



WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on
Resistance in Europe during
World War II

Edited by

Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

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FOR PUBLISHER:

Elma Hašimbegović, directress

EDITORS:

Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll, Ivo Pejaković

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

Nicolas Moll

PEER REVIEWS:

Gruița Badescu, Tamara Banjeglav, Yaacov Falkov, Mechthild Gilzmer, Olga Manojlović Pintar, Bill Niven, Vjeran Pavlaković, Milovan Pisarri, Kaja Širok, Dubravka Stojanović, Fabien Théofilakis, Gaj Trifković.

COPY EDITOR:

Nicholas Kulawiak

TECHNICAL SUPPORT:

Caroline Altmann, Lana Balorda, Elma Hodžić, Martin Pfann

LAYOUT:

Boriša Gavrilović

COVER DESIGN:

Amer Mržljak

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Sarajevo, 2024

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The project involved the organisation of several workshops and conferences in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Jasenovac, Nice, and Berlin, in cooperation with a group of 12 researchers and curators working in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany. Besides this book, the project resulted in an exhibition in the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a digital platform with 100 stories about resistance: <https://weristwalter.eu/>.

The present book and the individual texts can also be found online on the mentioned website.

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Introductory Part

Introduction: Wer ist Walter?

Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

He is a legend in Sarajevo, but unknown in most other parts of Europe: Vladimir Perić “Valter”, the main organiser of the communist-led resistance in Nazi-occupied Sarajevo during World War II, who was killed on 5 April 1945, during the liberation of the town. Proclaimed People’s Hero in Socialist Yugoslavia in 1953, he gained iconic status through the movie *Valter brani Sarajevo* (Walter defends Sarajevo) made in 1972. The movie describes how the German occupiers try (in vain) to identify and arrest the mysterious Partisan leader, desperately asking themselves: “Wer ist Walter?”

As a starting point for the present book, the question “Who is Walter?” stands symbolically for the observation that many of us in Europe know little to nothing about the history and memories of resistance to Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration during World War II in other European countries. This is also due to the fact that historical research and museography have predominantly dealt with resistance movements and activities “at home”, within their own country or state. This focus on one’s own country is understandable; it reflects the general self-centred gaze of our societies, but also that resistance groups and movements in Europe during World War II were mainly organised and fought within certain geographical and political borders.

Looking beyond the borders of one’s own country

However, over many decades there have also been various efforts to look beyond the borders of one’s own country and at resistance in Europe during World War II in a more general perspective. One early example is the conference organised in April 1962 in Warsaw by the International Federation

of Resistance Fighters (*Fédération Internationale des Résistants* - FIR), on “the national and international character of the resistance movement” in Europe, gathering mainly communist researchers from eastern and western Europe.¹ There were other early initiatives looking at resistance in an European perspective. In 1967, the historian and former resistant Henri Michel founded the International Committee for the History of the Second World War (*Comité international d’Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*) which brought together historians from over 30 countries, and published several books about resistance in Europe.² In the following decades, more researchers sought to present and analyse resistance by looking at the entire European continent, be it through monographies, for example by Jørgen Hæstrup and by Halik Kochanski, or edited volumes, as by Philip Cooke and Ben Shepherd.³ Other publications have dealt with particular regions within Europe,⁴ or look at specific dimensions in a European context, for example: Jewish or Roma resistance, unarmed forms of resistance, or visions of Europe in different resistance movements.⁵ In this perspective, the transnational character of resistance activities and groups has also attracted some attention, as exemplified in the book *Fighters across frontiers*, edited by Robert Gildea and Ismee Thames.⁶

- 1 *Internationale Konferenz über die Geschichte der Widerstandsbewegung. Der nationale und internationale Charakter der Widerstandsbewegung während des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Warschau, 15. bis 19. April 1962 Palais der Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 2 volumes (Wien: Internationale Föderation der Widerstandskämpfer, 1962).
- 2 See, for example: Henri Michel, *The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe 1939-45*, trans. Richard Barry (London: André Deutsch, 1972).
- 3 Jørgen Hæstrup, *Europe Ablaze: An Analysis of the History of the European Resistance Movements, 1939-45* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1978); Halik Kochanski, *Resistance: The Underground War in Europe, 1939-1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2023); Philip Cooke and Ben H. Shepherd, eds., *European Resistance in the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2013).
- 4 See for example Jean-Marie Guillon and Robert Mencherini, eds., *La résistance et les Européens du Sud* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999); Bob Moore, ed., *Resistance in Western Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Olivier Wieviorka, *Une Histoire de la résistance en Europe occidentale* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2017); John Paul Newman, Ljubinka Škoderić and Rade Ristanović, eds., *Anti – Axis Resistance in South-eastern Europe 1939 – 1945. Forms and Varieties* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).
- 5 See for example Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen and Gideon Botsch, eds., *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016); Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva, eds., *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery* (Budapest: European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, 2020); Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943* (Westport: Praeger Press, 1993); Daniela Preda and Robert Belot, eds., *Visions of Europe in the Resistance. Figures, Projects, Networks, Ideals* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang Edition, 2022).
- 6 Robert Gildea and Ismee Thames, eds. *Fighters across frontiers. Transnational Resistance in Europe 1936-48* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020). On this question, see also:

The named publications address the topic of resistance in Europe in different ways: Some deal with the history of resistance country by country, others choose transversal topics and look how they apply throughout Europe, and some connect both approaches. All together, these publications address fundamental questions that need to be discussed again and again: What were differences and common points between resistance movements and activities in Europe? Does it make more sense to speak about “European resistance” or about “resistance in Europe”? What have been national, international and transnational dimensions of resistance?

Paying a specific attention to the Yugoslav space

The present book wants to contribute to these efforts of looking at resistance in Europe in a more international, transnational and comparative perspective. Geographically, our aim is not to cover entire Europe, but we chose as a starting point countries that represent different regions and historical and political contexts: France as an occupied and collaborating country in western Europe, Germany as the country that attacked and occupied most of Europe, within which resistance activities also developed, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia in southeastern Europe, as parts of the Yugoslav space and more specifically of the collaborating Independent State of Croatia between 1941 and 1945. The focus on the Yugoslav space is especially important to us. Although resistance in Yugoslavia was addressed in different forms in the works mentioned above, we estimate that more needs to be done to make this history known within Europe, also because in general the (post-)Yugoslav space is often forgotten or neglected in discussions about European history and memories.⁷

Although the texts in this book mainly deal with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany, they partially also include other countries and societies. This reflects the reality that the history and the memories of

Jens-Christian Wagner, “Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Europa – eine transnationale Erfahrung?”, *Stiftung Gedenkstätten*, 2022: <https://www.stiftung-gedenkstaetten.de/reflexionen/reflexionen-2022/widerstand-gegen-den-nationalsozialismus>. All quoted websites were last accessed on 20 May 2024.

7 A striking recent example was the comment often heard after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, that this was the first war in Europe since the end of World War II, totally omitting the wars during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

resistance often cannot be strictly limited to state borders, something that is especially true for the (post-)Yugoslav space. Also, our aim was not to gather general studies about each country, but rather to focus on specific topics which we deem important to better understand the history and complexity of resistance, not only in the mentioned countries, but also beyond, like for example: What have been spaces of resistance? The texts gathered in this volume address the chosen topics from different perspectives. By this, we don't understand just country-perspectives (which are in any case also plural and diverse) but also different methodological points of view.

Dealing with the history of resistance after 1945

Another important choice for this book was not to limit ourselves to the history of resistance during (and partially before) World War II, but also to address the question of the transmission of this history after 1945, up to today. Here, also, the countries of this book represent different situations and developments, as well as similarities. In France and in Yugoslavia, the reference to own resistance became the dominating narrative after 1945, until the situation changed radically in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, while in France, the reference to own resistance remains an important part in the country's historical self-definition, even if it has considerably evolved in the last decades. Germany represents an interesting mix of both evolutions and also a particular case: On the one hand, in Eastern Germany, the reference to (communist) resistance became a fundamental pillar after 1945, which radically changed with the dissolution of the GDR and the German (re)unification in 1990. On the other hand, in Western Germany, resistance against Nazism was for a long time a contested and disputed topic before becoming more generally accepted and positively connoted.

The boom of memory studies in the last decades has led to an increased attention to the memories of World War II, especially on the Holocaust and other mass atrocities, and partially on the resistance in European countries and in Europe in general.⁸ In our book, we look at different ways of

8 See for example Monika Flacke and Deutsches Historisches Museum, eds., *Mythen der Nationen. 1945 - Arena der Erinnerungen*, 2 vol. (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2004). This book was accompanying the exhibition with the same title at the German Historical Museum in Berlin in 2004/2005.

transmitting the history of resistance in our societies between 1945 and today. A specific focus is put on ways that museums and exhibitions were and are addressing the topic of resistance. Among the editors and the authors of this book are several curators, and we hope that this publication will also inspire discussions about the role of museums today and possible ways to address the question of resistance in current and future exhibitions.

All together, the present book gathers 32 texts in eight parts – one introductory part, four parts on different aspects of the history of resistance until 1945, and three on the transmission of this history since 1945. The introductory part aims to provide an overview about the history of resistance during World War II in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany as the geographical focus of this book. Besides this introduction, it includes a contribution by Hrvoje Klasić, who deals with a question that will always remain fundamental: Why did people decide to resist? He addresses this question by developing what were the main reasons that people resisted and joined the communist-led Partisan movement in the territory of the fascist puppet state Independent State of Croatia, which became the epicentre of the Yugoslav Partisan resistance during the war. This text is followed by a conversation with Robert Gildea and Christl Wickert, in which the situation in the Independent State of Croatia (and Yugoslavia more generally) is compared with France and Germany in order to better understand specificities and similarities regarding motivations, forms and evolutions of resistance in the different countries.

Addressing the history of resistance from different perspectives

The first part then gathers contributions around the question “Where to resist?”: What were different spaces of resistance, and how does space influence the possibilities of resistance? Yvan Gastaut emphasizes the importance of mountains as a space of resistance, through the example of the French Alps, which became a military and symbolic battlefield between the Resistance on the one hand, and Vichy France and German occupiers on the other. Mountains played also a central role in Yugoslavia, a fact that appears in Dino Dupanović’s contribution, which deals with another important topic: the relations between urban and rural areas within the Partisans’ struggle in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the attempts and the difficulties

for the Partisan movement to connect these two areas. The two following texts discuss the question of possibilities and limits of resistance in concentration camps: Markus Roth focuses on the example of Michał Borwicz in the Lemberg-Janowska camp, who developed literary activities as a space of cultural resistance, and who tried to connect them with other activities, including armed resistance. In her contribution about music and spaces of resistance in concentration camps, Élise Petit emphasizes that music was first of all an instrument of repression used by the Nazis, but also created opportunities for limited and sometimes ambivalent ways of resistance, which were articulated in different ways inside and outside the camp's barracks and in the camp's official orchestras.

The second part is dedicated to the role of women in resistance during World War II, a topic that has been overlooked or downplayed in many postwar societies, but which has attracted increased attention in research and in the public sphere in recent decades.⁹ Juliane Kucharzewski focuses on one social group – wives of resistance fighters in Nazi Germany, and analyzes the reasons why they and their activities remained often invisible during and after the war. In contrast, Robert Belot deals with one of the most known women of the French resistance, Berty Albrecht, who co-founded the *Combat* movement, and highlights that her role in the French resistance can at the same time be seen as exceptional and as representative for the role of women in the French resistance, and that this applies also for her memorialisation after 1945. Is it possible to quantify the place of women in resistance? Dragan Cvetković attempts this through a statistical analysis on the basis of the losses Partisan women suffered within the Independent State of Croatia, underlining the importance of women's contribution to the Partisan movement, and also of differences regarding the regional, national, urban, age and socio-professional structure of their participation. The massive participation of women in the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia, including the armed fight, led to significant emancipation processes in a very short time span: This is analyzed by Aleksandar Horvat in his case study about the province of Srymia, which shows also the difficulties of this process within a widely rural society with strong traditional and patriarchal values.

9 See below the bibliographical references in the contributions of this part, and also the text on the new exhibition on women in resistance from the German Resistance Memorial in the part "How to Represent Resistance in Museums?"

The following part deals with “grey zones“ of resistance: What were interactions, overlaps and transitions between attitudes of resistance and of collaboration? Regarding World War II, the term “grey zone” was coined by Primo Levi to describe the space forcibly created within concentration camps where victims would compromise and collaborate with their oppressors to varying degrees and for the sake of survival.¹⁰ We use it here in a more general sense, and for a variety of contexts. Xavier Bougarel deals with the case of a mutiny in September 1943 by a Waffen SS unit composed of Bosnian and Croat soldiers stationed in the French town of Villefranche-de-Rouergue; while some presented it as a revolt of “freedom fighters against Nazism”, the text questions this interpretation and attempts to reconstruct the circumstances, motivations and different readings of this controversial event. Kolja Buchmeier’s contribution brings us back to the situation in camps – in this case the Stalag III D in Berlin for Soviet Prisoners of War; his text shows the broad spectrum of behaviours between collaboration and resistance and the fluid transitions between these attitudes. Milivoj Bešlin then deals with one of the most controversial topics related to the history of World War II in Yugoslavia: the role of the royalist and Serb nationalist Chetnik movement, showing how it developed increasingly and very early in the war from an initial anti-occupation force into a collaboration force. The inverse evolution is addressed by Marius Hutinet in his case study about a section of the French Gendarmerie in eastern France: He analyzes how and why some members of the forces who were part of the collaborating Vichy regime turned towards resistance at the end of the war. The four texts show different dimensions of this complex space between resistance and collaboration and also allow for a critical reflection on the concept of “grey zone” and the question of to what extent it is an appropriate term for the described constellations.

Transnational trajectories and transmission

Part four is deepening a question that, as mentioned earlier, has been attracting increased interest in the research about resistance and World War II more generally: What were transnational spaces and trajectories of

¹⁰ Cf. Stef Craps, “The Grey Zone”, *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*, 118 (2024), <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/1266>

resistance within occupied Europe? Without ignoring national and state borders, the contributions here illustrate how important it is not to confine resistance activities within such boundaries. One example is the role of international volunteers during the Spanish Civil War who participated later in different resistance movements in occupied Europe: Vladan Vukliš deals with the Yugoslav “Spaniards” and their place in the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia and in the French resistance, analysing to what extent their experiences from Spain gave them a particular place within the two movements. Corine Defrance also deals with transnational resistance trajectories, by focusing on the entangled lives of Raymond Schmittlein and Irène Giron before, during and after the war; the paths of these two members of the French resistance also highlight the importance of extra-European spaces for some resistance movements, in this case North Africa for the French resistance. Switching back to Yugoslavia, Alfredo Sasso analyses the situation of Yugoslav prisoners of war who were held in a camp in the city of Garessio in northwestern Italy and from which they escaped in 1943; this case study shows different degrees of interactions and solidarity between the Yugoslav (ex-)prisoners and the camp’s command, the local population and Italian resistance groups. Susanne Urban’s text also addresses the topic of transnational help and rescue, by looking at the Youth Aliyah movement created in 1933 in Germany by Recha Freier which rescued many young Jews by bringing them to Palestine; Youth Aliyah can be seen simultaneously as a national and transnational movement: It advocated the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, and was a rescue network which included organisations in many countries and regions, including Yugoslavia. Finally, Jelena Đureinović deals with transnational resistance in a post-war perspective: Her text shows the important role that memory of the Partisans played for socialist Yugoslavia’s policy of non-alignment and anticolonialism, through the example of the Yugoslav support for the Algerian war of independence in the 1950s and 1960s.

This last contribution constitutes a good transition towards the next part of the book, on the transmission of resistance history after 1945: What were different ways to transmit the memories and legacies of the resistance and who was involved in these processes? What has been transmitted, what not, and for which purposes? Robert Parzer speaks about the collection of reports written by former inmates from Buchenwald about their custody and their resistance in the camp, and critically analyses how these reports

were done in a context of “organised memory” in order to support the state narrative about antifascist resistance in the GDR. What happened with the material traces of resistance activities in the decades after 1945? Sanja Horvatinčić focuses on the efforts and initiatives in Socialist Yugoslavia to document and preserve original sites and artefacts related to the Partisan struggle, a crucial but often overlooked dimension of Yugoslav memory culture which is today often reduced to a decontextualized vision of its big artistic and modernist monuments and memorial complexes. Another way to transmit resistance narratives has been through the creation of resistance heroes, a phenomenon we can observe in all post-war societies: Matthias Waechter deals with three examples from France, which illustrate the competing efforts of the Gaullist and communist resistance movements to present themselves as the leading force of the French resistance, but also the attempts to create more consensual resistance heroes. Education is also a central tool for transmitting memories, and a space for disputing and contesting them: In her analysis of history textbooks from today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mirna Jančić Doyle shows how the once dominating narrative about the common fight against fascism led by the Partisans has been replaced since the 1990s by the coexistence and competition of several antagonistic narratives about World War II. Finally, Danijel Vojak deals with another example that shows what the role of resistance narratives in the political arena can be: His case study analyses how Roma associations tried to highlight their largely forgotten participation in the Partisan resistance and to use it as an argument in order to obtain a better political and social status within socialist Yugoslavia.

Resistance in museums and memorials

The last two parts deal with the representations of resistance in museums and memorials, and with the (changing) roles of museums and other institutions dealing with resistance in our contemporary societies. In socialist Yugoslavia, numerous museums and memorials were opened to document and promote the legacies of the Partisans’ struggle in World War II, and they played a key role in transmitting and legitimising this narrative. In his case study, Nedim Pustahija analyses the content of the permanent exhibition of the Museum of the Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina opened in

1966, which was based on a clear-cut division between “the people” led by the Communist Party, on the one hand, and the German occupiers and the collaborating Ustasha and Chetniks as the fascist forces, on the other; his text also shows how aspects that could have blurred that division between “us” and “them” were discarded by the exhibition makers. With the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and the establishment of new states in the 1990s, the interpretations of World War II and also the situation of the related museums changed radically. Ana Panić and Veselinka Kastratović Ristić from the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade explain how the socio-political changes affected their museum and how difficult it has become to deal with the history of Yugoslav antifascist resistance today. Another illustration for the radical changes is provided by Nataša Mataušić: In a personal account, she retraces the work of the Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia until 1990, its dissolution in the 1990s and the current efforts to establish a new museum about antifascist resistance in Zagreb. While many World War II-related museums have closed or find themselves today in a neglected state, some of them have become (again) spaces of antifascist gatherings: Nataša Jagdhuhn analyses these performances, which reenact commemorative repertoires from the socialist period and can be seen as form of resistance to the currently dominating ethnonationalism.

Exhibitions and institutions dealing with World War II and resistance in Germany have also been affected by socio-political changes in the last decades. This is especially true for Eastern Germany: While in the GDR, the antifascist resistance in the Buchenwald concentration camp played a central role in the memorial's exhibition set up in the the 1960s, with the dissolution of the GDR in 1990, a totally new exhibition was created in 1995 with a very different view on the camp resistance, as pointed out by Maëlle Lepitre in her comparison of the two exhibitions. Institutions in Western Germany have been operating in a context of bigger political continuity, but have also evolved, as Thomas Altmeyer shows when retracing the history of the organisation he is part of: the *Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945*, a grassroot organisation founded in 1967 in Frankfurt/Main in order to address aspects of the anti-Nazi resistance that were neglected in Western Germany, especially the resistance in the workers' movement. Bigger institutions also try to fill gaps from the previous decades: Dagmar Lieske writes about the creation of the first exhibition at the German Resistance Memorial in Berlin which deals exclusively with the role of women

and their resistance to National Socialism. Finally, coming from France, Marie-Édith Agostini talks about exhibitions she worked on at the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris; while this institution is not specifically dedicated to resistance, the mentioned exhibitions have dealt with the question of resistance through arts by those who have been persecuted by the Nazi regime.

Resistance or liberation struggle?

Wer ist Walter? Our leading question can also be translated as “What is resistance?” When we began our discussions about the book, we decided to embrace a broad approach, gathering various attitudes of opposition and rejection of the politics and ideas of Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration during (and before) World War II. This approach reflects a historiographical evolution in many European countries, where resistance was first mainly seen as an armed and political combat and limited to certain groups, while gradually including other forms, attitudes, groups and perspectives. Choosing a broad approach has also the advantage of confronting you with a multitude of different definitions and understandings of resistance. The contributions in this volume show not only the broadness of resistance attitudes and activities, but also how diverse definitions, interpretations and discussions about resistance have been and are, depending on time periods and geographical and sociopolitical spaces. Acknowledging this diversity is an excellent if not necessary starting point for a discussion that we need to have again and again and to which we hope to contribute with our book: What can be called resistance?

Also for this discussion, the inclusion of the Yugoslav context proves to be stimulating. Indeed, we rarely question using “resistance” as a generic term. The English word “resistance” corresponds to the terms that dominate historiographically and politically in France, *Résistance*, and in Germany, *Widerstand*. However, as mentioned in some of our texts, within the communist-led Partisan movement in Yugoslavia, the equivalent word *otpor* was rarely used; this was also the case in socialist Yugoslavia. Other terms dominated, such as *borba* (struggle) and *oslobođenje* (liberation), best synthesised in the term *Narodnooslobodilačka borba* (People’s Liberation Struggle), shortened in the famous acronym NOB. Are “resistance” and “liberation struggle” the same? They might be understood as identical,

but can also be seen as very different. It is important to look at the history of the terms in their sociopolitical context, including the evolutions of their meaning(s), and also what they mean in different languages. As we know, languages can reflect and convey different realities, and it is also by looking at the terms we use that we can better understand what are common points and specificities in our shared history and try to learn more about them. Who is Walter? Wer ist Walter? Qui est Walter? Ko je Valter?

Why Did They Resist? Motivations for Entering into Resistance in the Independent State of Croatia

Hrvoje Klasić

Introduction

The answer to the question of why many people who lived on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) decided to resist during World War II largely lies in understanding the situation that emerged after Germany, Italy, and their allies (Hungary and Bulgaria) attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941. Just 11 days later, the kingdom capitulated and the king and government fled the country. Yugoslavia was occupied and dismembered and in this entirely new geopolitical situation, different occupation policies became a key factor in the emergence, development, and character of the resistance by the population.¹ This text will focus on the situation in the NDH because between 1941 and 1945, this area became the epicentre of the resistance movement and the site of the largest armed conflicts between resisters on one side and occupiers and their domestic collaborators on the other.

The NDH was a creation in the central part of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia, covering much of the present-day territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Srem province in Serbia. Parts of the Croatian coast and a broad hinterland were annexed by Italy, and smaller areas in the north were annexed by Hungary. The NDH was established through an agreement between Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini and, despite the term “independent”, effectively existed as an Italian-German protectorate. The demarcation line that divided the German and Italian occupation zones and areas of influence ran from west to east through the

1 Regarding the attack on Yugoslavia, the occupation and division of the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the nature of the occupation regimes, see: Jozo Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji, 1941-1945. Okupacija i kolaboracija* (Zagreb: EPH Novi liber, 2010).

middle of the NDH.² Approximately 6,5 million people lived in an area slightly over 100.000 square kilometres: around 53 percent Croats, 31 percent Serbs, and 11 percent Muslims, while the remaining population included members of other ethnic groups such as Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Jews, Roma, and others. Power in the NDH was handed over to the Ustasha movement, a Croatian terrorist and nationalist organisation. Many Ustasha members, including its leader Ante Pavelić, had lived in exile for more than a decade, mainly in Italy, under the protection and control of the fascists. One of the most important features of the Ustasha movement was its anti-Serb sentiment, which, given the number of Serbs in the NDH, would prove to be one of the key factors in the emergence and development of the resistance movement.

This text's ambition is not to cover all the ways in which resistance to the occupation and fascism on the territory of NDH was carried out. Despite numerous examples of "urban guerrilla" actions such as armed clashes with the enemy in city streets, destruction of infrastructure, writing anti-regime slogans and individual and organised actions to rescue endangered populations, especially Jews, the focus will be on the reasons why people of different nationalities joined military formations known as the People's Liberation Army, or Partisans.³

A brief war, rapid capitulation, the ruling authorities' escape from the country, and the unhindered establishment of new geopolitical relationships were seen by the occupiers as a sign that the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had been successfully pacified. The resistance movement that would jeopardise the new reality, let alone lead to the opening of a new front on European soil, was not expected by anyone, as evidenced by the fact that the the Germans quickly withdrew and redeployed the bulk of their military force shortly after Yugoslavia's surrender to where they believed it would be more needed. However, it would only take a few months for circumstances on the ground to force them to change their strategy.

2 The demarcation line stretched across the entire territory of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia, from Slovenia in the northwest to the border of Serbia and Bulgaria in the southeast.

3 The armed formations that emerged in summer 1941 under the command of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ) were called the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia (*Narodnooslobodilačkih partizanskih odreda Jugoslavije* – NOPOJ), and all members of these detachments were referred to as "Partisans". In early 1945, this army would change its name to the Yugoslav Army.

Considering that Yugoslavia was occupied by Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, their allies, and their domestic collaborators, who began to use various repressive methods when establishing their rule, it is logical to conclude that the resistance of the population was motivated by patriotic, antifascist and existential reasons. But not necessarily in that order. Contrary to expectations, patriotic reasons, such as the desire to liberate the country from foreign rule, would prove to be the least influential motive at the outset of the war. Just as the establishment of fascist regimes did not provide sufficient reason for the majority of the population to take up arms or resist the authorities in some other way. Therefore, most people decided to resist not because of political or ideological reasons but out of fear for their own lives and the lives of their families. This does not mean that other motives were absent from the beginning. On the contrary, the unexpected synergy of all these motives would result in the creation of the strongest and best-organised resistance movement in Europe.

In the historiography of socialist Yugoslavia, as well as in society in general, the motives for people's decisions to resist during World War II were often approached in a very simplistic way, influenced by ideology. The official narrative focused on the "People's Liberation Struggle" in which the "people" under the Communist Party's leadership decided to rebel against the new situation. As one of the most prominent Yugoslav historians of that time wrote: "They [the communists] managed to unite the liberation and social aspirations of the people in the form of large-scale insurgent actions that evolved into a nationwide war..."⁴ Since the Communist Party had largely legitimised its central role in socialism by emphasising the Yugoslav communists' central role in the resistance movement, any questioning of the Party's role in the war was seen as a threat to the position the Party believed it held during peacetime. Therefore, much less attention was devoted to examples of resistance in which the Party did not have a dominant role. Thus, Fighter's Day, a national holiday commemorating the official start of the People's Liberation Struggle, was celebrated on 4 July. This was done to mark the Communist Party leadership's session on 4 July 1941, in which the decision to initiate a nationwide armed uprising was made. In doing so, it deliberately overlooked the fact that many Yugoslavs, as will be discussed further in the text, had already been resisting with arms before that date.

4 Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije, 1918-1978* (Beograd: Nolit, 1981), 194.

Existence/survival as a motive for resistance

The first individuals in the NDH who decided to actively resist were Serbs who primarily lived in rural areas where they constituted the majority of the population. The motives for their decision to take up arms were not of a patriotic nature. After the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's capitulation, most defeated soldiers from the newly-established NDH, including Serbs, returned to their homes and attempted to continue their lives as they did before the outbreak of the war. The fact that their homeland was occupied was not a sufficient motive for rebellion. The establishment of the new Croatian state was also not a motivation for them. Instead of fighting Serbs chose to adapt to the new circumstances as one participant in the Partisan movement, a Serb from Banija,⁵ recalls in his memoirs: "...the older people reconciled themselves to the occupation because they hadn't seen any good in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia either. They were used to respecting every authority and quickly came to terms with the situation."⁶ The fact that Serbs were ready to accept the Independent State of Croatia as their own country is also reflected in a letter from a Serb Partisan in Lika⁷ sent to their Croatian neighbours at a time when the uprising had already gained momentum: "Brothers and neighbours, Croats! For years and years, our good neighbourly harmony and love have been a tradition in all our villages. This tradition should have continued in this Croatian state [NDH]. Unfortunately, it was not continued..."⁸

Some of the Serb population in the NDH did not see the occupation as a reason to rebel but rather as a prerequisite for survival. In fact, they sought and obtained protection under the Italian occupation forces, fearing the Ustasha's repressive policies. In order to protect as much of the Serb population as possible, Serb politicians from the region even asked the Italians to expand their occupation zone.⁹ In return, local Serbian paramilitary

5 A region in Croatia, about fifty kilometres south of Zagreb toward the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

6 Nikola Mraković, "Grabovačka akcija i početak ustanka na Baniji", in *Sisak i Banija u revolucionarnom radničkom pokretu i ustanku 1941*, ed. Katarina Babić (Sisak: Muzej Sisak, 1974), 717.

7 A region in Croatia between Central Croatia to the north, Dalmatia to the south, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the east.

8 The letter is dated 31 August 1941, see: Max Bergholz, *Nasilje kao generativna sila* (Sarajevo: Buybook, 2018), 168-169.

