



# WER IST WALTER?

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Resistance in Europe during  
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# Brigadistas, Maquis, Partisans: Yugoslav Veterans of the Spanish Civil War in European Resistance Movements

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At least 1.800 Yugoslavs fought for the Spanish Republic between 1936 and 1939, most of them as volunteers in the International Brigades.<sup>1</sup> Out of that number, one quarter came from their homeland, while the rest travelled from other countries where they had previously established their residence. Individuals who fought the long battles away from home, as Robert Gildea and Ismee Thames argue, “were more likely to engage in transnational resistance activity if they were already people on the move, if not on the run, *before* the Second World War”, either as economic migrants, students, or political refugees.<sup>2</sup> Yugoslav volunteers fit all of these categories, as most of them were men in their late twenties, proletarians with countryside roots who went abroad in hope of finding better opportunities in desperate times of the post–depression era. Many aligned themselves with left–leaning labour unions and encountered communist ideas. Some were already inspired by the October Revolution, but others were attracted by wider currents of antifascism, fueled by altruistic motives and fears of the visible reactionary upsurge and the threats of revanchist regimes.

About half of the Yugoslav volunteers in Spain were communists. Apart from the smaller core of professional revolutionaries, many of them had joined the movement recently, in the era of the “Popular Front”. They were

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1 For a booklet–size text, see: Vjeran Pavlaković, *Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (Belgrade: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, 2017); for a more detailed approach, see unpublished dissertations: Vladan Vukliš, “Jugosloveni, Španski građanski rat i ratna emigracija”, PhD diss., (University of Banja Luka, 2022) (Cyrillic), forthcoming as a book; also: Hervé Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés au XXe siècle: Itinéraires de volontaires en Espagne républicaine”, PhD diss., (Université de Paris I, Pantheon – Sorbonne, 2011). These works also treat the veterans’ participation in World War II in Yugoslavia.

2 Robert Gildea and Ismee Thames, “Introduction”, in *Fighters Across Frontiers: Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936–48*, eds. Robert Gildea and Ismee Thames (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 2.

either members of the illegal Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ), or of fraternal parties in other countries, most notably the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Française* – PCF). Over 80 who had been residing in the Soviet Union were hand-picked by the Comintern and sent to Spain to join the multinational cadre of the International Brigades. Some were distributed to native Spanish units as instructors and guerrilla commandos, while others took over important positions in the headquarters in Albacete and in various international units. In addition to two lieutenant-colonels and eight majors, the Yugoslav contingent produced some 300–400 officers and non-commissioned officers.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, it was not only the Moscow cadres who attained leading positions, but also younger men, including students from Prague, Zagreb and Belgrade universities. In fact, the expectations that the “Muscovites” would establish themselves as the leading figures often did not come to fruition. Party seniority did play a crucial role in the formative days, but “the struggle and its conditions created new arrangements and gave different assessments.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the new, young cadre that arose from the Spanish Civil War provided the necessary manpower for the KPJ in 1941, as the Yugoslav communists established the Partisans as the most effective resistance movement in occupied Europe.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, an entire volume could be written about the role of “Spaniards” (“*Španci*”) – over 250 of them – in the People’s Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret* – NOP), but for this occasion and far from elaborating the detailed web of their commitment on the Yugoslav front, we will provide a general overview supported with several examples. The primary questions to be asked are: what was the real value of their role and how did their transnational experiences contribute to the process? We will also look at the participation of Yugoslav veterans from Spain in the French Resistance, not only in a comparative purpose, but also to affirm the transnational character of resistance networks. The reason for choosing France as a comparative case may seem obvious, since it has arguably produced

3 For the numbers, see: Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 118–122, 164, 279, 385, 455–457; also: Stanislava Koprivica–Oštrić, “Jugoslavenski dobrovoljci u jedinicama španjolske republikanske vojske 1936–1939. godine”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 19, No. 2 (1987), 15, 22.

4 Vlajko Begović, “Iz Moskve u Španiju”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, ed. Čedo Kapor (Beograd: Vojno-izdavački zavod, 1971), I, 371.

5 Vast guerrilla activity behind Axis lines in the occupied USSR should be considered a part of the Red Army war effort and thus not as an autonomous resistance movement.

the second most effective European resistance movement, with the second largest concentration of Yugoslav “Spaniards.” On the other hand, the very different nature and dynamics of this movement created a different context for their individual roles.

Before looking at the war, however, it is important to understand the major intermission that occurred in the trajectories of the “Spaniards” with the collapse of the Spanish Republic. After the fall of Catalonia in early 1939, the *interbrigadistas* who could not or would not be readmitted to their countries – mostly Germans, Polish, Italians, Czechs and Yugoslavs – joined the retreating Republican soldiers and civilians into France. They were disarmed and placed in the improvised coastal internment camps of Saint-Cyprien and Argelès. Among them were about 450 Yugoslavs. The authorities soon transferred several thousand *interbrigadistas* to Gurs, a new camp under the Pyrenees. The numerous communists quickly established political and military structures.<sup>6</sup> The imprisoned international volunteers elected as their military commander Ljubomir Ilić, a Yugoslav communist who headed one of the Spanish guerrilla squads, from which the famous 14th (Diversion) Corps was created.<sup>7</sup>

With this concentration of the antifascist cadre, the camps became “crucibles of transnational resistance.”<sup>8</sup> As the conditions deteriorated with the signing Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact in August 1939 and the consequent banning of the PCF in France, the inmates had to close ranks. The Yugoslav group asserted itself in April 1940, when it successfully demonstrated its refusal to be conscripted into the French Army’s labour companies.<sup>9</sup> Such exercises in discipline and unity, combined with prolonged internment, produced a long-term advantage: political work in the camps, much more than in Spain, fostered cohesion among communists. While Spain

6 On camps, see: Gojko Nikoliš, *Korijen, stablo, pavetina: memoari* (Zagreb: Liber, 1981), 241–292; Ljubo Ilić, “Interbrigadisti u francuskim logorima”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 7–36; Ivan Gošnjak, “Život i borba jugoslovena u francuskim logorima”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 37–60; also other texts in the same volume.

7 More on Ilić: Vukliš, “Jugosloveni, Španski gradanski rat”, 105, 114–118, 222–224, 256–258; Samuël Kruizinga et al., “For your freedom and ours!': transnational experiences in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39”, in: *Fighters Across Frontiers*, eds. Gildea and Thames, 15–16, 23.

