sociopolitical and economic rights, relegating them to second class citizens. Also, the Nazi and Fascist occupations during World War II and inter-ethnic/ideological conflicts ensued, which highlighted the nationalistic inclinations of Četniks and Ustašas, while Communists were pro-Yugoslav since the founding of their party. In the post-war era, Yugoslav women continued to expand their political rights since by 1980s, they still had to deal with traditional and patriarchal restrictions.

Although Yugoslav women contended with different sociopolitical conditions than female Zapatistas, their organizational efforts and continuing work to improve the conditions of women are very similar. Yugoslavia’s unique position in both Europe and international circle allow for comparisons with women who directly contend with direct colonial legacies and more recently with neo-liberal economic intrusions. Although Yugoslav Partizankas were white, within the European context, they were considered as “the Other” since they came from the European outskirts - the Balkans. Term “balkanization” which “not only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward,
the primitive, the barbarian.”⁹¹²⁵ With this classification, women along with others from the Balkans did not belong to the “civilized world.”⁹¹²⁶ Their peripheral position within Europe from the western perspective relegated Yugoslavs to a status of something foreign. The concept of race within the Yugoslav context varied from the Mexican society; however, Yugoslavs’ ambiguous position toward whiteness allows for non-western conceptualization of race. For Yugoslavs, whiteness was as it was “available as an identification within east European national identities,” however, it also “informed the frames through which it is disavowed”⁹¹²⁷ since Yugoslav women as part of the socialist framework stood in solidarity with the Third World against racism. During the Cold War period, Yugoslav government aimed to “contain and disavow racism and imperialism.”⁹¹²⁸ Racist expressions increased within the nationalist discourse of the 1990s and translated into larger society abundantly present in attitudes toward Roma and often acted on within the soccer fields (Fascist chants, banana peels). At the same time, nationalism that inspired Yugoslav wars in 1990s “buried memories of Yugoslavia's global Non-Aligned entanglements and the idea of explaining Yugoslavia's role in the world through global connectivities not ethno-territorial antagonisms.”⁹¹²⁹ These connectivities refer to solidarity both diplomatic and cultural in which Yugoslavia supported decolonization

⁹¹²⁶ The perception of the Balkans changes over time and after World War II, Yugoslavia held a prestigious status in the world. However, as a result of the Yugoslav wars that perception shifted back to violent and barbaric superlatives. As part of Eastern Europe, in the retrospect, the socialist experiment is often viewed as unviable attempt at state building i.e. Sabian Ramet. With that Yugoslav female experience is especially sidelined due to the tendencies to dismiss women from former socialist countries as brainwashed or puppet like.
processes in the Non-Aligned world. In this sense, the Yugoslav region occupies post-colonial, post-socialist, post-conflict spaces abridging the gap in distance and temporality with women from Chiapas. While Yugoslav wars are often reduced to oversimplified explanations of tribal conflicts among people predisposed to violence, Chiapas Zapatista movement is often contextualized within “its notoriously bad social conditions and its history of social conflict.” Mexican government with the lack of protections and policies historically discriminated against indigenous peoples and considered them as “backward, primitive, barbarian,” in a need of assimilation.

The indigenous outlook on individualism resembled that of Marxism: “In contrast to the stark individualism promoted by globalized capitalism, indigenous women reclaim the value of ‘community by understanding this term as a life where people are intimately linked with their surroundings, under conditions of respect and equality, where nobody is superior to anybody.’” Both ideologies put community at the center over individualism which has been revered in the west. The role of religion played out differently in both cases, nevertheless, AFW delegates still struggled to eradicate the influence of religious clerics as “women still gladly attend churches” or wear niqabs in Muslim villages in the most immediate aftermath.

The conditions in which these two struggles emerged differ, however, Yugoslav women before World War II and Chiapas indigenous women shared some characteristics. Although Chiapas women had the right to vote granted by the national Mexican

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131 In the memoirs of the First Summit of Indigenous Women in the Americas (Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América 2003).
government, the community and family structures excluded them from much participation. Although Chiapas women could exercise their rights, this would also mean migrating and being expelled from their communities. Yugoslav women in interwar Yugoslavia had no such political outlet since:

…females had no political rights. Women in the Yugoslav kingdom were not only denied suffrage, but also, by custom and law, they were among the most subjugated in Europe. Particularly notorious for its discriminatory family and inheritance laws was the Serbian Civil Code, which was designed in 1844 to protect the traditional multigenerational peasant family (the zadruga). With regards to their legal ability to make decisions about their own property, the code placed married women in the same category with minors, the insane, those heavily in debt, and bums [propalice].”

This fact makes their transformation even more remarkable as the CPY offered political and social freedoms for their fight not only changing the law of land but also drastically impacting family dynamics by empowering women. Indigenous women from Chiapas gradually interjected the issues concerning women, such as domestic abuse, economic opportunities, discrimination, reproductive choices, etc. The revolutionary Zapatista platform allowed women to bring their grievances mainstream which current generation exemplifies these transformations. The challenges to patriarchy itself became crucial components of the Zapatista revolution. Although women in other revolutionary movements also attempted to tackle the patriarchal constraints, both Yugoslav and Chiapas women succeeded in practical improvements, if not achieving the complete destruction of patriarchy.

133 Jelena Batinic, 49. dis
The demands of Chiapas women stated in the “Revolutionary Law,” as part of the larger Zapatista platform, echo those that Yugoslav women asked for in some ways. Understanding female Zapatistas and Partizankas within their own concept of rights, offer lessons on how women engage within the allotted spaces and despite the constraints make a difference. Rather than imposing western liberal interpretation of rights as the universal norm with a focus on an individual, it is important to comprehend the notions toward individual and collective rights in different contexts. Both Yugoslav Partizankas and female Zapatistas operated in alternative geographical and socioeconomic spaces as the outsiders in their ideologies against capitalism and individualism. Female Zapatistas’ demands, relegated to the back matter of the Revolutionary law, placed claims on their rights, however, they still had to contend with the communal repercussions. Yugoslav Muslim women, also had to face both personal, familial and communal pressures in the unveiling since they were defying not only patriarchal but traditional and religious customs. However, it is important to note that female Zapatistas’ demands did not play the central role in the larger struggle, at least not initially. In the Yugoslav context, women became inseparable from the revolution and in the post-war period they became symbols of a successfully executed revolution. The authorities emphasized women’s progress as they became central to strengthening of Yugoslav nationhood. Partizankas’ achievements are directly interwoven with the success of the Yugoslav project. Twenty-five years later, Chiapas women made a remarkable progress and improved their socioeconomic position through the creation of local and regional collectives. As a sociologist Márgara Millán describes:

“while supporting and mobilizing around community and ethnic demands like the struggle for land, for justice, for democracy, also began to put forward gender
demands: democratic relations within the family, the community and organizations themselves, their participation as women in decision making in communal and organizational bodies, the right to inherit land, the right to decide when and whom they marry; the right to work and study and when in a position of authority the right to be respected by men.”