9 As Tomasevich writes, with the Italian expansion of the occupational zone one-third of the Serbs in the NDH came under the control of Italian armed forces and thus avoided the fate of their compatriots who remained under Ustasha control. Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija*, 285.

units became an integral part of the Italian paramilitary formation called the Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia (*Milizia Volontaria Anti Comunista* – MVAC) which, together with the Italians, fought against the Partisans.¹⁰

The motive for the resistance among Serbs in the NDH was also not antifascism, specifically the fact that the Ustasha regime in NDH established fascist rule. From the very establishment of the state, repression was legalised against anyone declared undesirable for national, racial or religious reasons. Serbs, alongside Jews and Roma, were the most numerous among the undesirable. The repression against the Serb population included dismissals from public service, confiscation of property, restrictions on human and civil rights, expulsion from NDH and more.¹¹ However, none of the above led to a mass uprising and a large number of Serbs chose to continue submitting to the new authorities. Over 250.000 Serbs decided to demonstrate their loyalty (of course, fearing for their lives) by, among other things, converting from the Orthodox to the Catholic faith, or as one participant in these events described it: “In some villages people fought for a place on overcrowded trucks hoping that, as ‘converts,’ they would have a place in the sun in this Ustasha state.”¹²

The main trigger for resistance against the new authorities was the mass murders of Serbs that the Ustasha began to carry out just a few days after the NDH’s establishment. These escalated throughout summer 1941.¹³ Faced with the real threat of physical annihilation, Serbs organised armed village guards with the aim of preventing further people from being taken to their deaths. These guards were among the first to resist.¹⁴ However, the resistance of the local population only resulted in increased pressure from

10 The MVAC would operate in all Yugoslav areas occupied by the Italians. In the NDH area, 20.000 Chetniks were a part of MVAC. Ibid, 153.

11 Regarding the repression of the Ustasha authorities towards the Serbian population, see: Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija*, 431-456.

12 Slobodan Bjelajac, “Šamarički partizanski logor”, in *Sisak i Banija u revolucionarnom radničkom pokretu i ustanku 1941* (Sisak: Muzej Sisak, 1974), 689.

13 About mass killings of Serbs, see: Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija*, 447-456 and Bergholz, *Nasilje*, 114-155.

14 This happened on 3 June 1941 in the village of Drežanj in the Nevesinje district in eastern Herzegovina. During the battles, which lasted the entire day, three Ustasha soldiers were killed and several were wounded. The uprising soon spread to neighbouring areas, and around 600 villagers participated in it. In addition to defending their own villages, the insurgents also began launching their first attacks on facilities and infrastructure. See: Slavko Stijacić-Slavo et. al. eds., *Hercegovina u NOB, knjiga 1* (Beograd: Vojno delo, 1961), 42-72. Similar conflicts with the Ustasha soon followed in other parts of the Independent State of Croatia where Serbs comprised the majority of the population.

the Ustasha authorities, who sent more numerous punitive expeditions that poorly armed peasants could no longer oppose. As a result, people sought safety in mass escapes. Entire villages moving to nearby forests and mountains. Armed groups of local men ensured the security of the fugitive population, often taking offensive actions against the enemy in addition to defensive measures.

The appearance of an increasing number of people willing to resist the terror and the new authorities prompted the Yugoslav communists to take advantage of the situation. Life-endangered Serb peasants gave the communists the one thing they lacked despite their uncompromising commitment to fighting against the occupiers and collaborators: large numbers. By introducing discipline and incorporating several hundred Yugoslav communists who had gained military experience in the Spanish Civil War into the ranks of the insurgents, the Party helped Serb peasants transform their spontaneous resistance into a well-organised resistance movement. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, in its early stages, the resistance initiated by the Serb population was not driven by any ideology but primarily by the desire for survival. As one German officer wrote: “Without Ustasha crimes no propaganda would be able to convince the Serbian peasants to fight to the death for communist goals.”¹⁵

Antifascism and patriotism

Yugoslav communists, specifically members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ) and the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* – SKOJ), were the most significant group that, for patriotic and antifascist reasons, chose armed resistance during World War II. Admittedly, some officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav Royal Army who refused to capitulate in April 1941 and would later become known as Chetniks also decided to continue resisting the occupiers for patriotic reasons, mainly on the territory of the NDH, Serbia and Montenegro. However, except for several brief

15 See: Bergholz, *Nasilje*, 165. One of the highest-ranking members of the Ustasha regime and a key figure in the repressive apparatus of the NDH wrote after the war that the Ustasha struggle against the communists would have been more successful if they had pursued a policy of understanding with the Serbs. Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija*, 455.

periods of open hostility towards the occupation forces and their interests in certain parts of the country the Chetniks mostly collaborated openly with Italians, Ustasha and Germans during World War II.¹⁶

At the time of the attack on Yugoslavia, the KPJ had been operating strictly in secrecy for 20 years; its legal activities had been banned in 1920. Due to the repression against communist supporters, Party membership had been steadily decreasing over the years and had dropped to only 8.000 members by 1941.¹⁷ Communists across Europe, including those in Yugoslavia, condemned fascism and Nazism from the moment these ideologies emerged, especially when fascists took power in Italy and Nazis in Germany. They were willing to go from words to action as demonstrated during the Spanish Civil War, when they voluntarily joined the International Brigades seeking to prevent Francisco Franco and his fascists from coming to power. About 2.000 Yugoslav communists participated in these brigades and they soon had the opportunity to apply their wartime experience in their own homeland.¹⁸

Communists had been warning for years before the German and Italian threat to Yugoslav independence that the country needed to prepare for resistance. In May 1939, the Central Committee of the KPJ's journal *Proleter* published a text that stated: "According to the plans of fascist conquerors, Yugoslavia should either be a vassal of the Rome-Berlin Axis or not exist at all. For a freedom-loving people, such an alternative is called either capitulation or resistance, defending its independence." The alternative for which the KPJ began preparing from that moment was summarised at the end of this text: "Fascist imperialists should know that the peoples of Yugoslavia will not give up an inch of their land and that the working class is ready to make any sacrifice in that struggle."¹⁹ When Yugoslavia was attacked in April 1941, the KPJ was one of the few political parties that not only refused to accept the occupation and the disintegration of the country but actively

16 About Chetniks, see: Milan Radanović, *Kazna i zločin: snage kolaboracije u Srbiji* (Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2015) and Jozo Tomašević, *Četnici u Drugom svjetskom ratu: 1941-1945* (Zagreb: Liber, 1979).

17 To this number we need to add between 30.000 and 50.000 members of SKOJ. Petranović, *Istorija*, 219-220.

18 About the participation of Yugoslavs in the Spanish Civil War, see: Vladan Vukliš, *Sjećanje na Španiju: Španski građanski rat u jugoslovenskoj istoriografiji i memoaristici 1945-1991* (Banja Luka: Arhiv Republike Srpske, 2013) and Vjeran Pavlaković, *The Battle for Spain is Ours* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2014).

19 "Nezavisnost Jugoslavije u opasnosti", *Proleter*, no. 1, 1939.

resisted the new situation. On 10 April 1941, the day when the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed in Zagreb, a meeting of the communist leadership was held in the same city, where the Military Committee was established, with Josip Broz Tito at its helm, and an order was sent to the party membership to start collecting weapons.²⁰

Recognizing that they could not achieve significant success on their own, communists invited the entire population to join the fight against the enemy. In the spirit of a popular front, this included other civil political parties. However, even as conditions in the country became increasingly conducive to a general uprising, the KPJ could not make this decision independently. The green light was awaited from the Soviet Union which was still in a non-aggression treaty with the Third Reich at that time. Given the clear hierarchy within the communist world – the subordination of all communist parties to the one in Moscow – any armed provocation against the German army (and its allies) would have been considered a violation of that agreement. Therefore, the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, which terminated that treaty, also served as a call for all communists, including the Yugoslav ones, to engage. On 27 June, the Military Committee was renamed the Main Headquarters of the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, and on 4 July, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the KPJ decided to establish the first Partisan detachments. It was decided to shift from sabotage and diversions, which the communists had already carried out in cities, to a general uprising in the form of a partisan war starting from mid-July 1941.²¹ Consequently, military formations organised and led by the KPJ began to emerge throughout NDH and all of Yugoslavia.²²

20 The weapons were largely gathered from deserters from the Yugoslav Royal Army and from the army's warehouses after its surrender. For example, through a raid on a military depot near the town of Sisak, local communists acquired around 30 rifles and two machine guns, which were hidden in nearby barns, and even in the attic of a rural church. This weaponry would be used by members of the first Partisan unit formed in the NDH and in Yugoslavia more broadly on 22 June 1941, in a forest near Sisak. See: Hrvoje Klasić, *Mika Špiljak. Revolucionar i državnik* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2019), 53-54.

21 Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* (Rijeka: Liburnija, 1981), 389.

22 The first military formation was established by Sisak Communists on the day of the German invasion of the USSR but it was done independently, before the KPJ leadership's official decision. As a result, that day (22 June 1941) was not commemorated as one of the most important events related to the war in socialist Yugoslavia.

As mentioned earlier, many people had already taken up arms before official communist involvement began. Realising the potential of this dissatisfied and combat-ready population, the KPJ sought to establish itself as the organiser and political leader of the ongoing national uprising. For this reason, prominent KPJ members were first sent to Serb villages and then to rural communities across the Independent State of Croatia to resist the enemy alongside the local population. After the official decision to launch a nationwide uprising, the dispatch of communists to the field intensified and existing armed groups of Serb peasants became the core of the first Partisan detachments. Although this relationship has been portrayed as a natural symbiosis in post-war historiography, the local population, especially Serbs, initially showed considerable distrust toward the communists, especially when they were Croats.²³ The atmosphere improved with the daily arrival of an increasing number of communists in the field and their determination to sacrifice their lives to assist those in need. Armed groups of Serbian peasants soon realised that their joint struggle with the communists brought other advantages. Besides better resistance organisation, the contributions of communists who had fought as volunteers in the Spanish Civil War was particularly significant. The KPJ sent them to already established insurgent units where they became military strategists and commanders as well as instructors for inexperienced civilians in handling weapons and various explosive devices.²⁴

Although the KPJ was the main catalyst for resistance against occupation and fascism, communists were not the only ones who joined the resistance movement for patriotic and antifascist reasons. The practice of recruiting individuals who were not KPJ members into Partisan units became

23 One of the organisers of the uprising in Croatia, a communist and a Croat by nationality, Savo Zlatić, wrote the following in his wartime diary: “We find ourselves in an area where we still have no influence. The residents of the nearest village are afraid of us, so it’s only on the second day that we receive food. When thinking in rigid schemes, as often happens, things seem quite simple and clear. This logic also underlies the belief that the Serbian people, under the pressure of Ustasha persecution, essentially joined the Partisans under their flags. However, the reality was quite different. The political orientation of the majority of the Serbian population toward the People’s Liberation Struggle was the result of the intense and difficult political struggle of the Party... Where this work was not done there were no results despite persecutions and all other ‘favourable’ conditions.” Savo Zlatić, *Poslali su me na Kordun* (Zagreb: Razlog, 2005), 27.

24 Approximately 250 former Spanish volunteers participated in Partisan units. The majority of them held important command positions, including about 15 members in the main headquarters of the Yugoslav republics. The liberation of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1945 was carried out by four Yugoslav armies, each of which was led by a former “Spaniard”. See: Vuklić, *Sjećanje*, 26-27.

common in all regions of NDH, and in the rest of Yugoslavia. Over time, more and more Croats joined the Partisan movement in the NDH, while at the beginning of the war, this had only been the case for Croatian communists and communist sympathisers. Growing repression against all dissenters, especially critics of the Ustasha regime, coupled with increasingly difficult living conditions, were among the motives. A particularly important role in reinforcing the Partisan movement was played by Croats from Dalmatia and Istria, regions that remained outside the Independent State of Croatia and were annexed by Italy. The fact that Rome became their capital, through the agreement between the Independent State of Croatia and Italy, provoked antifascist and patriotic feelings. Non-communist Croats were also disturbed by the collaboration of fascist authorities with the Chetniks and the Italian tolerance of Chetnik crimes against Croatian civilians.²⁵

Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims also increasingly chose to take up arms, even though many of them were not communists, for patriotic as well as existential reasons. It should be noted that the Ustasha movement considered Muslims as members of the Croatian nation, so unlike the Serbs, they were not as such the target of repression by the NDH. Some Muslim political elites actively joined the Ustasha movement and numerous Muslims became members of the NDH's armed forces. Problems arose when Chetniks, whose ideology was fundamentally anti-Muslim and who were seeking revenge for Ustasha crimes against Serbs, began to carry out massacres against the Muslim civilian population. Since NDH as a state proved incapable of protecting them, some Muslims joined the Partisans, while others formed special paramilitary formations.²⁶ The enlistment in Partisan units grew after the end of the initial cooperation between Partisans and Chetniks, and when Ustasha authorities signed a series of cooperation agreements with Chetnik units throughout the NDH during 1942. The trend of joining the Partisans became especially important when it became clear, from 1943 on, that the communist leadership was advocating equal rights for Muslims with Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and recognition of the latter as a republic in its own right within the future Yugoslav state.

25 Zdravko Dizdar and Mihael Sobolovski, *Prešućivani četnički zločini u Hrvatskoj i u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941-1945* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest – Dom i svijet, 1999).

26 These Muslim militias were neither antifascist nor anti-occupation. In addition to protecting civilians' lives, some of them aimed to achieve autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina within or outside the NDH. For more information, refer to: Marko Atilla Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Other motives of resistance

In addition to liberating the country and resisting Nazi fascism, there was another significant motive that led Yugoslav communists to take up arms in 1941. It was the belief that the newly emerged situation should be used to seize power in Yugoslavia. Consequently, the People's Liberation Struggle was understood from the very beginning as a socialist revolution. As Tito asserted during the war: "Our People's Liberation Struggle would not have been so determined and successful if the people of Yugoslavia did not see in it, in addition to victory over fascism, a victory over those who oppressed and aimed to further oppress the Yugoslav people."²⁷ However, this very motive also caused the first disagreements in the relationship between the KPJ, the Comintern and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Namely, Tito was more inclined toward the doctrine of the Chinese communists during the civil war in China, advocating the simultaneous struggle for liberation and the establishment of socialism, in contrast to the Bolshevik doctrine of two stages of revolution – first liberation of the country, then a change in the political system. This divergent approach was evident from the very beginning of the uprising.

The emblem of the Yugoslav Partisan movement became the red five-pointed star, a symbol of communism. The term "partisan" was borrowed from the USSR and it literally meant a member of the party, specifically the Communist Party.²⁸ Each Partisan unit was required to have a political commissar alongside the military commander, someone who would oversee morale and discipline and implement the KPJ's political line. In areas liberated from occupiers or collaborators, Partisans established national liberation committees as bodies of the new revolutionary people's government. Dedication to revolutionary change as well as loyalty to the leader of all communists, Stalin, was most clearly demonstrated by the establishment of elite Partisan formations called proletarian brigades. The First Proletarian Brigade was founded on 21 December 1941, Stalin's birthday.²⁹

27 "Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji u svetlosti narodno-oslobodilačke borbe", *Proleter*, no. 16, 1942.

28 In the beginning terms like "guerrilla" and "guerrilla units" were also used.

29 In contrast to most of the existing Partisan units, whose members were from specific territories and operated within those territories, the proletarian brigades were composed of the best fighters from various regions of Yugoslavia and were deployed on missions wherever the need for their involvement arose.

Contrary to expectations, Moscow did not react enthusiastically to the Yugoslav communist comrades' decisions. The Comintern immediately warned the KPJ leadership that they should adhere to the doctrine of two stages of revolution, insisting that "the current stage was about liberation from fascist subjugation, not a socialist revolution".³⁰ This is why all the decisions of the Yugoslav Partisan leadership mentioned earlier were criticised.

Why did the Soviet Union (and the Comintern) disagree with the KPJ's military-political strategy? The reason was actually quite selfish. The precarious situation in which the USSR found itself after the Third Reich's attack suggested the need to maintain good relations with Western allies. In this regard, any support for a communist revolution in the Balkans would likely mean a rupture of the alliance with Great Britain and the USA, further worsening the already difficult situation for the Soviets. For this reason, not only did Moscow criticise the Yugoslav Partisans' political "deviation", but the USSR also re-established diplomatic relations with the Yugoslav royal government in London during the war and invited the KPJ to cooperate with Draža Mihailović, the leader of the royalist resistance movement in Yugoslavia.³¹

Such news from Moscow triggered bitterness and even anger but it did not lead to a shift in Tito's and the Partisan leadership's military-political strategy.³² Although there were many disagreements and misunderstandings in the relationship between the KPJ and Moscow during the entirety of World War II, it should be mentioned that pro-Russian sentiments were important motivating factors for joining the resistance movement. Yugoslav communists entered the war, among other reasons, to assist their

30 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, 387.

31 Marie-Janine Calic, *Tito – Vječni partizan* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2022), 127. The USSR signed a Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on the night of 5-6 April 1941, only to, under pressure from Berlin, sever diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia in May of the same year. However, Moscow re-established relations with the royal government, which had already relocated to London, in July 1941 following Germany's invasion of the USSR.

32 On 25 November 1941, prompted by broadcasts on Radio Moscow praising the Chetniks and Draža Mihailović, Tito sent a telegram to the Executive Committee of the Comintern in which he strongly condemned the broadcasts' content, stating that it was "appalling nonsense". Tito demanded: "Tell them up there to stop spreading the nonsense that the London radio is promoting" and continued "We have all the evidence that Draža is openly collaborating with the Germans in the fight against us. Draža's men do not fire a single shot against the Germans. The entire struggle is carried out only by the Partisans". Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, tom 7 (Beograd: NIRO Komunist, 1983), 198.

Russian (communist) brethren in some parts of Yugoslavia, the tradition of Russophilia transcended ideological boundaries. This was most evident among the Orthodox Serb (and Montenegrin) population. Thus, after the Third Reich's attack on the USSR, the belief in the Russian army's invincibility encouraged many Serbs to take up arms. It was believed that once the Russians defeated the Germans, they would come to liberate their South Slavic brethren. Naivety and lack of information sometimes resulted in almost surreal situations. According to eyewitness accounts, upon hearing the news of the fighting in the Soviet Union, Serb peasants in NDH began to mow wheat and grass en masse in preparation for Russian paratroopers to land on soft ground.³³

The USSR's entry into the war against Germany in June 1941 caused euphoria among Yugoslav communists, further strengthening their determination to initiate armed resistance. At the time, there was no doubt about whether the Red Army would win but rather how long it would take for victory. The belief in the Soviet Union's superiority had a positive impact on the combat morale of Yugoslav communists. However, unrealistic assessments of the situation on the Eastern Front had some negative consequences on the insurgents' combat effectiveness. For example, the Comintern in late June 1941 appealed to the communists to destroy bridges, factories and other infrastructure that served the needs of the German army throughout Yugoslavia. However, some, like the communist official Vlado Popović in Zagreb, refused to do so, arguing that the Red Army would arrive quickly and it was unnecessary to destroy something that would serve the people in the future.³⁴

The building of a socialist society after the war was a significant motive for Yugoslav communists to join the resistance and persevere in opposing a much stronger enemy. However, the way in which they attempted to organise life in the liberated territories motivated many non-communists to become participants or sympathisers of the Partisan movement. This was a significant success because resistance and the liberation of the country, despite the unquestionable dedication and courage of the communists, would have been almost impossible without the involvement of the "broad masses of the people". Therefore, those who had no prior connection to communism needed to be convinced that life organised according to

33 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, 388.

34 Ibid.

communist principles would be better and fairer than what they had before and during the war. Great attention was given to the so-called “moral economy” or the “economy of survival” based on the redistribution of economic resources in favour of the most vulnerable population groups. Assistance was provided for refugees and the families of fallen fighters, food, clothing and shoes were collected for the poor. Solidarity and mutual aid were encouraged, while looting was punished. Literacy programs and cultural centres were established. Efforts were made to improve health and living conditions. For the first time in the history of the Yugoslav region, women and young people were included in social and political life. Contrary to fascist propaganda that portrayed Partisans as enemies of religion, freedom of religion was emphasised and assistance was provided in the restoration of damaged places of worship. Some priests and imams became members of national liberation committees and even Partisan units.³⁵

Finally, one of the motives for supporting the Partisan movement was the attitude towards the national question. In the atmosphere of a civil war in which nationalists from one ethnic group committed mass crimes against members of another ethnic group, insisting on national equality and a joint struggle against the occupiers sounded utopian if the Partisans did not implement it in practice. For example, on NDH territory, Croat Partisans saved Serbs from the Ustasha, while Serb Partisans protected Muslims from the Chetniks. The national equality established in the struggle was meant to lay the foundation for the equality of all citizens and all ethnic and religious groups in the new state after the war. Thanks to the leadership of the Partisan movement, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina would, for the first time in their history, have their own statehood in the form of an equal republic within the Yugoslav socialist federation.³⁶

All the aforementioned factors – the building of a better and more just world, the emancipation of socially marginalised groups, and the promotion of national and religious equality – motivated many on the NDH territory, regardless of their previous ideological preferences, to join the KPJ-led resistance movement. Of course, the communists’ revolutionary methods such as the confiscation of property from those arbitrarily labelled

35 For more on the successes and challenges of building life in liberated territories and the relationship between communists and non-communists, see: Xavier Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana. Komunisti i seljaci u Bosanskoj krajini 1941-1945* (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2023).

36 See *ibid.*, 35-67 for the Partisans’ attitudes towards the national question.

as “enemies of the people” and brutal confrontations with dissenters, deterred many from any form of cooperation with the Partisans and turned some of them into active opponents.³⁷

It has already been mentioned that Ustasha crimes against the Serb population were a key motive for joining insurgent and later Partisan units. Often, the insurgents’ reaction to these crimes was revenge, carrying horrific consequences with it. However, revenge was not only a consequence but often an important motive for joining the insurgent ranks.³⁸ Bergholz supports this thesis with numerous examples of insurgent violence not only against members of the NDH army and police but also against innocent (non-Serb) civilians. In his opinion, this was a process of “antagonistic collective categorization” primarily based on ethnic principles. For Serb insurgents, Croatian (and Muslim) villages became Ustasha and therefore deserved punishment. Ethnic-motivated antagonism that escalated into revenge and violence often was not triggered by recent crimes but by settling old pre-war scores.³⁹

Along with revenge, one of the motives for joining the resistance movement, associated with violence, was looting. This motive should be observed on two levels. On the first, it involved individuals whose *modus operandi* was best described by an old saying from Yugoslav territories that every conflict is “someone’s war and someone’s brother” (“*nekome rat a nekome brat*”). On the second, one must consider the context of widespread poverty, especially in rural areas. Both the “looters in the dark” (“*lovci u mutnom*”) and some impoverished peasants joined the insurgents, seeking to exploit the situation for their own benefit. Both groups were aided by the fact that looting “enemy” property in a wartime atmosphere and lawlessness was accepted as justifiable and necessary. However, contrary to the previously mentioned revenge killings, the victims of the looters were not exclusively members of antagonised ethnic groups. By citing numerous examples in which Serbian insurgents looted property and stole livestock from Serbian families, Bergholz attempts to prove that looting was often

37 One of the most well-known examples of Partisan violence came in so-called left-wing shifts in Montenegro and southeastern parts of NDH at the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942. Mass liquidations were carried out on all those who did not want to support the Partisan movement. Violence subsided during 1942, and then intensified at the very end of the war and immediately after its conclusion.

38 Bergholz, *Nasilje*, 191.

39 *Ibid.*, 191-221.

not just a consequence but also an important motive for action, specifically, joining the insurgent ranks.⁴⁰

It should also be noted that another reason for joining the Partisan resistance movement was the attraction generated by its growing strength and success. This applies in particular to the period from 1943 to 1945. Italy's capitulation in September 1943 gave the Partisans a considerable boost; moreover, toward the end of the war, it became increasingly clear that whoever would emerge victorious would likely take power over the country. Some members of the Croatian Home Guard and the Chetniks became part of the Partisan movement for this reason, especially after Tito offered, in the summer and autumn of 1944, a general amnesty to those who joined the Partisans (except for those who had committed serious crimes). Also, unlike those who voluntarily joined the Partisans for various reasons, towards the end of the war when the Partisans transformed from guerrilla forces into a well-organised and massive army, a certain number became members of the resistance movement due to the (forced) mobilisation carried out by the leadership of the movement in liberated territories.⁴¹

Conclusion

Just a few months after Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and their allies attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a resistance movement emerged in the occupied territory. Day by day, and for various reasons, it attracted an increasing number of participants. The epicentre of resistance was the territory of the Independent State of Croatia. Except for the very beginning, when there was spontaneity driven by Serb peasants' ad hoc decision to rebel in order to save their lives, the resistance quickly began to take on a clear organisational and hierarchical structure. The results of this process would be incredible in every aspect. The resistance grew from a few thousand insurgents in summer 1941, mainly on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia and Serbia, to 150.000 fighters in the Partisan units all around Yugoslavia by the end of 1942. There were 320.000 at the beginning of 1944, and around 800.000 fighters in May 1945. These numbers forced the Germans, Italians and their allies to keep between 30 and 35 divisions – over

40 Ibid., 160-161.

41 Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana*, 125-128.

600.000 soldiers – on Yugoslav territory during World War II instead of sending them to another European front.⁴² After the initial activities, mainly focused on the defence of the threatened population, Partisan units went on to liberate more than one-third of Yugoslav territory by the end of 1941 – around 100.000 square kilometres – thus justifying the name “People’s Liberation Army”.⁴³ With the exception of Serbia, which was liberated in 1944 by the joint forces of the Red Army, Bulgarians and Yugoslav Partisans, the liberation of the rest of the country, including the territory of NDH, was an independent achievement of the domestic fighters.

The main credit for the transformation of unconnected, small guerrilla units into a massive and powerful army should go to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its leadership, with Josip Broz Tito at the helm. This does not mean that all Partisans were communists. On the contrary, members of the KPJ and the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia were a minority among the fighters, although it should be noted that membership in these organisations increased significantly by the end of the war. Often, especially in the historiographies of the states formed after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, there is an insistence that Yugoslav antifascist and liberation resistance movement resulted from the Third Reich’s attack on the USSR. However, the facts indicate that Yugoslav communists started preparations for the struggle against occupation and fascism well before 22 June 1941, and they were ready when German troops entered the Soviet Union. What is perhaps most important is that subordination within the global communist movement certainly influenced the start date of the organised armed resistance movement in Yugoslavia. However, it is worth noting that the appeal to initiate armed resistance against the Nazis and fascists from Moscow was addressed to all European communist parties. Unlike the others, the Yugoslav Communist Party responded to it by creating the most organised and efficient antifascist and liberation resistance movement in Europe.

42 Svetozar Oro, “Titov antifašistički ustanak – novi front u okupiranoj Evropi”, in *O ustanku 1941 – danas* (Beograd: Društvo za istinu o antifašističkoj narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, 2002), 77.

43 Dušan Bilandžić, *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1978), 53. The liberated territory fluctuated in size during the following war years.

Comparing Resistance in Yugoslavia with France and Germany

A Conversation with Robert Gildea and Christl Wickert

The general context

Let us first compare the general situation. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was attacked, occupied and dismembered in April 1941. Some parts were annexed by Germany and its allies, Serbia came under German military administration, while large parts of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina became the so-called Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH). The NDH was a vassal state of Germany and Italy, headed by Ante Pavelić, who had led a small terrorist organisation, the Ustasha, in the 1930s and whose forces very quickly began a massive campaign of terror against parts of the population. Germany militarily occupied one half of the territory and Italy the other until Italy's capitulation in 1943, whereupon German troops occupied the entire territory.

Robert Gildea:

France was attacked one year before Yugoslavia, in May 1940 and also suffered a crushing defeat within a few weeks and then signed an armistice dictated by Germany in June. Similar to Yugoslavia, the French territory was also treated in different ways: In the east of France, Alsace and parts of Lorraine were annexed, and the northern half of France and the Atlantic coast down to the Spanish border was occupied by the German military. This was initially not the case for the southern half, the so-called Free Zone, until November 1942 when German troops also occupied this part, in response to the Allied landings in North Africa. Incidentally, there was also an Italian occupation zone in southeastern France, which Germany took over after the Italian capitulation in autumn 1943.

Similar to the NDH, a new regime was also established in France, in summer 1940: the so-called *État français*, which abolished the Republic,

with its seat in Vichy in central France. Vichy France was, like the NDH, a vassal state of Germany, which increasingly engaged in open collaboration, but there were also two important differences. Firstly, unlike Ante Pavelić in the NDH, Philippe Pétain as head of the new state was incredibly popular. As victor of Verdun he was a legend of World War I, and many French people thought initially that he would defend their interests against Germany. And secondly, although there were increasingly influential fascist groups in the Vichy regime, for example the *Milice*, which was founded in 1943 to crush the resistance, Vichy was more of a national-conservative, authoritarian state. The regime also did not immediately use open terror against parts of its own population and built up its antisemitic measures gradually.