8 Robert Gildea, et al. “Camps as crucibles of transnational resistance”, in *Fighters Across Frontiers*, eds. Gildea and Thames, 49.

9 Archives of Yugoslavia/*Arhiv Jugoslavije* (Belgrade) – SR AJ, 724, X–2, “Logori – II deo”, 14–16; Gošnjak, “Život i borba Jugoslovena”, 46–51; Ilić, “Interbrigadisti u francuskim logorima”, 20–23; Veljko Kovačević, “Pobuna u Girsu”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 171–185.

remained a military school for them, the French camps became party schools *par excellence*.

From May 1940, as the remaining Republican veterans were moved to the camps of Argelès and Le Vernet, the Yugoslavs were divided into two groups, 90 in the former and 170 in the latter.<sup>10</sup> After the German invasion and French capitulation in June 1940, the imprisoned Yugoslavs started devising plans for a breakthrough. Given the dangers of the occupation and Philippe Petain's collaborationist Vichy regime, they decided to use any means necessary to return to their homeland.<sup>11</sup> The escaping veterans who made it to Marseille established a link with the democratically-oriented Yugoslav consul general, who issued papers for legalising their residence in France.

One of the escapees, Lazar Latinović, established the first transit point for other Yugoslav veterans in Marseille. The veterans also linked up with the Foreign Workers Union (*Main-d'œuvre immigrée* – MOI), the immigrant subdivision of the PCF. Czech comrades in the MOI provided the connection for crossing the demarcation line into the German zone. Lazar Udovički managed to establish a second transit point in Paris. The connection with Anka Matić, a doctoral student in Paris, was highly important. Entrusted by the KPJ to keep in touch with the camps, she was already connected with the MOI. These links were instrumental for the next phase: veterans would rest and then use documents with fake names to apply for work in the labour-hungry Third Reich. From there, they would find a legal route back to Yugoslavia.<sup>12</sup>

## Uprising and Revolution: “Španci” in Yugoslavia

In April 1941 Yugoslavia was attacked, occupied and carved up by the Axis powers, resulting in the establishment of several puppet states, the

10 Report for the Central Committee, September 1940, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 269–277; Ilić, “Interbrigadisti u francuskim logorima”, 25–33; Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 522.

11 SR AJ, 724, X–2, “Logori – II deo”, 22–23; Ilić, “Interbrigadisti u francuskim logorima”, 23–25.

12 Croatian History Museum/*Hrvatski povijesni muzej* (Zagreb) – HR HPM, No. 102881, Anka Matić, “Jugoslaveni u francuskom pokretu otpora”, 1–7; Lazar Latinović, “Centar u Marselju”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 338–347; Peko Dapčević, *Od Pirineja do Cetinja* (Beograd: Prosvjeta, 1981) (Cyrillic), 57–206; Lazar Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti: pismo mojoj deci* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 1997), 153–158.

largest being the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH). By then, some 180 “Spaniards” had already found their way back from France.<sup>13</sup> The remaining internees stepped up their efforts toward breakthrough and soon, the first major group of Yugoslav communists who also applied for work in the Reich was transferred from the Le Vernet camp to several German industrial towns. The arrivals wrote back, telling others it was safe. “Spaniard” Većeslav Cvetko Flores, who already reached home, was sent back to Germany, where he managed to track down many of his comrades. They were all able to leave legally, using their rights to take vacation.<sup>14</sup> By the end of 1941, the total of 260 “Spaniards”, including those who came before the April war, were amassed in their war-torn homeland. Dozens more arrived throughout the war.<sup>15</sup>

The potential value of the “Spanish” veterans may have been deduced by the occupying Germans ahead of time. As Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the USSR, commenced on 22 June 1941, the head of the German Military Administration ordered the so-called Commissar Government of Serbia to “as of tonight arrest all the veterans of Red Spain”.<sup>16</sup> By then, most of the “Spaniards” who had successfully returned had already been activated. The KPJ established a network of clandestine military committees necessary for the upcoming uprising. The “Spaniards” were not usually co-opted into the KPJ’s top tier, but they were seen as instrumental in setting up this underground military network. While over 90 were active throughout the NDH, some 30 of them were put to work in occupied Serbia.<sup>17</sup> During June 1941, the KPJ Military Committee for Serbia ordered several “Spaniards” to lead the future “Partisan detachments” or work as instructors. While some remained in Belgrade, others were concentrated in newly established units in northwestern Serbia. In one example, Danilo Lečić was sent to the Mačva Detachment upon a request of the regional party instructor for one “militarily fully prepared Spaniard”. The same instructor

13 Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 592–597.

14 SR AJ, 724, X–2, “Logori – II deo”, 24–25; Gošnjak, “Život i borba Jugoslovena”, 58–59; Dapčević, *Od Pirineja do Cetinja*, passim; Ivan Gošnjak, “Od Vernea do oslobođene teritorije”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 294–295; Vlado Popović, “Organizovanje povratka u zemlju naših drugova”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 281–284; Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 158–163.

15 Not all were active in the NOP. Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 544, 556, 571, 593, 627, 666.

16 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu Jugoslovenskih naroda* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut JNA, 1949), Volume I, Tome 1, documents 108–109 (further on as: *Zbornik NOR*, without issue dates).

17 Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 633–637, 646–647, 680.

would soon report how the “comrade Sp[aniard] is on duty and already his presence is commanding”.<sup>18</sup> The “Spaniard” name would soon bear noteworthy symbolism: Žikica Jovanović, a young journalist nicknamed “Španac”, the company commissar in the Valjevo Detachment, fired what the communists considered to be “the first shots” of the uprising on 7 July 1941.<sup>19</sup>

During the early phase of the war, communists had to compete and at the same time engage in an uneasy alliance with the Serbian royalist Chetnik detachments who were led by regular Yugoslav Army officers. In central Serbia, however, the Wehrmacht’s 714th Division quickly noticed how, beside regular officers who failed to turn themselves in, one “Spanish Red Army” officer had also been active. This officer was Milan Blagojević, who had received military education in the Soviet Union and was sent to work as an instructor in the Spanish mixed brigades. Blagojević was among the early evacuees to Paris, but instead of going back to Moscow, he was granted leave for Yugoslavia. There, he was conscripted during the Axis invasion, against which he demonstrated his anti-aircraft gunner skills. His commanding officer, although informed about his political background, refused to relieve him. Blagojević evaded capture and was soon named to lead the First Šumadija Detachment. By mid-October, the detachment amassed some 750 Partisans and thanks to their commander’s Spanish experience, it did not shy away from engaging German tanks. But as his fame preceded him, Blagojević became the first target in the ignited war with the Chetniks, who captured and killed him on 29 October 1941.<sup>20</sup>