This gradual inclusion of women’s issues, however, still does not centralize women’s question within the larger society. Nevertheless, the detected improvement suggests that EZLN members successfully continue to improve the position of indigenous people from Chiapas while at the same time slowly transforming local discriminatory practices aimed at women. Ultimately, like women in Chiapas, women from the territories of ex-Yugoslavia transformed into feminists in the 20th century. Similarly, scholar Kampwirth concludes that women from all Latin American movements shared the fact that they became “feminist activists, an unintended outcome of the revolutionary movements.”

Yugoslav women developed their own Yugoslav feminism in 1970s within the socialist framework defying the criticism of western feminists who often dismissed them as brainwashed or lacking agency. These Yugoslav “feminists” became pacifists, whom coincidentally Subcomandante Marcos includes in the aforementioned address, during the Yugoslav wars calling for interethnic unity and tolerance.

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135 Kampwirth, Women and Guerrilla Movements, 117.
CHAPTER THREE

REMEMBERING PARTIZANKAS: YUGOSLAV HEROINES IN CULTURAL MEDIUMS

Media coverage of the bloodiest conflict on European soil since World War II sent shockwaves around the world. The reports of rapes and concentration camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina evoked memories of the Holocaust. In particular, the portrayals of victimized women and wailing mothers permanently found its way into the public consciousness, both domestically and internationally.\(^{136}\) Twenty-two years later, this imagery of terrorized women established mental associations with Yugoslav civil war in general, and Bosnian conflict in particular (Figures 1 and 2). Usually, the creation of public memory after traumatic events freezes the imagery of victims, victors, and perpetrators and establishes a national narrative(s) that promote collective recuperation. Gender equality or lack of it becomes a telling component of transformative effects that war may have had on women. Scholars such as Marie E. Berry argue that war “may be one of the few comprehensive disjunctures that opens social and institutional space for women’s gains.”\(^{137}\) Culturally, the portrayal of women in collective memorialization through art, media and popular culture after the war can also reflect the societal

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\(^{136}\) The reports of mass rapes during the Bosnian conflict (1992-1995) continuously appeared in the international media. Estimates vary, but some reports such as Amnesty International’s Report (2017) indicate over 20,000 rape survivors, some as young as seven years of age. Rape as a systematic violence aimed explicitly at women reveal gender specific brutality since mass rapes were committed by the actors from all ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Although Serbs lead the number in the most rapes and overall atrocities committed, the fact that women of all ethnicities were targeted reveals that these women were targeted based on both their ethnic belonging and their gender. The victimization of women through the tool of rape led to the subsequent portrayals of female war victims in its aftermath. Similarly, the mothers of Srebrenica victims (approximately 7,000 men perished according to ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) became the symbols of Serb aggression by depicting them as crying and wailing on the coffins of those exhumed from the mass graves.

tendencies and notions toward gender equality and the treatment of women. The depictions of women in the 1990’s civil war mirror the national stagnation frozen in time through the images of mothers of Srebrenica or rape victims. As Dijana Jelača concludes, “this static and naturalized understanding of how gendered violence takes shape in an ethnic conflict has frequently been deployed toward furthering ethnic divisions, by feeding into ethno-national(ist) ideologies that position an entire ethnic group as either a perpetrator or a victim.” Their faces frozen in a perpetual grief, cowered and beaten by the loss of the loved ones or humiliated and ravaged by the enemy stand for symbols of victimization that war had brought (Figure 3). More often than not, these women appear in public spaces as brutalized survivors who endured an immense loss, an indescribable assault and despite all of it, they continue to live and even thrive. The focus on their victimization in public sphere rather than the resilience and courage often strips the rape survivors of their agency and instead perpetuates gender stereotypes of women as weak and helpless. Some may argue that this assertion undermines the extent of atrocities committed against the survivors and downplays the crimes. I, on the other hand, show that depictions of females in collective memory offer valuable insights into the social and political agency of women.

But there are other images from the past that lurk in the background. The portrayals of Partizankas, female fighters and activists during World War II, appear as antithesis to the depictions of female imagery produced by the Yugoslav wars. These women became visible actors in public consciousness and memory, offering a counter-memory to victimized women of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. The symbol of a

**Figure 1** Traumatized woman, Bosnian Muslim rape victim. Photo taken by Anthony Lloyd, noted war correspondent and former British Army officer.

