



# WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on  
Resistance in Europe during  
World War II

Edited by

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# The Partisan Resistance Goes Global: Yugoslav Veterans and Decolonisation

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## Introduction

In May 1959, a ship with 26 wounded fighters of the Algerian National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale* – FLN) arrived in the port of Rijeka on the Croatian coast. They were part of a group of 50 men in need of medical rehabilitation and prostheses, who would spend the next months in hospitals, rehabilitation centres and orthopaedic clinics across Yugoslavia. Desanka Perović from the Nursing School of the Red Cross accompanied the wounded fighters together with other medical professionals and representatives of the Yugoslav Red Cross. Too young to have experienced the People's Liberation War (*Narodnooslobodilački rat* – NOR), she identified with “the suffering, difficulties, heroism and sacrifice” of the Partisans through reading about it.<sup>1</sup> Arriving at Tangier, Morocco, where they would pick up the FLN fighters, she saw her imagination of the NOR in practice, impressed and admiring the Algerian people who, just like Yugoslavs, “stood up against colonialism for the bright cause of the future”.<sup>2</sup> During her stay in Morocco, Perović was impressed by how much Algerians knew about the Yugoslav struggle.

The long trip to Yugoslavia was accompanied by expressions of friendship and mutual solidarity and statements about the shared struggle for liberation. There were not enough beds for the wounded passengers, so a part of the Yugoslav crew gave up their beds and slept on the floor. According to Perović, there were not two nations on that ship, but only one. A 19-year-old Algerian, “a fiery young man called Ali”, could not contain his

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1 Archives of Yugoslavia/*Arhiv Jugoslavije* – AJ, fond 731, *Crveni krst Jugoslavije* (CKJ), box 468, “Utisci sa puta”, 12 May 1959.

2 AJ-CKJ, f.731, k.468, “Utisci”.

excitement about going to Yugoslavia. It did not only feel like going home to their family, he said, but “your liberation struggle has been a model for us in our hardest times, what the fight should be, what sacrifices should be made and what to go through for freedom”<sup>3</sup>

The 24 men on the ship *Rumija* were a part of the first group of wounded FLN fighters transported from Morocco or Tunisia to Yugoslavia. By 1962, almost 300 would go through medical treatment and rehabilitation in Yugoslavia, after which they returned to Tunisia or, later, post-independence Algeria. The care for the wounded was a medical dimension of the broader Yugoslav support for the FLN war efforts, which was financial, military, political, diplomatic and humanitarian and developed after the initial caution stemming from a desire to avoid a diplomatic conflict with France.<sup>4</sup> The Algerian War was the first conflict in which Yugoslavia became directly involved,<sup>5</sup> by providing diplomatic, financial, military and humanitarian support to the Algerian struggle.

The Red Cross implemented the large-scale initiative of transporting the wounded men and organising their treatment, accommodation, pocket money, entertainment and courses of Serbo-Croatian, while the Yugoslav Committee for Helping Algeria coordinated and managed it as an aspect of the broader assistance to the Algerian liberation struggle. The Committee involved state institutions and socio-political organisations including the Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia (*Savez sindikata Jugoslavije* – SSJ) and the League of Associations of the Fighters of the People’s Liberation War (*Savez udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata* – SUBNOR).<sup>6</sup> While the state institutions provided funding and support, the socio-political organisations had direct contact with the FLN and shaped the assistance during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). These organisations remained the main drivers of the Yugoslav initiatives of anti-colonial solidarity throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

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3 AJ-CKJ, f.731, k.468, “Izveštaj sa službenog puta u Split i Rijeku po pitanju alžirskih ranjenika u vremenu od 5. do 13. maja ove godine”.

4 Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 86.

5 Dora Tot and Stipica Grgić, “The FLN 1961 Football Tour of Yugoslavia: Mobilizing Public Support for the Algerian Cause”, *Soccer & Society* 24, no. 2 (2023): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2022.2064452>.

6 Until 1961, SUBNOR was called the Association of Fighters of the NOR (*Savez boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata*). In this chapter, for conciseness purposes, SUBNOR refers to the veteran association before and after 1961.