Christl Wickert:

The context in Germany was very different compared to Yugoslavia and France. Germany was not a country attacked and occupied by a foreign state, but it was the country in which the Nazi Party had taken power in 1933 and then invaded and occupied large parts of Europe during World War II. The occupation policy was carried out everywhere by force, generally with even more violence in Eastern Europe than in the West. In the invaded and occupied countries, Nazi Germany often set up collaborator regimes, such as the Independent State of Croatia or the Vichy regime, in order to preserve its own forces.

As far as the situation within Germany was concerned, Hitler was legally appointed Reich Chancellor on 31 January 1933, and many thought that he would not remain in power for long. However, the Nazi leaders used the Reichstag fire in February 1933 to drastically restrict civil rights and arrest political opponents en masse, and in this climate of terror, the majority of parliament voted on 23 March to give full powers to the government in what was known as the *Ermächtigungsgesetz*, or enabling law. All communist members of the parliament had already been arrested at that time; only the social-democrat MPs who were present voted against the law.

Germany was transformed into a dictatorship that increasingly encompassed all levels of society and everyday life. Through propaganda and terror, economic policy measures, foreign policy successes and the first victories in the war, the Nazi regime also secured the support of the German population. The development of totalitarian power structures and the population's



Map 1: Axis occupation and partition of Yugoslavia in World War II (as of 1941). The grey line within the Independent State of Croatia represents the demarcation line between the German occupation zone (on the northern side) and the Italian zone. (Source: wikimedia commons, public domain)

attitude, which ranged between conformism, consent and active participation, also minimised the scope for resistance within the society.

The beginnings of resistance

Let us now turn to the beginnings of resistance. In the NDH and also in other parts of Yugoslavia, armed uprisings broke out within a few months of the occupation and spread rapidly. Very soon, a powerful and well-organised resistance force emerged with the communist-led Partisan movement. This development was accompanied by a brutal civil war, among others, with the royalist Serbian nationalist Chetnik movement, which had also started as a resistance force but then turned increasingly towards collaboration. What can we say about the beginnings and developments of resistance in France and Germany?



Map 2: Occupation zones in France during World War II.
(Source: wikimedia commons © Eric Gabe, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Robert Gildea:

There was also early resistance in France, but it was isolated and sporadic, and not armed. The shock of defeat was profound and, as in many other occupied countries, the vast majority of people came to terms with the occupation and the new regime. Only very few took immediate action: these included the then still unknown general Charles de Gaulle, who went to London and urged the French to continue the fight from there, as he announced in a radio address on 18 June 1940, which almost nobody heard at the time. Others said to themselves that they should do something and didn't really know what to begin with. First groups and networks developed, for example what was later called the *Musée de l'Homme* network, which included persons working at the mentioned ethnographic museum in Paris; they helped escaped prisoners of war and Allied soldiers, wrote and distributed leaflets and an underground newspaper, and gathered intelligence for

the British. With time, more structured and organised groups emerged, and they increasingly worked together: a crucial step was the formation of the National Council of Resistance (*Conseil national de la Résistance* – CNR) in May 1943, which included nearly all the internal resistance movements, including the communists, and also trade unions and political parties, and which acknowledged the leadership of de Gaulle. The Resistance in France remained very plural and marked by many internal rivalries, but nevertheless they came together in a united front.

The German occupiers and the Vichy regime took increasingly violent action against the Resistance, and this confrontation between Vichy forces and the Resistance had civil war-like characteristics. However, there was no equivalent in France to the Chetniks, who initially resisted and then slipped into collaboration and fought a violent war with the Partisans.

Christl Wickert:

In Germany, there were active opponents of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) before 1933, especially among the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland* – SPD) and the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – KPD), even though the KPD had sometimes organised strikes together with the NSDAP against the Weimar Republic at the end of the 1920s. However, most were not prepared for resistance in illegality, especially not in the SPD. One exception was the International Socialist Militant League (*Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund* – ISK), in which women and men from the SPD and KPD were already preparing for illegality in 1932.

When the NSDAP took power in January 1933, many opponents of the Nazis faced a bitter choice: arrest or exile. Politicians from the left who came from Jewish families without necessarily identifying themselves as Jewish were particularly at risk. After casting her vote in the last parliamentary elections on 5 March 1933, Reichstag deputy Tony Sender, for example, fled to Czechoslovakia following death threats. Those who consciously stayed often paid for this with their lives. The SPD leader in the Prussian state parliament, Ernst Heilmann, for example, wanted to continue fighting the NSDAP legally from Berlin. But a few days after the SPD was banned in June 1933, he was arrested and then spent several years in concentration camps until his murder in Buchenwald in 1940.

Despite ever-increasing persecution, underground resistance groups and activities developed in Germany in the early years, particularly from

the communist side, which produced and distributed numerous leaflets and anti-Nazi writings. Resistance groups were mainly formed in cities, and there were also networks like the White Rose (*Weißerose*) student organisation, which was founded in Munich in 1942 and had contacts with groups in Berlin and Hamburg. But throughout the 12 years of the Nazi era, resistance in Germany remained extremely isolated and fragmented, unlike in Yugoslavia and France. Martin Niemöller, a pastor of the Nazi-critical Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) and a prisoner in the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps from 1937 to 1945, wrote the following text there, presumably in 1938: “First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.” These lines not only contain self-criticism, but also show the lack of cooperation between the various opponents of the regime.

Main motivations for resistance

As Hrvoje Klasić's text emphasises, the triggers for the first uprisings in the NDH were the existential threat posed by the terror of the Ustasha, while for other persons it was patriotic and anti-fascist reasons. These motivations could also overlap. How was the situation in France and Germany: who resisted and for which reasons?

Robert Gildea:

The resisters in France emerged from a wide range of different milieux, with very different views and aims, and were drawn from all parts of the political spectrum, from the extreme left to the extreme right, including socialists and Christian democrats. Many acted out of patriotism: they did not want to resign themselves to defeat and occupation by Germany. This applies, for example, to Charles de Gaulle, who came from a traditional-conservative milieu. For others, resistance was a continuation of the antifascist movement that had led to the Popular Front in France in 1936. Many of those who became active in the resistance were those who were particularly targeted by the German occupation and the Vichy regime:

foreigners, Jews and communists. This does not necessarily mean that they were only or mainly active in the Resistance because they saw themselves as personally endangered. Many of the French Jews who joined the resistance did so not because they felt Jewish but as French patriots. For many, however, antifascist and patriotic motivations overlapped with the experience of personal danger.

Interestingly, especially in the beginning, opposition to Germany was not necessarily linked to opposition to Vichy. However, the increasingly open collaboration of the Vichy regime with the German occupiers also drove many who had initially still trusted Petain into a more active resistance, not only against the German occupation but also against the collaborating Vichy regime. With the increasing antisemitic persecution, helping Jews became more urgent – and those who helped did not necessarily do so because they were antifascists, patriots or persecuted themselves, but for humanist reasons. The step into resistance could derive from family backgrounds or be an effect of contingency: In early 1941, for example, 17-year-old Madeleine Riffaud was walking in the train station of Amiens when she was stopped by German soldiers and one kicked her in the backside. She later wrote: “I was so furious, it was humiliation, anger and in my anger I vowed to myself that I would find the Resistance. [...] It all started from there.”

Christl Wickert:

I would distinguish between three main forms and motivations for resistance in Germany: political resistance, ideological dissent and everyday dissent. Political resistance, which grew out of a traditionally bound identity, was directed against the Nazi system as such and could be found above all in the labour movement. Ideological dissent could be found mainly among representatives of religious groups – Catholics, members of the “Confessing Church” and Jehovah’s Witnesses. These groups resisted above all the attacks on their respective religious communities and their way of life, but not against the National Socialist state as such. And finally, everyday dissent, which could be seen in telling political jokes, listening to foreign radio stations or refusing to make the Hitler salute – which could be life-threatening due to the Nazi regime’s claim to total obedience.

Of course, there were also overlaps and fluid transitions, from nonconformism to refusal to active resistance. And there were also other forms of

non-conformist behaviour that do not fall into the aforementioned categories. These include helping those persecuted by the regime, in particular hiding Jews, which is now referred to in Germany as *Rettungswiderstand* – rescue resistance. This could be connected to the aforementioned motivations and forms of resistance, but it did not have to be. It is also important to note that, as in other countries, Jews themselves actively contributed to their own rescue. It is estimated that around 1.700 Jews survived the war underground in Berlin – they did not do this because they were passively waiting for help, but because they themselves were looking for ways to survive.

To what extent did those Germans who became active in the resistance also act for patriotic reasons? Yes, many of those who fought against the Nazis wanted a “different Germany”, saying that the Nazi state was not the real Germany. But as a resistance fighter in Germany, it was more difficult to be a “patriot” than in an occupied country because in Germany, resistance fighters were immediately labelled traitors to the fatherland (*Vaterlandsverräter*) by the regime, especially during the war. They were also perceived as such by the vast majority of the population.

The Communist Party’s role

In the NDH and in the rest of Yugoslavia, the Communist Party managed to become the leading resistance force and, in doing so, also brought along many people who were not communists, in a policy of the National Front that was supported by Moscow. How can the role of communist resistance in France and Germany be summarised?

Robert Gildea:

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 played a decisive role in the resistance of French communists, as it did for the Communist Party in Yugoslavia. Prior to this, the Hitler-Stalin Pact had had a paralysing effect. In Yugoslavia, this hesitant attitude lasted only a short time, as there were only two months between the invasion of Yugoslavia and that of the Soviet Union. But in France, a whole year passed between the armistice of June 1940 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, which is one of the reasons why the resistance in France began so cautiously.

Although there were Communists in the resistance during this period and there were some actions, for example, a strike among the miners in the north of France in May 1941, the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français* – PCF) as a whole behaved very cautiously, and when it did engage in propaganda, it was more against Vichy than against Germany.

This changed radically after the German attack on the Soviet Union. From this point, the communist resistance developed into one of the most active forces in France, with the movement *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* as its military arm. Similar to Yugoslavia, the PCF in France pursued a policy of the National Front, and the *Front National* was also the name of the political arm of the communist resistance – it was a way of encouraging people to get involved in communist-sponsored resistance without necessarily knowing that it was led by communists. So, for example, the National Front in France included a large number of Catholic resisters who wouldn't otherwise have joined the resistance. Continuing Popular Front policy, the PCF then also joined in 1943 the National Council of Resistance (*Conseil National de la Résistance*) as the united French resistance front. But while the Communist Party was clearly the dominant force in the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia, even if it included representatives of other political tendencies, the united resistance movement in France was much more diverse politically and the PCF played an important but not the dominant role in it.

Christl Wickert:

As mentioned, communists in Germany were among the early opponents of the Nazis, and when Adolf Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933, the KPD called for a general strike, which was hardly heeded. They were also those who were most persecuted by the Nazi regime from the outset, for example with the arrest of their Reichstag deputies as early as February 1933, even before the KPD was banned. In contrast to Yugoslavia, where the party leadership continued to operate within its own territory, the leadership of the KPD was largely active abroad. It tried to stay in contact with the underground groups in Germany via bases along the borders of the Reich, but this became increasingly difficult. Many groups were largely on their own. One of them was the Herbert Baum Group, a communist and Jewish resistance group formed in 1936, which distributed leaflets and underground newspapers in Berlin and carried out an arson attack on the anti-Soviet propaganda exhibition “The Soviet Paradise”

on 18 May 1942. Some communists were also able to organise themselves in concentration camps: The best-known example is Buchenwald, where members of the KPD dominated the camp's resistance organisation.

As there was no united German resistance, the question of the KPD's influence on such a movement did not arise. One important initiative was the National Committee for a Free Germany (*Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland* – NKFD), which was formed in the Soviet Union in 1943. Based on the idea of the Popular Front, it brought together German prisoners of war, most of whom were not communists, and German communist émigrés. The NKFD's main task was persuading Wehrmacht soldiers at the front to defect. As far as the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 was concerned, it was like in many other European countries; it confused and disturbed many communists in Germany, but the KPD leadership in exile stood firmly by Moscow's decision.

Resistance inside and outside the occupied territory

This brings us to the question of the role that areas and actors outside of their own territory played in resistance. In the case of the NDH and for Yugoslavia as a whole, it is striking how much the Partisan resistance organised itself from within. There was a royalist government in exile in London, but it supported the Chetnik movement in occupied Yugoslavia. Also, the British government initially supported the Chetniks and not the Partisans, before changing its position in 1943. But despite increasing international support from 1943, the actors of the Partisan resistance stayed and fought on occupied Yugoslav territory.

Robert Gildea:

It was different for France. Parallel to the various internal resistance movements, there was also outside the metropolitan territory the so-called Free France (*France Libre*), led by de Gaulle, and the two most important areas for this were London and Africa. From London, he built up the *France Libre*, politically and militarily, before making Algiers its centre following the liberation of North Africa by the Allies. After the armistice agreement of June 1940, Algeria and other French territories and colonies in Africa had been placed under the control of the Vichy regime, including the

French Army of Africa that existed there. In order to strengthen de Gaulle's position, it was crucial for him to gain control over these territories and their resources, which he ultimately succeeded in doing, despite ongoing tensions with Vichy and the Allies. From London, and then from Algiers after 1943, de Gaulle also tried to increase his influence on the resistance movements in France, which was very limited at the beginning. He eventually succeeded here also, even if the relationship between the external and the internal resistance always remained tense.

For the development of the French internal and external resistance, the support of the Allies was very important. As it did in Yugoslavia, the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the secret British organisation formed in 1940, dropped agents and weapons on the French territory to support the local resistance. With one interesting difference: While Churchill didn't hesitate to support the communist-led Partisan movement in Yugoslavia from 1943, he was reluctant to support the communist resistance in France, so that well into 1944 supplies of weapons from the air were restricted to non-communist groups.

Christl Wickert:

In Germany, after 1933, resistance to the Nazis was strongly articulated outside of the country, in exile. The aforementioned Tony Sender, for example, immediately became involved in anti-Nazi border work towards Saxony after fleeing to Czechoslovakia in 1933, then in an exile political organisation in Amsterdam, and finally in the U.S. from 1935. In the U.S., she gave lectures on the situation in the Third Reich and during the war, wrote reports on countries occupied by the Wehrmacht for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the American secret service.

Two important places of exile in the 1930s were Czechoslovakia and France, where antifascist emigrants attempted to raise awareness of the Nazi regime and help resistance groups in Germany. When these countries were occupied by Germany, some attempted to flee, while others stayed and joined the local resistance. This was particularly the case in France. One example is the German-Jewish communist Dora Schaul, who fled Germany in 1933 and moved first to Holland and then to France; she escaped from a French internment camp in 1942 and was hired under a false identity by a Wehrmacht office in Lyon, where she gathered valuable information for the Resistance.

There were also contacts between German resisters in exile and within Germany during the war, but they were very difficult. The communist Käthe Niederkirchner, for example, who had been living in exile in the Soviet Union since 1933, parachuted over Poland in October 1943 to join the inner-German resistance, but was then arrested on the journey to Berlin and murdered in Ravensbrück concentration camp. In contrast to France, there was never a synthesis between resistance from within and resistance from outside. And unlike France and Yugoslavia, the resistance within Germany did not receive any support from the Allies. There were attempts by resistance groups in Germany to make contact with the Allies, but the British government in particular reacted negatively as it did not trust the German resistance forces.

Key moments for the development of resistance

Resistance did not develop in a linear way in any country in Europe. In general, it can be said that it increased in the occupied countries over time, but there were also setbacks and, in turn, important developmental steps. In Yugoslavia, 1942 was a particularly difficult year, as the German occupiers organised several offensives against the Partisans; 1943 was then a decisive year, especially with the capitulation of Italy, which gave the Partisan movement a very strong boost. What were key moments for the resistance in France and Germany?

Robert Gildea:

External circumstances also played an important role for the French Resistance, for example the Allied landing in North Africa in November 1942, which strengthened the development of the *France libre*. Within France, a decisive moment was the introduction of forced labour service, the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO), in February 1943. This was when the Vichy regime agreed forcibly to send young men of military age to Germany to work in the factories for the German war effort. Until then, the majority of French people had not faced a direct existential threat – but being forced to go to Germany meant leaving a familiar environment to work directly for the enemy and to be exposed to incalculable risks, for example the Allied bombing of German factories. This decision affected hundreds

of thousands of young men and their families, and a good part refused to leave and went instead into hiding. Of these so-called *réfractaires*, several tens of thousands went into the *maquis*, which was a kind of the equivalent of what was seen in Yugoslavia, moving to the mountains and to the forests where camps of resistance were established. So the STO brought new persons to the resistance and also created new spaces of resistance, in which the countryside became more important.

A crucial moment for the development of the resistance was then the landing in Normandy in June 1944. A lot of the *maquis* broke cover after D-Day, and started attacking Germans who they thought were retreating. It was at that moment that German collective reprisals became the most intense. So the most dangerous moment for the resistance in France during the entire war was that time span between D-Day and the liberation of Paris in August 1944.

The progressive liberation of France in summer 1944 and the attraction of being on the winning side motivated others who had stayed passive so far or who had been part of the collaborating forces to join the resistance. Here, obviously, opportunistic motivations were a decisive factor. The phenomenon of last-minute resisters existed in all occupied countries – in France there is one specific term to design them: *résistants de la 25ème heure*, resisters of the 25th hour.

Christl Wickert:

For Germany, it is important to distinguish between the pre-war period and the war period. On the one hand, the war made resistance even more difficult; on the other hand, the war also encouraged people to become more active. One example is the Red Orchestra (*Rote Kapelle*) network, which brought together women and men of various political and religious orientations and whose most intensive period was in the years 1940-1942. The Red Orchestra distributed leaflets and texts, documented Nazi crimes of violence against the civilian population of the occupied territories, particularly in the Soviet Union, and organised a poster campaign in protest against the propaganda exhibition titled “The Soviet Paradise”. For some who turned to the resistance during the war, experiences from the front played a significant role, because it was there that they learnt of the mass crimes committed by the Nazis. A central question is how much the changing war situation, especially after the lost battle of Stalingrad in February

1943, affected motivations for resistance. This concerns, for example, the conspiracy of 20 July 1944, which aimed to kill Hitler and end Nazi rule. In the circles of 20 July, similar plans existed partially already before 1942, but that military defeat that was foreseeable in 1944 was certainly an important motivation to take action at that time, also in order to possibly avoid Germany's unconditional surrender.

The beginning of the war in 1939 also meant a turning point for women. On the one hand, they had new opportunities on the labour market, but on the other, additional everyday problems due to supply shortages and then the bombing of the cities. Gestapo files from the end of 1938 already mention that a growing number of women were making "defeatist statements" against the impending war. The war then reinforced women's attitudes of refusal, for example against the compulsory labour in the armaments industry introduced in 1940 as a replacement for front-line soldiers. The Nazi state punished this everyday dissent as "undermining the military force" (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*).

Resistance as multi- and transnational phenomenon

What is also characteristic of the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia is that it succeeded in appealing to different national groups, for example within Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbs, Croats and Muslims, as well as to minorities. France and Germany did not define themselves as multinational societies, but here too the question arises: how "national" or how multinational/transnational was the resistance?

Robert Gildea:

This is a crucial question. The role of foreigners in the Resistance in France has for a long time been ignored. Many of those who became involved in resistance activity in France had come there in the interwar period as economic migrants seeking work, as political exiles fleeing repressive regimes, or as a combination of both. There were for example Poles, Italians, Spaniards and Germans, and many of them were of Jewish origins. A main gathering place for them was the French Communist Party's organisation MOI (*Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée* / Immigrant Labour), which under the German occupation formed its own armed underground group, under

the umbrella of the mainly French *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans*: FTP-MOI. The FTP-MOI carried out numerous anti-German guerilla actions in Paris and other towns between 1941 and 1944.

The transnational dimension of resistance during World War II in France and Europe is also evident in that many members of the International Brigades, who fought in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, later joined the resistance in their country of origin or in other countries. There they brought with them the military experience they had gained in Spain. This was the case in Yugoslavia, and also in France: The Polish-Jewish Mendel Langer and the Yugoslav Ljubomir Ilić, for example, had commanding roles in the International Brigades and then also in France in the southern zone in the FTP and the FTP-MOI. Thousands of Spanish Republicans who had fled Spain in 1939 also joined the Resistance in France.

Let us also not forget the role of people from the French colonies. Within metropolitan France, the resistance also included former soldiers from Africa who had deserted or escaped from prison camps. Additionally, the majority of the rank and file who fought with the Free French Forces in Africa were soldiers from the French colonies. But after the Liberation, neither de Gaulle nor the French Communist Party were eager to highlight the role of non-French citizens in the liberation of France. This changed only slowly. An important step to recognize their contribution has been the recent introduction in the French Pantheon of the Armenian immigrant Missak Manouchian who had headed the FTP-MOI in Paris in 1942-1943, and of his wife Mélinée.

Christl Wickert:

Regarding transnational resistance, we must on the one hand talk about the Germans who were active in the resistance in other countries, including France, as mentioned by Robert Gildea. One example of the integration of German emigrants into the Resistance was German Work (*Travail Allemand*), a grouping in the *Front National* initiated by the French Communists. Its main task was to carry out propaganda work among members of the German occupying forces and later also to procure intelligence and weapons from the Wehrmacht service centres.

On the other hand, there was also resistance from non-Germans within Germany. Among the forced labourers brought to Germany from all over

Europe, there were for example organised revolts, sabotage, individual rebellion, escape and contacts with German resistance groups. Concentration camps were also important places of transnational resistance in Germany. Ravensbrück is a good example: many of the women interned there, from the Soviet Union, France, Poland, Yugoslavia and other countries, had been resistants in their own countries and had been deported precisely because of this. They developed various forms of solidarity in the camp to help each other and defy the concentration camp violence. The role of foreigners living in Germany should also be mentioned, especially in the rescue resistance. One example is the Brazilian Aracy de Carvalho, who worked at the Brazilian consulate in Hamburg and, against the instructions of her superiors, organised visas and passports for persecuted Jews.

Women in resistance

The Partisan movement in Yugoslavia is also characterised by the massive participation of women, in various roles, and tens of thousands of them also as fighters. At the same time, there were also patriarchal prejudices in their own ranks against their participation.

Robert Gildea:

The role of women in the French resistance has also long been underestimated. After the defeat of 1940, when men of military age had either been dispersed or were in prisoner of war camps, women were among the first to form resistance groups. As in other countries, in France the war created a situation where women continued to be confronted with traditional gender stereotypes, and at the same time unexpected opportunities came up to step out of the usual social conventions. When Marguerite Gonnet, head of *Libération-Sud* in the Isère, was arrested and questioned in 1942 by a German military court as to why she had taken up arms, she replied, “Quite simply, colonel, because the men had dropped them”. Women were active in many segments of resistance, for example in intelligence work, propaganda, as SOE agents and in sabotage. Their most important role was as liaison agents or couriers, a crucial task because resistance networks were widely and thinly drawn, and because telephones and letters were closely monitored, and because women were less likely to be stopped than men

at street controls set up by German or Vichy forces. Also, outside formal resistance groups, women played a significant role, for example by helping and sheltering persecuted persons, including Jews.

In contrast to the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia, women in France rarely bore arms. An exception was Madeleine Riffaud, who as an FTP fighter shot dead a German officer in Paris on 23 July 1944. This is one of the reasons for the relatively low profile of female resisters after the war, as the public image and recognition of resistance in France was connected with military activity and armed fighters.

Christl Wickert:

In Germany as well, the role of women in the resistance was not recognised for a long time. Since the early 1990s, however, more research has been carried out on this topic and their role is also being recognised more in the public: This can be seen, for example, in the fact that the German Resistance Memorial Centre in Berlin will open an exhibition this year on the subject of “Women in the Resistance against National Socialism”.

Women had to contend with stereotypical images of their role in Germany too. Generally, women were underrepresented in leadership positions in the organised resistance, and there were only a few resistance groups in which women could be described as equal partners. This is particularly true of the aforementioned Red Orchestra, the Herbert Baum Group and the *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund*. In many other groups, women played a more discreet but not negligible role in the physical and psychological support of men active in the underground.

As part of the rescue resistance, a spectacular action initiated by women took place in Berlin in February 1943. It was a vociferous demonstration by “Aryan” wives (some with their children) in favour of the release of their husbands and fathers. They had been arrested at their workplaces as Jewish forced labourers in the arms industry and were to be transported to an extermination camp. This unique action of massive resistance against the deportation of family members in front of the Gestapo prison on Rosenstraße in Berlin-Mitte lasted several days. It made a great impression on the National Socialists and saved the lives of the family members.

Armed resistance

Another characteristic of the Partisan movement across Yugoslavia is its armed dimension and its military strength. The Partisans quickly built up armed forces, which led a constant campaign of sabotage, ambushes, raids, attacks and battles. They were able to liberate and control bigger territories within Yugoslavia. And what began as guerrilla squads was increasingly transformed into a regular and massive army.

Robert Gildea:

The development and organisation of the French armed resistance was rather different. Within France, armed resistance only really developed one year after the occupation began, from summer 1941. It was mainly an urban guerrilla action, especially by the communists, with their armed wing, the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans*, carrying out direct attacks on German institutions and personnel. But de Gaulle was opposed to it, since these attacks triggered harsh reprisals by the Germans and he thought that it was necessary to wait for the Allies to land. The internal resistance movements close to de Gaulle also had their paramilitary wings, which gathered in 1943 under the name *Armée secrète* and were more an armed force in construction and in waiting. Various military formations, which often lacked weapons and training, developed in the *maquis*. Most of the armed actions then took place in 1944, in connection with the Normandy landings and the progressive liberation of the territory, with numerous acts of sabotage and attacks on the forces and installations of the German army and the Vichy regime.

Outside metropolitan France, de Gaulle built up the military units of the *France Libre*, who from 1941 were involved in combat activities in Africa, against Italians and Germans, alongside with Allied troops, and partially also against the Vichy-controlled French Army of Africa. The latter then switched to the side of the Allies, and in August 1943 merged with the units of the *France Libre*, to become the *Armée française de la Libération*, the French Army of Liberation. From 3.000 persons in July 1940 and approximately 50.000 in summer 1943, the *France Libre* now controlled an army of over 400.000 soldiers. Parts of this army then participated in the Allied invasion of Italy in September 1943, of Normandy in June 1944 and in Provence in August 1944. In the summer 1944 the external and internal

military forces of the Resistance then worked together for the liberation of metropolitan France, even if their relation was sometimes tense.

Christl Wickert:

We cannot speak of armed or military resistance within Germany in the strict sense. Rather, one should speak of resistance in the military. There were some small opposition circles in the Wehrmacht. The best-known examples are the various officers who belonged to the 20 July 1944 conspiracy, including Claus von Stauffenberg, who carried out the failed bomb attack on Hitler that day. This was not the only attempt to assassinate Hitler; there were also corresponding plans in military circles in previous years, but also beyond. On 8 November 1939, Hitler was almost killed by a bomb in Munich; this assassination attempt was planned and carried out solely by the carpenter and Nazi opponent Georg Elser. There were also very few “rescuers in uniform”, members of the Wehrmacht who tried to save Jews in the occupied countries. These included Sergeant Anton Schmid, who rescued hundreds of Jews from the ghetto in Vilnius in 1942 and also supported members of the Jewish resistance movement there.

Post-war visions

Beyond rejecting fascism and/or occupation, one motivation for participating in the resistance was also the vision of a new order. For the KPJ, it was the vision of a socialist society and of an united Yugoslavia in which the different nations would live together on an equal basis. Under no circumstances the KPJ wanted a return to the previous system, the monarchy and a centralised Yugoslavia. What were dominant post-war plans in the resistance in France and Germany?

Robert Gildea:

In terms of post-war visions of the French resistance, the most important document is the charter of the *Conseil national de Résistance*, which was adopted on 15 March 1944 by all the strands of resistance, from the right to the communists. This charter included a governmental program for the future, among them nationalisations, the establishment of social security and votes for women. In many ways it was a kind of a blueprint

for what happened at the liberation in France. More generally, this charter expressed a consensus that after the German occupation and the Vichy regime, France should continue to be, or become again, a Republic, but not the same stale Republic that had lost the war. The CNR therefore did not advocate a complete break with the pre-war system, but more a renewal of French state and society.

At the same time, there were huge struggles between the communist and non-communist resistance for who would become the more influential force in liberated France. For some time, there was the fear that there would be a communist *coup d'Etat* in France at the liberation. But in fact nothing such happened, partly because Stalin held off, partly also because the communists became part of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, which was established in June 1944 and in which they held several ministerial positions. So why would they have a revolution when they were already in power? They remained a dominant force in French politics until the outbreak of the Cold War in 1947.

Christl Wickert:

As the German resistance was so fragmented, there was also no common vision of what Germany should look like after the war. For many, a return to the previous political system was not really an option. Germany had only experienced a brief period of democracy, with the Weimar Republic, which many considered a catastrophic failure. In the very diverse circles around 20 July 1944, there was a common understanding that the rule of law should be restored, but there was no agreement on the future form of government. Many of them rejected parliamentary democracy and favoured a strong German state with a dominant executive. There were also other voices. Interestingly, the KPD did not call for a socialist system in 1945, but for social reforms and a democratic renewal with a parliamentary republic, although it is debatable to what extent this was merely tactical. For some groups, the European reference was important: in one of its leaflets, the White Rose demanded a federalist Germany in a united Europe and that Germany must separate itself from imperialism and Prussian militarism for all time.