**Figure 2** Bosnian Women during Yugoslav Wars. Photo taken by Andrew Kaiser-G.A.F.F./SIPA PRESS, Autumn ‘92.

**Figure 3** Bosnian women weep at the grave of a victim of the infamous Srebrenica massacre, at a memorial cemetery in Potočari, near Srebrenica (AFP Photo/Koca Sulejmanovic)
successfully executed revolution, became an image of a female soldier equipped with a
gun, uniform and a hat with a red star (petokraka) (Figure 4). Yet, the juxtaposition of the
females in the post-war World War II imagery of Yugoslavia and contemporary
depictions of victimized women of Yugoslav wars show two opposing representations
(Figure 5 and 6). Two polar opposites of memorialization separate these women as if the
gender politics came from two different cultures and were not separated by only a few
decades. The former generations of resolute, resilient female soldiers and activists
contend with the symbolism of fragile, wailing women engraved as the victims, as if their
lives halted when their loved ones ceased to exist. This contrast between victims and
heroes highlights significant contributions by women in the post-World War II period and
showcases a longstanding tradition of Marxist feminism and, later, Yugoslav socialist
feminism. In the Yugoslav context, Partizankas appear as strong, successful women who
not only have achieved emancipation but became revered symbols of National Liberation
Movement (NLM). Also, the comparison between victims and heroes illuminate a
juxtaposition between women’s status in the socialist Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav
countries.
This chapter focuses on Partizankas’ representations in Yugoslav cinema, Yugoslav historiography and Yugoslav public spaces from 1945 to contemporary times. The exploration of popular culture and official imagery reveals the depth of Partizanka’s penetration into public consciousness and memory. The depiction of gender – based
violence that paints women as victims rather than active agents in war simultaneously furthers ethnic divisions in the post-Yugoslav era, as Jelača posits, Partizankas’ representations served to alleviate ethnic differences by adherence to the supranational Yugoslav identity in post-World War II period. Partizankas became symbols of trans-ethnic nation building, a victorious revolution, and indicators of progressive politics in action. These achievements appeared in popular culture and official imagery/rhetoric to testify to the visibility of female fighters and activists in public memory. In contrast, pictures of victimized women and their realities in the 90’s serve to advance ethnic divisions and hinder the reconciliation process. By dividing the timeline into three different periods (1945-1980s, 1980s-2000, 2000-present) I show that Partizankas as symbols of a successful revolution continuously appear in popular culture and public spaces. I focus on continuity rather than on fragmented collective memory of Partizankas in order to illuminate their accomplishments both during the war and later in public memory in Yugoslavia. A slow return of Partizankas—as well as other Yugoslav insignia in both popular culture and academic research in recent years testifies to the presence and cultural relevance of the Yugoslav idea despite the borders and ethnic politics separating the former republics. The upsurge in depictions of Partizankas following World War II attests to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia’s (CPY) commitment to women in return for their participation in war. Since the Yugoslav regime controlled and monitored production of film, historiography, and monument building, the ideological component in portrayal of Partizankas played a crucial role. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav project viewed through a lens of female actors showcases that gender equality reflected CPY’s commitment to the Yugoslav unity. Women’s status in society became firmly tied to the
progression/digression of the Yugoslav idea. As the commitment to the Yugoslav supranational identity weakened in cultural spheres, so did the image of Partizankas faded. The abandonment of cultural dedication to the Yugoslav idea by the political echelon also betrayed promises to women’s progress. Despite the failure to continue improving women’s status in the Yugoslav society, Partizankas remained standing as a testament to the achievements of gender equality, successful revolution, and the anti-fascist struggle.

The majority of current scholarship on cultural memory focuses on Yugoslavnostalgia, a term derived from a positive sentiment toward the socialist postwar project. As sociologist Ivana Spasić suggests in her exploration of contemporary Serbian society: “majority remembers socialist Yugoslavia in laudatory tone, with the feeling of loss and nostalgia.” Collective memory formation in the Yugoslav context acquires a specialized meaning devoid from ideological impetus. Or as Svetlana Boym coins two tendencies of nostalgia, restorative and reflective, where the former centers on the efforts to “rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps,” the latter focuses on the reconstruction of monuments of the past to commemorate “the dreams of another place and another time.” This reflective nostalgia in the Yugoslav context proves the continuity in collective memory about socialist Yugoslavia. Although the remembrance of Partizankas in particular gets overshadowed by the atrocities of the 1990s conflict, their presence deserves further attention in order to offer alternatives to victimization of women during recent Yugoslav wars. Along with Yugoslav insignia, Partizankas

reemerge as epitomes of strong, willful women who fought for the liberation on both national and individual level, for their country and their gender. The origins of these depictions emerge in the post-World War II collective memory formation which presents women as victors and active agents in nation building and cultural progress. Yugoslav film industry serves as a backdrop to the collective memory foundation.

1945-1980: Establishing Memory: Partizankas in the Yugoslav film

Cinematic works served as an important propaganda medium in the communist world. The film industries in the communist societies became state-sponsored ventures attracting large audiences while conveying cultural messages.¹⁴¹ In socialist Yugoslavia, film became a key tool in propagating CPY’s sociopolitical messages. The choice to select the first movie after World War II with a female lead showcases CPY’s commitment to gender equality along with the dedication to present tranethnic character of the Yugoslav project. In 1947, the movie Slavica embodied both commitments. First, the female Croatian protagonist Slavica (Irena Kolesar) fulfilled the ethnic standard that proved CPY’s efforts to distance itself from pro-Serbian monarchy in the interwar period. Therefore, a Croatian woman rather than a Serbian woman sent a unitary message that new Yugoslavia promised the key to the national question by emphasizing diversity. Partizanka Neda Božinović in her recollections posits: “When they (CPY) looked (for a representative), they wanted a woman, a Croat, a fighter from 1941…I satisfied all of the categories at once.”¹⁴² Secondly, the depiction of a transformation of Slavica symbolized the effects of NLM successes while at the same time promising a better and brighter

¹⁴² Gordana Stojakovic, Neda: jedna biografija, (Novi Sad: Futura Publikacije, 2002), 34.
future for both women and the nation. The story takes place along the Dalmatian coast in Croatia where Slavica falls in love with a young fisherman Marin (Marijan Lovrić). Due to their class differences, Slavica’s family disapproves of this relationship. However, war circumstances force Slavica and Marin to join the Partisans and attempt to hide the boat built by the local community from the Italians. Ultimately, Slavica dies in the battle and the boat itself carries her name which becomes the first ship of the Yugoslav Navy. A woman’s life becomes synonymous to the sacrifice for the nation where an individual appears of a secondary importance.

Similarly, in postwar historiography, the emphasis on collective rather than individual emerges as the theme. When one of the surprised Partisans stumbles upon the First Female Regiment in Lika, Croatia, he interviews several of the Partizankas that joined the regiment. He asks Milica Vejovic: “You are young. Wouldn’t it be a pity if you died?” Milica responds: “It would be worse to die as a slave than die for the freedom of our people.” Desanka Stojić in her book The First Female Partisan Regiment (Prva Ženska Četa), includes excerpts of conversations among surprised passersby and often uses laudatory phrases to depict Partizankas “irresistible enthusiasm” or makes sure to mention “the fire in her eyes” when speaking of the enemies or the cause. In both cinema and historical accounts, the theme of Yugoslav unity emerges in presentations of courageous women who willingly sacrificed for the common cause.