This chapter examines the afterlives of World War II resistance, exploring the role of memory and legacies of the People's Liberation War in the context of Yugoslav non-alignment and decolonisation. It focuses on the agency of veterans – the Partisans – and their relationship with the anticolonial liberation movements.<sup>7</sup> The chapter centres on the narratives of the common struggle for liberation and the sharing of the Yugoslav experience of the NOR and the postwar building of state socialism in the postcolonial world. The Partisans constitute a valuable lens of analysis as key political actors in socialist Yugoslavia, leading agents of the culture of war remembrance and as women and men with a direct experience of war and revolution. Their agency in the decolonisation context transpired through, on the one hand, SUBNOR as a socio-political organisation involved in all solidarity initiatives and, on the other, individually as the Partisans occupied leading positions in state institutions, embassies, and other socio-political organisations. By focusing on memories, legacies and veterans of the NOR during decolonisation, the chapter probes a connected, or entangled, history of antifascism and anticolonialism.<sup>8</sup>

As the above-mentioned story around the transfer of the wounded FLN fighters shows, the narratives about the parallels between the Yugoslav and anticolonial struggles for liberation underpinned the Yugoslav actions of assistance to anticolonial liberation movements. The efforts to provide medical rehabilitation and treatment to the FLN represent an example of socialist medical internationalism,<sup>9</sup> which was – in the Yugoslav case – intertwined with the experiences of the war and revolution and the care for wounded fighters during the war and for disabled veterans after its end. After the introduction of the broader context of Yugoslav non-alignment and relationship with anticolonial liberation movements and of the war memory and the role of veterans in Yugoslav society, the chapter engages in a brief

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7 In this text, I use “(Yugoslav) Partisans” to refer to the Yugoslav veterans of the People's Liberation War. It is important to note that the Yugoslav public or official discourses did not use the terms “war veterans” (*veterani*) or adjective “former” to refer to the Partisans, signifying that their struggle was not over.

8 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia”, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–62; Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria and Beate Sutterlüty, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2022).

9 Dora Vargha, “Technical Assistance and Socialist International Health: Hungary, the WHO and the Korean War”, *History and Technology* 36, no. 3–4 (2020): 400–417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07341512.2020.1863623>.

discussion on entanglement and multidirectional memory of antifascism and anticolonialism. The chapter centres on these two aspects of the exchanges between Yugoslavia and the Global South and between antifascist and anticolonial fighters: war memory and narratives of the shared struggle and the transfer of knowledge and assistance in the sphere of medicine. The Yugoslav relationship with Algeria and the FLN serves as the main case study for illustrating the multidirectional war memory and connection between antifascism and anticolonialism.

### **Yugoslav non-alignment and anticolonial solidarity**

Non-alignment represents a key context in which exchanges between Yugoslavia and the postcolonial world and, as demonstrated in this chapter, between Yugoslav and Algerian veterans, developed. After the 1948 break with the Soviet Union and expulsion from the Cominform, the Yugoslav leadership gradually turned to non-alignment and the Global South, seeking to break away from isolation and reposition itself in the international context. During the 1950s, socialist Yugoslavia started establishing the first diplomatic relations with independent and decolonising states across Africa, which accelerated in the following decade.<sup>10</sup> The networks in the Global South that emerged in the 1950s culminated in the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) “as a counterweight to the blocs of the Cold War” in Belgrade in 1961, with Yugoslavia as one of the co-founders.<sup>11</sup> The ideas of non-alignment, peaceful coexistence and self-determination that were central to the NAM preceded the establishment of the organisation, circulating within global networks of the internationalist and anti-imperialist movements since the late 19th century.<sup>12</sup>

All NAM member states were situated outside of the European space, except Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup> As a key initiator of the NAM, Yugoslavia exemplifies a

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10 Nemanja Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2023), 58–59.

11 Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1.

12 Nataša Mišković, “Introduction”, in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade*, eds. Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nada Boškovska (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

13 Paul Stubbs, “Introduction: Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Contradictions and Contestations”, in *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Social, Cultural,*

specific positionality in the global Cold War context. Yugoslavia's position was characterised by its "in-betweenness" and by the liminal hegemony within the movement – the combination of "soft power" leadership in the NAM and "liminal positionality in relation to the developing world".<sup>14</sup>

The NAM as an international organisation can also be understood as a network that facilitated relationships, flows and trajectories across multiple nodal points.<sup>15</sup> The NAM represented both a top-down interstate initiative and international organisation but there was also non-alignment from below. The latter encompassed "relatively autonomous spaces created for meaningful transnational exchanges in the realms of science, art and culture, architecture, education and industry".<sup>16</sup> The relations of Yugoslav institutions and organisations with and their assistance to anticolonial liberation movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s functioned similarly at multiple levels: as interstate initiatives and diplomatic relations and as, often autonomous, spaces for exchanges from below. Finally, non-alignment was also "a living practice, refined through involvement in peace-keeping missions, in business practices, education, film, art, cultural exchange, and activism".<sup>17</sup>

One of the main priorities of the policy of non-alignment was the unconditional support to the process of decolonisation and liberation movements from Africa and Asia.<sup>18</sup> Yugoslav officials saw important future allies and partners among the leaders of the liberation movements and decolonising countries.<sup>19</sup> In the case of Algeria, Yugoslavia deemed providing assistance and building its influence in the country that would soon become

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*Political, and Economic Imaginaries*, ed. Paul Stubbs (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 3.