Still, Soviet-trained Blagojević was not necessarily a typical representative of the wider cohort of Spanish veterans. In fact, he was one of only four major Partisan organisers in 1941 who had spent time in the USSR before going to Spain. As a comparison, Konstantin Koča Popović is a noteworthy example of a more nuanced personality. Popović, a Sorbonne philosophy student, was one of the more prolific minds of the Belgrade Surrealist Circle, “arguably one of the most vibrant early-surrealist strongholds in Europe”.<sup>21</sup> In the mid-1930s, his political outlook, already shaped

18 *Zbornik NOR*, I – 1, documents 4, 11, 23.

19 Dojčilo Mitrović, *Zapadna Srbija 1941* (Beograd: Nolit, 1975) (Cyrillic), 82–86.

20 Milivoje Stanković, *Prvi šumadijski partizanski odred* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1983) (Cyrillic), passim.

21 Sanja Bahun-Radunović, “When the Margin Cries: Surrealism in Yugoslavia”, in *Revue des Littératures de l’Union Européenne* 3 (2005), 37–38.

by Marxism, became staunchly antifascist. As he would later explain, “I commit to action... impressed by the increasingly obvious rise of fascism which was a challenge that merits only one response: we have to fight. It became pointless to keep writing some semi-understandable poetry, I have to move.”<sup>22</sup> As a KPJ member, he went to Spain, where he served as an artillery lieutenant.<sup>23</sup> He was quickly released from Saint-Cyprien camp with the help of his French intellectual friends and stayed for a while in Paris’ 19th arrondissement with his fiancée, from where he kept in touch with his Party comrades. Politburo member Rodoljub Čolaković later wrote how Koča “did not look like a veteran of a defeated army”, but as someone fully ready to go into “another battle for which Spain was only a preparation”.<sup>24</sup> Back in Belgrade, he was expelled from the KPJ due to his unclear posture under police interrogation, but once the uprising started, he left for the nearby Kosmaj Mountain where he was entrusted with commanding the Kosmaj and then later the Posavina detachments.<sup>25</sup> Quickly reinstated to the KPJ, he suggested separating the functions of political commissar and party secretary, because, as he explained, “similar separation existed in the Spanish Republican Army and it gave excellent results”.<sup>26</sup> This proposition was subsequently put into effect.

The spatial distribution of “Spaniards” suggests that the KPJ quickly focused on the western parts of occupied Yugoslavia, namely the NDH, where spontaneous resistance by the Serb population against the Ustasha regime’s genocidal policies sparked a massive rebellion. Taking control over these masses was set as the primary political objective. In August 1941, Josip Broz Tito wrote to Vlado Popović, a “Spaniard” and the Party instructor for Croatia, telling him to coordinate as much as possible between different areas, but also to take “those ten Spaniards you meant to send our way” (to Serbia) and to direct them to the Bosnian–Herzegovinian Provincial Staff, where more “capable commanders and polit–commissars” were needed. The early predominance of the Serb partisans in most of the NDH and the combat alliance with the Serb nationalists (which fell apart by early 1942)

22 Aleksandar Nenadović, *Razgovori sa Kočom* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989), 13, 201–203.

23 Russian State Archives of Socio–Political History/Российский государственный архив социально–политической истории (Moscow) – RGASPI, 545–6–1529, biography 871.

24 Rodoljub Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, III (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1972) (Cyrillic), 537.

25 Dušan Čkrebić, *Koča Popović: Duboka ljudska tajna* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012) (Cyrillic).

26 *Zbornik NOR*, I – 1, document 21.



made Tito suggest that the capable cadre should be selected from “Spaniard Serbs”.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, this was elaborate military–political engineering, as “Spaniard Croats” were reserved for the ethnically mixed or Croat–majority regions, where their presence was intended to inspire the Croatian population to join the uprising. In essential terms, however, the “Spaniards” were internationalists and they involved themselves anywhere, as fast as it was necessary. The Italian 5th Army Corps noticed their presence in southwest Croatia in October 1941, where “the attacks have a seemingly sporadic character, but in fact they are directed by a single centralized organization”, whose staff is partially composed of “former Spanish combatants”.<sup>28</sup> The overview of the early phase of the revolutionary war clearly demonstrates their exceptional role as military organisers. Their presence was notable in the areas of Kozara, Moslavina, Slavonija, Banija, Kordun, Gorski Kotar, Dalmatia, Lika, Western Bosnia (Krajina), as well as Slovenia, which was carved up and annexed by Germany and Italy.<sup>29</sup> Five “Spaniards” also formed the first six–member Provincial Staff for Croatia.<sup>30</sup> One Partisan in Slavonija would later recall his impressions of Vicko Antić’s and Ćiril Dropuljić’s arrival: “I was pleased. Most of us know very little about waging war. The arrival of ‘Spaniards’ was quite significant. They did a lot for the development of our combat units. Experienced fighters and communists were of immense help to Slavonian Partisans in the first months of the fighting.”<sup>31</sup> Of course, the “Spaniards” could not perform miracles. Among many unfortunate events, they were unable to stop the fall of Lika and the western Bosnian highlands in late 1941,<sup>32</sup> or the encirclement of the Kozara Mountain in the summer of 1942, followed by a significant loss of civilian life.<sup>33</sup> Some local commanders even blamed them for misunderstanding

27 *Zbornik NOR*, II – 2, documents 14, 18; Tito, *Sabrana djela*, ed. Pero Damjanović (Beograd: Komunist, 1982), IV, 81, 112.

28 *Zbornik NOR*, XIII – 1, document 164.

29 Vukliš, “Jugosloveni, Španski građanski rat”, 412–415.

30 *Zbornik NOR*, V – 1, documents 10, 71.

31 Dušan Čalić, “Sjećanja na ustaničku 1941. godinu u Slavoniji”, in *Prilog građi za historiju NOP u Slavoniji 1941. godine* (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1965), 220; also quoted by: Vjeran Pavlaković, *The Battle for Spain is Ours: Croatia and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2014), 329.