The contribution of resistance to the defeat of Nazi Germany

It is also characteristic of Yugoslavia that the Partisan movement largely liberated the country itself. In the liberation of parts of Serbia in 1944, the Red Army fought together with the Partisan army, but in the NDH and other parts, it was the Partisan army that ended the occupation. What can be said about the contribution of the resistance in France and in Germany to the defeat of Nazi Germany?

Robert Gildea:

On 25 August 1944, in liberated Paris, de Gaulle said these famous words: "Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of the armies of France, with the support and help of the whole of France." He failed to mention the Allied troops. It is true that there had been an insurrection by the resistance within Paris when the Allied troops approached and that the first army division which entered Paris was a French one, accompanied by an American one. But for the Americans the priority was to pursue the German army as it retreated eastwards and not to liberate Paris. Only after de Gaulle insisted that they liberate Paris as a priority and to lead the attack, did they allow him to do so. Of course the liberation of Paris and of the rest of the French territory would not have been possible without the Allied landing in Normandy and the massive deployment of American and British troops on the French territory. To put it shortly: France was not liberated by the French with the support of the Allies, but by the Allied with support of the French.

That said, the resistance played a significant role in the liberation of the territory, through its external and internal forces, and in some places more than others. It is little known that the liberation of southwest France was largely achieved from within, in the slipstream of the landing of the Allied troops including the French army, but without their direct involvement: the towns of Toulouse, Perigueux, Agen, Foix, Castres, Alès and Nimes were all liberated in August 1944 by diverse regional resistance forces, among which the part of immigrants was particularly high.

All together, the fact that there had been a resistance against Nazi Germany and Vichy allowed their forces to constitute a government in 1944 in liberated France and to reestablish the Republic, and also for France to become one of the occupying powers in Germany in 1945.

Christl Wickert:

If you think in terms of effectiveness, you can say that the German resistance achieved nothing. There were only a few of them, they could not overthrow the regime and could not prevent nor end the war. But what was decisive was that there was resistance: it showed that not all Germans blindly followed the Nazi state, and these women and men, many of whom paid for their efforts with their lives, thus contributed to the moral rehabilitation of Germany after the war.

Narratives about resistance since 1945

Let us finally look at the dominant narratives about the resistance that developed after the war. In Socialist Yugoslavia, the narrative about the Partisan struggle was omnipresent and served to legitimise the central role of the Communist Party. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the situation changed radically, and today in most successor states, the dominant narratives about World War II ignore the Partisans, denigrate them or attempt to reinterpret them in nationalist terms.

Robert Gildea:

In France, the Gaullist narrative of resistance dominated in the first decades after liberation, focusing on the General's leading role, on military resistance, especially of the *France Libre*, and emphasising that the French had liberated themselves. However, the Gaullist narrative never exercised complete hegemony in France, and the communists insisted on their own leading role in the resistance. There have been important developments since the 1970s: On the one hand, the question of collaboration became much more present, and on the other, dimensions that had long been neglected received more attention: civilian forms of resistance, the role of women and also of foreigners: Polish Jews, Spanish republicans, Italian antifascists and even German anti-Nazis. With the increasing significance of the Holocaust, the rescue of Jews also became an important topic, whereby resistance is viewed from a humanitarian rather than a political perspective. There have therefore been significant developments in the narratives about the resistance in France in recent decades, but not radical change as in Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

Christl Wickert:

It is characteristic of Germany that until 1989 the discourse on the resistance was very divided between the GDR and the Federal Republic. In East Germany, the focus was on the communist resistance, which, as in Yugoslavia, played a central role in legitimising the regime. In West Germany, from the 1950s onwards, the focus was on the military resistance of the men of 20 July 1944, the White Rose, and in some cases also ecclesiastical resistance. It was not until the 1980s that citizens' initiatives emerged in the Federal Republic of Germany, which focused more on everyday resistance and the role of the labour movement and women in the resistance. With German reunification in 1990, the communist resistance narrative disappeared as a state doctrine and was critically scrutinised, but in today's Germany, the internal communist resistance is not ignored and has its place alongside other resistance groups. Similar to France, the rescue of Jews today plays a central role in the public perception of resistance in Germany.

The questions were asked by Nicolas Moll

Part 1.
Where to Resist?
Spaces of Resistance

The Mountains as a Place of Resistance: The Case of the French Alps (1943-44)

Yvan Gastaut

The mountain landscapes we enjoy and contemplate throughout Europe are often laden with traces and memories of the confrontations of World War II. Indeed, mountainous areas have played an important role in the history of resistance in Europe, both in terms of acts and of the symbols that still play out in people's imaginations today. Such is the case of the Balkans (a Turkish word for a "forest-covered mountain"), and in particular the Yugoslav mountains, which between 1941 and 1945 were taken over by the communist resistance, the Partisans. For example, Drvar (from the Bosnian word *drvo*, meaning "wood"), located in the western mountains of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was Josip Broz Tito's headquarters in 1944, when the Germans tried and failed to dismantle it through a military attack called *Operation Rösselsprung*. Sanja Horvatinčić's work on the mountains of Croatia, particularly the Drežnica site, attests to the importance of the Partisans' victorious resistance in the mountains of Yugoslavia,¹ as Xavier Bourgarel also shows in a recent book on Tito's Partisans.²

The comparison with the French Resistance in mountain areas leads us to important insights, despite the different framework, context, temporalities and results. As specialists of the Resistance such as Jean Vigreux,³

1 Project Description, "Heritage from Below, Drežnica: Traces and Memories 1941-1945", 1 June 2019, <https://www.ipu.hr/article/en/761/heritage-from-below-dreznica-traces-and-memories-1941-1945>. All webpages were last accessed on 16 April 2024.

2 Xavier Bourgarel, *Chez les partisans de Tito: communistes et paysans dans la Yougoslavie en guerre (1941-1945)* (Paris: Éditions Non-Lieu, 2023).

3 Jean Vigreux, "L'image du maquisard, un clandestin en forêt: histoire et mémoire", in *La forêt dans tous ses états de la Préhistoire à nos jours*, Actes du colloque de l'Association inter-universitaire de l'Est: Dijon (16-17 November 2001 sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Chabin, (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche Comté, 2005), 317-328.

François Marcot,⁴ and Philippe Hanus have pointed out when evoking the “army of trees” in the Vercors,⁵ mountains and forests were a major venue for resistance, particularly for young people in the 1940s. This was the experience of the *maquis*, marked by an ascetic life in the forest: a long period of waiting, learning the life of a man of the woods, experiencing the robinsonades that they had read about as children.⁶ Not all the *maquisards* came from rural backgrounds: many knew nothing about the mountains. Workers, intellectuals and artists were forced to learn how to use an axe and chop wood for the necessities of daily life.

Specific features of the Resistance in the French Alps

The specific case of the Alps is relevant for studying both the real and symbolic dimensions of the mountains in resistance, as René Jantzen has argued.⁷ The Resistance in the Alps has been well-studied by historians, journalists and curators, by the protagonists themselves, and by novelists and film directors, albeit from different angles and in different geographical areas. This is where a question of scale appears: The French Alps are a mountainous area of resistance comparable to other mountainous areas in France (Cévennes, Pyrenees or Jura) and in Europe (Swiss, Italian, German and Austrian Alps, as well as the various Balkan territories), but there are specific features that make it unique among other mountain ranges.⁸

In comparison to other parts of the country, the French Alps did not see the emergence of significant resistance movements in the first period of the war. This changed due to two new developments in 1943. On the one hand, the Compulsory Work Service (*Service du Travail Obligatoire* – STO) was introduced by a law passed by the Vichy government on 16 February 1943, after many unsuccessful attempts at voluntary service that had resulted in only

4 François Marcot, “La forêt sous l’occupation”, in *Les hommes et la forêt en Franche Comté*, eds. Pierre Gresser et al. (Paris: Bonneton, 1990).

5 Philippe Hanus, “‘L’ Armée des arbres’: la forêt dans les rêves et l’action des résistants du Vercors”, in *Vercors, Résistance en résonance*, eds. Philippe Hanus and Gilles Vergon (Paris: L’Harmattan-La mémoire des Alpes, 2008), 239.

6 In French, *maquis* means a place of dense vegetation. During World War II, it became synonymous with groups of resistance fighters hiding in the forest or mountains, simultaneously designating the location and the group.

7 René Jantzen, *Montagne et Symboles* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1988).

8 *Alpes Magazine*, hors-série 2014-2015, “Résistance et Libération dans les Alpes (1944-45)”.

70.000 people volunteering to work in Germany (far below the occupying forces' expectations).⁹ This new situation created a massive movement of draft dodgers, called *réfractaires*, which affected different regions of France, and particularly the Alps. Because occupation and collaboration forces were less present there than in towns and villages, the mountains became a place of desertion and refuge, from what many young men saw as deportation.

On the other hand, and more specific to the area, the end of the Italian occupation, a few months later, also had an impact on the Alps. The Italian occupation zone included the entire massif up to the Rhône between November 1942 and early September 1943, when Mussolini was defeated and Italy capitulated. This short and unprecedented period gave this area, which included several regions and departments from Chamonix to Nice, including Isère, Vaucluse and the upper and lower Alps, its own timeframe and logic ahead of the brutal German takeover of the entire region, which led to immediate and large repression from September 1943.¹⁰ Jews, communists and Resistance fighters in general were hunted down, rounded up and sometimes killed. It was in this context, as the war turned in favour of the Allies, that the French Alps became a strategic area during the planned landing of the Allies in France, playing a role in the Resistance that few had previously imagined.

The mountain, a Vichy issue

For the first resisters in 1941 and 1942, the Alps did not appear as the ideal refuge. They were often too far away from objectives that remained primarily urban and were familiar only to a minority of the population. Until the 1940s, much of France's population had little experience with the mountain environment. Although mountaineering and skiing had been developed since the middle and end of the 19th century, evidenced by the foundation of the *Club Alpin Français* in 1874, they were still mostly an elite practice.¹¹ In the 1930s, the left-wing government of the Popular Front (*Front Populaire*) established holiday camps and youth hostels in the Alps. However,

9 Raphaël Spina, "La France et les Français devant le service du travail obligatoire (1942-1945)", (PhD diss., ENS Cachan, 2012), 1341; Raphaël Spina, *Histoire du STO* (Paris: Perrin, 2017), 570.

10 Jean-Louis Panicacci, *L'Occupation italienne du Sud-Est de la France (juin 1940-septembre 1943)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 440.

11 Olivier Hoibian, *Les Alpinistes en France (1870-1950). Une histoire culturelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 338.

“outdoor” activities still tended to take place in the countryside or by the sea. Activities in the mountains were promoted by the Vichy government, which came into being in July-August 1940, and its General Commissioner for Physical Education and Sports (*Commissariat Général à l'Éducation physique et sportive*). The latter was led by former tennis player Jean Borotra from 1940 to 1942) and then former rugby player Colonel Joseph Pascot between 1942 and 1944).¹² The Alps in particular stood out as an “exemplary site” in Pétain’s ideology and a founding area for a state of mind based on the compulsory youth camps with community service and physical activities for young men – *chantiers de jeunesse* – introduced by the new regime. Jean-Louis Gay-Lescot and Olivier Hoibian have studied the development of mountain leisure activities under Vichy,¹³ as has Alice Travers, who argues that in the Vichy ideology of the National Revolution (*Révolution nationale*), the mountains took on a special meaning and became a major element of the regime’s propaganda, particularly aimed at young people.¹⁴

In fact, there is continuity between the Third Republic and Vichy on the subject of the mountains and the Alps in particular. During the Popular Front government, (1936-37) mountain sports and activities became popular, as the state invested in Alpine resorts to promote tourism. Vichy continued this, with a new element: Expressing regional patriotism through, for example, encouraging young inhabitants of the Alpine departments to get to know better the massifs from Chamonix to Nice.¹⁵ In this way, we find topics discussed by the French nationalist writer Maurice Barrès in his 1913 book *La Colline inspirée* (The Sacred Hill), in which he celebrates mountains as a space of spiritual awakening.¹⁶ According to Vichy ideology,

12 Jean-Louis Gay-Lescot, *Sport et Éducation sous Vichy (1940-1944)* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1991), 254.

13 Olivier Hoibian, “La jeunesse et la montagne sous Vichy”, in *Les loisirs de montagne sous Vichy. Droit, institutions et politique*, ed. Philippe Yolka (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2018), 125-149.

14 Alice Travers, *Politique et représentation de la montagne sous Vichy: la montagne éducatrice, 1940-1944* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 284.

15 Sophie Cuénot, *Le Roman de Chamonix* (Paris: Paulsen, 2023); Jean-Paul Potron, “Victor de Cessole, l’inventeur des Alpes Maritimes”, Rencontres autour du patrimoine sportif et de la mémoire du sport (Musée National du Sport/Université Nice Sophia Antipolis, 2012-2015), https://www.museedusport.fr/sites/default/files/Victor%20de%20Cessole%20inventeur%20des%20alpes%20maritimes_Jean%20Paul%20Potron.pdf.

16 Maurice Barrès, *La Colline Inspirée* (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, Éditeurs, 1913). The book was translated to English in 1929: Maurice Barrès, *The Sacred Hill*, trans Malcolm Cowley (New York: Macaulay, 1929).



Map 1: Southeast France. (Map designed by Iris Buljević for this publication.)

mountain sports should prepare the bodies of young Frenchmen, and this was a weapon against the decadence of France; the mountains were the absolute and positive opposite of the city and its excesses. The Alps forged good French character: Energy, self-control, decisiveness, courage, tenacity, discipline and solidarity.

In 1941, the Higher School of Skiing and Alpinism (*Ecole Supérieure de Ski et d'Alpinisme*), founded a few years earlier and directed by mountain guides Édouard Frenedo and Émile Allais, moved to Chamonix. Chamonix was a symbol of the Alps having been taken over by the Vichy authorities. In 1943, Louis Daquin's film *Premier de Cordée* (First of the Rope)

built on the success of Roger Frison-Roche's 1941 novel of the same name, which was exploited by Vichy mountain propaganda.¹⁷ In 1943, when the Germans occupied Chamonix, Frison-Roche went into hiding in the Beaufortain massif in Savoie, becoming a liaison officer for the Resistance in the French Forces of the Interior (*Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* – FFI), an episode he would later explain in his novel *Les montagnards de la nuit* (The Night Mountaineers).¹⁸ Another highly emblematic place, the École des Cadres at *Uriage-Les-Bains* near Grenoble, was set up in a mountain setting as a supervisor school for training future administrative executives, a new French elite under the command of Cavalry Captain Pierre Dunoyer de Ségonzac. Founded in September 1940, it was to have a short life. It closed in January 1943 because many of those involved turned their backs on Vichy and even joined the Resistance.¹⁹

Alpine territories, from refuge to resistance

For most of the resisters, who were workers, employees and peasants from the plains, the mountains were unknown and rather worrying. Gilbert Garrier has studied the mountain dimension of the Resistance in the Rhône-Alpes region and has emphasised that the first *maquis* were not established in mountain but rather in plain areas, especially in Brittany. Indeed, in June 1944, there were still twice as many armed *maquis* in Brittany as in the Alps.²⁰ In the Rhône-Alpes region, the mountains had different levels. For the region's farmers, who came from Savoie, Dauphiné, Vaucluse, Gap, Digne and Nice, the mountains were familiar, humanised areas: Pastures, where they went up with their animals in summer and descended in autumn. Above them rose an inhospitable world of rock, snow and ice, where only a few guides, adventurers, hunters and crystal-cutters ventured.

17 Roger Frison-Roche, *Premier de cordée* (Paris: Arthaud, 1941), 318.

18 Roger Frison-Roche, *Les Montagnards de la nuit* (Paris: Arthaud, 1968), 416. The French Forces of the Interior (*Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* – FFI) were established in 1944 as the junction of the different internal resistance groups in France.

19 Bernard Comte, *Une utopie combattante: L'École des cadres d'Uriage (1940-1942)* (Paris, Fayard, 1991), 357; Antoine Delestre, *Uriage: une communauté et une école dans la tourmente 1940-1945* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1989), 333.

20 Gilbert Garrier, "Montagnes en résistance: réflexion sur des exemples en Rhône-Alpes", in *La Résistance et les Français*, eds. Jacqueline Sainclivier and Christian Bougeard (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995), 207-220.

In fact, the sites favoured by the first *maquis* in the region belonged to the first mountain level, between 800 and 1.500 metres, between villages and mountain pastures; these were the so-called “utilitarian” mountains, the antechamber to an inhospitable “other world”. Thus, the Alps, as a place of refuge and hiding before being a place of resistance, were from the outset not an easy place.

How did the mountains transition from being a place of refuge to a place of resistance? A good example of the *maquis* that has been studied in France is that of the Cévennes as a land of refuge on less imposing massifs on the other side of the Rhône.²¹ Throughout 1943, the Resistance general staff gradually institutionalised and militarised the *maquis* in the Alps, particularly in the Vercors. The *maquis* were joined by escapees from the *Chantiers de la jeunesse* and the *Groupements de travailleurs étrangers*, labour camps for groups of foreign workers, as well as Italian soldiers who had been routed in autumn 1943.

From then on, the aim was to turn *réfractaires* into fighters by structuring life in the highlands in camps that formed small units. There were tensions and regular friction in this process of moving from individual to collective action. With a view toward being ready for combat action, life in the camp was organised around raising the flag, learning how to handle weapons, “helping out” in villages in search of supplies, and intellectual and political training. The *maquisard* thus gradually became a clandestine fighter in the forest, capable of immediate guerrilla action: Ambushes, rapid attacks, immediate retreat under cover of vegetation.²²

This development took place in the broader context of a unification of the Resistance under Jean Moulin’s leadership. The Unified Resistance Movements (*Mouvements Unifiés de la Résistance* – MUR) were created at the beginning of 1943. Although the coordination of movements in the southern zone and the merging of their military resources – under the name Secret Army (*Armée Secrète*) – came up against internal rivalries, after discussions, the main Resistance movements recognised the authority

21 Patrick Cabanel, Philippe Joutard and Jacques Poujol eds., *Cévennes terre de refuge (1940-44)* (Montpellier: Nouvelles Presses du Languedoc, 1987), 357. A land of *maquis* and armed resistance, the Cévennes were first and foremost a land of refuge, for example for persecuted Jews. In the mountains of the Gard and Lozère departments, several hundred persecuted people found a hospitable home, particularly among the Protestants, who were numerous in the region.

22 Philippe Hanus and Gilles Vergon eds., *Vercors, Résistances et résonances* (Paris: L’Harmattan-La mémoire des Alpes, 2008), 239.

of the Free French Forces (*Forces Françaises Libres* – FFL) led by General de Gaulle from his headquarters in Algiers. In 1943, 300 to 400 resistants from the Isère region joined mountain camps in the Alps. How many of these refugees would become volunteers for the guerrilla actions now prescribed for the *maquis* by the MUR headquarters? Until the spring of 1944, the main concern was ensuring the survival of the outcasts and their transformation into fighters.²³

The specificity of the mountain environment is obvious. It can be considered from three points of view: Accommodation, equipment and supplies. For an individual or a very small group, huts could be enough. The best place to stay was with the locals, who could be farmers or lumberjacks by day and saboteurs or guerrillas by night. Living and surviving in the mountains required good individual equipment. All those who climbed required appropriate footwear. Food remained the big issue. The mountain environment alone could not provide good nourishment. In the mountains, the survival of the *maquis* also depended on the attitude of the population and local resources. Since local resources were more limited than elsewhere, it was necessary to compensate and multiply the sources of supply.

This incessant quest for survival sometimes required the entire groups' attention, as shown by the case of the Hautes-Alpes, which was the subject of a study by Jean-Pierre Pellegrin.²⁴ The case of Chamonix is also emblematic: Many STO *réfractaires* who were working on the Aiguille du Midi cable car at the time joined the Resistance by hiding in the mountains. The exemplary action of figures such as Abbé Payot, who was appointed to the parish of Vallorcine and set up a clandestine Resistance network in 1942, is particularly noteworthy. Payot hid refugees in the church tower and set up networks to help them cross the border into Switzerland. With the help of Vallorcins and mountain guides, he rescued Resistance members, Jews and *réfractaires*.²⁵ More generally, the MUR tried to bring these people together and provide them with military training. Despite a lack of resources and repression, the number of mountain *maquis* increased throughout 1943.

23 Suzanne Silvestre and Paul Silvestre, *Chronique des maquis de l'Isère* (Grenoble: Éditions des Quatre Seigneurs, 1978).

24 Jean-Pierre Pellegrin, "La Résistance FTP dans les Hautes-Alpes", in *Histoire des Francs-tireurs et partisans. Isère, Savoie, Hautes-Alpes*, eds. Olivier Cogne and Gil Emprin (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2017), 155-183.

25 Jean-Luc De Uffredi, *L'Abbé André Payot, résistant et chef de réseau (1939-45), Chamonix Mont-Blanc Vallorcine* (Lyon: Les passionnés de bouquins, 2019).

Glières and Vercors: The tragic resistance in 1944

Two of those mountain *maquis* will go down in the history and legend of the Resistance. The first was set up in early 1943 by *réfractaires* on the Plateau des Glières near Annecy (Haute-Savoie) in a vast, relatively isolated mountain pasture 1.500 metres above sea level.²⁶ After validation by a Franco-British mission (led by the British lieutenant-colonel Heslop and the French captain Rosenthal), this area of large, fairly flat pastures far from the high peaks and easily spotted from the air thanks to its alignment with Annecy Lake, was chosen for a British aeroplane operation. The plan, scheduled for February 1944, was to drop weapons and other equipment by parachute there for all the *maquis* in the Alps. The plan also called for a British company of around a hundred men to parachute in.²⁷

On the initiative of Resistance fighter and *maquis* organiser Henri Romans-Petit, between 31 January and 26 March 1944, 467 *maquisards* went up to the Plateau des Glières under the command of Lieutenant Tom Morel. They faced the cold and constant danger. It was a long wait and, despite the promises made by London, no help arrived, no parachute drops. Soon, the plateau was surrounded by Germans and Vichysts. On 9 March, Lieutenant Morel was killed by an officer from the *Groupes mobiles de réserve* (GMR), the paramilitary gendarmerie units created by Vichy. He was replaced by Captain Maurice Anjot. On 26 March 1944, after several days of fighting in a difficult environment (in which some people were injured or even killed in accidents), a Wehrmacht Alpine division comprised of almost 7.000 men, supported by aviation and artillery, and over 2.000 Vichy paramilitary forces, the GMR and *Milice*, launched an assault.²⁸ In the snow and cold, without heavy weapons, the *maquisards* resisted as much as they could, but were outnumbered and suffered heavy losses. Around 150 victims (including Captain Maurice Anjot), were shot by the Germans or the *Milice* or arrested and deported, and just as many were taken prisoner. Conversely,

26 Pierre Mouthon, *Haute-Savoie 1940-1945. Résistance, occupation, collaboration* (Épinal: éditions du Sapin d'Or, 1993).

27 Claude Barbier, *Le maquis de Glières. Mythe et réalité* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 466; Robert Amoudruz and Jean-Claude Carrier, *Dimanche fatal aux Glières, 26 mars 1944* (Divonne-les-Bains: Éditions Cabédita, 2011); Pierre Vial, *Le sang des Glières* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1993).

28 The *Milice*, with full name *Milice française* (French Militia), was created by the Vichy regime in 1943 as a political paramilitary organisation especially to fight against the French Resistance.

there were less than ten German casualties, most of them because of accidents, and 13 dead on the Vichy side.²⁹

The Vercors plateau near Grenoble, which reaches an altitude of more than 2.300 metres, has a different timeline, but a similar epilogue. Well studied by Gilles Vergnon, it also stands as a symbol of mountains as a space of resistance.³⁰ From the beginning of 1943, the Resistance organised itself on the massif. A dozen camps were set up deep in the forests. In 1942, Pierre Dalloz and the writer Jean Prévost had the idea of transforming the massif into a “fortress” or “citadel” for the Resistance, with the plan that the Vercors would become the site of an Allied landing that would bring the fight to the enemy’s rear.

The project, accepted in February 1943 by Resistance leader Jean Moulin and General Delestraint, commander of the *Armée Secrète*, became known as the Mountaineer’s Plan (*Plan Montagnard*) and was to serve as the basis for a substantial flow of troops by air. It was approved by General de Gaulle and the Allies in both London and Algiers. The idea was developed by Alain Le Ray and François Huet, the military leaders of the Vercors, along with Eugène Chavant, the civilian leader of the *maquis*. At the beginning of 1944, they brought together 400 to 500 civilians and soldiers who had “climbed” onto the plateau from various villages and towns in the region, often very young men, supplied by a generally supportive population and equipped with weapons and medicines from Allied parachute drops. On 6 June 1944, the day of the Allied landing in Normandy, the Vercors responded to the general mobilisation order issued by a message broadcast from *Radio Londres*. On 25 and 28 June, in Operation Zebra, over 180 Allied bombers made numerous parachute drops on the plateau to provide arms to the resisters.

On several occasions, unlike on the uninhabited Glières plateau, a large portion of the local population helped with equipment recovery operations, both day and night. The weapons were hidden in numerous natural cavities, particularly around Vassieux. The mood at the time, in the run-up to the Normandy landings, was optimistic, so much so that in early July 1944, the Republic of Vercors (*République du Vercors*) was proclaimed on the plateau, flying the tricolour flag over a territory declared “free”. For the first time since June 1940, France was back in control of an admittedly

29 Michel Germain, *Glières, mars 1944 – “Vivre libre ou mourir!” – L'épopée héroïque et sublime* (Les Marches (Savoie): La Fontaine de Siloé, 1994).

30 Gilles Vergnon, *Le Vercors, histoire et mémoire d'un maquis* (Paris: l'Atelier, 2002).

limited and mountainous part of its territory, the Vercors plateau. But as the Normandy landings in June 1944 and the Provence landings in August 1944 occurred, the Alps were no longer a strategic priority for the Allies, and the hoped-for arrival of Allied troops in the Vercors Massif never took place. On the ground, the situation was quickly reversed.

From Grenoble and Saint-Nizier in the foothills of the massif, German troops aided by Vichy forces, intensified their repression. They were led by General Karl Pflaum, head of the 157th Reserve Division of the Wehrmacht, which was the same division that had acted on the Plateau des Glières. The *maquisards*, potential attackers, were besieged. The German operation, with Vichy help, mobilised almost 10.000 men, the largest operation against the Resistance in France. An airborne landing at Vassieux was organised in late July 1944 precisely along the lines of *Operation Rösselsprung*, which had been launched in Bosnia against Tito's Partisans at the end of May 1944. The offensive against the *maquis* was accompanied by atrocities against civilians and captured *maquisards*. More than 200 civilians were massacred or summarily executed, particularly in the villages of Vassieux and La Chapelle-en-Vercors. These acts of violence against civilians in France were rare compared with the Balkans, where the Germans massacred many more people. In all, over 639 *maquisards* and civilians were killed in July and August 1944 in the Vercors.³¹

Glières and Vercors: Emblematic sites of the Resistance myth

Glières and Vercors are cases of territories being abandoned by the Allies at the same time as they suffered disaster and were transformed in the mythology of the Resistance. The negative balance sheet was transformed into a promotion of the values of heroism and the introduction of the extraordinary symbolic value of the Alpine Mountain environment, acquired and then preserved and even amplified over the years. Henri Romans-Petit called it "A defeat for arms but a victory for souls".³² From 1944 onwards, the Glières plateau played a part in the myth of the Resistance that General De Gaulle in particular would come to defend, and that some, such as Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brillac, questioned from the 1970s onwards.³³ The

31 Ibid.

32 François Pernot, "Les Maquis de l'Ain", *Revue historique des Armées*, no. 195 (1994): 68-78.

33 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brillac, "Les Glières", *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, no. 45, (January-March 1995): 54-66.

Gaullist nationalist narrative suggested that the vast majority of French people had supported the Resistance, emphasising heroic deeds and epic tales that were partly, if not entirely, imaginary. The French *maquisards'* courage was an important piece of this discourse.

The elevation of the Glières into a symbol of resistance mythology began in September 1944 with a ceremony at the Morette cemetery, the necropolis of Les Glières (in the commune of Thône in Haute-Savoie). This was followed by the creation of the Association of Glières Survivors (*Association des rescapés des Glières*). On 4 November 1944, General de Gaulle himself visited the cemetery, which was officially inaugurated on 25 May 1947 by President Vincent Auriol.³⁴ A central square in Algiers was named after the Glières plateau and in 1966, a secondary school named “Glières” was built in Annemasse. This helped perpetuate the myth at a local level, as did André Malraux’s speech on the plateau at the inauguration of the spectacular monument designed by Émile Gilioli in September 1973. Today, every hiker who visits the plateau can see that monument.