- 14 Stubbs, "Introduction: Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Contradictions and Contestations", 11; Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012); Tvrtko Jakovina, *Treća strana Hladnog rata* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2010).
- 15 Paul Stubbs, "Yugocentrism and the Study of the Non-Aligned Movement: Towards a Decolonial Historiography", *History in Flux* 3, no. 3 (2021): 142, <https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2021.3.6>.
- 16 Stubbs, "Introduction: Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Contradictions and Contestations", 4.
- 17 Ljubica Spaskovska, James Mark and Florian Bieber, "Introduction: Internationalism in Times of Nationalism: Yugoslavia, Nonalignment, and the Cold War", *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 3 (2021): 49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.19>.
- 18 Dragan Bogetić, "Podrška Jugoslavije borbi alžirskog naroda za nezavisnost u završnoj fazi Alžirskog rata 1958-1962", *Istorija 20. veka*, no. 3 (2012): 155.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 155.

independent as crucial for actualisation of the novel ideas of non-alignment.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as the Algerian War of Independence broke out only nine years after the end of World War II in Yugoslavia, the recent war experience forged a bond and understanding for the Algerian struggle, as this chapter will discuss later.

Yugoslav multifaceted assistance for the FLN and Algerian independence involved diplomatic support, including the opening of a FLN Bureau in Belgrade in the spring of 1960.<sup>21</sup> This was not an embassy, as Yugoslavia led a policy of *de facto*, but not *de jure*, recognition of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, but its staff engaged in conversations and meetings with the Yugoslav leadership and attended events with diplomats of other countries.<sup>22</sup> Josip Broz Tito and Yugoslav representatives campaigned for Algerian independence in the United Nations. The official, *de jure*, recognition of Algerian independence came during the first NAM summit in Belgrade in 1961, when Yugoslavia became the first European country to recognise independent Algeria.<sup>23</sup> In his speech, Tito presented the recognition as the expression of the deepest wish of the people of Yugoslavia, which had nurtured sympathies and feelings for the Algerian people.<sup>24</sup>

Other concrete forms of Yugoslavia's support for the FLN encompassed education and training in different spheres organised for Algerians in Yugoslavia, medical aid and direct financial and military assistance, including multiple large shipments of weapons, munition and vehicles produced in Yugoslavia. The support for the FLN became a pattern upon which the later Yugoslav anticolonial solidarity initiatives that developed in the 1960s and 1970 were built,<sup>25</sup> either by following the practices or learning from mistakes, limits and difficulties of the past efforts. From Algeria to liberation movements of Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau as well as Southern Africa, socio-political organisations

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20 Ljubodrag Dimić, *Jugoslavija i hladni rat, Ogledi o spoljnoj politici Josipa Broza Tita* (Beograd: Arhipelag, 2014), 287.

21 Bogetić, "Podrška Jugoslavije borbi alžirskog naroda za nezavisnost u završnoj fazi Alžirskog rata 1958-1962", 163.

22 *Ibid.*, 163–64.

23 *Ibid.*, 165. The recognition provoked France to withdraw its ambassador from Yugoslavia and temporarily break diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia.

24 Josip Broz Tito, *Govori i članci XVII, 1961/62 godina* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1965), 90.

25 Milorad Lazić, "Arsenal of the Global South: Yugoslavia's Military Aid to Nonaligned Countries and Liberation Movements", *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 3 (2021): 432, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.6>.



Fig. 1: A soldier of the National Liberation Army (ALN) with Yugoslav journalist and Partisan Zdravko Pečar (left) during the Algerian War of Independence, 1958. (Author: Zdravko Pečar. Source: Museum of African Art, Belgrade. CC BY-SA 4.0)

shaped the Yugoslav actions of solidarity with the support of state institutions.

Zdravko Pečar, a Partisan veteran, journalist, diplomat and historian and, with his wife and journalist Veda Zagorac, co-founder of the Museum of African Art in Belgrade, whose photographs accompany this chapter, illustrates Yugoslavia's relationship with Algeria and Africa more broadly. Pečar and Zagorac were both communist activists from before and during World War II who went on to dedicate decades of their lives to living in and working on Africa. A strong anticolonial discourse and promotion of liberation struggles of the people of Africa were an integral part of their texts that Yugoslav newspapers continuously published, but they often also involved stereotypical representations of the continent.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji*, 290.