Another iconic film in the partisan genre Kozara (1962) portrays the variety of female roles during World War II, depicting them as clandestine informants, nurses, nurses,
combatants and victims. By the 1960s, the cinematic approach shifted from Soviet-style socialist realism to a distinct Yugoslav Partisan genre, new film (novi film). One New York Times journalist in 1969 makes the distinction between Soviet and Yugoslav filmmaking: “For them (Soviets), contemporary conflicts are something to be resolved through sagacious and engaged mediation of Christ-like party officials.” The author continues to add that “their (Soviet) films are generally a bore,” while Yugoslav filmmakers depict “quite a different version of life in a Communist society, where people love and hate, kill and cheat, lie and go hungry.” This suggested complexity of Yugoslav cinema uncovers amicable relationship between the United States and Yugoslavia on international stage. After the Soviet-Yugoslav split in 1948, Yugoslav president-for-life Josip Broz Tito allowed the screenings of American and other western movies to domestic audiences. This political shift also restructured the film industry and its approach to filmmaking. As evident in Kozara, plots became more complex and acting significantly improved. While the film narrates the famous 1942 Kozara Offensive, the ideological message finds its way to the screen in a portrayal of romantic relationships. The characters of Zlata and Ahmet suggest an inter-ethnic romantic alliance utilized to normalize and showcase Yugoslav unity. The courageous Zlata serves as a courier who carries the messages to disjointed Partisan troops surrounding the city of Prijedor. In one scene, Zlata covers Ahmet’s eyes as he is dancing the partisan circle (partizansko kolo) to surprise him after a long separation. While they are talking about her new assignment, Ahmet emotionally wonders when they will finally be together as Zlata consoles him.

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147 Ibid.
This momentary reversal of stereotypical gender roles signifies the dedication to the cause but at the same time, renders Zlata as an equal to the soldier regardless of her civilian attire. Whether she carries a gun, or a letter becomes insignificant. Yet, her attire defines her femininity as she wears a skirt slightly below her knee and carries a purse while walking through the woods. Zlata’s fate follows that of Slavica as Germans in Prijedor execute her. Once again, a courageous Partizanka dies for the cause. Zlata’s martyrdom defines the ideal of Yugoslav femininity and places it on the pedestal.

As part of the new film wave of 1960s, a “gifted Belgrade director” Puriša Djordjević directed the surrealism inspired *The Girl (Devojka)* in 1965. In it, he explores the revolutionary efforts of the Partisans.\(^{148}\) In this period, a new generation of directors who did not participate in the war produced more artistically creative films. A NY Times article suggests that “Mr. Djordjević, for example, has been revolutionizing the image of the Partisan warrior, always the glorious patriot-hero in earlier Yugoslav films.”\(^{149}\) This “generational metalepsis” or a “leap forward” tied “the Yugoslavs abidingly to the partisan past and transferred the partisan spirit to art production anew.”\(^{150}\) The relevance of partisan revolutionary past continues to appear in popular culture. However, the approach toward the presentations of Partisans in general and Partizankas in particular transforms as time elapses. More critical and complex narratives emerge as evident in the film *The Girl (Devojka)*. The main characters include two nameless individuals, a


partisan who becomes a deserter (Ljubiša Samardžić) and a girl with the number 26 (Milena Dravić), along with a photographer and Nazi aggressors. This anonymity attests to many lives lost during WWII without any particular glorification. The photographer binds the characters together through his collection of the photos. This shift toward a more realistic view of devasting effects of war also presents this Partizanka as a nameless individual trapped by chaotic violence. Additionally, a portrayal of partisan deserter points to the emergence of more complex narratives compared to earlier movies where such a critical approach would have created official controversies. In one scene, Milena Dravić walks by the body of water as bombs keep falling around her. She aimlessly walks along the shore without paying attention or reacting to the bombs. Her resigned attitude reflects the numbness that war brings, erasing not only the joys but the existence of individuals who become mere human shells in the midst of violence.

The image of Partizankas shifts from the one seen in Slavica and moves toward a less glorified depiction. In one of the occasional dialogues in the film (since the majority of movie is narrated in first-person perspectives), Ljubiša Samardžić calls after the girl: “Hey young man!” to which she responds: “I am not a young man, I am a solider!” Later in the movie, as she recollects their encounter, the Partizanka downplays her role as a solider and rather perceives herself as a lesser combatant in comparison to a male partisan who becomes her lover. She proclaims war chose her, rather than the other way around. When she carries a rifle, one of the soldiers from her unit tells her that it looks good on her, especially now since she is in love. The emphasis on her femininity in comparison to earlier films signifies the shift from heroic and gender-neutral depictions

151 Puriša Djordjević, Devojka, (1965, Avala Film), film. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH4Hgy1MUw4&t=3316s
to a more gendered representation of female combatants. Yet, when other characters discuss her involvement in combat, there is no surprise reaction but rather an indifference, indicating how common female participation was during wartime.

This film denies the realities of fratricidal animosities and offers a one-dimensional view of the conflict. The play with characters’ names symbolizes the flattening of individuality to point to its insignificance during a large-scale violence where humans become casualties. At some point in the film, a nameless couple gives each other the names Petar and Rain (Kiša) to highlight the obscuring of the individual among those who fought for the revolutionary cause. At the same time, the film also obliterates the individual and reduces her/him to an insignificant actor caught not only in the war but also within the ideological ideas that strip important cultural layers that make up a person. Simultaneously, the war strips Partizanka of her femininity that she tries to regain in a scene where she takes of her uniform to try on the female clothing and hats which she decides to wear to the battlefield, marking her presence as awkward and out of place. The transformation from a soldier to a woman wearing a civilian dress points to the inner struggle concerned with the identity that she did not choose for herself but was forced into due to the circumstances. In that attire without a rifle she dies as a woman not as a soldier. While Petar perishes as a soldier, Rain falls as both a soldier and woman. Their gazes permanently fixed on each other as they lay dead in the field.

The new film in Yugoslavia marked a shift from socialist realism to a more distinct and idiosyncratic partisan genre. 1960s movies represented a vibrant film production and attested to the importance of war narratives to both the Yugoslav regime and audiences. The new film became “a lightning rod which attracted heated polemic
exchanges on the 'proper' role of artistic expression in a socialist state.”  

152 The foci centered on decentralization and democratization of Yugoslav society and self-management to distance itself from the Soviet-style socialist realism.  

153 However, in the 70s scholars attempted to “degrade Serbian ‘novi’ film” as “bleak portrayals of socialist reality (which) became undesirable in the period of ideological ‘normalisation.’”  

154 Particularly, the cultural debates surrounding the official language of Yugoslavia culminated in the pushback from the authorities against Croatian communist during the period coined as the Croatian Spring ending in 1971. This controversy as well as the earlier cultural debate between a Serbian writer Dobrica Ćosić and a Slovene critic Dušan Pirjevec in regard to the relationship between Yugoslav republics introduced the elements that illuminated ethnic and regional discord at the expense of Yugoslav unity. Still, internationally acclaimed films, such as Battle of Neretva (1971) and Battle of Sutjeska (1973), became the epitomes of the partisan genre and the perpetuation of the Yugoslav ideal. The cast, which included Russian-American Yul Brynner in Neretva and American Richard Burton in Sutjeska, testify to the expansion into international cinema. Tito handpicked Richard Burton to portray his wartime leadership role; this move signified a shift in Tito’s previous stance where he instructed film directors to stay away from the portrayals of his persona.  