In the frame of the “Wer ist Walter?” research project, which refers to the *nom de guerre* of the communist Vladimir Perić in Sarajevo and which gave birth to the present publication, it might also be noted that a “Walter network” existed in the Alps during World War II. It is linked to the resistant Walter Bassan, who was born in Italy in 1926 and whose anti-fascist family then lived in exile in Haute-Savoie near Les Glières. At the age of 17, this young communist resistance fighter formed a group called the “Walter Group” in the Alps and in Lyon. Most in the group were arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Dachau. Walter Bassan survived Dachau and later became a member of the Resistant Citizens of Yesterday and Today (*Citoyens Résistants d’Hier et d’Aujourd’hui* – CRHA) association, through which he continued to talk about his Resistance experience until his death in 2017. He also participated actively in CRHA’s annual gatherings from 2007 onwards on the Glières plateau in order to protest the politics of newly elected right-wing French President Nicolas Sarkozy. In 2009, director Gilles Perret made a film about him, *Walter, retour en résistance* (Walter, return to resistance), part of which was shot on the Glières plateau.³⁵

34 Claude Barbier, *Le maquis des Glières, mars 1944, mythe et réalités* (Paris: Perrin, 2013), 480.

35 Claire Rösler, *Walter, une vie de résistances* (Magland: Neva Éditions, 2012). The documentary film of Gilles Perret: *Walter, retour en résistance* (Paris: La Vaka Production, 2009).

Vercors – apart being the surname of the famous writer Jean Bruller, author of the novel *Le Silence de la mer* (The Silence of the Sea),³⁶ who chose the name in 1941 with no idea of the massif's resistance destiny – has become a veritable sanctuary for memory of the Resistance, particularly through the cultural activities developed by the Vercors Regional Park since its creation in 1970.³⁷ It combines the beauty of the landscape with numerous memory sites linked to the events of 1944, among them a museum in Vassieux, created in 1973 by a resister, Joseph La Picirella, a memorial set into the mountain and opened in 1994, and a necropolis built in 1948 in Vassieux with the graves of 187 *maquisards* and civilians, near the remains of a German plane.³⁸

Other important sites include the necropolis at Saint-Nizier, with the graves of 100 more *maquisards*, and the ruins of the village of Valchevrière which, in the middle of the forest, served as a camp for the *maquisards* before becoming the scene of heavy fighting and the heroic actions of a group of Resistance fighters under the command of Lieutenant Chabal. There is also the *Cour des fusillés* (Court of the Shot Dead) at La Chapelle-en-Vercors, a courtyard where 16 young people were executed, and the Grotte de la Luire, a cave that served as a hospital on the plateau and was surrounded by the Germans on 27 July 1944, resulting in the execution of several people, including doctors and the chaplain.³⁹ Among different publications, the book edited by Philippe Hanus and Laure Teulières and published in 2013 explores foreigners' important roles in the Vercors Resistance.⁴⁰ As for the Glières plateau, since the 1990s, researchers and local associations have opened new perspectives and approaches towards the life and resistance in the Vercors, which go beyond the official heroic narrative.⁴¹ One example is

36 The novel *Silence de la mer* was published secretly in German-occupied Paris in 1942 and became a symbol of spiritual resistance against German occupation.

37 Hanus and Vergon, *Vercors, Résistances et résonances*, 239.

38 See the website of the Parc National du Vercors: https://www.parc-du-vercors.fr/sites/default/files/inline-images/resistance/Pdf/166062_MEMORIAL%20RESISTANCE_DEP%20Lieux-Me%E2%95%A0%C3%BCmoire_BAT.pdf

39 Cf. on the website: "Cartes des principaux lieux de mémoire dans la drôme *Musée de la résistance 1940-1945 en ligne*: <https://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/media1380-Cartes-des-principaux-lieux-de-mmoire-dans-la-Drme>.

40 Philippe Hanus and Laure Teulières Laure eds., *Vercors des mille chemins. Figures de l'étranger en temps de guerre* (Rochechinard: Comptoir d'éditions, 2013), 319.

41 Marie-Thérèse Têtu-Delage, "Un tournant mémoriel sur le Vercors entre blocage et ressources", *Journée Mémoires de la Résistance et de la guerre: redéploiements en région Rhône-Alpes*, eds. Alain Battégay and Marie-Thérèse Têtu-Delage (Lyon: Centre d'histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation, 2007), <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00727412>; Marie-Thérèse Têtu, "Vercors et Résistance, sous le mythe les mémoires", in *Vercors, Résistance en résonance*, eds. Philippe Hanus and Gilles Vergon (Paris: L'Harmattan-La mémoire des Alpes, 2008), 173-190.

the Mémorha Network, which was established in 2011 and gathers different organisations, researchers and remembrance sites linked to World War II in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region.⁴²

The Glières and the Vercors are now internationally renowned sites, giving them a special role regarding the history and memory of the Resistance.

Further south, another resistance in the mountains of the Alpes-Maritimes

Major Marcel Pourchier was one of the pioneers of the Vercors *maquis*. His friend, Pierre Dalloz, had asked him to set up the *Plan Montagnard*. Pourchier was born in 1897 in the hinterland of Nice, in Beuil, a village at an altitude of 1.500 metres. He became a soldier of the Alpine Hunters (*Chasseurs alpins*) and in 1932, the first commander of the new French mountain warfare school (*École de haute montagne* – EHM) in Chamonix. During World War II, he returned to his village and joined the Resistance. He was arrested by the Gestapo in January 1944, transferred to the Struthof concentration camp and liquidated there in September 1944.⁴³

Marcel Pourchier was from the southern Alps, an area that saw its share of troubles and resistance. Nice and its hinterland became a veritable land of refuge, not so much for STO *réfractaires* as for Jews during the period of Italian occupation between November 1942 and September 1943. Several thousand Jews came there, taking advantage of the lack of Italian repression against them. But the situation changed radically after Italy signed an armistice in September 1943. With the German occupation, Nazi violence descended on Nice, its region and hinterland. The Gestapo, based at the Excelsior Hotel near the main train station and led by Alois Brunner (who until then had commanded the Drancy internment camp in the North of Paris), deployed all possible means for persecution and repression.⁴⁴

Although resistance in Nice grew over the war years, the early times were difficult. The most important action happened on 28 August 1944, when armed resisters from the FFI, most of whom were communists,

42 “Memorha network”, hypotheses, <https://memorha.hypotheses.org/>.

43 Jean-Pierre Martin, “Jusqu’au bout du devoir, le lieutenant-colonel Marcel Pourchier”, *Les Cahiers des troupes de montagne*, no. 17 (summer 1999): 30-38.

44 Jean-Louis Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes de 1939 à 1945. Un département dans la tourmente* (Nice: Éditions Serre, 1996).

assisted by civilians and other resistance fighters from villages in the hinterland, liberated the city before the Allies, who were liberating the entire coast, arrived on the following day. The 30 casualties of this day on the Resistance side have been commemorated for several decades in an original scheme called The Memory Circuit (*Le circuit de la mémoire*), which offers a commemorative tour of the plaques honouring each of the victims in the places where they fell on 28 August of every year.⁴⁵

There were also fights in the mountains of the Alpes-Maritimes. The battle of Authion, at an altitude of over 2.000 metres in April 1945, is particularly noteworthy. In this, one of the last battles, the Germans were pushed out of the area.⁴⁶ This hinterland of Nice was the base for another form of resistance, in which a large part of the local population supported endangered persons and groups, especially in the Vésubie valley. Between April and September 1943, several thousand foreign Jews had officially been placed under house arrest by the Italian authorities in Saint-Martin Vésubie and surrounding villages such as Venanson, Belvédère, La Bollène-Vésubie and Roquebillière. The Italian authorities showed a lot of indulgence, and the Jewish refugees spent a paradoxically quiet summer of 1943 in these villages, as recounted in a radio documentary by Raphaël Krafft and Véronique Samouiloff in 2016.⁴⁷ This is also the topic of Jean-Marie Le Clézio's 1992 novel *L'Étoile errante* (Wandering Star). In the shade of the plane trees in the village square, on the café terraces, people talked about everything, freely and in all languages: Polish, German, Czech, Russian, even Yiddish. Groups of teenagers bathed in the river where their first flirtations and loves were born in the surrounding fields and woods. Food was scarce and expensive, but people danced the night away. In mid-1943, Saint-Martin-Vésubie was a haven of peace, an unimaginable refuge in Europe.

The situation changed with the Italian armistice and the foreseen arrival of the German army. Transalpine officers urged the Jews to follow them to Piémont to escape German repression. Without waiting, around a thousand of them took the steep routes over the passes of Cerise, Fenestre

45 Cf. Michel Goury, *La liste. 28 août 1944* (Nice, 2019), <https://www.fichier-pdf.fr/2019/08/25/circuit-memoire-la-liste-par-michel-goury/>.

46 Pierre-Emmanuel Klingbeil, *Le front oublié des Alpes-Maritimes (15 août 1944-2 mai 1945)* (Nice: Éditions Serre, 2005).

47 "1943 Saint Martin Vésubie, l'histoire d'un millier de juifs", *Radio France*, 6 September 2016: <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/la-fabrique-de-l-histoire/1943-saint-martin-vesubie-l-histoire-d-un-millier-de-juifs-3865280>.

and Boréon, at heights of over 2.500 metres, towards the Piedmont villages of Valdieri and Entracque, where they were well received. Others decided to wait and stay in the Vésubie. The manhunt began in September. The commander of the police of Saint-Martin-Vésubie, *maréchal des logis* Landry Mangon and his wife Adrienne Mangon, hid Jean-Claude Dreyermann, a fifteen-month-old infant; another gendarme in the brigade, Joseph Fougère and his wife Yvonne, hid his older sister Cécile, aged five, passing her off as their own daughter. The two children remained hidden in the gendarmerie for several months; their mother, eight months pregnant, was able to escape with her family from the roundup organised on 8 September 1943. The two gendarmes and their wives were posthumously awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations (*Juste parmi les Nations*) by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, at a ceremony in Saint-Martin-Vésubie in September 2010. Other Jews, helped by local farmers, tried to cross the border through the mountains in haste. But many – between 800 and 1.000 – were arrested and interned at the Borgo San Dalmazzo barracks, which had become a mountain concentration camp close to the Italian side of the border, until 21 November, when they were deported via Savona and Nice to Drancy and then Auschwitz. Only 12 escaped extermination. On 25 September 2016, the commune of Saint-Martin Vésubie was officially recognised as a member of the network Righteous Towns and Villages of France (*Villes et Villages Justes de France*). The village thus enjoyed a late but real notoriety putting forward its “spirit of resistance”. This is also reflected in cultural productions such as the successful film *Belle et Sébastien*, directed in 2013 by Nicolas Vanier, which had 3 million viewers in cinemas during its run. The film was based on a serial by Cécile Aubry broadcast on French television in 1965. Appreciated by children and families, the story is about the friendship and affection of Sébastien, a young, slightly rebellious village boy with an uncertain identity, with a mountain dog chased by hunters who he names Belle (beautiful). The story is set in 1943 and takes place in Saint-Martin Vésubie (“Saint Martin” in the film). While the 1965 TV series focused on mountain life and made no reference to historical events, the omnipresent backdrop of the 2013 film is the villagers’ resistance against the Nazis, notably serving as smugglers for Jews fleeing repression, heading to Italy.

Conclusion

For the young men, and more rarely women, involved in the armed fight against barbarism, following the example of the *maquis* in the Alps in 1943-44, the mountains became a place that was viewed differently. They were a place for physical exercise, for the exaltation of camaraderie and for surpassing oneself. Counteracting the Vichy ideological issue, it was the Resistance's investment in the Alps that made the mountains an imaginary world linked to the rebellious spirit, courage and fraternal values. The Youth and Mountains (*Jeunesse et montagne*) association created in 1940 by Vichy and gradually taken over by the Resistance, bears witness to this. In 1965 it became the Union of Outdoor Sports Centres (*Union des centres sportifs de plein air* – UCPA), which organises and promotes leisure activities for young people and families. The mountains were particularly well liked by the communists in the decades after the war, as evidenced by the 1967 song “La Montagne” by the popular communist singer Jean Ferrat.

The Alps played a key role in the French Resistance during World War II, with day-to-day resistance and mythical heroism, the armed mobilisation of the younger generation and the generally benevolent attitude of the civilian population in villages. Confronted with the beauty of the landscapes, the mystery of the forests, the exhilaration of the heights and the material difficulties, the *maquisards* experienced, at the constant risk of losing their lives, the exaltation of great plans that were ultimately abandoned or even betrayed. This generation of young people spent those long months fighting for an ideal, the ideal of their youth. Left to their own devices, they fought by their own means for an objective that became blurred in a theatre that had become a trap that closed in on itself. Those who died were honoured just as much as the survivors. The failures of which they were the victims have been transformed into a narrative shared internationally because it is so universal. That narrative is about the heroism of people of little means, whose commitment is considered noble because it was spontaneous and not formally structured on a military or ideological level.

Unlike the case of the Yugoslav mountains, where Tito and his Partisans were able to triumph over the enemy, the French case was one of failure, but one that the Resistance movement incorporated into the more global triumph of the Allies who liberated France starting in summer 1944. What remains are the common values of fraternity and courage in commitment shared by resistants from the mountains of Yugoslavia and France, values that are still important to pass on today.

The Partisan Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina During World War II: A Comparison of the Towns and the Countryside

Dino Dupanović

The Partisan resistance movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) developed differently in towns and in the countryside. Connecting urban and rural areas was one of the Partisans' major challenges. In order to understand the role of the towns and of the countryside in BiH for the communist-led Partisan movement during World War II, it is essential to address the following questions: what was the influence of the communists in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian towns and villages before World War II? What was at the core of the disconnection between communists in the towns and Partisans or communists in the countryside when the uprising began in 1941? What were the differences in resistance patterns among communists in towns and the countryside? From when can we see a clear synergy of action among all communists, regardless of whether they were in the towns or on the periphery, in remote Bosnian mountains like Kozara or Igman or the canyons of Neretva and Sutjeska, or in urban centres like Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo, or Tuzla? These questions will be answered using the example of Bosnian Krajina, a region in northwestern BiH that became the centre of the Partisans' Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka Borba* – NOB), and partially through examples in other regions of BiH.

Communists in the towns and countryside before 1941

From 1929, when a dictatorship was established in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to 1937, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) in BiH did not have a unified provincial leadership.¹ Such circumstances led to a com-

¹ The Kingdom was established in October 1918, under the name Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In 1920, the new government banned the KPJ, which went underground. In January

plete lack of organisation among the communists and the emergence of factionalism, which was addressed in several provincial conferences of the KPJ for BiH. From the Third Provincial Conference at the end of June 1940 and new leadership under Đuro Pucar Stari, the communists began more active engagement and revival of their work. This work began to be felt primarily in towns such as Prijedor, Jajce, Drvar and Bihać, mostly through labour unions, cultural and artistic societies, and rural associations.²

However, the influence of the communists on the rural population was much weaker than in towns for subjective and objective reasons. Subjective reasons stemmed from the importance the KPJ placed on the working class. Objective reasons were mainly linked to the social conditions in society. Openness to communist ideas was limited in many regions in BiH due to pronounced underdevelopment and economic backwardness among the predominantly rural population, which was under the strong influence of national parties, as well as strong patriarchal remnants from the past, which often resulted in religious and national intolerance between ethnic and national communities.³ These tensions were heightened through the agrarian reform organised by the Kingdom after its proclamation in 1918. This reform provided many peasants with the opportunity to acquire land but also caused dissatisfaction, especially among Muslims, which often led to hostility between national communities, for example in Bosanska Krupa.⁴

In this context, the communists' influence on the rural areas remained mostly limited to a small number of individuals who came to towns for education and then returned to their villages. A broader influence on the peasants was lacking. This does not mean there was no influence at all; some events in the Bosnian Krajina region, in places such as Bosanska Dubica, the surroundings of Prijedor and Jajce, indicate that communists

1929, King Aleksandar I Karađorđević dissolved the National Assembly, banned the work of all political parties and changed the country's name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 51, 60-61.

2 Dušan Lukač, *Ustanak u Bosanskoj krajini* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1967), 19-22.

3 Zdravko Dizdar, *Radnički pokret u Pounju 1929-1941* (Sarajevo: IRO Veselin Masleša, 1980), 30.

4 For an example of interethnic conflicts in Bosanska Krupa, see ed. Rajko Jovčić, *Bosansko-krupaska opština u ratu i revoluciji* (Bosanska Krupa: Skupština opštine i Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a Bosanska Krupa, 1969), 42-47. For the social conditions see Xavier Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana – Komunisti i seljaci u Bosanskoj krajini 1941-1945* (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2023), 20-21.

sometimes organised demonstrations or collected aid from peasants for families on strike, mainly through rural teachers.⁵

In some towns, such as Bihać, the spread of new communist ideas was very slow due to the insufficient number of members of the working class. For example, Oskar Davičo from Belgrade, a professor of French, came to Bihać in 1931. Davičo was supposed to encourage the spread of communist ideas among the students of the Bihać high school. However, his actions were only partially successful. Describing this period, one of Davičo's collaborators, Velimir Korać, describes Bihać as a

small Bosnian town, without any industry, with outdated craft shops, very primitive and backward Sunday markets that revealed all the poverty and destitution of the Krajina peasants. [...] The population in this town, where nothing significant happened, was divided into Serbs, Muslims, Catholics and Jews, reminiscent of other similar Bosnian towns of this type, as Ivo Andrić depicted in *The Days of the Consuls*.⁶

Until the beginning of World War II, the influence of the communists in Bihać was limited to a small group of individuals.

When World War II started in 1939, the conditions for the communists to enlarge their influence in BiH were not advantageous. This being said, the KPJ had been unified after Josip Broz Tito was appointed General Secretary in the second half of the 1930s, had adopted a new political line of the anti-fascist front advocated by the Comintern from 1935, and had developed a coherent stance on the national question by accepting the principles of the Yugoslav state and the equality of its various constituent nations.⁷ When the war reached Yugoslavia in April 1941, the new situation required a more engaged approach. It was necessary to spread communist ideology, solve the tense national issue and connect rural and urban areas. In other words, the communists had to reconcile all the mentioned diversities under unfavourable circumstances. The overall situation was further complicated and exacerbated by the fascist occupation of the Kingdom and

5 Lukač, *Ustanak u Bosanskoj krajini*, 27-41.

6 Museum of Una-Sana Canton/Muzej Unsko-sanskog Kantona, Collection of Memoirs (MUSK-COM), box 1, no. 00007/1, "Velimir Korać—O radu partijske organizacije 1931/32. godine u Bihaću", 1.

7 Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana*, 21.

the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH), led by the fascist Ustasha regime, as well as the development of the Serb-nationalist Chetnik movement which began as a rebel force turned increasingly to collaboration with the occupiers.⁸

The situation in BiH after the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the reaction of the communists

The attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers, often also called the April War, started with the bombing of Belgrade on 6 April 1941. It lasted two weeks, ending with the Yugoslav army's capitulation on 17 April. The war led to significant changes in the political and military organisation in that area. New political units were created, among them the Independent State of Croatia on 10 April, which included the entire territory of BiH. This process was organised under the control of Germany and Italy, which shared two military occupation zones in the NDH. The new circumstances led to the emergence of several genocidal policies in the Yugoslav and Bosnian-Herzegovinian regions. The Ustasha leader, Ante Pavelić, led a policy of extermination of the Serb, Jewish and Romani populations, while, on the other hand, Serb Chetniks carried out massacres of Muslim and Croatian populations.⁹ This situation soon forced the local population in BiH to decide which of the present authorities and armies they should support.

In some parts of BiH, Croats and Muslims enthusiastically welcomed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's collapse, which led to their partial support for the Ustasha authorities, especially in parts of Herzegovina. In the Bosnian

8 Chetniks was originally the name for members of Serbian paramilitary units that fought in Macedonia at the beginning of the 20th century and, more broadly, during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and World War I. During World War II, the Chetniks, led by Draža Mihailović, were a paramilitary and political movement that stood for the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in which they wanted to strengthen Serb supremacy. In 1941, the Chetniks fought alongside the Partisans in some places, before they started to collaborate with Italian and also German occupiers, partially also with the Ustasha, in order to fight against the Partisans. Their presence and influence was especially strong in Serbia, Montenegro and some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. See Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana*, 25-26; Rasim Hurem, *Kriza NOP-a u Bosni i Hercegovini krajem 1941. i početkom 1942* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1972), 61-74.

9 Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana*, 21; Rasim Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu 1941-1945* (Zagreb: Plejada-University Press, 2016), 23-32.



Map 1: The Bosnian Krajina – cities, regions and rivers.
(Map designed by Iris Buljević for this publication.)

Krajina, in the surrounding villages near Bihac, such as Zavalje, Međudražje, and Skočaj, a large part of the Croats welcomed and supported the new state's establishment. However, the majority of the local population in Bihac decided to remain neutral. Recalling the early wartime days, a local communist remembers that the streets of the town were eerily empty during those days.¹⁰ A similar situation occurred in Banja Luka, where only a few Muslims and Croats joined the Ustasha ranks.¹¹

10 MUSK-COM, box 1, no. 23/1, "Ale Terzić–Formiranje prvog Sreskog komiteta Komunističke partije za Bihac", 3.

11 Dušan Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica u ratu i revoluciji* (Banja Luka: Savez udruženja boraca NOR-a opštine Banja Luka, 1968), 91.

In general, when the occupation forces arrived and the NDH was established, there was a lot of confusion regarding the new situation, not only among illiterate locals, but also for communists who had prior knowledge of fascism and its dangers. For example, it is recorded that when the German army entered Bihać, Huse Biščević, who was close to communists, raised his hand and greeted the German soldiers with a fascist salute. When Hilmija Lipovača, a local communist, asked him why he was saluting the occupiers, Biščević replied: “Well, it’s all the same [referring to National Socialism and socialism], that’s what we’ve been waiting for.”¹²

However, the unwillingness of a significant number of Muslims and some Croats to align themselves with the occupiers, as well as the support for the new Ustasha authorities until the revelation of their true principles and the crimes they committed against Serbs, Jews and Roma, did not necessarily mean that the local population was ready to immediately lean toward the communists and embrace the idea of the People’s Liberation Struggle. When Ustasha crimes became more evident, the part of the Serb population that had not perished in the towns fled to the surrounding forests and Serb villages, where it was much more challenging for the Ustasha to operate, although Ustasha raids had already destroyed many Serb villages and their inhabitants in the Cazinska Krajina. In the following years, the Ustasha managed to maintain control mainly in towns with a Muslim and Croat majority, while their influence in rural areas, except for regions with a Croat majority, was very weak.¹³

The mass killing of Serb Orthodox Christians confronted the survivors with a difficult choice: Fight or be killed.¹⁴ However, when things were aligning for the communists to capitalise on such an opportunity and gain the support of the rural Serb population as well as of the urban escapees, they were confronted with a major problem. As Pero Morača, Yugoslav historian and former Partisan, points out, in a period when over 80 percent of Yugoslavia’s population lived in rural areas, the concept of the KPJ developing an armed struggle with liberatory and revolutionary goals could only be achieved if peasants were engaged in that struggle. The Partisan Supreme Headquarters, headed by Tito, seriously counted on the area of the Bosnian

12 Branko Bokan, “Organizovanje i aktivnost komunističke grupe u Ripču”, in *Bihać u novijoj istoriji I*, ed. Galib Šljivo (Banja Luka: Institut za istoriju u Banja Luci, 1987), 403.

13 Marko Attila Hoare, *Bosanski muslimani u Drugom svjetskom ratu* (Zenica: Vrijeme, 2019), 113.

14 Max Bergholz, *Nasilje kao generativna sila – identitet, nacionalizam i sjećanje u jednoj balkanskoj zajednici* (Sarajevo: Buybook, 2018), 156.

Krajina to fill their ranks and start a guerrilla war. However, the problem was that the KPJ had not managed to improve its position in the villages around the outbreak of the war.

At the beginning of the war, some communists unsuccessfully attempted to develop military actions in urban areas, obsessed with involving workers and other town classes in the fight.¹⁵ But in May 1941, after a KPJ conference in Zagreb, the communists emphasised the need for party organisations to become more actively involved in rural areas.¹⁶ Following this, at the Regional Conference in Šehitluci, Banja Luka, the KPJ called for the preparation and commencement of the struggle against the occupiers.¹⁷ Even though there was some communist activity among the peasants, as discussed earlier, it was not enough. Communists still considered the KPJ as a working class party that should also accept peasants into its ranks. However, the creation of this alliance between the KPJ and the peasants was only considered as preparation for the next stage of the struggle that was to follow after the end of the war. Class goals and the KPJ gave the uprising and the liberation revolution a socialist character, and the mass movement of the peasantry gave it a base.¹⁸

The uprising 1941 and the communists' attempts to take control in rural areas

The history of the beginning of the armed resistance against the new Ustaša authorities in summer 1941 in BiH is very complex and turbulent. We

15 Pero Morača, "Grad u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji (s posebnim osvrtom na Banja Luku)", in *Banja Luka u novijoj istoriji 1878-1945*, ed. Muharem Beganović (Banja Luka: Institut za istoriju u Sarajevu, Arhiv Bosanske krajine, Muzej Bosanske krajine, 1976), 566-568; About influence of the KPJ in villages and towns in the Bosnian Krajina, see: Dušanka Kovačević, "Organizacija KPJ u Podgrmeču za vrijeme narodnooslobodilačke borbe", *Prilozi*, no. 17 (1980): 283-284.

16 The conference in Zagreb was organised on invitation of Josip Broz Tito, two weeks after the Kingdom's capitulation. Tito emphasised the need for the KPJ to "organizationally adapt to the new conditions" and "determine the tasks" in the new situation as the main reasons for holding these "May Consultations". Ivan Jelić, "Majsko savjetovanje rukovodstva Komunističke partije Jugoslavije u Zagrebu 1941. godine", *Časopis sa suvremenu povijest*, no. 3 (1984): 1-18.

17 Zdravko Antonić, "Šehitlučki dogovori u sklopu opštih priprema za ustanak u Bosni i Hercegovini i Jugoslaviji 1941. godine", in *Oblasna partijska savjetovanja na Šehitlucima jun-jul 1941. godine*, ed. Galib Šljivo (Banja Luka: Institut za istoriju u Banja Luci, 1981), 10-16.

18 Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana*, 112-113; Ivan Cifrić, "KPJ/SKJ i seljaštvo", *Sociologija i prostor*, no. 67-68 (1980): 7-9.

have on the one hand spontaneous armed revolts by Serb peasants, and on the other hand various attempts of the Communist Party to control or initiate such uprisings, with varied success. The first resistance to Ustasha terror – known as the June Uprising – in BiH took place in eastern Herzegovina. The uprising began spreading to other parts of BiH. The most significant uprising took place in the Bosnian Krajina, where it broke out in Drvar on Sunday, 27 July 1941.¹⁹ It then spread to the regions of Podgrmeč, Kozara, Pljeva, and also to regions in central and eastern Bosnia, Ozren, Majevisa, Birač, Romanija, Jahorina, Bjelašnica where Serbs formed the majority of the population.

The uprising in Bosnian Krajina started with the conquest of the little town of Drvar, where an Ustasha garrison had been stationed. However, it was not realised from inside but by insurgents coming from the countryside. The uprising in summer 1941 developed mainly in rural areas and the main organisation centres were mountainous areas that provided opportunities for guerrilla warfare. Contrary to the KPJ's expectations, the centres of the uprising did not become towns. In these population centres, activities were initially limited to some actions of sabotage, information gathering and attempts to assist the insurgents in the countryside.

What was the Communist Party's role in organising these early uprisings? The KPJ sent its people to different areas to initiate or influence armed revolts, with mixed results. In some parts, their contribution was important, for example, in Prijedor, Bosanska Dubica, Bosanski Novi and in the area of Kozara, but in others it was not. In the Drvar region, for example, a small group of communists, such as Gojko Polovina, Đoko Jovanić, Stojan Matić and Stevan Pilipović Maćuka, had been making plans for armed resistance. However, their role and the KPJ's role in organising this uprising were minimal or, as Max Bergholz suggests, non-existent. In his post-war memoirs, the communist commander Kosta Nađ similarly claimed that "Apart from rare cases, our party organizations did not play any role in organizing the uprising."²⁰ In fact, at the beginning of the uprising in the summer of 1941, the group of insurgents, mainly composed of Serbs who rebelled against the Ustasha terror, represented a mix of individuals with different political and military stances.