## Remembering the resistance: War veterans and memory in Yugoslavia

The People's Liberation War and the Partisans were intrinsic to Yugoslav state socialism. The political agency of the Partisans in Yugoslavia can be observed through the activities of SUBNOR and, more broadly, by tracing their individual roles and activism. SUBNOR, with more than one million members in the early 1950s,<sup>27</sup> was the association of fighters and one of five socio-political organisations that had a wider purpose as a space for free political organising of people. As individuals, the Partisans acted as the highest state officials, institutional leaders and diplomats, but also as prominent actors in spheres such as culture, arts, medicine, journalism and economy. SUBNOR and the Partisans were essential actors in Yugoslav society from the local to the federal level.<sup>28</sup> The usage of fighters (*borci*) rather than veterans (*veterani*) to refer to the Partisans illuminates that they were not imagined as former soldiers, *anciens combattants*, who had laid down their weapons and completed their role, but active political activists and revolutionaries.<sup>29</sup>

Yugoslav socialist internationalism and relationship with the postcolonial world mirrored the multifaceted agency of the Partisans. SUBNOR as a veteran association actively participated in exchanges with other veteran associations, including World War II resistance fighters and World War I veterans from both West and East during the Cold War. When it comes to the Global South, SUBNOR had close relations with liberation movements during and after the anticolonial struggles, but they were also on a friendly footing with veterans of earlier wars who had served in colonial armies. The Partisans as individual actors of Yugoslav socialist internationalism were state officials, diplomats and experts but also leading figures of other socio-political organisations who participated in Yugoslav initiatives of anticolonial solidarity.

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27 "Referat Aleksandra Rankovića", in *Drugi kongres Saveza boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Crvena zvezda, 1951), 21.

28 For the local level, see: Tina Filipović, "Osnutak, struktura i djelovanje boračke organizacije na lokalnoj razini: Općinski odbor SUBNOR-a Labin", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 53, no. 1 (2021): 43–68, <https://doi.org/10.22586/csp.v53i1.10924>.

29 Iko Mirković, *Savez boraca u političkom sistemu*, Borba: Aktuelna politička biblioteka 9 (Beograd: Borba, 1978), 6; *Osnivački kongres Saveza boraca Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata* (Beograd: Glavni odbor Saveza boraca Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata, 1947).

SUBNOR was not only a veteran association, but also a key actor of memory politics and a policymaker in that sphere. Yugoslav memory culture centred on the People's Liberation War, preserving the war memory, commemorating the NOR and disseminating the official narratives were the most important duties of SUBNOR.<sup>30</sup> Committees and working groups of SUBNOR worked on collecting documents and testimonies, publishing, organising commemorations and events informing the public about the war and dealing with monuments and memorial museums dedicated to the NOR.

Yugoslav culture of revolutionary war remembrance “celebrated the Partisans and their revolutionary deeds”,<sup>31</sup> honoured the fallen fighters and commemorated victims of fascism, merging it with the idea of brotherhood and unity. Heike Karge considers brotherhood and unity as most relevant for understanding the official war narrative, remembering the war as “fought and won by the ethnically mixed and fraternally united Yugoslav Partisan forces”.<sup>32</sup> The brotherhood and unity represented for many Partisans more than the ideological foundations of the new state, it reflected their wartime experience.<sup>33</sup> The dominant war narrative was revolutionary as it was future-oriented, with “a shared Yugoslav memory of a painful but ultimately victorious wartime past and the vision of a glorious shared socialist future”.<sup>34</sup> The Partisans stood at the centre of the memory culture built on a cult of heroism, as those who had given “their lives for the liberation and creation of the socialist homeland”.<sup>35</sup>

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30 For a detailed account of SUBNOR as an actor of the Yugoslav culture of war remembrance, see: Heike Karge, *Steinerne Erinnerung – versteinerte Erinnerung? Kriegsgedenken in Jugoslawien (1947-1970)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010).

31 Nikola Baković, “Retracing the Revolution: Partisan Reenactments in Socialist Yugoslavia”, in *Re-enactment Case Studies: Global Perspectives on Experiential History*, eds. Vanessa Agnew, Juliane Tomann and Sabine Stach (London: Routledge, 2022), 105.

32 Heike Karge, “Local Practices and “Memory from Above”: On the Building of War Monuments in Yugoslavia”, in *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia*, eds. Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc (Ljubljana: Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory, Archive Books, 2023), 93.

33 Karge, *Steinerne Erinnerung – versteinerte Erinnerung?*, 24.

34 Karge, “Local Practices”, 93.

35 Max Bergholz, “When All Could No Longer Be Equal in Death: A Local Community's Struggle to Remember Its Fallen Soldiers in the Shadow of Serbia's Civil War, 1955-1956”, *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 2008 (2010): 2.