155 America’s iconic actress Elizabeth Taylor accompanied her husband Burton to Yugoslavia and paid a visit to Tito himself at his vacation residence in...

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152 Goulding, Liberated Cinema, 66.  
153 Ibid.  
Brioni. This visible display of hosting American actors symbolized Yugoslavia’s unique Cold War status. This change to the actual depiction of Tito’s character show the significance of film industry not only in propagandizing but also chronicling Yugoslav history and public memory of WWII.

In both films, women hold various roles, such as nurses, doctors and fighters, pointing out the importance of female involvement in World War II. The movies can easily be confused with each other as they follow standard partisan genre scenarios overtly vilifying Nazis and fascists while glorifying Partisans achievements, and highlighting transthetic brotherhood and unity. Both films are based on factual operations Swartz and Weiss that took place during the war. However, “the new elements of sexuality and a new degree of conformity with old ideas about femininity” emerge in these films.\textsuperscript{156} Historian Jelena Batinić describes a scene where “one Partizanka, for example, a demolition woman, is shown as she takes a bath in the river with a Partisan commander at her side, with explicit hints at a sexual relationship between the two.”\textsuperscript{157} This shift to Partizanka’s sexualization attests to the reversal of gender norms as the new generations, distanced from the immediate post-war memory, projected contemporary gender attitudes onto the silver screen. The shift in portrayals of women as more sexualized objects signal the weakening of Yugoslav unity as the progress of women itself indicated the growth of ethnic accord in the immediate period in cultural presentations after World War II. These two movies continue to perpetuate Yugoslav founding myths of WWII as the National Liberation War and Yugoslavia as a unique


\textsuperscript{157} Ibid. s
socialist regime. The fact that the Yugoslav movie industry invested untold material and financial resources into the production of Kozara and Neretva movies, spoke to CPY’s commitment to continue propagandizing Yugoslav unity. This came as a response to the Croatian Spring where some prominent Croatian communists and intellectuals, such as Miroslav Krleža, called for a separate Croatian language instead of the hyphenated variant of Serbo-Croatian. In order to subdue the regional sentiments that threatened Yugoslav unity and a unitary cultural policy, the CPY once again turned to cinema production to galvanize founding myths of NLM including Partisans and Partizankas and economic self-management.

The Fall of Partizanka (1980-2000)

The words of the prominent TV anchor Miodrag Zdravković “Comrade Tito has died!” (“Umro je drug Tito!”) reverberated throughout the country. The announcement left Yugoslavs confused and grief-stricken as if they nervously anticipated the events that were about to unfold. Tito’s death on May 4th 1980 marked the beginning of the end of transethnic unity among the diverse Yugoslav nations. Seen as the only leader who could not only overcome internal ethnic differences but also secure Yugoslavia’s prestige in the world, the earlier fervor for unity turned into cynicism and pessimism. The following decade featured economic instability, rising nationalisms, and a complete abandonment of cultural polices aimed at achieving Yugoslav unity. For the film industry, however, this general uncertainty meant a freer political climate which allowed the depictions of “contradictions of human nature” and “human imagination.” The directors of the 1980s

158 Peter Stanković in his article “Titoist Cathedrals: The Rise and Fall of Partisan Film,” states that the Battle of Neretva film still stands as one of the most expensive European movies ever made.
examined “the labyrinthine, sometimes coercive, infinitely complex surfaces of Yugoslav reality.”¹⁵⁹ This reality encompassed, as Daniel Goulding argues, “vulgarization and spread of such ideas by extreme nationalist parties and leaders of all stripes.”¹⁶⁰ When *Great Transport* was released in 1983, it was considered to be the last example of the partisan genre. The audiences appeared disinterested since there were “no more school projections, no sense of global importance and success, no unifying father figure and no enthusiasm for big, costly film projects.”¹⁶¹ As the Yugoslav idea waned, so did depictions of Partisans in general and Partizankas in particular.

While the first feature partisan movie *Slavica* included a female lead, the last partisan film *Great Transport* relegated women to supportive roles. The movie begins with a typical narration about the war situation and informs the viewer about the group of 1,000 men and women who courageously marched toward Bosnia from Vojvodina in order to contribute to the National Liberation Movement. One of the female protagonists, Dunja, a Party activist and translator, accompanies Pavle, the leader of the transport carrying food and other supplies in capacities. Although Dunja carries a gun, she does not actively engage in combat but rather serves as Pavle’s right hand and his lover.

A notable difference that sets *Great Transport* apart from other films appears in the depictions of inner conflicts between civilians and Partisans that marched together, showing a complex reality of the NLM. Unlike previous films of this genre, *Great Transport* suggests the presence of interethnic/regional and ideological conflict that predated World War II. Despite the fact that some civilians disagreed with the Partisans

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at first, the Partisans still managed to overcome the initial resistance to their movement. The rape of a character Dragana, a Romani woman, also appears as a novelty in the partisan genre. Toward the end of film, two German soldiers abduct Dragana only to assault her moments later. The camera narrows down on her face as she is being violated. Luckily for her, one of the civilians who happened to be in the same convoy as her, comes to her rescue. This portrayal of savagery committed by Germans gains a new level in YU cinema in this explicit depiction. The choice to render a Romani civilian female as a rape victim rather than a Partizanka showcases the level of veneration toward Partizankas and suggests the impossibility of such acts toward them. Dragana’s ethnicity as a Romani further singles out Serb/Croat/Muslim women as the epitomes of Yugoslav femininity and labels them as sexually pure, almost angelic. Untainted, the virile Dunja marches along with others in the convoy to Bosnia, successfully completing the mission. While Slavica heroically dies at the hand of Nazis, Dunja continues to contribute to the liberation movement disappearing in the crowd of Partisans. Her blending in symbolizes the fading of Partizankas, as a cultural trope, dissappearing in the following decade, before they re-emerged in the 1990s as “ugly, hysterical and merciless avenger(s).”