32 *Zbornik NOR*, IV – 1, document 222; also, IV – 2, document 8; Branko Bokan, *Prvi Krajiški NOP odred* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1988), 184.

33 For a personalised perspective, see: Kosta Nađ, *Ratne uspomene: četrdesetdruga* (Zagreb: Centar za kulturnu djelatnost SSO, 1979).

and exacerbating the “complex problem of inter-ethnic relations between the Serbs and Croats in Croatia”<sup>34</sup>

Two questions arise. Were the “Spaniards” a cohort beyond their common transnational experience? And was there an archetypal “Spaniard”, a “Spanish” strategy, a “Spanish” policy? Their primary value to the movement was the fact that most of them were the only communists with experience in modern warfare. But that may be as far as we can go. First, they were not all communists and certainly not all communists of equal pedigree. Numerous diverging biographies testify to that effect. Second, they did not bring one imported strategy. For example, during a discussion in the Banija Detachment, Robert Domanji and Ivan Rukavina expressed opposite answers to a question of essential importance to partisan warfare: should villages be defended?<sup>35</sup> Third, their shared ideologies were also individualised. Although one “Spaniard”, Petar Drapšin, was among the key figures of the so-called “Left Turns” in Montenegro and eastern Herzegovina, there was nothing specifically “Spanish” about these events. Indeed, Drapšin admittedly ordered the execution of “250 fifth-columnists” in a wave of “anti-kulak” repression. He would remark how the “fifth column” was the reason why Spain fell, so he would not let that happen again.<sup>36</sup> According to Enver Ćemalović, however, the only other “Spaniard” in the two Herzegovinian detachments at that time, Savo Medan, was against the “anti-kulak” campaign, for which he was relieved of duty.<sup>37</sup>

More importantly, the general strategy of the NOP in itself represents an added value which developed through revolutionary praxis. Wartime experiences in Spain were limited to regular warfare. The vast majority of the Yugoslavs were in infantry and artillery units, conducting front-line operations, while only around 25–30 went through what the Spanish called “guerrilla” formations.<sup>38</sup> And these troops performed diversionary activity in an auxiliary capacity. Indeed, one of the Yugoslavs in these units, Ivan Hariš, was a quick-learning student of Ilya Starinov, the famous Soviet

34 Gojko Polovina, *Svedočenje: sećanja na događaje iz prve godine ustanka u Lici* (Beograd: Rad, 1988), 81–82.

35 *Zbornik NOR*, V – 1, document 35.

36 *Zbornik NOR*, IV – 4, document 25; Puniša Perović, “O ‘lijevim greškama’ u Hercegovini”, *Istorijski zapisi* 3–4 (1983) (Cyrillic), 188–189; Savo Skoko, *Krvavo kolo hercegovačko 1941–1942*, II (Pale: SPKD Prosvjeta, 2000) (Cyrillic), 151.

37 Enver Ćemalović, *Mostarski bataljon* (Mostar: Skupština opštine Mostar, 1986), 136.

38 Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 406; Koprivica–Oštrić, “Jugoslavenski dobrovoljci”, 21.

instructor. Hariš demonstrated immense talent and skill in commando tactics, which he will decisively use as a diversionary commander in occupied Yugoslavia.<sup>39</sup> But these tactics became a part of the qualitatively higher form of partisan warfare, which meant building a mobile army based on a socio-politically transformative and totalizing basis of the “liberated territories”.

The concept of “liberated territories” may have been introduced to the “Spaniards” during their French internment. Ivo Vejvoda, a former architecture student in Prague who was allowed by his Yugoslav comrades to join Czechoslovak units of the French Army in 1939, would later organise the fleeing Serb villagers around Drežnica and become the political commissar of the Primorsko–Goranski Detachment.<sup>40</sup> “In the camps after Spain”, he told historian Mihael Sobolevski, “from day to day we would look at the maps to follow the movements of the Chinese partisans under Mao and Chu Teh”. Among other inmates, he said, there were “Chinese comrades, volunteers of the International Brigades, who explained the tactics of partisan warfare in China. We were exceptionally interested in the concept of the ‘liberated territory’ and the way it is defended. It was quite incomprehensible to us. Only when we’ve liberated Drežnica did I understand the concept of a ‘liberated territory.’”<sup>41</sup>

Of course, the theory of partisan warfare may have been partially taught in Soviet and Comintern special schools. It was mixed with vivid folklore traditions of the “hajduci” in the mountainous Balkans and then kept alive in the form of “chetnik” and “komita” detachments, well known for their activities in Macedonia.<sup>42</sup> It also intertwined with traditions of numerous anti-feudal uprisings. All of these forms of knowledge came together in the mass upheaval of 1941. They went hand-in-hand with the KPJ’s shift from urban to rural areas, which was a step in an essentially uncharted direction, where entirely new strategies had to be devised and learned. In 1944, “Spaniard” Ivan Gošnjak, the commander of the Provincial Staff for

39 Aleksej Timofejev, *Rusi i Drugi svetski rat u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: INIS, 2010) (Cyrillic), 199–204; Ivan Hariš Gromovnik, *Diverzant* (Beograd: Rad, 1960); Ivan Hariš Gromovnik, *Dnevnik diverzantskih akcija u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1977); Ilya G. Starinov, *Zapiski diversanta* (Moskva: Vypel, 1997) (Russian Cyrillic).

40 See: Gojko Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće: Sjećanja Ive Vejvode* (Zagreb: Profil, 2013).

41 Mihael Sobolevski, Ivan Tironi, *Drežnički borac i Drugarica* (Partizanska Drežnica: Spomen-područje Partizanska Drežnica, 1988), 67.

42 In more detail: Aleksej Timofejev, Milana Živanović, *Udžbenik za Tita: Kominterni i pripreme partizanskog rata u Evropi* (Beograd: INIS, 2018) (Cyrillic).



Fig. 1: “Spaniard” Danilo Lekić, commander of the First Proletarian Brigade, speaking to his unit on 6 June 1943, before the assault to break through the encirclement on the Sutjeska River. (Photo: Museum of Yugoslavia)

Croatia, explained to Vladimir Dedijer in the simplest possible terms the crux of their strategy: “The critical point of each enemy offensive is passed when you pinpoint their exact direction and start to penetrate behind their backs.”<sup>43</sup> There can be no mistake about it: no one could have learned this in the Spanish People’s Army.