## Antifascism and anticolonialism: Connected history and memory

Global and transnational history of antifascism is still a growing field. While the transnational turn in history has diversified the approaches to it, antifascism is still predominantly studied within European nation-states and through the lens of European national histories.<sup>36</sup> However, it is productive to think of “global antifascisms” and the different articulations of antifascism around the world, including its interplay with anticolonialism and anti-imperialism.<sup>37</sup> This interplay demonstrates the entangled nature of local and national histories of antifascism with cross-cultural circulations.

The entwinement between antifascism and anticolonialism was most prominent during the interwar period, even though the political attention shifted from the colonial world to Europe as the Nazis took power in Germany. World War I, the Russian Revolution, nationalist movements in Ireland, India or China and the instances of shocking imperial violence, such as in Amritsar in 1919 or in Shanghai in 1925, mobilised the metropolitan anti-imperialist sentiment.<sup>38</sup> With the rise of the military threat of fascism, many antifascists saw an alliance between Western democracies and the Soviet Union as the only way to contain it, while the critique of these democracies’ own empires and colonial rule became muted, at least for a while.<sup>39</sup>

This chapter argues for shifting the temporal focus of the interplay between antifascism, anticolonialism and anti-imperialism to the post-1945 period, by focusing on the transnational afterlives and legacies of World War II antifascism. Transnational history is “a way of seeing”, a lens that does not negate the importance of states but pays attention to “networks, processes, beliefs, and institutions that transcend them”.<sup>40</sup> Transnational

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36 Hugo García, “Transnational History: A New Paradigm for Anti-Fascist Studies?”, *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 564; For the transnational turn, see: Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History. The Past, the Present, and Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

37 Kasper Braskén, David Featherstone and Nigel Copsey, “Introduction: Towards a Global History of Anti-Fascism”, in *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism*, eds. Kasper Braskén, David Featherstone and Nigel Copsey (London: Routledge, 2021), 1–21.

38 Tom Buchanan, “‘The Dark Millions in the Colonies Are Unavenged’: Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s”, *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 646.

39 *Ibid.*, 646.

40 C. A. Bayly et al., “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History”, *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1460.



Fig. 2: ALN soldiers during the Algerian War of Independence, 1958.  
(Author: Zdravko Pečar. Source: Museum of African Art, Belgrade. CC BY-SA 4.0)

history is multi-layered, it is a set of “links and flows”, as “people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between politics and societies”.<sup>41</sup> The focus on the interconnectedness of societies is at the core of the understanding of history as entangled. In the case of Yugoslavia, the memory of the NOR facilitated the sense of interconnectedness with the decolonising world. Moreover, the legacies of the war were at the centre of the networks and flows of anticolonial solidarity.

Like the history of antifascism, the transnational turn affected the field of memory studies, pushing the focus beyond the nation-state as a natural container of memory.<sup>42</sup> The transnational gaze highlights the entanglements and travelling of memory and its discourses, forms, media and practices through time and space,<sup>43</sup> creating new communities of memory

41 Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier, *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History: From the Mid-19th Century to the Present Day* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xviii.

42 Ann Rigney and Chiara De Cesari, “Introduction”, in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, eds. Ann Rigney and Chiara De Cesari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 1.

43 Astrid Erll, “Travelling Memory”, *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570>.

and blending historical experiences.<sup>44</sup> These processes gained momentum, particularly after 1945.

What does antifascism have to do with anticolonialism? Why would the Yugoslav and Algerian struggles against fascism and colonial rule and the memory of them be connected? Looking at the dialogue between the Holocaust memory and decolonisation struggles, Michael Rothberg observes that “the interference, overlap, and mutual constitution of seemingly distinct collective memories” defined the post-war era.<sup>45</sup> Multidirectional memory binds together different sites and the interaction of different historical memories and commonalities can lead to new forms of solidarity, empathy and understanding.<sup>46</sup> For the Yugoslav veterans, and, we could argue, for large segments of Yugoslav society, war memory facilitated a bond with Algerian liberation fighters that was fundamental for initiatives of solidarity and assistance.

## **A shared struggle? The connecting role of war memory**

The People’s Liberation War in Yugoslavia and the War of Independence in post-colonial Algeria were the central historical references in each society and politics, providing legitimacy to the respective regimes.<sup>47</sup> The combatants in these revolutionary wars of liberation, the Partisans and *mujahideen*, became leading political actors as those who had fought for and achieved liberation, independence and the establishment of a new political order. In both contexts, the war veterans and their associations took the leading role in the preservation and dissemination of war memory.

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44 Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, “The Transnational Dynamics of Local Remembrance: The Jewish Past in a Former Shtetl in Poland”, *Memory Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 302, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771860>.

45 Michael Rothberg, “Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional Memory and the Counterpublic Witness”, *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (2006): 162, <https://doi.org/10.1086/509750>.