The fall of Partizankas’ image followed the trajectory of Yugoslav disintegration. As long as the commitment to transethnic unity thrived, so did the representations of Partizankas flourish. As soon as the nationalistic rhetoric interjected into public discourse, the focus shifted onto revisionist themes that aimed at obliterating anything

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162 Renata Jambrešić and Reana Senjković, “Legacies of the Second World War in Croatian Cultural Memory: Women as Seen through the Media,” in Aspasia, Vol. 4, (2010), 84. The authors discuss the TV series Files of Four: The Story of Bleiburg (Četverored, priča o Bleiburgu, 1999) in which the imagery of armed women both Partisan and fascist appear as monstrous or evil. This false equivalency served to deny any reference to the socialist past in objective terms and instead aimed at the revision of historical facts.
socialist or Titoist. However, in the 1980s the mainstream popular culture still included overt Yugoslav imagery. The publications of Partizankas’ auto(biographies) continued to appear and bands such as a Yugoslav legendary pop rock band *White Button* (Bijelo Dugme) persisted in unifying Yugoslavs through music. Socialist holidays such as The First of May (Prvi Maj), Day of the Republic (Dan Republike) and Day of Youth (Dan Mladih) continued to be celebrated around the country. Although the economic and political crisis culminated into food shortages and other hardships, the cultural sphere appeared strong. Comedies became the most popular genre of this period with TV series such as *Better Life* (Bolji Život) or sequel films such as *Zhika’s Dynasty* (Žikina Dinastija). Although the state and cultural workers never abandoned the YU project, the legacy of the partisans played a diminished role. The flop of the last partisan movie *Great Transport* showed the loss of interest in this particular genre and highlighted the problems of funding as moviemakers had to secure non-state, foreign sources to fund their productions.

Simultaneously, women’s role in Yugoslav society took a backseat to economic and political issues. In 1991, Slovenia gained independence and by doing so, caused the domino effect in the region. Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina followed Slovenia’s suit as Slobodan Milošević sent troops to countries who wished to separate. The interethnic conflict among Serbs and Muslims ensued in 1992, while Croats switched alliances throughout the Bosnian conflict. By 1995, Yugoslavia was reduced to ashes as roughly 140,000 people lost their lives in Yugoslav wars with 100,000 in Bosnia alone, with another four million displaced.\(^1\) Once a country of brotherhood and unity, boasting

\(^1\) ICTFY Report
a prominent role on international stage, Yugoslavia disappeared from the map. Yet, the Yugoslav idea persevered since cultural exchanges between the now six different countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia) continues. The question of Kosovo’s status remains disputed by Serbia and Republika Srpska (a de facto autonomous entity in B&H forged after the Dayton Peace Accords). Nevertheless, the continuous references to the Yugoslav period constitute more just than nostalgia (Yugonostalgia) but an alternative to current instability in the region, whether imagined or real. The memory of Yugoslavia offers a coping mechanism against the atrocities of the 90s as well as against the kleptocracy, right-wing extremism, clericalism and rabid ethnic nationalism evident in recent years.

**Cultural fight for survival: Remembering Yugoslavia (2000-Present)**

The contest for public spaces between World War II monuments and newly erected commemorative structures reveal the cultural complexities of memory in former Yugoslav republics. For example, football clubs commemorate fallen soldiers in “memorials which honor impossibly pure socialist heroes (who) coexist awkwardly alongside those dedicated to supporters who gave their lives in pursuit of ethnically exclusive states.”164 The paradox of displaying in tandem two opposing ideologies, one of ethnic unity and the other of ethnic exclusivity, uncovers the ambivalent legacy of a Yugoslav supranational project. Similarly, the juxtaposition of Partizankas and rape victims of the 90s reveal the conflict in public spaces between the commemoration of strong, agency-driven actors on the one hand, and frail, victimized women, on the other.

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The memory of Partizankas and Partisans in public spaces stand out as a reminder of simpler times with distinct victors when compared to a chaotic situation of the 90s and the ongoing transition period. This specific type of nostalgia - Yugonostalgia - is “based on the constitutive fiction of a viable supranational sense of unity”\(^{165}\) offers a possibility for continuing a shared cultural project of the Yugoslav idea. Based on the real past projected onto imagined future, Yugo-nostalgia serves as a commentary on current nationalist, separatist reality. Rather than viewing this nostalgia as “the incurable modern condition,”\(^{166}\) the viability of the multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual Yugoslav project as a positive step toward reconciliation and cooperation deserves attention. Yugo-nostalgia as a form of cultural memory can inform an improved Yugoslav idea that defies chauvinistic, fascist and nationalist tendencies plaguing the Balkans. The post-World War II monuments, although in decay, remain standing as reminders of a past that competes with the contemporary cultural presentations of controversial historical figures and/or depictions of victimized ex-Yugoslav nations. On the one hand, the tall statues of strong, determined women featured as the commemorative symbols represent both feminine and national strength. On the other hand, more recent representations of women cowered and crying counter these previous representations, signaling the regression that occurred in the post-socialist era. The mural depicting Srebrenica’s victims in Visoko, BiH and their perished family members showcases a distinct type of commemorative renditions that perpetuate women as a weaker gender compared to the socialist Yugoslav monument building. (Figure 1 and Figure 2) These victimization images, as scholar Elisse Helms


\(^{166}\) Boym, \textit{The Future of Nostalgia}, xiv.
asserts, flatten the identity of these women with that of dehumanized rape survivors. These victimized portrayals undermine the strength of rape survivors who continue to come to terms with the onslaught they survived as the attempt to heal. The legacy of Partizankas and AFW offer a historical example of agency-driven women who despite the hardships that war brings organized to fight for women’s improvement in Yugoslav society. They serve as a reference point and historical legacy for contemporary women and their presence is visually widespread in World War II monuments around ex-Yugoslav republics.

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**Figure 1**


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The practice of renaming streets, town squares and buildings dates back to Nazi occupation during World War II. To reverse Nazi-era changes, a new socialist regime implemented counter-naming measures and selected names that would reflect brotherhood and unity. During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990’s the name-changing began anew, but this time to erase any trace of the socialist legacy. Most recently in Zagreb both right-wing and moderate groups pushed for the renaming of Marshal Tito’s Square (Trg Maršala Tita) to The Square of Croatia (Trg Hrvatske) which they successfully achieved in 2017. The revisionist approach to history in former Yugoslav republics became the dominant narrative debunking foundational myths including the National Liberation Movement, Partisans and Partizankas and Tito himself. During the Yugoslav wars, many monuments have been demolished and/or damaged with the attempt to erase traces of Yugoslavia itself. However, these memorials still stand as reminders of the anti-fascist fight of Yugoslav Partisans and Partizankas and the fact that current authorities do not actively seek their destruction as in the case of street renaming showcases the significance in cultural legacy in all former Yugoslav republics.