In the final overview, it is noteworthy to point out how the “Spaniards” were on the forefront of forging the new Partisan army. The architect of the central Partisan mobile medical service was Gojko Nikoliš, a former medic of the 11th International Brigade.<sup>44</sup> In this crucial endeavour, he assembled a team of other “Spaniard” doctors. Among them was Borka Demić (born Luiza Pichler), whose vivid biography is an outstanding illustration of the perplexing complexities that define the Partisan generation.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Koča Popović and Danilo Lekić would lead the first mobile “proletarian” brigade and division, the Main Staff’s principal shock-troops. In Koča’s words, Lekić’s “audacity” and “bravery” enabled the critical penetration

43 Vladimir Dedijer, *Dnevnik* (Beograd: Jugoslovenska knjiga, 1951) (Cyrillic), 612.

44 Nikoliš, *Korijen, stablo, pavetina*, passim.

45 See: Hervé Lemesle, “Demić Lujza (dite Demić Borka)”, *Maitron* (Online), Article No. 221240.

through the deadly encirclement during the Battle of the Sutjeska in June 1943, arguably the most decisive battle of the Yugoslav partisans.<sup>46</sup>

If we look at the numbers, we see that the “Spaniards” accounted for at least 35 detachment commanders in 1941–1942. Afterwards, they were either commanders or commissars (or both) for all five “operational zones” in Croatia during 1942. “Spaniards” comprised 15 out of 25 members of all provincial staff headquarters, including nine commanders and commissars. By the end of the war, “Spaniards” commanded each of the four Yugoslav Armies from their establishment in early 1945 until the final victory.<sup>47</sup>

### Few, but plenty: Yugoslav “Spaniards” in the FTP–MOI

Yugoslavs’ participation in resistance movements outside of their homeland remains under-researched.<sup>48</sup> The role of the “Spaniards” certainly demands deeper attention, but we must also note contextual disparities that create additional research challenges. While at least 500 Yugoslav volunteers went to Spain as residents of France, the number of those who came back and continued the antifascist struggle throughout the Axis occupation is significantly lower. So far, we are familiar with about 60 who claim to have been connected with the French Resistance.<sup>49</sup> In total, out of some twenty thousand Yugoslavs with French residence just before the war,<sup>50</sup> at least 500 took part in the fighting,<sup>51</sup> making the “Spaniard” contribution relatively substantial, despite the fact that there must have been dozens of Yugoslav veterans from Spain who resided in France at that time but did not engage in resistance activities.

46 Nenadović, *Razgovori s Kočom*, 80; see also: Koča Popović, *Beleške uz ratovanje* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1988).

47 Vukliš, “Jugosloveni, Španski građanski rat”, 420–423.

48 Notable exception is the early work of Mladenka Ivanković; for France, see: Mladenka Ivanković, “Jugosloveni u antifašističkom pokretu i pokretu otpora u Francuskoj 1933–1945”, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 37, No. 3 (1986), 127–136. More recent work discusses “Spaniards” in France, such as: Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, *passim*; Olga Manojlović–Pintar, “Jugoslovenski interbrigadisti u Francuskoj tokom Drugog svetskog rata”, *Transnacionalna iskustva jugoslovenske istorije*, II (Beograd: INIS, 2019) (Cyrillic), 123–152.

49 Lemesle, “Des Yougoslaves engagés”, 556; also see the list.

50 An estimate based on the issues of *Statistički godišnjak – Annuaire statistique* (Beograd: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1930–1940).

51 According to: Historical Archives of Belgrade/*Istorijski arhiv Beograda* – SR IAB, 2821, Box 5, Begović to Ranković, 20 January 1945.

Those who did, however, left a notable mark. As foreigners, they worked within the larger framework of what should be understood, not as “French” resistance, but resistance in France.<sup>52</sup> Self-preservation of foreigners in an occupied land, especially among the Jews, was an early impetus for active resistance. In fact, the actual Spanish refugees, with a vanguard of veterans, comrades of Ilić and Hariš from the Spanish 14th Corps, who had launched guerrilla activity in the Pyrenees as early as spring 1941, were the spearheading force in the early stages.<sup>53</sup> Other foreigners were also activated and the MOI itself was effectively militarised.<sup>54</sup> The acronym FTP–MOI signified its attachment to the PCF’s militia, *Francs-tireurs et partisans* (FTP). In comparable symbolism to Yugoslavia, the “first shot” of the communist resistance was fired on 21 August 1941 by a French “Spaniard”, Pierre Georges (Colonel Fabien). As was the case with Žikica Jovanović, he was also killed in action.

It is important to understand, however, that the lower figures of Yugoslav “Spaniards” in the French Resistance, as well as the peculiar role of the FTP–MOI in it, are indicative of the very significant differences between resistance movements in Yugoslavia and France. While the uprising in Yugoslavia was massive and had a central guiding force that sucked in the vast majority of the “Spaniards” (and indeed, purposefully brought them home), the French Resistance was scattered, heterogeneous and based on clandestine networks operating as “urban guerrilla” and the “Maquis”, without anything comparable to the “liberated territories” in the Balkans. Crucial contextual differences stand out. The PCF apparatus was effectively shattered when the party was banned by the state in 1939. In contrast to the fully clandestine KPJ, it had to rebuild itself in the wake of Nazi occupation and as it did, it was more of an amalgam than a monolith. And for a long stretch of time, the FTP–MOI was kept “at an arm’s length” from the PCF, almost self-reliant, functioning internally in small isolated groups, usually “triplets” (groups of three), that communicated with each other through

52 As argued by: Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2015), 205–239; see also: Denis Peschanski, *Des étrangers dans la Résistance* (Paris: Atelier, 2002).

53 Yaakov Falkov et al., “The ‘Spanish Matrix’: transnational catalyst of Europe’s anti-Nazi resistance”, in *Fighters Across Frontiers*, eds. Gildea and Thames, 37–39; also: Émile Temime, “Les Espagnols dans la Résistance”, in *Mémoire et Histoire: la Résistance*, eds. Jean-Marie Guillon and Pierre Laborie (Paris: Éditions Privat, 2000), 99–107.