46 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

47 For memory politics in Algeria, see: Raphaëlle Branche, “The Martyr’s Torch: Memory and Power in Algeria”, *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 431–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2010.550138>; Thomas DeGeorges, “The Shifting Sands of Revolutionary Legitimacy: The Role of Former Mūjahidīn in the Shaping of Algeria’s Collective Memory”, *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 273–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380902745199>.

It seems natural to think about the Yugoslav and Algerian wars of liberation beyond national histories because the nature of both revolutions was inherently internationalist and did not take place in isolation but in the global contexts of World War II and decolonisation respectively. The respective liberation struggles developed into the main sources of regime legitimacy and central historical references in both societies in parallel to socialist and Third World internationalism that Yugoslavia and Algeria committed to. Both countries worked on exporting their revolution throughout the decolonising world, supporting political and military movements that shared their ideological views.<sup>48</sup>

The Yugoslav non-aligned positionality in the global Cold War grew out of the NOR and experiences of leftist internationalism such as the participation in the Spanish Civil War, the opposition to the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia and “the communication of the knowledge of the Partisan struggle from Yugoslavia during World War II to anticolonial movements”.<sup>49</sup> For Algeria, a global vision was a fundamental dimension of the struggle for liberation and the FLN knew that the goals of the struggle would not be possible without being connected to other similar struggles across the colonial world, which was equally important as the military and guerrilla operations within Algeria.<sup>50</sup>

For Yugoslav non-alignment, the NOR created “a kind of symbolic resonance and affective affinity with struggles in the Global South against colonialism”, as a popular front against reactionary forces, a struggle for survival and freedom and with a new and radically different political order as a goal.<sup>51</sup> The NOR had a threefold nature. It was a war against the fascist occupation, a class war for socialist revolution and a struggle for independence.<sup>52</sup> The nature, goals and strategies of the Partisans’ struggle reflected

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48 Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199899142.001.0001>.

49 Spaskovska, Mark and Bieber, “Introduction”, 410.

50 Alina Sajed, “Between Algeria and the World: Anticolonial Connectivity, Aporias of National Liberation and Postcolonial Blues”, *Postcolonial Studies* 26, no. 1 (2023): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2023.2127655>.

51 Stubbs, “Introduction”, 5.

52 Bojana Videkanić, “The Long Durée of Yugoslav Socially Engaged Art and Its Continued Life in the Non-Aligned World”, in *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Social, Cultural, Political, and Economic Imaginaries*, ed. Paul Stubbs (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023), 142.

the anticolonial wars that ensued and formed a basis for connection and understanding between Yugoslavia and the Global South.<sup>53</sup>

The Algerian War was the first postwar event that generated intersecting histories of violence and cross-referencing between decolonisation and Nazi genocide.<sup>54</sup> In France, for example, the memory of the Nazi occupation and resistance played an important role in motivating anticolonial resistance and participation in FLN support networks.<sup>55</sup> For some groups in France, their relationship to the Algerian War and decolonisation more broadly was heavily influenced by their diverse experiences of World War II and anti-Jewish policies.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, antiracist and anticolonial groups in France made parallels between the treatment of Jews during the Nazi occupation and that of Algerians by the French state.<sup>57</sup>

As opposed to France, where the Holocaust represented the main cross-referencing point, in Yugoslavia, it was the NOR that played a connecting role and generated solidarity, empathy and understanding. It was the armed struggle for liberation and the stories of heroism, sacrifice and suffering of Algerian people that invoked the memory of the Yugoslav collective experience of the war and revolution during World War II. The Yugoslav state officials, leaders of socio-political and social organisations, Red Cross representatives and various experts involved in the initiatives of solidarity and assistance all referred to the Algerian struggle as similar to the NOR. Many of them had been Partisans. The FLN and the Algerian War revived the memories of the war that had ended just nine years before, of the similar difficulties and challenges they had also faced in their own liberation struggle and of the necessity and meaning of assistance and solidarity. These sentiments were often communicated at meetings with the FLN representatives and Yugoslav meetings about helping Algeria.

In a 1964 interview, Josip Broz Tito argued that the Yugoslav people empathised with the Algerian liberation struggle because they “had to go through an equivalent ordeal in their fight for national liberation and

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53 Ibid., 142.

54 Rothberg, “Between Auschwitz and Algeria”.

55 Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

56 Jim House, “Memory and the Creation of Solidarity During the Decolonization of Algeria”. *Yale French Studies*, no. 118/119 (2010): 38.

57 House, “Memory and the Creation of Solidarity During the Decolonization of Algeria”, At the same time, some French resistance fighters supported the French efforts to keep French Algeria.



Fig. 3: Houari Boumédiène (right), the chief of staff of the ALN and later president of Algeria, with Zdravko Pečar, 1962.