Figure 2
A close up of a mural created by HAD Collective, “Silence” (2016), commemorating Srebrenica victims in Visoko, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photo by Ilhana Babić.
After World War II, Tito commissioned monuments to commemorate NLM and the fallen soldiers throughout the country. Although the majority of the monuments represented partisan brigades collectively while some commemorated individual heroes, other statues stand out because they feature female fighters front and center. More recently, Martino Stierli’s exhibit in New York City’s MoMa “Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948-1980” attempts to introduce Yugoslav architectural influences to international audiences. In The New York Times review of the exhibit, the author implies that “these concrete spomeniks (monuments) aimed to unify multiethnic Yugoslavia through futuristic abstraction.”

The monument “Freedom” (sloboda) at top of Fruška Gora, carrying a feminine label in Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian (BCS), portrays Partizanka as symbolizing a successfully executed revolution. (Figure 3) At the top of “Freedom,” a woman in civilian clothing is gesturing the call for a fight while at the bottom of the monument a handful of Partisans and Partizankas stand. While the feminine, gun-less version of Partizanka dominates the statue, the lesser male and female Partisans gather at the bottom. Underneath the soldiers, the relic of Partisans fighting against Nazis commemorates the struggle for liberation. She emerges untouchable, erected above those she commands and those who find themselves at the site, timeless and prophesying Yugoslav unity. Her depiction still hovers over Fruška Gora and attracts curious tourists. Another such example appears in Tetovo, Macedonia. A tall statue of a female soldier clenching her fist with a stern face looking ahead depicts Partizanka, or “A Female Fighter” (Žena Borec) as the name of the statue suggests.

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Similarly, the “Monument for the Fallen Fighters” in Viškovo, Slovenia features a woman holding a star and a sword in remembrance of those who gave their lives for the anti-fascist fight. (Figure 5) A number of plaques appear sporadically across the ex-Yugoslav republics in remembrance of female national heroes. Overall, ninety-one Partizankas hold the decoration of national heroes, the most in the world in relation to population totals.169

The presentation of Partizankas in both film and public spaces suggest the importance of female soldiers in Yugoslav cultural memory and public consciousness. While the ideological component and propagandistic nature of such representations cannot be ignored, Partizankas nevertheless serve as a symbol of progress and victory in ways that are deeply embedded in collective memory. Their slow but evident resurrection attests to the cultural interest in the Yugoslav past whether commercialized or not. Particularly, in the politically volatile environment in ex-Yugoslav republics, the images of Partizankas along with NLM serve as a reminder of what transpired and what can possibly occur in the near or distant future. For the film industry, the “Yugoslav film experience survives, even if Yugoslavia itself has slipped into oblivion,” since film communities from ex-Yugoslav republics continue to work “against overwhelming odds.”170 For the Yugoslav idea, these continuous mentions and depictions of Partizankas and other Yugoslav insignia in posthumous Yugoslavia serve as a testament of a successful supranational project despite the country’s disintegration.

169 Batinić, 345.
Figure 3 “Freedom” (Sloboda), a monument in Fruška Gora to commemorate NLM. Architect: Sreten Stojanović, 1951.
Conclusion

As the 1990s postwar hysteria subsided, the image of Yugoslavia found its way back into public consciousness in all of the ex-Yugoslav republics. In the transition period YU memorabilia attained a different sort of meaning for its consumers. Just as the face of Che Guevara appears omnipresent on various apparels, so does Tito’s image show up in souvenir shops around the former republics. White Button (Bijelo Dugme) in the early 2000s, a legendary Yugoslav rock band, brought together former group members
and successfully organized and executed a world tour, including the United States. Croatian TV series Ponos Ratjkajevih (Ratkajev’s Pride) (2008) show Partizankas and Partisans in a more sympathetic light once again. On the day of Tito’s death, the older generations, visit his grave in Belgrade in the House of Flowers (Kuća Cveća) to pay their respects to the former president. In Croatia, individuals organize to protest the renaming of Zagreb’s square despite the recent removal. The anti-fascist legacy of Partisans and Partizankas gains a new level of importance as fascist tendencies in Croatia continue to rise. Yet, Yugoslavia or at least an idea of unified Yugoslavia continues to present itself as younger generations can recite lines from Valter Brani Sarajevo or Otpisani, iconic Yugoslav films. The music industry, more than any other cultural medium, offers a platform where popular entertainers and artists expand their market around former Yugoslav republics connecting former countrymen culturally and economically.

And where are the Partizankas as Yugonostalgia frames the post-Yugoslav era? The transformation from a fierce soldier into a civilian female underwent a long process. While Partizankas served as a norm of Yugoslav femininity, they relegated qualities to de-mobilized every-day, ordinary women. Their legacy influenced social, educational and gender related policies in the postwar era. Partizankas’ images became synonymous to the spoils of the revolutionary anti-fascist fight. With the disappearance of soldier-like qualities of Partizankas, a new civilian Partizanka has taken over. She does not have a gun or a uniform, but she appears among those that are willing to continue their legacy of gender equality and Yugoslav unity with borders or without them. The turbulent 1990s obscured Partizankas’ image, only to resurrect in the archives. In 2018, the translation of
The Lost Revolution: Women’s Anti-Fascist Front Between Myth and Forgetting points to the commitment among predominantly female intellectuals and academics to preserve AFW and Partizankas’ memory through the efforts of the Association for Culture and Arts Crvena. A 2015 Jelena Batinić’s monograph about Partizankas attests to the growing interest in the subject in order to continue gender specific inquiry in former Yugoslavia. In 2017 on a popular children’s Serbian TV music show Pink’s Stars (Pinkove Zvezdice), then 11-year-old Katarina Radulović from Podgorica, Montenegro preformed a song by Rani Mraz Count on Us (Računajte na nas) written in 1978. This patriotic song, one of the many from Yugoslav music genre, included the themes of battles of the previous generations and primarily served to continue the principles of brotherhood and unity among Yugoslav multi-ethnic society. Katarina’s performance signifies how deeply felt the Partizan movement’s ideals remain decades later. The educational programs in all of the former Yugoslav republics adhere to their own revisionist interpretation of history. And yet, the Yugoslav legacy still finds its way into public consciousness as seen in a bold performance by young Katarina. To paraphrase Aleksandar Bošković in his discussion of the Lexicon of YU Mythology, Yugo-nostalgia can have emancipating effect on citizens living in the politically and economically volatile environments in the ex-Yugoslav republics and offer a new, more tolerant and inclusive path toward mutual future. Once again, women’s status reflects national standings in the former Yugoslav republics and instead of resilient, strong willed Partizankas, rape survivors and mothers of those that perished in Srebrenica emerge as a mirror of the current sociopolitical situation. Victims rather than heroes dominate the collective memorialization relegating the absence of a high ground where victors are
losers and heroes appear as brutalized, raped women taking a back seat to the economic and political challenges.
CONCLUSION