54 Denis Peschanski, “La résistance immigrée”, in *Mémoire et Histoire: la Résistance*, 212.

intermediaries.<sup>55</sup> Despite their initial isolation, the communists became the most active part of the Resistance and eventually garnered massive support, but they could not impose themselves on the other parts of the wider movement. Likewise, many foreigners played exceptional roles as organisers, but they were eventually swept by the tide brought with the Allied landings in summer 1944.

Nonetheless, narrating their biographies demonstrates the French Resistance's complexities. Focusing on the French itineraries of four Yugoslav "Spaniards", Olga Manojlović–Pintar rightfully makes two distinctions: geographic and temporal.<sup>56</sup> There is an understandable disparity between "northern" (occupied) and "southern" (Vichy) zones, with their number twice as high in the latter than in the former. Indeed, by the end of 1941, Paris had already played out its transit role, which was functional due to a direct link between Anka Matić and Artur London, a Czech communist code-name Gérard, who was in the leading "triangle" of the MOI.<sup>57</sup> Matić was in close contact with Udovički, who also worked with German anti-fascists of the *Travail allemand*. The Yugoslav group produced an illegal bulletin called *Naš glas* (Our voice). The police soon cracked down on their activities; their group of 19 was arrested in April 1942. Prior to these events, Udovički managed to secure employment in Germany.<sup>58</sup> Upon return, he reconnected with the FTP–MOI, which directed him to work as "inter-regional" instructor in Lille in northern France, where he orchestrated acts of sabotage and several hit-and-run attacks. He was arrested in 1943, sentenced for missing proper paperwork and imprisoned in Germany until liberation.<sup>59</sup>

There were several reasons why the "southern" zone was more suitable for the "Spaniards" resistance activity. These reasons include the proximity of the internment camps from which they fled, the absence of German troops until November 1942, the ongoing activity of the Spanish refugees, the concentration of numerous immigrants, the French mass evasion of

55 Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 86, 223–224 and passim; see one example in: Guido Nonveiller, *Sećanja jednog građanina dvadesetog stoleća*, I (Beograd: Nadežda Nonveiller, 2004), 218–222.

56 Olga Manojlović–Pintar, "Jugoslovenski interbrigadisti u Francuskoj", 133–134.

57 Denis Peschanski, "La résistance immigrée", 208.

58 Archives of the Police Prefecture/*Archives de la Préfecture de Police* (Le Pré–Saint–Gervais) – FR APP PSG, 1 W 943–43718, Anka Matitch (Matić); also, GE 16, "Surveillances et arrestations"; HR HPM, No. 102881, Matić, "Jugoslaveni u francuskom pokretu otpora", 8–12.

59 Defence Historical Service/*Service Historique de la Défense* (Vincennes) – FR SHD, GR 16 P 580785; Lazar Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 161–188.

the Compulsory Labour Service (*Service du travail obligatoire*) and the topography of these areas, which enabled the appearance of the countryside “Maquis” and the “urban guerrillas”, that the Yugoslav veterans joined. One notable example is that of Dimitrije Koturović, a metalworker from Rakovica, later known as “Commandant Cot”. Released in 1942 from a labour company with the help of the Yugoslav Consulate in Marseille, Cot joined a small group of “Spaniards” around Latinović. Apparently, before leaving for Switzerland, Latinović organised the first local “triangles” of the FTP–MOI in 1942. Later in that year, Koturović took over and arranged several successful bombing attacks on the German installations.<sup>60</sup> He was the head technician responsible for the “inter–regional” weapons workshop, connected primarily with the “Marat” group. He was also instrumental in reestablishing armed groups in Var and Alpes–Maritimes, where he directed several Armenian and Bulgarian communists (including veterans from Spain), after a series of arrests that fell on the Italian antifascist groups throughout mid–1943.<sup>61</sup> Similar to his “Spanish” comrade Matija Vidaković in Belgrade,<sup>62</sup> “Commandant Cot” died by accident in April 1944 while dismantling a bomb in his workshop.

If we are to find a turning point for “Spaniards” in France, the most important moment came in September 1943 with the capitulation of Italy. A number of Italian antifascists left for their homeland to organise resistance, leaving the FTP–MOI in sudden need of experienced militants. As Jean–Yves Boursier argues, they could still be found in the Comintern’s “reserves”, under the wing of unsuspecting French captors.<sup>63</sup> Back in the Le Vernet camp, a last ditch standoff between the remaining groups of communists – who were too well known to police to go anywhere – and the guards took place on 24 February 1941. Ilić, alongside Guido Nonveiller, who would later become a world–renowned Yugoslav entomologist, organised this riot to militate against the handover of Polish and Czech prisoners

60 Aleksandar Mezić, “Marselj”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 482–504; also: Robert Mencherini, “Naisance de la résistance à Marseille”, in *Mémoire et Histoire: la Résistance*, 145; for chronicles of activity in Marseille, see: FR SHD, GR 19 P 13/1, “Bouches–du–Rhône: Dossier général”, A1/11, “Ci–joint en bref des actions...”

61 Grégoire Georges–Picot, *L’innocence et la ruse: des étrangers dans la Résistance en Provence* (Paris: Tirésias, 2000), 76, 104, 216, 224, 228, 233–236.

62 Rade Ristanović, *Beogradski komunisti: Komunistički pokret otpora u okupiranom Beogradu 1941–1944* (Beograd: Catena Mundi, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2022) (Cyrillic), 161.

63 Jean–Yves Boursier, *La guerre des partisans dans le sud–ouest de la France 1942–1944: La 35e brigade FTP–MOI* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), 65; also: Georges–Picot, *L’innocence et la ruse*, 185.