(Author: Zdravko Pečar. Source: Museum of African Art, Belgrade. CC BY-SA 4.0)

independence”.<sup>58</sup> The identification with the Algerian struggle was not just the official narrative but people of Yugoslavia, whether they had direct experience of World War II or not, recognised the similarities between the NOR and the anticolonial wars.<sup>59</sup> Nurse Perović from the beginning of this chapter, who did not remember World War II or the Partisans’ struggle but read and dreamt about it and recognised it among the FLN and Algerian people in Morocco, illuminates this tendency. In addition to films, exhibitions and books about the Algerian liberation struggle, the Yugoslav press published detailed accounts of the revolutionary fight and suffering of the Algerian people, making the war palpable for the Yugoslavs and drawing parallels to the NOR. For the Yugoslav leadership, involving “the whole society in supporting the Algerian cause” was an important objective that would legitimise the vast and multifaceted assistance that Yugoslavia provided to the FLN.<sup>60</sup>

The FLN reciprocated the narrative of the similarity between the Yugoslav World War II revolution and their own, representing it as a basis for

58 Lazić, “Arsenal of the Global South”, 433.

59 Ibid., 433.

60 Tot and Grgić, “The FLN 1961 Football Tour of Yugoslavia”, 238.



the friendship and mutual understanding between the countries and often portraying Tito, the Partisans or the Yugoslav revolution as role models. In a similar manner as in Yugoslavia, these narratives of the similarity were promoted at different levels, from the highest state officials, like Ahmed Ben Bella,<sup>61</sup> to the FLN fighters, particularly the wounded and disabled men who spent many months in Yugoslavia.

## **Medical assistance as exporting the revolution**

Medicine represented a very important aspect of the Yugoslav assistance to the FLN. It was the main activity of the Yugoslav Committee for Helping Algeria, established in 1959. In this chapter, medical assistance is understood as directly linked to the experience and legacies of the NOR and a form of their exporting to Algeria. It also relates to the understanding of the Yugoslav and Algerian liberation wars as inherently similar, as Yugoslav actors involved in it were predominantly Partisans who understood the conditions of a guerilla war and urgent medical necessities during and after it.

The initiatives of medical assistance primarily aimed at helping wounded and disabled FLN fighters, encompassing surgeries, prosthetics and rehabilitation. The care for the wounded fighters was one of the most pressing issues for the FLN throughout the war. The movement did not have enough medical professionals or supplies to provide care for the combatants or the broader population of Algeria and the French authorities invested enormous efforts in restricting access to medications and other supplies.<sup>62</sup>

As noted above, the Yugoslav medical assistance to Algeria before and immediately after independence focused primarily on the wounded and disabled soldiers and veterans, later expanding into different spheres of the public healthcare system. As socialist medical internationalism in general, the Yugoslav initiatives always had two purposes: providing urgently needed help during the war and, once the war ended, helping advance the organisation of permanent public healthcare structures.<sup>63</sup> When it comes to the combatants, the dichotomy of the medical assistance meant that the

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61 Lazić, "Arsenal of the Global South", 433.

62 Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 80.

63 Vargha, "Technical Assistance".

Yugoslav initiatives attended to their urgently needed treatment, transporting them to Yugoslavia, while aiming to contribute to the establishment and independent working of the spheres of medical rehabilitation, orthopaedics and prosthetics through training of medical professionals and equipment donations. As the *mujahideen* created a veteran association and the Algerian government established the Ministry of Veteran Affairs and the need to create structures of veterans' protection surfaced, contacts and mutual visits with SUBNOR intensified, focusing concretely on veterans' rights and benefits and rehabilitation frameworks.

The Yugoslav experience during World War II and after the war's end was a key factor in the medical assistance for decolonisation wars, together with the understanding that the anticolonial liberation movements faced the same challenges and shortages in medicine as the Yugoslav Partisans. The People's Liberation Army was not a regular army, just like the Algerian National Liberation Army (*Armée de Libération Nationale* – ALN), meaning that there were no professional military medicine corps or formal training opportunities and they both faced a more powerful and organised enemy. The Algerians had to deal with the same vital issues that the Partisans had gone through: in battlefield medicine, care for the wounded, healthcare in liberated areas and, eventually, building a public healthcare system and creating structures of care for the disabled veterans, both almost from scratch. Permanent shortages of staff and supplies and training of medical workers as the war went on affected the NOR as well, as most Partisan units in 1941 and 1942 did not have medical corps or even a doctor or a nurse.<sup>64</sup> Caring for the wounded Partisans was an enormous challenge throughout the war, even when military medicine professionalised and spread as the movement grew into a mass army. After the war ended in 1945, thousands of wounded and disabled Partisans pushed the Yugoslav authorities to establish legal and institutional frameworks dedicated to veteran protection, including the permanent structures of medical and professional rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans with war-related disabilities.