This research comes in time of a wave of protests in former of Yugoslavia, particularly in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Serbia, demonstrators are taking to the streets to oppose the current president Aleksandar Vučić who has become the face of state-sponsored violence against dissent, free speech suppression, and economic decline. In Bosnia and Herzegovina an unusual coalition between individuals from both ethnic entities\(^{171}\) has been formed, sparked by a killing of a young man, David Dragičević, exposing corrupt police force who engaged in a cover-up. Politicians’ reluctance to investigate the case is telling of widespread palm-greasing. For almost a year in the center of Banja Luka a series of protests organized by the group Justice for David continues to take place on David’s Square (renamed by protestors) in order to seek justice for this unresolved crime. Davor Dragičević, David’s father, galvanized popular support with his emotional pleas not only within Bosnia and Herzegovina, but beyond her borders. In December of 2018, the government issued a warrant for Davor Dragičević, accusing him of jeopardizing public safety and banning all the meetings on Banja Luka’s square without proper authorization.

These protests showcase the general dissatisfaction within Bosnia and Herzegovina and its corrupt leadership’s inability to establish viable economies and decrease the astronomical unemployment rate which now stands at over 40%. Young people are leaving daily to find better opportunities within the European Union and elsewhere. This exodus will only add a strain to already depleted economies exploited by these kleptocratic, corrupt regimes who use ethnic and religious divisions to maintain the

\(^{171}\) Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two legal and constitutional entities Federation of B&H and Republika Srpska with very few non-Serbs living there.
status quo. Women’s rights, like during the Yugoslav wars and twenty-three years later, continue to be an afterthought in a politically, socially and economically unviable circumstances. Traditional norms, propagated by religious institutions, curtail women’s opportunities as more “pressing issues” take precedence. For support, women and LGBTQ+ population turn to left-leaning grass-roots organizations who advocate for their rights but face well-funded chauvinistic and misogynist elements in both government and wider society.

Yet, these protests cannot bring political and social changes without the sustainable alternatives that could replace current regimes. In the decades after the Yugoslav wars, anything remotely associated with the Yugoslav past has been shunned in favor of strict ethnic/tribal nationalisms. But how do we then place Yugoslav women who contributed to the creation of such a socialist regime explored in this thesis? Since they were not coerced but instead willingly engaged with CPY to promote women’s rights, how is it possible to undermine and dismiss their achievements? In a search of alternatives, current populations living on the ex-Yugoslav territory, ought to turn to the unprecedented achievements of women and men who fought in NLM and subsequently created a unified, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual society based on brotherhood, sisterhood and unity. The lessons of these three decades abridge these seemingly irreconcilable identities and can serve as a guidance to create more tolerant and cooperative societies living in close proximity to each other. The Yugoslav idea fused with the socialist ideology can serve as a cultural characterization rather than national one and can help ex-Yugoslav republics stray away from bourgeoning fascism.
and rampant nationalisms. Reconciliation, rather than division, should take precedence over segregation, discrimination, and hatred.

This project reassesses the Yugoslav example in general, and women’s contributions in particular, and more broadly contributes to debates on women’s involvement in war and nation-building processes. Women’s presence in armed conflicts is not unusual but rather normal and frequent. Furthermore, I trace the memory of female soldiers in Yugoslav cultural mediums and reinforce the claim that women’s contributions became interwoven with the larger Yugoslav project, making them mutually inclusive. As long as Partizankas were remembered, the Yugoslav idea advanced. Once the memory of their achievements started to disappear from public consciousness, so did the Yugoslav idea. Usually, the creation of public memory after traumatic events freezes the imagery of victims, victors, and perpetrators and establishes a national narrative(s) that promotes collective recuperation. After the Yugoslav wars, the public memorialization is telling since women are generally depicted as victims and no decisive victors emerge out these conflicts. Juxtaposed to strong-willed Partizankas, this collective remembering reflects the psychological state the ex-Yugoslav societies find themselves in.

In the international context, this thesis showcases that women within socialist regimes exercised their agency within the parameters of their own respective governments. The parallels to other women in revolutionary movements such as Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Chiapas, attest to the shared women’s experiences based on gender-dictated positionality in the political sphere. This geo-temporal comparison situates Yugoslav women in their rightful historical place and illuminates
their unique contributions that stand apart in their legacy and success. Also, when presented with opportunities, women willingly engage and advocate for the betterment of their status.

The growing interest in the subject of Partizankas and AFW by younger generations showcases that their legacy informs ex-Yugoslav activists and scholars and serves as an example of unity and cooperation. The online Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia attests to this curiosity as the creators want “to preserve and make known historical evidence about the work and activities of the Antifascist Front of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, as well as about women’s participation in the People's Liberation Struggle and in the building of Socialist Yugoslavia.”¹⁷² Despite of prevailing traditional norms in the ex-Yugoslav societies “both the music and film industries simultaneously challenge and affirm normative gender and sexuality roles, creating a dynamic field of cultural contestation.”¹⁷³ Yugoslav themes are often invoked in these cultural contestations and serve as challenges to current traditional, misogynist, chauvinist, right-leaning depictions. Economically too, music and film cater to a wider Balkan audience in order to make it more relatable and appealing hence profitable. Monuments, as cultural manifestations in public spaces, also stand as a reminder of the past in competing environments of memory creation. Nevertheless, the fact that they are still standing and that calls for their removal have not been too vocal, suggests that this shared, anti-fascist legacy can once again serve as a connecting link between the peoples living on the South Slavic lands. For women

¹⁷² http://afzarhiv.org/
among those current protestors, the continuity in the fight for women’s rights provides a platform, both practical and theoretical, to successfully advance women’s status in the post-Yugoslav spaces.
Archive

Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, www.afzargiv.org

Films

Slavica
Kozara
The Girl (Devojka)
Sutjeska
Battle of Neretva
Great Transport


Djordjević, Puriša. *Devojka*. (1965, Avala Film), film. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH4HgyIMUw4&t=3316s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH4HgyIMUw4&t=3316s)


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