Fig. 2: The four organisers of the Castres breakout: Milan Kalafatić (left), Vlajko Begović (middle), Guido Nonveiller and Ljubomir Ilić (right), with captain Vučković (second from the left). (Photo: Museum of Yugoslavia)

to the German authorities. Ilić and Nonveiller were transferred to the prison of Castres in Tarn. Others would follow in the later months. Finally, on the night of 16–17 September 1943, in collusion with the MOI in Toulouse, 34 international prisoners escaped, including a group of Yugoslavs. Along with Ilić and Nonveiller, “Spaniards” Vlajko Begović (Stefanovich) and Milan Kalafatić also broke through.<sup>64</sup>

As it turned out, their tasks were already assigned. Before departing for Italy, Ilio Barontini, the commander of the FTP–MOI for “Zone Sud”, passed his duties to Ilić, while Begović was appointed as his political commissar. After establishing a headquarters in Lyon, Ilić and Begović passed through the cities of the “south”, inspecting units and rearranging commanders. They introduced the practice of swapping commanders and combatants between different units, to reduce the risks of exposure. Grégoire Georges–Picot notes that after a low point in the summer of 1943, the “operations resumed with a vengeance”.<sup>65</sup> While Nonveiller was directed to Saint Etienne

64 Robert Gildea et al., “Camps as crucibles of transnational resistance”, 56–59; Ilić, “Interbrigadisti u francuskim logorima”, 33–34; Manojlović–Pintar, “Jugoslovenski interbrigadisti u Francuskoj”, 123–124, 135–136; Vlajko Begović, “Bekstvo iz zatvora Kastre”, in *Španija 1936–1939*, IV, 206–231; Nonveiller, *Sećanja jednog građanina dvadesetog stoleća*, I, 193–210.

65 Georges–Picot, *L’innocence et la ruse*, 185–186.

as the “inter–regional” commander,<sup>66</sup> Begović would move between Lyon and Marseille. His own biography up to that point is an array of peculiar intricacies. This Bosnian–born Prague student transferred to the Soviet Union, from where he was sent to Spain. He served as the intelligence officer of the 15th International Brigade, in close contact with Soviet military intelligence advisors. From October 1937 until February 1938, he managed the frontline operations of the Control Department in Albacete, officially a part of the Spanish intelligence services (*Servicio de Información Militar* – SIM). But then, in agreement with the NKVD advisor André Marty relieved him of duty and placed him under investigation for his previous contacts with the purged KPJ leadership. Marty would later report to the Comintern that Begović is “a suspicious element”, while his predecessor, Roman Filipčev, accused him of an “inclination to align with the Trotskyists”.<sup>67</sup>

Apparently, the case of Major Begović was immediately closed in Saint–Cyprien by Luigi Longo and Franz Dahlem.<sup>68</sup> He was again used for intelligence activity in the camps,<sup>69</sup> and, with such credentials, assumed political and organisational duties in the FTP–MOI. In Lyon, he was in contact with the “Carmagnole” group.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Begović lent his hand in Marseille, where he reorganised the FTP–MOI groups, which was followed by a significant increase in daring actions all around Provence, including sabotage on the main railways, assassinations and bombings.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to his Spanish endeavours, he did not leave a detailed account of his activities in France after Castres, apart from a short manuscript titled *Gazdarica* (The Landlady). In it, Begović describes his clandestine life in Lyon under the false name of Viktor Firmin, an Ukrainian expat, who prays to God before supper and tells his landlady how he dreams of returning to his father’s factory once Ukraine is liberated from the Bolsheviks.<sup>72</sup>

66 Nonveiller, *Sećanja jednog građanina*, I, 220–231.

67 SR IAB, 2821, Box 4; Vlajko Begović, “Rat u Španiji”, passim; RGASPI, 545–6–1536, 11, “Sur le service de Sûreté Militaire...” 23 October 1939; RGASPI, 495–277–17, 66–67, Statement by Begović, 10 February 1938; SR AJ, 724, I–B/10, KPJ Paris “Control Commission”, 43.

68 State Archives of Serbia/*Državni arhiv Srbije* (Belgrade) – SR DAS, Fonds BIA, CP 3/90, Notebook 115, Milan Kalafatić, 9–10.

69 RGASPI, 545–4–1A, 88, “Informe No. 5”, 25 February 1939.

70 See: Claude Collin, *Carmagnole et Liberté: Les étrangers dans la Résistance en Rhône–Alpes* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2000), 132–133.

71 Mezić, “Marselj”, 502–507; see also: FR SHD, GR 19 P 13/7, “FTPF–MOI: Milices patriotiques”.

72 SR IAB, 2821, Box 5, Vlajko Begović, “Gazdarica”.

When Nonveiller returned to Lyon, the three-man FTP-MOI “Zone Sud” headquarters became fully Yugoslav.<sup>73</sup> For his part, Milan Kalafatić remained in the southwest. One of the more combative units of the FTP-MOI was the one centred in Toulouse and commanded by Mendel Langer (Marcel), a Galician Jew, who was a member of the Palestine Communist Party and a captain in the “Dimitrov” Battalion in Spain. It was called the “35th Brigade” in tribute to the Spanish 35th (International) Division.<sup>74</sup> Combat activities started in late 1942 and grew steadily, but Langer was captured and executed in July 1943. After the setback caused by mass arrests in Toulouse in early 1944, activities were reoriented towards the countryside.<sup>75</sup> The recomposed command staff would soon include the “Spaniards” Apolonio de Carvalho (Edmond), a Brazilian and the Yugoslav Kalafatić (Fernand). Apparently, they were crucial in organising the surrender of one “Vlasovite” (Soviet-collaborationist) garrison in Carmaux in July 1944.<sup>76</sup> Kalafatić, who came to Spain from the USSR and at one point switched from combat to staff translator duty,<sup>77</sup> as one commendation indicates, used his polyglot skills to persuade the enemy soldiers to lay down their weapons.<sup>78</sup> As Kalafatić himself would later claim,<sup>79</sup> one propaganda novelette, *Le capitaine des diables noirs* (The Captain of the Black Devils), describes his endeavours under his *nom de guerre* “Capitaine Fernand”, alongside “Volodya” (Russian for “leader”), the head of the “Vlassovites” he had managed to turn and “Maurice”, the FTP commander who died in combat.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, in a documented confirmation of their role, a certain Colonel Raynaud reported that “the Yugoslav elements, few in number, but very active, took an important part in the fighting at Carmaux.”<sup>81</sup>

Rise in resistance activity was complemented by the constant rise in numbers. Initially, in October 1943, Ilić started exercising his command over 80 combatants in Toulouse and 55 in Marseille,<sup>82</sup> but this number increased over time and the FTP-MOI in the “Zone Sud” grew exponentially.

73 Nonveiller, *Sećanja jednog građanina*, I, 231–236.

74 Rolande Trepép, “La Résistance dans le Sud-Ouest”, in *De l'exil à la Résistance: Réfugiés et immigrés d'Europe Centrale en France 1933–1945*, eds. Karel Bartošek, René Gallissot and Denis Peschanski (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1989), 165–167.