19 Lukač, *Ustanak u Bosanskoj krajini*, 97; Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 129-130.

20 Quoted in Bergholz, *Nasilje kao generativna sila*, 157.

This situation lasted until almost the end of 1941, when the communists successfully imposed their ideas to a greater extent among the insurgents. But until then, historical sources suggest that there was a complete disarray in the insurgents' ranks. One such source is the recollection of Sajo Grbić, a communist activist, who described the beginning of the uprising as follows: "We called ourselves guerrillas. Some referred to us as Chetniks, but mostly guerrillas. I first heard the word 'partisan' in September, toward the end of September, from the late Voja Stanarević. [...]. Yes, we wore the five-pointed star, but there were also cockades, and there were red stars as well."²¹ Although without a clearly defined goal, the insurgents in northwestern Bosnia managed to initiate and develop resistance against the Ustasha, mainly in villages where they destroyed telegraph and telephone lines and ambushed the Ustasha.²²

In general, the communists coming from the towns to the insurgent, predominantly rural areas, in the woods and mountains, had significant problems with the uncontrolled insurgents. Many of these insurgents were inclined toward Chetnik ideologies or were eager for revenge against Muslims and Croats. Such insurgents blamed all Muslims and Croats for their sufferings at the hands of the Ustasha. Some communists, who attempted to organise anti-fascist resistance, like the Secretary of the District Committee for Bihać, Šefket Maglajlić, were forced to adopt a false Serb name, Mirko Novaković.²³ Other Muslim communists like Hajro Kapetanović and Avdo Ćuk managed to escape the revenge that the insurgents from Velika Rujiška planned for them.²⁴ Marko Orešković – nicknamed Krtinja – the political commissar of the Headquarters of the People's Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret* – NOP) of Croatia, was not so fortunate. He was killed by Chetnik elements within the ranks of a Partisan unit at the end of October 1941.²⁵

In the early months of the uprising, the insurgents rampaged and destroyed everything in their path. At the end of August 1941, for example,

21 MUSK-COM, box 2, no. 00014/1, "Sajo Grbić, Sava Popović, Slobodan Pilipović–O ustanku na području Bihaća 1941. godine", 11-12.

22 Bergholz, *Nasilje kao generativna sila*, 158.

23 Vera Kržišnik-Bukić, "Prilog pitanju odnosa KPJ i seljaštva na bihaćkom području u prvim ratnim godinama", in *Bihać u novijoj historiji I*, 139.

24 MUSK-COM, box 1, no. 00004/1, "Stojan Makić – O krupskoj partizanskoj četi 1941/1942 godine", 35; Kovačević, "Organizacija KPJ u Podgrmeču", 287; Jovčić, *Bosansko-krupska opština*, 99.

25 Esad Bibanović, "Kulnavakufski komunisti u radničkom pokretu i ustanku", in *Bihać u novijoj historiji I*, 454.

they set fire to abandoned Muslim villages in the Podgrmeč region, including Muslimanska Jasenica.²⁶ The resistance that the communists envisioned and their wish to establish themselves in the villages faced significant challenges in Podgrmeč. As Osman Karabegović, one of the leaders of the communists in the uprising wrote, a large number of capable party cadres was killed in a short time, and they fell at the hands of Chetniks or, in the words of Karabegović, of “unenlightened people from rural areas.”²⁷ The District Committee in the Podgrmeč region operated precisely in the rural environment where the influence of communists was underdeveloped. This eventually necessitated the arrival of a large number of experienced cadres from surrounding towns and Banja Luka.²⁸ They had some success, as indicated by the establishment of the first partisan hospital and later a pharmacy in Podgrmeč in August 1941, where the villagers played a significant role and, in this way, formed a united resistance front.²⁹

The events of late summer 1941 in the area of Bosanski Petrovac and Kulen Vakuf also indicate the complex and turbulent situation in the region. A group of insurgents, including some communists, entered the villages of Vrtoče and Krnjeuša at the beginning of August and massacred a significant number of local Catholic Croats. Lieutenant Colonel Božidar Zorn, the commander of the Croatian army of the NDH, the Home Guard,³⁰ managed to retake the mentioned villages shortly thereafter. The report he sent to Zagreb drew a dramatic picture of the situation.³¹ The peak of insurgent violence occurred on 6 September 1941, when insurgents captured Kulen Vakuf and killed around two thousand Muslims. Communists Esad and Ibrahim Bibanović, along with their friend Džafer Demirović, all Muslims, had been expecting an attack from the insurgents that day, believing them to be fellow communists. After the insurgents entered Kulen Vakuf,

26 Dušan Lukač, *Partizanska Jasenica* (Beograd: Skupština opštine Bosanska Krupa i Izdavačka radna organizacija Rad, 1979), 25.

27 Osman Karabegović, *Bosanska krajina nepresušivi izvor revolucionarnih snaga* (Beograd: Vojno izdavački i novinski centar, 1988), 220.

28 Ibid., 221-223.

29 Dino Dupanović, *Partizanske bolnice u Drugom svjetskom ratu u Bihačkoj krajini* (Bihać: Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona, 2023), 4-18.

30 The Home Guard was established in mid-April 1941 and stood under German supreme command. Nikica Barić, *Ustroj kopnene vojske domobranstva Nezavisne Države Hrvatske, 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest), 43-55.

31 Serbian Military Archive/Vojni Arhiv (Belgrade) (Collection: Independent State of Croatia) – VA-NDH, box 1, f. 2, doc. no. 14, “Izvjješće potpukovnika Zorna od 14. augusta 1941. godine”, 1.



Fig. 1: Central pharmacy in Bosanski Petrovac in 1942. (Courtesy of the Public Institution Museum of the Una-Sana Canton)

the three welcomed them but the insurgents considered them as enemies and threatened to kill them. They only survived thanks to insurgent commander Gojko Polovina's intervention.³²

What was the relationship between the communists in the towns and the communists in the countryside? Communists in the towns faced several obstacles when it came to assisting the communists among the insurgents in the periphery. One of them was the Ustasha secret police, which, after taking control of the government, obtained the complete archives of the previous police force and monitored most communist illegal activists in the towns. Some of them were arrested by the Ustasha, like Ivica Mažar, a prominent activist from Banja Luka, when he was sent by the Provincial Committee of the KP of BiH to convey directives for launching Partisan guerrilla actions to party organisations in Jajce, Janja and Pljeva. Mažar's arrest, followed by his execution by the Ustasha, left the communists in Jajce and the surrounding areas completely isolated and unconnected to the insurgents. Such Ustasha raids, which often led to executions, also significantly reduced the possibilities for communist propaganda.³³

32 Bergholz, *Nasilje kao generativna sila*, 223-230.

33 VA-NDH, box 61, f. 18, doc. 8., "Bosansko divizijsko područje-Očevidni izvještaj za prvu deseteticu od 1-10/X-1941. godine", 3.

Another problem that hindered the connection between illegal communist activists in the towns and the communists among the insurgents in rural areas stemmed from the already mentioned very sensitive ethnic tensions. Chetnik-oriented individuals who largely controlled the insurgents in some parts of Bosnian Krajina were often tempted to kill Muslim and Croat communists. Immediately after the establishment of the Ustasha government in Bihać in 1941, the communists were broken after two waves of arrests. For those who escaped, one important reason for not going to the periphery was the fear of possible revenge by Serb insurgents and Chetnik-minded individuals. Out of the mainly Croat and Muslim members of the Local Committee of the KPJ in Bihać, Stipe Butorac, who was their organisational secretary, Ante Rukavina, Robert Šolc, Hasko Ibrahimpašić, and Matko Vuković only established contact with the headquarters of guerrilla units in the neighbouring Croatian province of Lika in early November 1941. After this, they also established contact with local Serb communists from the villages around Bihać and left the town to join them in the First Bihać Company, a newly formed Partisan unit.

This connection was very important because in 1941, interethnic distrust affected communists from different ethnic communities, even if all were party members. Also at the end of 1941, the former secretary of the Local Committee in Bihać, Salih Mušanović, established contact with the KP District Committee in Majkića Japra in Podgrmeč and joined the insurgents.³⁴ At the beginning of the uprising, Mušanović had decided to join the Croatian army, the Home Guard, probably because he believed that it was not safe to join the insurgents at that moment due to the aforementioned revenge concerns. Several other examples suggest that others who later became prominent revolutionaries had similar behavioural patterns. In Croatia, Mika Špiljak, who became an important politician after the war, had a similar wartime trajectory as Mušanović; he first joined the Home Guard, although he was a member of the KPJ since 1938.³⁵ Also, Banja Luka illegal activist Željko Lastrić became a soldier in the Home Guard in summer 1941, having previously declined the invitation from other comrades to join them in the forest in preparation for the uprising, citing that he

34 Savo Popović, "Partijska organizacija Bihaća i razvoj oružanog ustanka, organizacija i organa NOP-a u bihaćkom srezu (1941-1942)", in *Bihać u novijoj istoriji I*, 314; Husref Redžić, "Mladi crveni grad", in *Podgrmeč u NOB-u: Podgrmeč do ustanka i u ustanku 1941: zbornik sjećanja I*, ed. Dušan Pejanović (Beograd: Vojno izdavački zavod, 1972), 121.

35 Hrvoje Klasić, *Mika Špiljak: Revolucionar i državnik* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2019), 54.

wouldn't be able to endure the hardships that come with insurgent life.³⁶

In Banja Luka, in contrast to Bihać, the process of connecting the insurgents in the town and its surroundings was somewhat more successful from the outset. When the April war broke out, some communists from Banja Luka had already gone to the Kozara mountain area to join the resistance against the occupiers. By the end of July and the beginning of August 1941, large parts of the organisation from the town had gone to nearby villages and the forests of Starčevica, where they worked on preparing for the uprising.³⁷ The Banja Luka case of connecting urban communists and insurgents/peasants outside the town who opposed Ustasha crimes, was a rare example of success at this stage of the war and was primarily due to the communists' strong position in this region before 1941. Thanks to the development of the partisan movement around the town, in connection with underground activities of the communists in the town, the partisans controlled the outskirts of Banja Luka by the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942.³⁸ These Partisan successes created a strong belief among the population in the town that the Partisans would soon attack and liberate the town, which caused great fear among the Ustasha. A volunteer company of illegals was even formed in Banja Luka, which was supposed to help from the inside in the event of a Partisan attack on the town.³⁹



Fig. 2: Salih Mušanović from Bihać, a shoemaker and member of the Local Committee of the KPJ for Bihać from 1932. From 1938, he was the secretary of the Local Committee of the KPJ. He died in June 1942 in Kozara at the hands of Chetnik forces. (Courtesy of the Public Institution Museum of the Una-Sana Canton)

36 Vladan Vukliš and Marijana Todorović Bilić, eds., *Banjalučki ilegalac – sjećanja Žarka Lastrića* (Banja Luka: Udruženje arhivskih radnika Republike Srpske i Arhiv Republike Srpske, 2020), 107.

37 Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica u ratu i revoluciji*, 109, 121.

38 Hoare, *Bosanski muslimani*, 123.

39 Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica u ratu i revoluciji*, 196-205.

Connecting the town and countryside: The Bihać Republic in 1942

At the end of 1941, various parts of the rural areas of the Bosnian Krajina had become liberated territories, while the bigger cities and urban centres like Bihać, Prijedor and Banja Luka continued to be under Ustasha control. In many of these liberated territories, the Partisans successfully gained control, while Chetnik influence was still strong in eastern parts of Bosnian Krajina. While both movements had initially and partially cooperated, they increasingly competed with each other. This was especially true for the aforementioned Podgrmeč area, where the transformation of insurgents into Partisan units became more pronounced following the arrival of Mladen Stojanović in November 1941, the commander of the Second Krajina Partisan Detachment, to this region.⁴⁰ From the end of 1941, the relation between Partisans and Chetniks turned more and more into open confrontation. Chetniks cooperated increasingly openly with Italian occupation forces and some Chetnik leaders even concluded agreements with local Ustasha authorities.⁴¹ This collaboration with the Ustasha significantly weakened the Chetniks' position in the Mount Manjača region, the surroundings of Jajce, Mrkonjić Grad, Glamoč, and Bosansko Grahovo. Simultaneously, it strengthened the Partisans. A large number of Chetniks either returned home or switched to the Partisans.⁴²

The development of the NOP in Bosnian Krajina was further strengthened in summer 1942 by the arrival and stay of proletarian brigades, the new mobile elite units of the Partisan army, and the army's Supreme Headquarters. The Partisan troops conquered more territory, including the towns of Livno, Mrkonjić-Grad and Jajce. In the territories under their control, Partisan units and NOP activists exhaustively explained the goals of the communist struggle to the local population through political conferences, gatherings, artistic programs and leaflet distribution. Thus, in 1942, the Bosnian Krajina was on its way to become the main stronghold of the Partisan movement during World War II, and where the network

40 Rasim Hurem, "Diferencijacija ustaničkih snaga u Bosni i Hercegovini zadnjih mjeseci 1941. i u prvoj polovini 1942. godine", *Prilozi*, no. 21 (1985): 189-190.

41 *Ibid.*, 186-190.

42 Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 185-187.

of People's Liberation Committees (*Narodnooslobodilački odbori* – NOO) would be the most developed and stable.⁴³

The Partisan movement's success in the Bosnian Krajina in early 1942 also attracted the attention of the Supreme Headquarters of the Partisans, led by Tito. In the second half of 1941, the headquarters were based in previously liberated territory in western Serbia, known as the Republic of Užice. The need for a new location emerged after the beginning of open conflict with the Chetniks in November 1941. In their search for a safe territory and increasingly reliant on Serbs of the NDH for support, they moved first to eastern Bosnia, near Foča and then in mid-1942 to the Bosnian Krajina.

However, the Supreme Headquarters and the Partisans, mainly staying in the rural areas, needed a larger liberated territory, just as the Užice Republic had been earlier. This required taking a larger town. Partisan commander Kosta Nađ, who stayed with Tito in an abandoned railroad wagon on Mount Oštrej near Bosanski Petrovac in autumn 1942, later wrote that Tito, after numerous uncertainties, uttered, “[...] We need a larger town. We need a town we can hold for a longer time.”⁴⁴ The decision was made that the town to be liberated would be Bihać, which was only a few kilometres away from the wagon where Tito and Nađ had their conversation. There were two reasons why Tito decided on this move. First, he desperately needed to mobilise and replenish Partisan units with new fighters, preferably from other national communities living in the town, meaning Muslims and Croats, as the existing Partisan units mostly consisted of Serbs. The second reason was that partisans from the surrounding villages and mountains had good connections with the illegal operatives in the town, and the population was on their side, already fed up with Ustasha's atrocities and misdeeds.⁴⁵ Nađ later described in detail the contact with the Bihać communist organisation in town while preparing for the attack. Based on this contact, he recalled a message that came from the town: “Bihać is with us!”⁴⁶

In November 1942, the Partisans attacked and conquered Bihać, which became the first major town in BiH to be liberated. This significantly

43 Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana*, 30-31; Hoare, *Bosanski muslimani*, 79; Đorđe Mikić, “O privrednim i socijalnim prilikama u Bosanskoj krajini u prvim godinama austrougarske okupacije”, *Prilozi*, no. 2 (1982): 76-77. The People's Liberation Committees were the governmental bodies established in the Partisan-held territories during the war.

44 Kosta Nađ, *Bihačka republika: ratne uspomene Koste Nada* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1982), 207-213.

45 Karabegović, *Bosanska krajina nepresušivi izvor*, 203.

46 Nađ, *Bihačka republika: Ratne uspomene*, 443.



Fig. 3: Bihać, 4 November 1942. The photo shows the Kloster building, which was one of the last lines of Ustasha defence during the Partisan attack on the town. In the same building, the First Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) was held on 26 November 1942. (Courtesy of the Public Institution Museum of the Una-Sana Canton)

influenced the change in the national composition of partisan units. In less than three months during which the Partisans stayed in the town, a large portion of the urban population, mostly Muslims and Croats, joined the ranks of the First Bosnian Partisan Corps.⁴⁷ By the end of December 1942, the Eighth Krajina People's Liberation Assault Brigade was formed in Cazin, primarily composed of Muslims from Bihać, Bosanska Krupa, Velika Kladuša and Bosanski Novi.⁴⁸

With the formation of a large free territory – the Bihać Republic – Partisans in towns and villages established authority over all social segments.⁴⁹ Thus, they connected rural and urban populations and used the opportunity to conduct more propaganda work among the rural population, who did not fully understand the communist struggle's goals. They were aided by local

47 MUSK-Collection of archival material (CAM), K-A6, no. 1241, "Dopis Komande područja Bihać-Cazin-Štabu I Bosanskog korpusa od decembra 1942. godine, o slanju 127 dobrovoljaca u NOVJ iz Bihaća i okoline", 1.

48 Izudin Čaušević, *Osma krajiška NOU brigada* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1981), 9; Dušan Lukač, "KPJ u borbi za učvršćivanje NOP-a i političko jedinstvo", *Istorijski zbornik*, no. 5 (1984): 121-124.

49 Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 188-192.

notables like Nurija Pozderac, who held great respect among all segments of the population.⁵⁰ The army mainly supplied itself with food that came from the villages. During their stay in the area of the Bihać Republic, the Partisans established People's Liberation Committees on a large scale. By the end of 1942, there were hundreds of them in the Bosnian Krajina: 414 village committees, 66 municipal committees, including three town committees.⁵¹

The Bihać Republic lasted only three months, until the end of January 1943, when the town was recaptured by German and Ustasha forces. But its existence during the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 was a very important period for the development of the Partisan movement. On a political level, the first session of the Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) was organised on 26 November 1942 in Bihać, which would become the legislative body establishing the future Yugoslav state's fundamentals. These three months also had a substantial impact on the NOP's growth. When the Partisans left Bihać at the end of January 1943, their base had significantly increased in terms of personnel. While in 1941, support for the Partisans was much greater among the rural than the urban population, it had now also grown considerably among the latter. One Ustasha report, for example, stated that when the Partisans left Bihać, over 80 prominent citizens joined them.⁵² The mainly Muslim and Croat urban population's fear that moving to the countryside, where predominantly Serb Partisans resided, could lead to revenge, was overcome. And while the city was reoccupied by the Germans and the Ustasha in February 1943, the majority of the rural areas around Bihać and in the Krajina region remained under Partisan control until the end of the war.

The development of the Partisan movement in towns and rural areas in BiH during World War II

While the Partisan movement succeeded in imposing its influence rather quickly in the Bosnian Krajina, the situation was different in eastern Bosnia.

50 MUSK-CAM, K-A6, no. 1651, "Neautorizovano sjećanje Pavla Savića na Nuriju Pozderca iz 1985. godine", 1; Karabegović, "Bosanska krajina nepresušivi izvor", 203.

51 Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 187-188.

52 Historical museum of BiH/*Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine* – Fund UNS-a, doc. no. 13423, "Napad partizana na Bihać, prilike za vrijeme partizana u Bihaću, povraćaj Bihaća i sadašnje prilike", 10-11.

At the beginning of the uprising, the KPJ could not establish itself in the areas around Srebrenica, Bratunac, Drinjača, Kalinovnik, Trebava and villages on the left side of the Bosna River due to a lack of personnel.⁵³ Chetniks were very strong in eastern Bosnia, and after the joint struggle of Partisans and Chetniks against the occupiers, the Chetniks managed to recruit a large number of members from Partisan units into their ranks. Additionally, the communists neglected political work with the population and were more active in trying to conduct sabotage actions, especially in the towns. From May 1942, Partisan units virtually ceased to exist in eastern Bosnia, except for the Biričan Partisan detachment, which was the only one that persisted. The Ustasha held power in the towns, while in the villages, in a very uncertain situation, power was shared by the Ustashas and the Chetniks.⁵⁴ Failed Partisan attacks such as the one on Vlasenica in June 1942 demonstrated that Partisan units were not yet able to reverse the situation. However, the Provincial Committee of the KPJ decided that it should stay in eastern Bosnia and revive armed activities there. No encouraging news came from the towns, where groups of illegals were often arrested. But from the end of the summer to the winter of 1942, the Partisans in eastern Bosnia recorded several significant successes against the Chetniks, mostly in mountainous areas. After the Battle of Maleševac in November 1942, where the Partisans inflicted a heavy defeat on the Chetniks, their influence also began to strengthen in the Tuzla region, in the northern part of eastern Bosnia.⁵⁵

Tuzla was the biggest town in eastern Bosnia and an industrial centre. In early October 1943, the Partisans defeated the NDH's military forces and conquered the city and its surroundings. The liberation of Tuzla became an important moment in making the Partisan movement more attractive to the urban population.⁵⁶ Before the liberation of the city itself, after the Partisans invaded Puračić near Tuzla, a larger group from the Muslim Legion led by Lieutenant Omer Gluhić had already joined the Partisan units.⁵⁷

53 Zdravko Antonić, *Ustanak u istočnoj i centralnoj Bosni* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1973), 239.

54 Nisim Albahari, "Prevazilaženje krize ustanka 1942. godine i novi polet narodnooslobodilačke borbe u istočnoj Bosni", in *Istočna Bosna u NOB-u 1941-1945. Sjećanje učesnika, volume 2*, ed. Esad Tihčić (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 7-9.

55 Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 193-195.

56 Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 224-231; Zdravko Antonić, "O razvoju NOB-e u istočnoj Bosni 1943-1944, s posebnim osvrtom na oslobođenje Tuzle", *Prilozi*, no. 21 (1985).

57 VA-NDH, box 28, f. 1, doc. no. 4/35, "Partizani prebačeni na Ozren upali u Puračić-Legionari muslimanske legije priključili se partizanima", 1-2. The Muslim Legion was created in late 1941 as

According to some sources, the Partisans were strongly supported by the town population, which fired from their windows on the defenders from their windows, thus helping the attacking Partisans during the liberation.⁵⁸ Local elites saluted the liberation of Tuzla. Partisan units were replenished with over five thousand new fighters, both workers and peasants, among them a majority of Muslims. This happened after Sulejman Filipović, a Home Guard colonel and commander of the Tuzla Brigade, declared that he would join the Partisan army.⁵⁹

Before the war, the city in BiH with the largest number of KPJ members was Sarajevo. During the occupation, the party's Local Committee organised cells in different neighbourhoods in the city. There was also a bigger number of Party sympathisers, some of whom were in the Home Guard. Others held important social functions such as doctors, pharmacists, printers and artisans, and made a significant contribution to the hiding of Jews as well as recruiting individuals to join the Partisans and transferring them to the insurgent-controlled territory.⁶⁰ However, starting in 1941, the KPJ in Sarajevo was significantly weakened by police raids; frequent arrests required frequent changes in leadership and finding individuals willing to engage in these dangerous activities. The arrests also significantly slowed the spread of propaganda activities. The situation in Sarajevo improved slowly after Vladimir Perić took over the leadership of the town's organisation in 1943. Perić restored the KPJ Local Committee which, until the final liberation of the town in April 1945, organised a series of actions in which citizens collected money, food and clothes, which were then sent to Partisans around the town. Inhabitants of Sarajevo were also very helpful in organising the transfer of communist activists from the town to Partisan territory.⁶¹

The only party organisation that demonstrated stability and continuity in its work, according to Ustasha reports from the spring and summer of 1942, was the one in Mostar. The NOP's influence there was very effective, especially through numerous acts of sabotage.⁶² Since summer 1942,

a self-defence militia and unit of the Croatian Home Guard in northeastern Bosnia to fight against Chetniks and against Partisans.

58 VA-NDH, box 153, f. 3, doc. no. 14, "Pad Tuzle u partizanske ruke-18. studenog 1943. godine", 1-2.

59 Antonić, "O razvoju NOB-e u istočnoj Bosni 1943-1944", 218-219.

60 Hoare, *Bosanski muslimani*, 113-121.

61 Emily Greble, *Sarajevo 1941-1945 – Muslimani, kršćani i Jevreji u Hitlerovoj Evropi* (Sarajevo: University Press – izdanja Magistrat, 2020), 224.

62 Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 192-201.

the communists in Mostar received increasingly strong support from local Muslims. This was particularly pronounced after the defection of the Home Guard officers Fazlija Alikaflić and Fahrudin Orman to the Partisans. The situation was similar in some other towns in Herzegovina, such as Konjic and Glamoč, where, according to an Ustasha report, increasing numbers of intellectuals and peasants went to the Partisans.⁶³ While in spring 1942, the KPJ was strongly implemented in some towns, this was not the case in other Herzegovinian towns, for example in Ljubuški, where support for the Ustasha was very strong.⁶⁴ However the Muslim notables' increasingly open protest against the Ustasha arrests and deportation of Muslims and Serbs – and even some Catholics – from Mostar, Konjic or Čapljina to camps, during 1944, brought the Muslim community closer to the Partisan movement.⁶⁵

In Banja Luka, the tight relations between the illegal movement in the town and the Partisans in the surrounding areas that existed in 1941 were soon broken because of strong Ustasha pressure. It was only in the second half of 1943 that the Partisans reestablished such a connection. This relationship could be maintained in very difficult conditions, especially the constant arrest of Partisan couriers. In late autumn 1944, the Partisans managed to completely cut off and isolate Banja Luka from the surrounding villages and supply roads and caused a great shortage of food in the town. The Ustasha were not even able to repair some industrial enterprises on the outskirts of the town, due to constant Partisan incursions.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, what did the situation look like in Bihać after the Partisans left the town at the end of January 1943? Several members of the KPJ Local Committee had gone with them, including Salih Mušanović, who died shortly after. A few communists remained in the town, led by Hasan Salihodžić, who eventually also had to leave the town after a Ustasha raid at the beginning of 1944 led to the arrest of almost all Committee members. The link between the Partisans in the villages and the town was maintained only through a few unreliable Partisan sympathisers in the town.⁶⁷

63 VA-NDH, box 69, f. 10, doc. no. 10, "Izbjegavanje domobranske vježbe domobrana muslimanske vjere", 1-3.

64 VA-NDH, box 153c, f. 1, doc. no. 17, "Raspoloženje pripadnika na području kotara Ljubuški prema ustaškom pokretu", 1.

65 VA-NDH, box 86, f. 23, doc. no. 2, "Pismo 15 muslimanskih predstavnika iz Sarajeva o zločinima vlasti NDH, posebno u Hercegovini i dr.", 1-5.

66 Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica u ratu i revoluciji*, 360.

67 Zdravko Dizdar, "Bihaćka partijska organizacija 1941-1945", in *Bihać u novijoj historiji I*, 74-77.

During the final months of the war, the Partisans took complete control of the villages and the surrounding areas of the largest towns in BiH, which were still occupied by the Ustasha and German forces. Generally speaking, the crisis that the Partisans went through in previous years in the villages to prove their “identity” had been overcome and now, the liberation of the remaining towns was to follow. In the first half of 1945, the Partisans liberated Mostar in February, Bihać in March, Sarajevo and Banja Luka in April. The large number of citizens who attended the gatherings held by the communists in liberated cities and supporters who joined the movement strengthened the Partisans in their fight for the further liberation of other parts of Yugoslavia, especially Croatia.

The liberation of the towns in BiH from the German occupiers and the Ustasha in 1945 followed a similar scenario. Partisan units moved towards the city from outside and advanced step by step into them, while the communists within the cities supported the attacks through sabotage activities and by taking control of strategic places. It was the closing of a paradoxical circle: While the KPJ had initially thought that the liberation would start in the cities, it was the countryside that liberated them.

Resistance with Words and Weapons: Michał Borwicz and the Resistance in the Lemberg-Janowska Camp

Markus Roth

The definition of resistance to the National Socialists' regime has been disputed for decades. The core question is how narrowly or broadly the term may or should be defined.¹ A general answer to this question is nearly impossible, as resistance is a reactive term. Depending on which area of Nazi politics one examines, one will deal with different forms of resistance. At best, any action that runs counter to the declared goal of the National Socialists in the respective area could be defined as resistance. According to this, where the National Socialists were interested in dehumanising the persecuted, resistance was already everything that helped preserve the dignity and humanity of the victims.

In his fundamental study of resistance in Nazi concentration camps, Hermann Langbein provided the following broad definition of resistance: "In the camps people were supposed to be morally broken, even physically destroyed. Every action that could raise morale and help to preserve life was directed against the masters of the concentration camps."² This concise definition is also the basis for this discussion of Michał Borwicz's activities in Lemberg-Janowska camp and beyond. Borowicz's actions are exemplary for showing the close connection between literature, documentation and active struggle as different forms of resistance against the National Socialist perpetrators and their helpers.

1 Wolfgang Benz, *Im Widerstand. Größe und Scheitern der Opposition gegen Hitler* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018), 16–22.

2 Hermann Langbein, ... *nicht wie die Schafe zur Schlachtbank. Widerstand in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1985), 57.

From Kraków to Lemberg-Janowska Camp

Michał Maksymilian Borwicz was born in Kraków as Maksymilian Boruchowicz on 11 October 1911, into an assimilated Jewish family.³ Even before the war, literature and political commitment played a major role in his life. Borwicz studied Polish philology at Kraków's Jagiellonian University; politically he was involved in the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*) and in the Zionist movement Poale Zion. Before the war, he appeared in public mainly with literary reviews, essays and the 1938 novel *Rasa i miłość* (Race and Love).

News of the mobilisation in Poland, due to fear of a German attack, reached him in Geneva in late August 1939, where he was taking part in the Zionist Congress. Like Emanuel Ringelblum and other participants, Borwicz made his way back to Poland. However, the travellers had to take a detour via Italy, Yugoslavia and Hungary in order to avoid German control. A few hours before the start of the attack, on the night of 31 August to 1 September, Borwicz crossed the Polish border and finally reached Lviv on the same day. On the evening of 1 September, he set off for Kraków as an army reservist. However, the Polish authorities and the military were in chaos and disintegrating. Many officials left their posts in a hurry. Borwicz was unable to find a unit that he could join. He and a friend were able to reach Zamość, 270 kilometres southeast of Warsaw. There, he first experienced the German invasion on 13 September, then a little later, after the German withdrawal, the Red Army's entry on 26 September. The Red Army stayed in Zamość until the beginning of October 1939. The area was assigned to the Soviet side in the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939, which divided Europe into spheres of influence between the German Reich and the Soviet Union. Border corrections to the agreement and the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty then led to the withdrawal of the Red Army.⁴

3 Klaus Kempfer, *Joseph Wulf. Ein Historikerschicksal in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2013), 77-78, 88, 94-97, 100-104, 116; Barbara Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen. Die Vernichtung der Juden in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005) 84-87; Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record. Jewish Holocaust Documentation in early Postwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 209-210; Michał Jagiełło, "Brama pamięci", *Odra*, no. 4 (2013): 43-46.