The experiences of wartime medicine and care for the wounded Partisans and the postwar development of frameworks of care for rehabilitation and reintegration of disabled veterans represented very useful knowledge

64 Žarko Cvetković, "Evakuacija i lečenje ranjenika i bolesnika u NOR-u", in *Sanitetska služba u narodno oslobodilačkom ratu Jugoslavije*, vol. 4 (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1989), 9.

that the Yugoslav Partisans could share with liberation movements like the FLN. In 1959, after pleas for help in treating the wounded fighters had become very common, Yugoslav institutions and organisations rallied up with experts and funding to organise the transport of the wounded liberation fighters to Yugoslavia and, at the same time, establish a Centre for Rehabilitation in Tunisia. The Centre, based in Nassen, opened in 1961, with the idea that it would move to Algeria after independence. Over the next three years, almost 300 Algerian men went through surgeries and rehabilitation processes across Yugoslavia, while the Centre provided treatment on-site and served as a training ground for Algerian physiotherapists. The Association of Fighters and the Association of Disabled War Veterans, which in 1961 merged to form SUBNOR, played a very important and active role in medical assistance concerning war-related disability. Moreover, most Yugoslavs involved in these initiatives, as state officials or representatives of organisations and the Red Cross were themselves veterans, including doctors specialising in rehabilitation and orthopaedic surgery who worked in Algeria, trained Algerian cadres and provided expert opinion.

At the opening of the Centre for Rehabilitation in April 1961, Olga Milošević from the Yugoslav Red Cross, and the head of the Yugoslav Committee for Helping Algeria, gave a speech. She referred to the Yugoslav experience of the war and revolution and caring for the wounded, arguing that it was not a coincidence that it was the Yugoslav people and the Yugoslav Red Cross who participated in creating an institution like the Centre for Rehabilitation.<sup>65</sup> Drawing a parallel between the Yugoslav and Algerian liberation struggles, she argued that the hardest struggles of the NOR were those for saving the wounded, emphasising the understanding the Yugoslavs had for the importance of care for the wounded comrades. Reflecting on the plan to create long-term structures of the public health system, she expressed that Yugoslavia wanted to continue helping Algeria, while also hoping that such help would cease to be needed, wishing “that there are no more wounded, no more disabled, that your fight ends and that you achieve your costly freedom and return to your beautiful and beloved homeland”<sup>66</sup>

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65 AJ, f. 731, k. 468, “Govor Dr Olge Milošević na otvaranju Centra za rehabilitaciju u Tunisu”, 23 March 1961.

66 Ibid.

## Conclusion

The People's Liberation War in Yugoslavia and the War of Independence in Algeria were revolutionary events that radically transformed both societies. The wars were central themes of state-sponsored memory politics, and they generated rich and multifaceted cultures of remembrance. In both states and societies, veterans of liberation wars, the Partisans and *mujahideen*, were key political actors who also shaped and led the politics of war remembrance. Zooming in on the exchanges between Yugoslavia and Algeria during the Algerian War, this chapter explored the afterlives, legacies and memories of World War II resistance. Centring on Yugoslavia and the agency of the Partisans in Yugoslavia's relationship to the anticolonial struggle, the chapter sought to investigate the connected histories and multidirectional memories of antifascism and anticolonialism.

Yugoslav institutions and organisations joined their efforts and provided considerable diplomatic, financial, military and humanitarian support to the FLN during the war. Memory and legacies of the NOR, as well as veterans of the war were key to these initiatives. The narratives of the common struggle for liberation and similarity of the Algerian fight for independence to the Partisans' struggle during World War II underpinned the Yugoslav solidarity actions and influenced Yugoslavia's relations with anticolonial liberation movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

While the discourses of the shared struggle shaped the contacts and actions of solidarity, Yugoslav assistance to liberation movements like the FLN can be observed as exporting or sharing of the Yugoslav experience of the NOR and the postwar building of state socialism. Medical assistance to the FLN, which focused on the care and rehabilitation of wounded and disabled fighters, built upon the Yugoslav know-how in the establishment of military medicine and protection and rehabilitation of Partisans with war-related disabilities after the war.

In this context, the Partisans represent a valuable lens of analysis not only as key political actors in socialist Yugoslavia, but as women and men with direct experience of war and revolution who participated in the anticolonial solidarity as government officials, institutional leaders, organisation representatives and experts. In other words, we cannot think of socialist Yugoslavia without thinking of the Partisans just as we certainly cannot think about practices of non-alignment and anticolonial solidarity without invoking the People's Liberation War, its combatants, memories and legacies.

# 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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