75 Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 236–238, 367–368; Boursier, *La guerre des partisans*, 195–201.

76 Boursier, *La guerre des partisans*, 85.

77 RGASPI, 545–6–1527, biography 459.

78 FR SHD, GR 16 P 316128, Milan Kalifatić (Kalafatić).

79 Manojlović Pintar, “Jugoslovenski interbrigadisti u Francuskoj”, 145.

80 Jack Hélier, *Le capitaine des diables noirs* (Paris: Éditions France d'abord, 1946).

81 FR SHD, GR 16 P 301149, Ljubomir Ilitch (Ilić).

82 Peschanski, “La résistance immigrée”, 210.

By mid-1944, according to an official recommendation, Ilić was responsible for “nearly 200 Maquis camps” that “paralyzed troop transports” in southwestern France.<sup>83</sup> With some 35 military actions until 1 October 1943 and at least 90 after that date, the “Langer” Brigade alone would grow to over 500 combatants.<sup>84</sup> Ilić was also involved in the rebuilding of the FTP in the “north” after the demise of the “Manouchian” group. Then, in mid-1944, as the FTP was amalgamated into a unified national resistance movement alongside “Gaulists”, the MOI was fully integrated into the FTP structures. Ilić was co-opted to the National Military Committee (*Comité Militaire National* – CMN)<sup>85</sup> and from October 1944, delegated as liaison to the Allied headquarters.<sup>86</sup> At one point he proposed parachuting anti-Nazi Germans into the Third Reich to organise guerrilla units, an idea that was turned down by the French commanders.<sup>87</sup>

This refusal was not exactly surprising. Partisan and guerrilla warfare lost its place in the European strategic arena after the Tehran and Yalta accords and the conspicuous erasure of the Comintern.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the strategy of insurgency devised by the PCF was never supported by other French actors or by the Allies, notwithstanding the very limited aid provided to the “Maquis” in the summer of 1944 to divert some German troops from the beachheads.<sup>89</sup> And as liberated France under De Gaulle was quickly re-nationalising its narrative of the Resistance, even less surprising is the fact that the foreigners were becoming a superfluous element in the national equation. Several Yugoslav “Spaniards” may have had an exceptional organisational role, but they were nonetheless marginalised. Ilić is a telling example, at least in formal terms: his rank of general, granted by both the FTP and the Yugoslav Army, was never acknowledged by the French Ministry of War. In any case, Ljubo Ilić would stay in Paris as the president of the Yugoslav expat antifascist council, Tito’s military attaché and later, the Yugoslav ambassador to France.<sup>90</sup> Most of the other “Spaniards”, with no

83 FR SHD, GR 16 P 301149, Ljubomir Ilitch (Ilić).

84 FR SHD, GR 19 P 31/24, “FTPF: 35e Brigade Marcel Langer et 3402e Compagnie”.

85 Boursier, *La guerre des partisans*, 186–194.

86 FR SHD, GR 16 P 301149, Ljubomir Ilitch (Ilić); SR AJ, 724, VIII, Ilić Ljubo.

87 Georges-Picot, *L'innocence et la ruse*, 277–278.

88 See: Boursier, *La guerre des partisans*, 193–194.

89 Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 290, 302, 330–334, 338–341.

90 Formally, his file confirms the rank of lieutenant colonel. FR SHD, GR 16 P 301149, Ljubomir Ilitch (Ilić); FR APP PSG, 77 W 1398–4618, Ljubo Ilitch (Ilić); HR HPM, No. 102881, Matić, “Jugoslaveni u francuskom pokretu otpora”, 17–18, 20.

reason to remain, left for Yugoslavia, where many of them assumed important positions in the political, military and diplomatic apparatus of the new state, alongside their “Spanish” companions who fought in Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

### **In lieu of a conclusion**

Apart from at least 320 “Spaniards” active in occupied Yugoslavia and France, dozens of others who managed to stay out of many concentration camps and prisons lent their hands as regular combatants (in Allied armies and the USSR), political workers, underground activists (in Belgium) and/or guerrilla fighters elsewhere (most notably in Italy). The itineraries and struggles of several hundred men and a dozen women, when compared to the staggering and unprecedented loss of life measured in millions may seem like a research subject that although captivating, carries the burden of justification. As individual stories of “Spanish” veterans may be interesting, by themselves, they do not tell us much beyond the vivid illustrations of personalised destinies in World War II. Therefore, the understanding of “Spaniard” biographies has to be pushed through the web of underlying connections that created the resistance movements throughout occupied Europe. Only then can we see the interconnection and interdependence between individuals and the collective matrix. As such, the personal stories of Yugoslav “Spaniards” such as Roman Filipčev, who died defending Moscow in 1941, or Miloško Teofilović, who joined the US Army and embarked for Sicily, may not tell us more than what we already know. But if we place them on networked trajectories in a wider prosopography and find their place in their historical context, the qualitative aspects of their engagements point us toward a more structured understanding of World War II.

Indeed, the small number of Yugoslav “Spaniards” stands in an inverse proportion to the “Spaniards” collective impact on events, not only in occupied Yugoslavia from the summer of 1941, but also in France, in even lesser numbers, especially from September 1943 onward. The results of their engagements are clear. In Yugoslavia, the “Spaniards” became a part of the already operational clandestine mechanism of the KPJ, which had managed to seize control over the massive uprising of the oppressed population. The “Spaniards” were crucial military organisers whose transnational experience

was indispensable. In France, on the other hand, the Yugoslav “Spaniards” may have been treated with the same sense of value, but this treatment was confined to a relatively isolated movement composed of foreign antifascists. Unable to materialise communist-directed insurgency before the Allied landings, the agency of “Spaniards” in France thus remained limited.

In historiographical terms, their contextualised biographies help broaden the horizon. In the Yugoslav case, they support a position that is not yet sufficiently present in academia, namely, that the histories of resistance should not be written outside of wider, multilingual frameworks of understanding. In the French case, they confirm the research findings which properly place foreigners within the wider history of the Resistance, while also uncovering the need to expand sources and perspectives and interlace different heuristic spaces. And in both cases, finally, the role of the “Spaniards” demonstrates the unavoidable weight of internationalist perspectives, ideologies and transnational experiences and networks.

# WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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