4 Stefan Gąsiorowski, "Maksymilian Boruchowicz w Lwowie w latach 1939-1943", in *Stosunki Polsko-Żydowskie. Tom 2: Kultura. Literatura, sztuka i nauka w XX wieku*, ed. Zofia Trębacz (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2020): 134-135.

Borwicz joined the withdrawing Soviet troops, like many other Jews, and went to Lviv. There he was initially busy finding an apartment and procuring supplies. At first, he was active in a Polish literary association, but its activities in Lviv, which was now occupied by the Soviets, soon had to be stopped. Borwicz tried unsuccessfully to flee to Lithuania. After returning to Lviv, he was able to escape the waves of Soviet deportations to Siberia. But these always hovered over him as an impending danger.⁵

After the German attack on the Soviet Union and invasion of Lemberg⁶ in summer 1941, Borwicz lived underground, where he was active against the occupiers. At the end of 1942, however, he was arrested by the Germans for attempting to smuggle weapons into the Lemberg ghetto. He was imprisoned in Lemberg-Janowska camp, from where he continued his underground activities and maintained contact with resistance groups outside the camp. Among other things, he developed close contact during this period with the *Żegota*, the Council for the Support of Jews, which, supported by the Polish government in exile, provided help to persecuted Jews in Poland by procuring false identities, ration cards and other documents, as well as organising accommodation and help for Jews living in hiding.⁷

The Lemberg-Janowska camp – A brief history⁸

The Janowska camp was part of the forced labour camp system in the Galicia district, which was annexed to the General Government after the attack on the Soviet Union. The camp, which was set up by the district's SS and police leader in May and June 1942, was intended to be both a labour camp and a transit camp. The Lviv Jews were to be selected here. Those able to work were still needed, and were to be sent to this or other camps; all others were to be deported to Bełżec extermination camp and murdered there.

5 Gašiorowski, "Maksymilian Boruchowicz", 136-141.

6 Lemberg is the German name of Lviv, which was already used under Habsburg rule. When referencing the German occupation, I use the German name.

7 Gašiorowski, "Maksymilian Boruchowicz," 146; Beate Kosmala, "Ungleiche Opfer in extremer Situation. Die Schwierigkeiten der Solidarität im okkupierten Polen," in *Solidarität und Hilfe für Juden während der NS-Zeit. Regionalstudien 1: Polen, Rumänien, Griechenland, Luxemburg, Norwegen, Schweiz*, eds. Wolfgang Benz and Juliane Wetzels (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 1996), 50-56.

8 Thomas Sandkühler, "Das Zwangsarbeitslager Lemberg-Janowska 1941-1944", in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager – Entwicklung und Struktur*, eds. Ulrich Herbert, Christoph Dieckmann and Karin Orth (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998), 606-635.

The Janowska camp was designed to hold 10.000 prisoners, but in March 1943, a high of around 15.000 prisoners had been reached. Janowska was more than just a transit and work camp. It was also the site of the mass murder of the Jewish population. Thousands of people were shot in the camp itself on the terrain of the so-called sand hill (*Piaski*), so that the mass murder and thus their own potential fate were constantly in front of the work prisoners in the camp.⁹

Those Lemberg Jews whose lives were temporarily spared and became prisoners of the camp, when they were able to work, were rented out by the SS to numerous companies in the city, including armaments companies and Wehrmacht companies. They left the camp in columns in the morning and were led to their workplaces, from which they returned to the camp in the evening. This arrangement directly impacted the possibilities and forms of resistance. The organisation of forced labour opened up more opportunities to establish contact – directly or through intermediaries – with groups outside the camp. In addition, leaving the camp every day offered scope for the smuggling of cash registers or even weapons, although the risk of detection by the controls was not low.

From May 1943, the SS began preparing to dismantle the camp. First and foremost, this meant that mass shootings of prisoners began again. Just on 25 May 1943, around 2.000 prisoners were shot. In addition, traces of mass crimes in the Janowska camp were to be removed. Therefore, from June 1943, a specially formed working brigade of Jewish prisoners had to exhume the bodies of the murdered and burn them completely. Finally, in November 1943, SS men surrounded the camp and murdered most of the remaining prisoners. However, the camp was not fully evacuated until 19 July 1944, immediately before the Red Army entered the city. Previously, from time to time, a few Jews were brought to the camp and many of them were killed.

Against this background, the camp's prisoners had little room for illusions about their own fate. It seemed clear that the only way to survive was to survive as long as possible and then find opportunities to escape. For the latter, some saw armed struggle against the perpetrators as a prerequisite. For many, surviving for as long as possible meant not only defying the physical challenges – hunger, possible illnesses, exhaustion from hard

9 Sandkühler, "Das Zwangsarbeitslager Lemberg-Janowska", 606-635; Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944. Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 331-337. The following history of Janowska is based on Sandkühler and Pohl.

work. It also meant maintaining the psychological strength needed to be able to even think about life beyond the camp, planning strategies and not being completely overwhelmed by the misery.

On the sense and methods of armed resistance in the camp

The activities of Borwicz and his fellow prisoners in Lemberg-Janowska were not only directed outwards, but also gained great importance within prisoner society and moved between the poles of active struggle on the one hand and maintaining and raising morale through literature on the other. While the benefits of moral or literary resistance for the inmates in the camp could be seen and felt immediately, armed actions and their limits and possibilities were disputed and were the subject of heated discussions. Moreover, there was not just one united resistance in the camp, different groups were active, be it with different political orientations or for practical reasons, since they were in different external working brigades. These different groups did not come together until the liquidation of the Janowska camp, so that the resistance in Lemberg-Janowska was significantly weaker in contrast to Auschwitz and other camps.

This involved questions and risks that were not without controversy within prisoner society. Borwicz documented a dispute about the chances and risks of armed resistance in his report on the Lemberg-Janowska camp, published in 1946: When the prisoners had to fear that current events would break off contact with the outside world and with it the possibility of smuggling weapons that had already been paid for into the camp, fellow inmate Artur fundamentally questioned armed resistance. Artur vehemently opposed the argument that one's dignity should be preserved, even if the fight seemed hopeless: "You're talking rubbish," he blurted out in an annoyed whisper, 'as if you were writing a stupid story about the camp you wanted, but never saw a real camp. As if you are looking at yourselves, not with your eyes, but with the eyes of one who lives in freedom and between this and that business regrets that the Jews (good heavens!) are deprived of their dignity.'"¹⁰

10 Michał Maksymilian Borwicz, "Die Universität der Mörder", in *Nach dem Untergang. Die ersten Zeugnisse der Shoah in Polen 1944-1947. Berichte der Zentralen Jüdischen Historischen Kommission*, eds. Frank Beer, Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (Berlin: Verlag der Dachauer Hefte/Metropol Verlag, 2014), 105. The original account was published 1946 with the title *Uniwersytet zbirów*.

According to Artur, such acts of resistance have no effect, since the environment is so permeated by anti-Semitism that any possibility of the Jews reacting would be interpreted negatively. Artur said that they, like sheep, go in silent passivity to the slaughterhouse; if they let their desperation run wild, it was Jewish whining; finally, if they resisted, they would be accused of “Jewish impertinence”.¹¹ In any case, such acts would be quickly forgotten. When a Jew killed an SS man with a knife some time ago, this quickly receded into the background in view of the Jews hanged by the SS in revenge, who hung on balconies in the city for days: “The hanging set an example.”¹²

Artur was not open to arguments against this. Some objected that such acts of resistance, which primarily have a symbolic meaning but less direct practical success, were not only aimed to have an external effect. Rather, acts like this also fulfilled an important function internally, as a fellow inmate objected: “The Germans not only force decent people to conspire, but also to solitude. That’s why I think “demonstrations” are necessary. At least for giving the lonely a message every now and then that they are not alone.”¹³

Artur, who harshly rejected such attitudes, finally formulated his motivation for a gun-in-hand resistance, which ultimately wasn’t that different from that of the others: “I want, you know, to defeat these bastards. Don’t just shoot at them, shoot them. That is the difference. And while the prospects are bad, you can’t waste an opportunity. Maximum number of weapons and maximum preparation. So that it’s not just a shootout for your vanity, forgive me... dignity, but that the bastards pay as dearly as possible.”¹⁴ While some people thought that fighting for the sake of fighting, as a sign to those around them and for posterity, seemed to suffice as motivation, Artur demanded in the preparation as well as in the implementation, not to fight for a symbolism, but for a victory. There seems to have been no discussion of using the weapons only to prepare an escape from the camp. The internal disagreements, the lack of weapons, and finally the early liquidation of the camp meant that armed resistance was only discussed and no fighting took place.

11 Borwicz, “Die Universität der Mörder”, 105.

12 Ibid., 105.

13 Ibid., 106.

14 Ibid., 107.

Literature and resistance in the Lemberg-Janowska camp

But things looked different when it came to resistance with words and the role of literature. Certainly, activities in this area could also be characterised as demonstrative acts to protect the dignity of the persecuted, but their immediate benefit was noticeable for everyone involved, so that the literary activities in the Lemberg-Janowska camp did not seem to have been equally controversial. From other places, especially from ghettos, Borwicz reported after the war, there were discussions whether cultural and literary events were permissible in the face of persecution and mass murder. Such discussions took place, for example, in the Warsaw and Vilnius ghettos. Concert events in Vilnius, for example, were rejected by some as irreverent. In early January 1942, in view of the mass murders of Jews in Vilna that had previously been carried out, opponents of the concert wrote on posters: “You don’t hold concerts in a cemetery!”¹⁵

And yet such cultural resistance existed in numerous ghettos, including all major ghettos: Warsaw, Łódź, Vilna, Białystok, Kaunas, Riga and others. It was not just professional authors, well-known actors and actresses and other artists who were involved here. Activists who carried out political underground work and later prepared armed forms of resistance also got involved. And in addition, many laypeople, young and old, wrote and recited their texts for the edification of others in private circles and cafés. Resistance groups organised cultural evenings for their people. For all of this, those involved often accepted a great deal of risk and some deprivation; this type of resistance was so important to them and their listeners. Word and weapon, to put it this way, went hand in hand and supported each other. This is also evidenced by the great importance of songs, often specially written songs, in the partisan movements.¹⁶

15 Michał Maksymilian Borwicz ed., *Pieśń ujdzie ciało... Antologia wierszy o Żydach pod okupacją niemiecką* (Warszawa: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce, 1947), 25.

16 Gudrun Schroeter, *Worte aus einer zerstörten Welt. Das Ghetto in Wilna* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2008); Andrea Löw, *Juden im Getto Litzmannstadt. Lebensbedingungen, Selbstwahrnehmung, Verhalten* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006), 208-210; Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2001), 515-608; Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University Nebraska Press, 1996), 215-227; Borwicz, *Pieśń ujdzie ciało...*, 13-16.

Literature as a form of resistance and a means of documenting what was happening in the ghettos and camps was so important to Borwicz and many of his fellow camp inmates that during the war, he helped publish an anthology of underground poetry and wrote his account, *Literatura w obozie* (Literature in the Camp). Finally, after the war, he used the opportunities available to him to publish literary works of Holocaust literature that had come into being during the events themselves.¹⁷

Borwicz dates the beginnings of his own literary work in the camp to January 1943. While clearing snow with a working brigade outside the camp, verses suddenly came to his mind, which he continued to work on in his mind while he was working until the first stanza was finished. He was finally able to secretly write them down on an old piece of paper that he found. He then worked on other stanzas in the same way. Borwicz reports that many works were certainly created in the camp that the poets kept to themselves or only shared with close confidants. Many of these works are undoubtedly lost forever through the death of their authors.¹⁸

Through persistence and fortunate circumstances, Borwicz was finally able to create a stage for the authors and their works so that they could be shared by many. The cleaning brigade he worked in had found an abandoned apartment where they could gather and warm up briefly. After a while, Borwicz was able to persuade the foremen to let them use this apartment for literary evenings as well: “But they finally gave in. Not because of my powers of persuasion, which have very limited power against the harsh logic of the camp. They are more likely to succumb to the longing that slumbers in all of us to put into words a catastrophe that we have lived through, to try to put it into words.”¹⁹ These evenings soon became a success that was appreciated by all. The dimly lit room, whose windows were draped with cloaks for safety, was packed with people. After a brief introduction by Borwicz, the poets presented their works; short papers and non-literary texts were also read and discussed. The success was so resounding that Sunday was the premier and a repeat took place on Wednesday. In the women’s barracks, too, they sought to take their minds off the suffering in the

17 Barbara Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen. Die Vernichtung der Juden in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 85-87.

18 Michał Maksymilian Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie* (Kraków: Centralny Żydowska Komisja Historyczny przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce – Oddział w Krakowie, 1946), 12. The following is based on this book. Only direct quotes are cited in the footnotes.

19 *Ibid.*, 15.

evening. In her report, written during the war, Janina Heschel, who was in Lemberg-Janowska when she was 11 or 12, remembers those evenings that would have been distracting for a moment, but without completely ignoring the terrible reality.²⁰

It didn't stop there. To put it bluntly, literature conquered the entire camp. In one department, for example, a novelist read to fellow inmates from a story about camp life that he was working on. Meanwhile, an inmate kept watch to warn of impending danger. In addition, literary evenings were organised in barracks, which were even covered by the Jewish *Ordnungsdienst*.²¹ In the technical office, prisoners secretly made copies of poems that had been written in the camp and were circulating there, as well as of classics from Polish literary history, the words of which, like those of some hits and folk songs, sometimes took on a completely new meaning through the new reality of the camp. "It is not the words that added something to the situation, but the situation has added something to the words,"²² Borwicz put it. As a rule, however, most of the works may have been passed on orally. The literary evenings described by Borwicz were the exception; by rule many poems were quietly read to the bystanders or those marching around a small group at work or on the march there or back to the camp.

Borwicz, himself a trained philologist, urgently warned against discussing the literary value of the works created in the camps, in the ghettos or elsewhere under high pressure of persecution in isolation: "One thing is certain: None of them may be evaluated without considering the conditions in which they were created."²³ Borwicz captured the conditions under which prisoners wrote literature in a few words: "One wrote in moments of cold and hunger. Between one execution and the next, between one series of lashes and the next."²⁴ Therefore, short forms of literature such as the poem naturally dominate. Since writing material was scarce, there are many poems in simple form, with short stanzas whose verses rhyme, as

20 Borwicz, *Pieśń ujdzie ciało...*, 36.

21 The Jewish Order Service (*Ordnungsdienst*) was set up on the orders of the German occupiers. It was responsible for maintaining internal order in numerous ghettos and some camps. In many places, the *Ordnungsdienst* was also involved in rounding up people for deportation. The behaviour of many members of the *Ordnungsdienst* in this regard, as well as widespread corruption, led to harsh criticism within Jewish society even at the time.

22 Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 38.

23 *Ibid.*, 68.

24 *Ibid.*, 44.

they were so much easier to memorise – whether for a lecture in the camp or for transmission afterward.

The form gave way to the content, sometimes even this was not so important, but the mere presence of literature in the camp was enough to lift prisoners up: “A supporting arm of a compassionate friend whose mere presence forces you to ‘pull yourself together.’”²⁵ First and foremost, literature looked after the psyche of the prisoners, raised them up a bit morally and gave expression to their suffering and longings. In this way, it counteracted the psychological oppression and dehumanisation that the National Socialists intended to occur in the camps and ghettos. Sometimes, it allowed them to draw new strength and confidence. Many prisoners apparently valued these cultural activities so highly that they accepted the enormous risks associated with them. Literature and culture were bridges back to the prisoners’ pasts, where, unlike in the camp, they were able to lead a normal and self-determined life. And they were bridges to a longed-for future in which they would be free again. This bridging function of cultural activities in the camp was of central importance for many prisoners.

In addition to literature’s intellectual importance, which should not be underestimated, it fulfilled other functions, some of which were closely linked to armed forms of resistance. On the one hand, it explicitly served to document what was happening in the camp. “This goal,” writes Borwicz, “was almost self-evident. The situation dictated it.”²⁶ The unprecedented personal experience was not only to be recorded, but these texts were also to be smuggled out of the camp so that some of them could still be used as educational material during the war, and some only afterwards. This happened with the help of various contacts with the outside world.

The political resistance, which wanted to arm itself for an armed struggle, also benefited from the literary life in the camp. The literary evenings in barracks, for example, offered resistance fighters the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas without arousing the suspicions of security service or spies. Because unlike conspiratorial political meetings, literary evenings were generally accepted and therefore not threatened by denunciations, while some saw political or armed resistance as an unnecessary danger for everyone. In this way, resistance fighters minimised the risk of being discovered in the shadow of the literary evenings. In addition, the smuggling

25 Ibid., 22.

26 Ibid., 25.

of literature could lower the inhibition threshold and be the gateway to arms smuggling. Those who had just started to work conspiratorially and were willing to take certain risks were less frightened by this step than someone who had never smuggled anything into or out of the camp. And finally, numerous personal 'overlaps' testify to the particularly close connection between literature and resistance in the Lemberg-Janowska camp. Leading figures in the armed struggle were poets themselves – in addition to Borwicz, these included S. Friedman and A. Laun, among others.²⁷

But the smuggling of texts and documents did not stop there. Together with others, Borwicz organised the escape of the twelve-year-old girl Janina Hescheles from Lemberg-Janowska camp. She had lived in various hiding places in Lemberg but had been caught and had to live in the ghetto. From June 1943 until her escape in October 1943 she was a prisoner in Janowska. There, she joined the circle of literati; writing and reciting poems. This is how Borwicz became aware of her and made the decision to help her escape from the camp. Active support came from the Kraków Council for the Support of the Jews around Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and others who cared for the girl in Kraków. There she was supposed to write about her time in Lemberg-Janowska to describe the camp and the crimes there from the perspective of a child. After the war, when Borwicz was working in the Kraków branch of the Jewish Historical Commission, he set about editing Janina Hescheles' notes for a publication. In 1946, the book was published under the title *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (Through the Eyes of a Twelve-Year-Old Girl).²⁸

Epilogue: From Poland to Paris

The organised escape of Janina Hescheles points to Borwicz's later work, in which resistance with word and weapon as well as documentation continued to play a major role. After escaping the camp, Borwicz kept up his resistance work. He was a member of the Polish Socialist Party and the only Jewish commander of a regional partisan unit in the Miechów District

27 Wassili Grossman and Ilja Ehrenburg, eds., *Das Schwarzbuch. Der Genozid an den sowjetischen Juden* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag, 1995), 180.

28 Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, 303/V/425/H 5528; Arolsen Archives, T/D-464 173; Preface of Maria Hochberg-Mariańska in: Janina Hescheles, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny* (Kraków: Wojewódzka Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Krakowie, 1946), 9–15.

in northern Kraków.²⁹ He was also in contact with the resistance movement in Auschwitz, namely the Socialists under Józef Cyrankiewicz, one of the leaders of the Fighting Group in Auschwitz (*Kampfgruppe Auschwitz*). Again, Borwicz devoted himself not only to the political and armed struggle, but also to literature. During this period, he wrote his report on literature in the camp and continued to collect literary works, mainly poems, about persecution and resistance, a small part of which he published in an underground publication.

Naturally, journalistic activities remained very limited during the German occupation of Poland. After the liberation, however, that changed abruptly. Borwicz took over the management of the Kraków Jewish Historical Commission, in which Joseph Wulf and Nella Rost were also active.³⁰ They published numerous diaries, memoirs and literary works in rapid succession. The latter had an exceptionally high status in the Kraków Jewish Historical Commission, which can primarily be attributed to Borwicz's special commitment. He was now able to seamlessly continue his activities in the camp and underground. As early as 1946 he published three books – his text about literature in the camp, written before the liberation, his memoir about Lemberg-Janowska, which he characterised as the university of murderers and under the title *Ze śmiercią na ty* (With Death by You), a collection of poems from Lemberg-Janowska and from the partisan unit. The large anthology of poems, *Pieśń ujdzie cało...* (The Song Will Escape Undamaged...), came the following year, in which numerous poems by more than 70 authors are collected. Since Borwicz saw it as something like a kind of lyrical documentation of the Holocaust,³¹ he focused on works that were created during the persecution and thus bear witness to it with immediacy. Moreover, the poems covered a wide range of topics – persecution, self-assertion, resistance, mass murder and the attitude of the non-Jewish Polish population. This important anthology, which, together with the significantly thinner brochure on which it is based, can be seen as a core text

29 Kempter, *Joseph Wulf*, 78. For the following, see Kempter, *Joseph Wulf*, 85, 88, 94-97, 100-102. Joseph Wulf came from Krakow and was active in a Jewish resistance group there. He was arrested and deported to Auschwitz in 1943. After the war, he worked for the Jewish Historical Commission before emigrating with Borwicz in 1947. Wulf later lived in Berlin, where he published numerous documentaries on the Holocaust.

30 Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, 84-120.

31 Among other things, he writes in his introduction that the works are a valuable source for investigation, not least because of the fact that they exist and were created in a specific place at a specific time. Borwicz, *Pieśń*, 40.

of Polish-Jewish Holocaust literature, which was expressly published for a Polish non-Jewish readership.³²

However, these bustling activities after the end of the war only lasted for a short time. The Stalinization of Poland seemed to repel Borwicz and awaken the feeling that he was also personally threatened. When he travelled to Sweden on behalf of the Jewish Historical Commission in early 1947, he heard of an imminent trial against him, which was to focus primarily on his activities in the non-communist underground. He never returned to Poland. According to another account, Borwicz was warned of his arrest by Józef Cyrankiewicz, the then General Secretary of the Polish Socialist Party and Prime Minister, whom he knew from his underground activities under German occupation.³³ In June 1947 he travelled on from Sweden to Paris, where he set up the Center for the Study of the History of Polish Jews (*Centre d'Études de l'histoire des Juifs Polonais*) together with Joseph Wulf, of which Borwicz became scientific director. In this function, too, he advocated for a broad view of the events. At a conference in November 1947, he advocated for considering the Holocaust as an unprecedented event and for developing new methods of historiography such as oral history, since traditional methods were no longer sufficient. During this time, Borwicz and Wulf drafted several book projects, which, however, came to nothing. A short time later, there was a dispute between the two and Wulf left the institute in 1950. Borwicz continued his work and sought academic recognition. In 1953 he received his doctorate from the Sorbonne on a topic that had accompanied him for many years: Jewish writing under German rule.³⁴ Despite all his activity, Borwicz remained an outsider in academic life. Nevertheless, he continued his work on the Holocaust in general, its literature, and the history of Jewish resistance in particular. Together with a few other survivor historians he was one of the pioneers of Holocaust historiography and the research of Jewish resistance. Borwicz was never able to build on the brief heyday of his journalistic work in the early postwar years in Poland as he would have liked. He died in Paris at the end of August 1987.

32 Breysach, *Schauplatz*, 85-87.

33 Vgl. Jagiełło, "Brama pamięci", 44.

34 Michał Maksymilian Borwicz, *Écrits des condamnés à mort sous l'occupation allemande (1939-1945). Étude sociologique* (Paris: Edition Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

“I’ll Take You in the Orchestra Right Now”: Music and Spaces of Resistance in Nazi Concentration Camps

Élise Petit

The presence of music in concentration camps¹ was revealed as soon as 1934, when the initial accounts from freed political opponents or escapees from the first “preventive detention camps” (*Schutzhaftlager*) confirmed the use of music for coercion and propaganda purposes. They also mentioned the role played by certain songs in creating symbolic spaces of solidarity or resistance.² After the war, the violinist Szymon Laks and the saxophonist René Coudy were the first to give testimonies about the official orchestra in the men’s camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and to provide details regarding its activities.³ In the 1950s, the singer Aleksander Kulisiewicz, who survived Sachsenhausen, collected hundreds of songs from dozens of camps, and gave numerous recitals throughout the world to introduce people to this musical repertoire of spiritual resistance to the Nazi program of destruction.⁴

The role and presence of music in the concentration camp system began to draw the interest of researchers and musicians during the late 1980s. Milan Kuna published his *Musik an der Grenze des Lebens* in 1993,⁵ while Gabriele Knapp provided the first study of an Auschwitz orchestra with *Das*

1 This contribution focuses on music in concentration camps only. It does not deal with prisoner-of-war camps, internment camps or the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto, which had a specific status.

2 See, for example, *Braunbuch über Reichstagsbrand und Hitler-Terror* (Basel: Universum-Bücherei, 1933); Gerhart Seger, *Oranienburg. Erster authentischer Bericht eines aus dem Konzentrationslager Geflüchteten* (Karlsbad: Graphia, 1934), or Wolfgang Langhoff, *Die Moorsoldaten. 13 Monate Konzentrationslager. Unpolitischer Tatsachenbericht* (Zürich: Schweitzer Spiegel, 1935).

3 Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World*, trans. Chester A. Kisiel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000).

4 After his death, his archives were acquired by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC.

5 Milan Kuna, *Musik an der Grenze des Lebens. Musikerinnen und Musiker aus böhmischen Ländern in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern und Gefängnissen*, trans. Eliška Nováková (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1993).

Frauenorchester in Auschwitz in 1996.⁶ Some years later, Guido Fackler's "*Des Lagers Stimme.*" *Musik im KZ*⁷ emerged as a referential text. Fackler's book was followed by other works, such as Gabriele Knapp's book on music in Ravensbrück,⁸ Shirli Gilbert's *Music in the Holocaust*,⁹ and Juliane Brauer's *Musik im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen*.¹⁰ Recently, the exhibition *La musique dans les camps nazis*, which I curated at the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris from April 2023 to February 2024, offered a unique occasion to display hundreds of documents, music instruments, pictures, drawings and objects related to the uses of music in Nazi camps.¹¹

While no official document from the Third Reich has been found regarding the creation of orchestras in the camps, inmate music ensembles of various sizes were nevertheless constituted in almost every camp, on the orders of commanding officers. The primary function of a camp orchestra (*Lagerkapelle*) was to synchronise the steps of the prisoners in work units (*Kommandos*), in order to facilitate their counting as they marched from the roll call square (*Appellplatz*) to the camp gate in the morning and in the evening. The *Lagerkapelle* could also be requisitioned to entertain the SS, or to accompany punishments and executions. Music thus mainly served the Nazi system of moral and physical destruction. However, from the very first days of captivity in the camps, music, particularly collective singing, established spaces for communication and moral or artistic resistance for certain inmates.

What should be coined "resistance" when it comes to music in this context? To be sure, the forms of resistance that were possible in a concentration camp were mainly geared towards physical survival in a very existential sense. Although music could help in escaping the camp reality of fear, disease and hunger for a brief moment, it did not play a part in armed resistance. In a certain way, this kind of resistance has been considered "passive". But, as Yehuda Bauer wrote about the Jewish struggle in

6 Gabriele Knapp, *Das Frauenorchester in Auschwitz. Musikalische Zwangsarbeit und ihre Bewältigung* (Hamburg: Von Bockel Verlag, 1996).

7 Guido Fackler, "*Des Lagers Stimme.*" *Musik im KZ. Alltag und Häftlingskultur in den Konzentrationslagern 1933 bis 1936* (Bremen: Temmen, 2000).

8 Gabriele Knapp, *Frauenstimmen. Musikerinnen erinnern an Ravensbrück* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003).

9 Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust. Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

10 Juliane Brauer, *Musik im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen* (Berlin: Metropol, 2009).

11 "La musique dans les camps nazis", Mémorial de la Shoah, <https://expo-musique-camps-nazis.memorialdelashoah.org/>. All internet sources last accessed 1 December 2023.

ghettos: "When one refuses to budge in the face of brutal force, one does not resist passively; one resists without using force, and that is not the same thing." Instead of resistance, he preferred to use the term *Amidah*, literally "standing up against", which he explained:

It includes smuggling food into ghettos; mutual self-sacrifice within the family to avoid starvation or worse; cultural, educational, religious, and political activities taken to strengthen morale; the work of doctors, nurses, and educators to consciously maintain health and moral fiber to enable individual and group survival; and, of course, armed rebellion or the use offered (with bare hands or with "cold" weapons) against the Germans and their collaborators.¹²

These forms of what has also been called "moral" or "spiritual resistance"¹³ raise several questions.¹⁴ In *Music in the Holocaust*, Gilbert insists: "The rhetoric of spiritual resistance arguably has good intentions – above all, to counteract depictions of victims as passive, attribute some retrospective dignity to their actions, and impute meaning to their suffering. However, it also has a tendency to descend into sentimentality and mythicization."¹⁵ Furthermore, as Bauer stated: "Individual acts of resistance constitute a slippery and awkward topic, because what to include and what to exclude is difficult to determine."¹⁶ Lastly, as Lawrence Langer pointed out in his essay "Cultural Resistance to Genocide" in 1987: Whereas "resistance to Genocide, as both concept and fact, restores a measure of dignity to the

12 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 120.

13 These terms were first used by Miriam Novitch, a Holocaust survivor and curator of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in Israel, from the 1950s onward. They gave way to an eponymous traveling exhibition in 1978. See the catalogue: Miriam Novitch ed., *Spiritual Resistance: Art from Concentration Camps, 1940-1945: A Selection of Drawings and Paintings from the Collection of Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetatot, Israel* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981).

14 Among the substantial literature on the subject: Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 1-20; Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 51-63; Michael Marrus, "Varieties of Jewish Resistance: Some Categories and Comparisons in Historiographical Perspective", in *Major Changes within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), 269-299; Nechama Tec, "Resistance in Eastern Europe", in *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, ed. Walter Laqueur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 543-550; Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance", in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 341-363.

15 Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 7.

16 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 119.

victim [...], it seems crucial to appreciate the limitations of an expression like ‘cultural resistance’, and not attribute to it a power it did not possess.”¹⁷

Numerous accounts written after the war by survivors mention the presence of music in concentration camps and killing centres, mainly to accompany the marching of the *Kommandos* in the morning and in the evening. Many of them also mention the power of music which, thanks to its soothing qualities, was said to have helped people get through the worst hours in the camps. These testimonies often fail to mention that music was first and foremost misused, or better said *abused*, by the perpetrators in a destructive way: While the camp orchestras sometimes did play for prisoners on Sundays, they more frequently accompanied punishments, violence and even executions.¹⁸ The music of the hit song *Tornerai* (known at the time in Germany as *Komm zurück*, Come Back), for example, accompanied the fugitive Hans Bonarewitz on 30 July 1942 as he had to “parade” through the Mauthausen camp after his capture, before being hanged the day after. The love song was chosen on purpose by the camp authorities because its lyrics alluded ironically to the situation of the fugitive, “awaited” by the inmates forced to attend this mock ceremony.¹⁹

Bearing in mind this preponderant and destructive abuse of music in Nazi concentration camps, how can we nevertheless view musical initiatives designed to momentarily “escape” from the camp, to make people forget the atrocity of their situation? Must resistance necessarily involve an active process aimed at overthrowing the Nazi system through arms or revolt? In this contribution, I will show how music could be linked to a form of “resistance” in specific places and spaces of the camps: As a means to transgressively stand up against the Nazi camps system, as “a life-affirming survival mechanism”,²⁰ but also as “a vehicle of moral and cultural sustenance”.²¹

17 Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, 51-53.

18 On this subject, read Élise Petit, *Des Usages destructeurs de la musique dans le système concentrationnaire nazi* (Paris: Cahiers du CRIF n°56, 2019).

19 Élise Petit, “What Do Official Photographs Tell Us About Music and Destructive Processes in the Nazi Concentration Camps?”, in *Photographs from the Camps of the Nazi Regime*, eds. Hildegard Frübis, Clara Oberle and Agnieszka Pufelska (Graz: Böhlau, 2019), 74-76.

20 Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 2.

21 Frieda W. Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable. Yiddish and Polish Poetry in the Ghettos And Concentration Camps* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 71.

Musical activities in Nazi concentration camps

When concentration camps opened in 1933, the SA and the SS commanders brought their military and musical system to the camps. The orchestra was expected to promote group cohesion and to set the pace for marching to the beat. Therefore, *Lagerkapellen*, made up entirely of prisoners, came into being to accompany the marching of the *Kommandos*. Initially, the small ensembles of non-professional musicians often consisted of only three or four instruments. From 1938 onwards, some of them grew to even become full-scale symphony orchestras, as in Auschwitz I, where the orchestra numbered nearly 120 musicians from 1942 to October 1944.²² After January 1945, faced with the advance of the Allied troops and the approaching German defeat, the acceleration of the indiscriminate annihilation of all prisoners led to a reduction in the number of members, and even the demise of certain orchestras.

Besides the orchestra, vocal activity was imposed by the SS in the camps. As Arnold Schulz wrote after the war: "The prisoners had to sing new songs again and again. We had to sing on command – ordered to by someone who had harassed us all day at work. Sing with starving stomachs and parched throats. That was nerve-wracking, more than nerve-wracking."²³ *Singstunden* ("song hours") were a frequent punishment after roll call, inflicted on inmates on various pretexts. In the first camps, drill, the Hitler salute and singing of the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* and the *Deutschlandlied* were part of the "reeducation" of the political opponents.²⁴ The guards also frequently demanded that the inmates sing while they worked, which prevented them from communicating with each other. On a daily basis, first of all, all the detainees had to sing German marching songs with their *Kommandos* as soon as they passed through the gate, as stated in a document from the Natzweiler-Struthof *Kommandantur*: "All *Kommandos* with 10 prisoners or more must sing on the way to the workplace and when returning from the workplace. When leaving, the *Kommando* has to begin singing after passing the guard post at the protective custody camp. When returning, singing has to stop before reaching the guard post."²⁵

22 Jacek Lachendro, "The Orchestras in KL Auschwitz", trans. William Brand, *Auschwitz Studies* 27 (2015): 19.

23 Arnold Schulz, *Schutzhäftling 409* (Essen-Steele: Webels, 1947), 30.

24 *Braunbuch über Reichstagsbrand und Hitler-Terror*, 268, 289-290, 297.

25 Josef Kramer, "Allgemeine Hinweise über das Verhalten der Häftlinge im Schutzhaftlager bei der Arbeit und während der Freizeit!", 1942, 1.1.29.0/82126143/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

In a camp order drawn up by SS Buchenwald deputy commandant Arthur Rödl, it was specified that “free time in the evenings must be taken up by mending, cleaning and singing”.²⁶ This included learning and repeating the German marching songs, which everyone had to sing every day from memory and in German, whatever their nationality. In this context, many musicians were able to take advantage of the presence of musical ensembles and imposed vocal activities, to organise small events where music was devoid of any utilitarian function.

Spaces of resistance

Although music was mainly played on the order of the SS, musical events were authorised as early as 1933 in the inmate blocks during so-called “free time”, which many prisoners used to rest, clean their clothes and shoes, look for relatives in the camp, etc. Most of the concerts were organised in the evenings and on Sundays, officially to learn and rehearse the marching songs of the *Kommandos*. The authorised concerts provided “a distraction from thoughts of the impending fate of starvation”,²⁷ which weakened prisoners both physically and mentally. They also boosted morale, at least for a short time. It should be pointed out from the outset that spontaneous musical activities, be they clandestine or authorised, were not accessible to all camp inmates. Most required invitations, more or less formal, some were paid for (with camp money), and the audience was restricted by the size of the spaces in which the concerts took place. Even if some concerts were held outdoors, the vast majority of the detainees could not attend these events because they had to struggle for physical survival, and had no energy to engage with music or entertainment. Ultimately, almost all musical activities were aimed at the camp’s most privileged prisoners (*Prominenten*), which more often than not excluded Jewish inmates. In Buchenwald or Sachsenhausen, for example:

Organized music-making across the camp spectrum owed its existence, in large part, to the willingness of German political prisoners

26 Arthur Rödl, “Schutzhaftlagerbefehl”, 17 November 1937, Federal Archives/*Bundesarchiv* – BArch, NS4 Bu-31, 5.

27 Hermann E. Riemer, *Sturz ins Dunkel* (München: Bernhard Funck Verlag, 1947), 180.

to help other inmates in the organization of events. Their assistance could be provided in a number of ways: securing venues, providing information regarding the safest concert times, or persuading the SS that certain activities were not subversive or threatening.²⁸

As survivor Leo Eitinger wrote: "The group of people who were able to mobilize the most adequate coping mechanisms were those who, for one reason or another, could retain their personality and system of values more or less intact even under conditions of nearly complete social anomaly."²⁹ For these persons, music was one of the coping mechanisms.

Interior spaces

The inmate blocks were among the interior spaces to which the SS rarely had access, and in which numerous concerts and cultural events of varying scope were organised. Restrictions to the authorised repertoires applied and varied from one camp to another. In Ravensbrück, a circular by Anna Klein-Paubel, head of the camp, stipulated: "Only German songs may be sung, no popular music (*Schlager*), no songs in foreign languages. The columns may sing when leaving and when coming back. In the blocks, singing is only permitted during free time. Outside of this time and outside of the blocks, singing is prohibited. [...] Dancing and theater are prohibited."³⁰

Vocal activities were predominant in the inmate blocks. In Sachsenhausen, a great amount of song books survived the war. Their repertoire, aimed at group cohesion, consisted mainly of popular or traditional German songs, and most of the songs were embellished with drawings in ink or coloured pencil.

Some workers' songs such as *Die Gedanken sind frei* (Thoughts are Free) acquired a particular connotation in the concentration camp context. New songs in German were also composed in detention, often praising the

28 Shirli Gilbert, "Songs Confront the Past: Music in KZ Sachsenhausen, 1936-1945", *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 3 (August 2004): 285.

29 Leo Eitinger, "On Being a Psychiatrist and a Survivor", in *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel*, eds. Alvin Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 196.

30 Anna Klein-Paubel, "An alle Blocks. Zum Aushang", 2 March 1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG-04.006*20.

primacy of moral resistance and calling on prisoners not to give up, such as *Kopfhoch* (Heads Up) in Buchenwald:

In the difficult long years
Remember comrade
We believed in the proven power of the saying:
Stand up straight or break!
Many have already broken
We stand behind the barbed wire
Upright, for years or weeks
Keep your head up, keep your head up, comrade!³¹

This song was meant to unite all prisoners, and it was quickly translated to Czech, French and Polish. Numerous choirs of various sizes sprang up spontaneously in the camps and performed during concerts, usually in unison. They were mainly formed by nationality and gave rise to a kind of cultural exchange, with some choirs from a block performing a variety of songs from their own country – patriotic and political songs were forbidden – for inmates in another block.

While the majority of concerts in inmate blocks were authorised or tolerated, the few clandestine or informal events were characterised by a desire for resistance, usually political: On these occasions, inmates sang in their own language, in lower voices, watching for any untimely arrivals, and the repertoire was generally more political or denounced camp conditions and mistreatment. Polish prisoner Alexander Kulisiewicz in Sachsenhausen expressed his anger at violent *Kapos* or his cynicism towards privileged prisoners in blunt terms, and described the omnipresent horror through what he called “songs of suffering”.³² Some lighter songs, such as Jan Vála’s *Kartoszki* (1942) in Sachsenhausen, mocked the major preoccupation with food, in an ironic cabaret spirit, to resist demoralisation. The chorus went: “*Kartoszki Kartoszki*, every man loves them, Monday and Tuesday,

31 “In den schweren langen Jahren / Kamerad erinnere dich / galt das Wort das schicksalharthe / steh gerade oder brich! / Sind auch viele schon zerbrochen / Wir stehn hinterm Stacheldraht / aufrecht, Jahre oder Wochen / hoch den Kopf, Kopf hoch Kamerad!” Music by Józef Kropiński to lyrics by Bruno Apitz, 1944.

32 Carsten Linde ed., *KZ-Lieder: Eine Auswahl aus dem Repertoire des polnischen Sängers Alex Kulisiewicz* (Sievershütten: Wendepunkt, 1972), 11.

Marzsch. **Kopf hoch...** *Muz.: J. Kropinashi*

In den schwarzen Jan-ken Jah-men-ka-me-
ren, eria nre - dich - galt das Wort, das schick-sals-
har - to steh ge-ra-de o-der brich -!! Sind auch
rie-le schoa zer-bro - chen, wir stehn his-term Stachel-

Fig. 1. Score of *Kopf hoch* in Josef Pribula's clandestine book, 1944. (Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora)

it doesn't matter, but only seven times a week."³³ Naming hunger, grief or despair in songs could be seen as "an attempt to control their domination"

33 "Kartoszki, Kartoszki, die hat jeder gern! / Kartoszki, Kartoszki schmecken jedem Herrn. / Montag und Dienstag, ist ganz egal / doch in der Woche nur siebenmal." The first word, Kartoszki, meaning potato, is derived from the German word Kartoffel and has a Slavic ending.

or “a form of exorcism”,³⁴ as Frieda Aaron writes about poetry. When composing in the camp, signing the score and song lyrics with their name was a way of reaffirming the artists’ identity in a dehumanising environment where names had been replaced by numbers. Some soloists or small groups also gave short concerts on Sundays from one block to another. For the musicians involved, performing in different blocks served several purposes: On the one hand, it sometimes helped their fellow inmates, for whom “these melodies were at least a reminder of home and family”,³⁵ to escape the camp in their thoughts. And on the other hand, it provided the musicians themselves with an additional means of subsistence, as they were often rewarded with bread or cigarettes by their comrades.

Given the restrictions in some camps, dancing and theatre activities could be considered transgressive and could lead to severe punishment. When forbidden, they were used as a means to stand up against the camp system. Several drawings made by the dancer and choreographer Nina Jirsíková in Ravensbrück testify to evenings where she clandestinely danced for her comrades in her block. In August 1940, the theatre piece *Schumm-Schumm*, written by Jewish prisoners Käthe Leichter and Herta Breuer in Ravensbrück, was performed in Block 11. After being denounced to the SS, the block and room elders and several prisoners were sentenced to six weeks in the bunker. The block’s occupants were deprived of bread for four weeks.³⁶ Preparing a clandestine musical event required mutual trust and cohesion on the part of the inmates, reinforcing their feeling of belonging to a group and including them in a space of solidarity.

The famous example of Germaine Tillion’s *Verfügbar aux Enfers* in Ravensbrück can also be evoked here: Hidden in a crate for several days by her fellow inmates, the French Resistance fighter wrote a work designed to laugh at the horror of the camp.³⁷ The highly cynical, denunciatory text alternated with songs, all based on well-known melodies with new lyrics. Written in the autumn of 1944 to cope with the demoralisation of her fellow

34 Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, 19.

35 Testimony by Jerzy Brandhuber, quoted by Lachendro, “The Orchestras in KL Auschwitz”, 48.

36 Knapp, *Frauenstimmen*, 47; Linde Apel, “Judenverfolgung und KZ-System: Jüdische Frauen in Ravensbrück”, in *Genozid und Geschlecht. Jüdische Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Lagersystem*, ed. Gisela Bock (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005), 49.

37 The *Verfügbar* in Ravensbrück were prisoners not assigned to a specific *Kommando*, and therefore considered “available” (*verfügbar*) for the worst chores inside the camp. About Tillion’s piece, read Philippe Despoix et al. eds., *Chanter, rire et résister à Ravensbrück. Autour de Germaine Tillion et du Verfügbar aux Enfers* (Paris: Seuil, 2018).

inmates, this work was not intended for performance on a stage. It was written on loose sheets of paper and passed from hand to hand. It therefore provided an opportunity to laugh and "sing in silence". The writing process, which involved several inmates suggesting lyrics or melodies, distracted them temporarily from the world of the camp and brought back memories of the time when they were free.

Although most musical activities took place in the inmate blocks, in some camps they were also organised in other buildings, notably the so-called infirmary (*Revier*), like in Birkenau women's camp, after 1943:

At that period it was an institution in the hospital compound that our orchestra [...] gave a little concert twice a week for patients able to be up and for the staff. It took place on a circular lawn, a little island in the desert of mud and dust. We nicknamed those concerts "sound-wave therapeutics", because they were organised while there was lack of medicaments and other means of medical treatment. [...] The band used to play light music, the time-honoured comical hits of the old Austrian music-hall star Leopoldi delighted the hearers, and we sometimes managed to laugh and joke.³⁸

From August 1943 onwards, concerts were organised in other buildings of the camps, like the disinfection block, the camp kitchen, or the *Trockenbaracke*³⁹ in Sachsenhausen:

In the *Trockenbaracke* a kind of "festival of nations" took place [...]. There, many of the nations represented in the camp performed their folklore (songs and dances). [...] We thus achieved the recognition of one side of international solidarity by presenting the cultural assets of the nations represented in the camp [...]. In this respect, these events became part of the international resistance.⁴⁰

38 Ella Lingens Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), 72.

39 Located next to the camp laundry, these barracks usually served for the drying of the prisoners' clothes.

40 Hellmut Bock, "Einige Erinnerungen an die Kulturtätigkeit der Häftlinge im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen", 1979, Archive of Sachsenhausen National Memorial/*Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen*, P3 Bock, Hellmut, 2.



Fig. 2. Program for the twenty-first concert at the Buchenwald cinema, 17 August 1944. Illustration by Karol Konieczny in Josef Pribula's clandestine book. (Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora)

In Buchenwald, over the course of a year, more than twenty concerts of varying sizes were organised in the camp cinema (*Kino*).⁴¹ These included classical music played by the *Lagerkapelle*, circus, theatre, musical comedy and more. As an example, after an introduction by the *Lagerkapelle*, the program for the twenty-first concert on Thursday 17 August 1944 alternated between choirs of different nationalities: Yugoslavs, Austrians, Poles, Germans, Russians, Czechs and French sang traditional songs and variety songs. These larger-scale events were attended by several hundred privileged inmates, and sometimes by the SS as well. As a result, programs tended to feature light music or non-political plays. The preparation process distracted the musicians from the gruesome reality, giving them something to talk and care about. Some performances required the creation of costumes and sets, allowing the artists to concentrate on their art and once again assert their creative power.

Exterior spaces

Whereas the interior could provide a space of resistance or spontaneous expression in the Nazi concentration camps, the exterior would most often be a space of restriction. The music performed outside was mainly played under coercion, on the orders of the SS or the guards and under their supervision: It contributed above all to the smooth running of the Nazi machine. Nevertheless, some attempts to struggle against the morally destructive system took place: on the roll call place, and where concerts were taking place.

In all concentration camps, roll call took place morning and night, sometimes even at midday for *Kommandos* returning to the camp. From 1943, it was reduced to morning and evening, and to evening only from 1944 onwards, in order to maximise the duration of inmates' working time in the service of war production. Roll call at night could last several hours and encroach on so-called "free time". As survivors wrote about roll call in Sachsenhausen: "For the exhausted prisoners, standing often nightlong, in

41 In some concentration camps, a "cinema" barrack was accessible to privileged inmates. For the SS, this was a way of disseminating Nazi propaganda through selected films, while at the same time capturing money from bonuses received by inmates, who had to pay for access to the cinema. This barrack would also be used for concerts or other purposes. See Rudi Jahn ed., *Das war Buchenwald! Ein Tatsachenbericht* (Leipzig: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Literatur, ca. 1945), 18-19.

a rigid posture or even with knees bent, proved fateful.”⁴² Numerous survivors testified how composing poems or songs during that time helped them in trying to find a distraction from the physical agony. In Ravensbrück, Czech music teacher Ludmila Peškařová composed many poems and songs during that time, mostly using existing melodies, and performed them afterwards from memory during clandestine events: “When we stood as silent as the grave during long roll calls, all manner of thoughts swirled around my brain! I sang inside my head, and if I could not think of the words or if the lyrics of a song did not express what I was feeling, I would supply my new, more appropriate words.”⁴³

In most of the camps where there was no work on Sundays, concerts for prisoners could take place in the outdoor space of the camp in the afternoon, depending on the weather. Prisoners who were strong enough and SS personnel could attend. The repertoires included sentimental songs, operetta or classical music, as well as traditional songs (*Volkslieder*) and songs from successful German films. The concerts provided a brief escape from camp reality and a sense of cohesion that could lead to solidarity and struggle against demoralisation. Zdzisław Maćkowiak wrote in Auschwitz in 1944: “My sole recreation on Sundays is the concerts by our excellent orchestra, the productions of which are generally well liked by music lovers. I have always been musical and it is precisely this pleasantly spent time that permits me for a moment to forget about where I really am.”⁴⁴

The most famous song composed on the occasion of a concert in an exterior space is the *Börgermoorlied* or *Moorsoldatenlied*, also called *Wir sind die Moorsoldaten*, better known under the title of *Peat Bog Soldiers*.⁴⁵ In 1933, after an episode of particularly extreme violence by the SS in the Börgermoor camp, Communist prisoner Wolfgang Langhoff asked the commandant for and obtained the right to organise a circus show in the camp on a Sunday afternoon. This *Zirkus Konzentrazani*, aimed at countering the demoralisation of his comrades, ended with this song, composed by

42 “Bericht über das Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen während der Naziherrschaft, handschriftlich niedergeschrieben im Lager in der Zeit Mai bis Juni 1945”, Archive of Sachsenhausen National Memorial/*Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen*, P3, Bock, Hellmut, 5.

43 Ludmila Peškařová, letter to Inge Lammel, 8 December 1964, Archive Academy of Arts/*Archiv Akademie der Künste* (Berlin), KZ-Lieder 57/1, 5.

44 Zdzisław Maćkowiak quoted by Lachendro, “The Orchestras in KL Auschwitz”, 54.

45 Börgermoor was situated in the northwestern peat bog area of Germany, where the main work of the prisoners was the cultivation of the surrounding wetlands.

WIR SIND DIE MOORSOLDATEN

Text und Musik von Politischen Schutzhaftlingen
Börgermoor

1. Wo-hin auch das Aug-geblicket
2. Hier in die-ser ö-der Frei-heit
3. Mor-gens ziehen die Kol-nen
4. Auf-son-wärts heim-wärts je-der
5. 1. Vo-gel-sang uns nicht er quor-let
6. 2. Wo wir fer-nen je-der Frei-heit
7. 3. Gra-ben bei dem Brand der
8. 4. Man-che Brust ein Seuf-zer
9. 5. sind die Moorsoldaten
10. 6. Auf und nieder gehn die Kosten
11. 7. Doch für uns gibt es kein Klagen
12. 8. Ewig kann nicht Winter sein,
13. 9. Ein-mal werden froh wir sa-gen
14. 10. Refrain: Wir sind die Moorsoldaten...
15. 11. Als Lagerlied gesungen August 1933
16. 12. Licht
17. 13. daten...
18. 14. daten
19. 15. in's Moor.

Fig. 3. Hanns Kralik, illustrated score of the *Börgermoorlied*, 1933. (Archiv des Aktionskomitee für ein Dokumentations- und Informationszentrum Emslandlager e.V., Papenburg / © Ralf Zimmermann (Köln))

Langhoff and two fellow prisoners: It described the harsh reality of those who called themselves “peat bog soldiers”, but also the hope of a return home. The song was an immediate success, both among the inmates and the SS guards, who all identified with the “peat bog soldiers”. The musical score quickly spread from the camp to other camps in Germany and Europe, as well as to the free world. It opened the way for the composition of *Lagerlieder* in all other camps, and became after the war the remembrance song for all deportees.⁴⁶ As Langhoff wrote about the show after his release as soon as 1935: “We had dared for a few hours to decide on our acts ourselves, without orders, without instructions.”⁴⁷

The *Lagerkapelle* as a space of resistance

The integration of musicians into the camp’s official orchestra (*Lagerkapelle*) seems to have made it possible to resist the destructive Nazi system by thwarting its aims, notably that of encouraging all forms of rivalry and disunity, especially between “old” inmates and newcomers. The status of *Lagerkapelle* musicians varied from one camp to another. Most of the time, musicians went to work during the day in various *Kommandos*, and played morning and evening in the orchestra, which was a source of additional fatigue, since the rehearsals took place at night during so-called “free time”. The repertoire was generally limited, due to the lack of time to practise. The mortality rate among musicians was high, leading to incessant changes in musical orchestration that jeopardised the quality of performances and displeased the commanding officers, as in the men’s orchestra of Birkenau at the beginning:

Apart from a few privileged persons, everyone went out to work just as before and returned in a state of extreme physical and mental exhaustion. Some managed to endure this, while others broke down completely. Some threw themselves on the wires. The size of the orchestra changed almost from day to day and in time shrank catastrophically.⁴⁸

46 On this subject, read Élise Petit, “The Börgermoorlied: The Journey of a Resistance Song throughout Europe, 1933-1945”, *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 28, no. 1 (2018): 65-81, <https://www.comparativ.net/v2/article/view/2822/2418>.

47 Langhoff, *Die Moorsoldaten*, 182.

48 Laks, *Music of Another World*, 47.

Nevertheless, in Dachau for example, some orchestra leaders managed to get prisoners assigned to less destructive *Kommandos*, often indoors, "which would enable them to retain the nimbleness of their hands and fingers and thereby ensure a better sound and a more rhythmic cadence of the marches".⁴⁹ These *Kommandos* often worked inside the camp, to be available if one needed them to play, and also if some *Kommandos* returned to the camp at midday for a meal and roll call. In the Birkenau men's camp orchestra, some members were assigned to the rehearsal block, where their tasks included composition or orchestration, copying scores, repairing instruments and setting up concert programs. After observing severe damage to instruments played under pouring rain, the Auschwitz orchestras "stopped going outside when bad weather threatened the instruments".⁵⁰ They played inside their block, windows open, to accompany the *Kommandos*' coming and going.

In Buchenwald, Auschwitz I, and the Birkenau women's camp, where the musical demands of the commandants grew higher after 1943, the conductors eventually got their musicians exempted from all other work, so that they could spend their days learning the pieces and adding to the orchestra's repertoire. Because the official orchestra's musical activities were seen as contributing to the prestige of the Nazi authorities, a block was allocated to the musicians for rehearsal and accommodation. In the Birkenau women's camp, their roll call eventually took place in the women's orchestra block, so they were not forced to go to the roll-call area where their comrades had to stand in all weathers for hours.⁵¹ In May 1943, to contribute to the war economy, a regulation issued by Oswald Pohl, head of the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*) introduced several measures to increase productivity in the camps, including the distribution of bonuses:

All prisoners assigned to work should have the opportunity to earn a performance-related bonus payment. It will be given in the form of bonus coupons, which represent monetary value within the

49 *Ibid.*, 66.

50 *Ibid.*, 67; Lachendro, "The Orchestras in KL Auschwitz", 30, 56, 67, 91.

51 Rachela Olewski, *Crying is Forbidden Here! Rachela Olewski (Zelmanowicz), Testimony: A Jewish Girl in Pre-WWII Poland, the Women's Orchestra in Auschwitz and Liberation in Bergen-Belsen*, ed. Arie Olewski (Tel Aviv: Arie Olewski, 2009), 29.

concentration camp, as a reward to those prisoners who distinguish themselves through good performance, diligence and commitment.⁵²

In Buchenwald, Auschwitz I, or in the men's orchestra in Birkenau, payment lists found after the war show that the *Lagerkapelle* members received quasi-monthly bonuses from 1944 onwards.⁵³ Numerous official orchestras were equipped with uniforms to be worn on special occasions such as Sundays and concerts in the presence of the commandant and his guests.⁵⁴

In camps where musicians had access to “privileges”, conductors were aware that recruitment into their orchestra could save lives. This form of solidarity was in itself a means of resistance to a system of annihilation. Survivor Adam Kopyciński explained how the conductor of Auschwitz I orchestra Franciszek Nierychło, an acquaintance he had helped in Krakow before the war, rescued him from hard labour in the camp's construction materials yard (*Bauhof*) and accepted him as a member of the orchestra.⁵⁵ About Alma Rosé, head of the women's orchestra in Birkenau, Violette Jacquet-Silberstein recalled:

Alma rightly was not convinced of my talents and told me: “I'll take you on a one-week trial.” [...] The third day, someone stole my galoshes. I arrived with cold, dirty bare feet from walking in the mud. [...] I began to cry. Coming onto the scene, Alma asked why the tears. When I explained, Alma said: “All right. I'll take you in the orchestra right now.” That was the first time she saved my life.⁵⁶

Another form of cohesion was to play forbidden music after the rehearsals, and, in case of an intrusion, “to start playing another piece that had

52 Oswald Pohl, “Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftlinge”, 13 May 1943. BArch, NS3/426, 62.

53 Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum/*Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau* – APMA-B, D-Au II-3a/1871-1888, vol. 19, 2665-2682; 1.1.5.1, G.C.C. 159, II B/55. ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

54 The presence of uniforms has been attested to in Buchenwald (where members wore them daily), Dora, Dachau, Mauthausen, Auschwitz I, Birkenau, Monowitz, and even in Treblinka death camp. Élise Petit, *La musique dans les camps nazis* (Paris: Mémorial de la Shoah, 2023), 28-35.

55 Account by Adam Kopyciński in Lachendro, “The Orchestras in KL Auschwitz”, 16.

56 Violette Jacquet-Silberstein, quoted in Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2000), 236.

been prepared in advance".⁵⁷ Whereas for the musicians, it was mostly a way of creating a space of conviviality leading to solidarity, it is interesting to see that playing forbidden music could be seen by others as a form of "active" political resistance:

During the next few days I harmonized all three polonaises and wrote out the parts for a small chamber ensemble, after which we began to practice the pieces in the barracks when conditions allowed. Some of my Polish colleagues congratulated me on this deed, regarding it as an act of the resistance movement. This surprised me a little, since for me this was an ordinary musical satisfaction, heightened by the Polishness of the music to be sure, but I did not see how its being played in secret could have harmed the Germans or had an effect on the war.⁵⁸

The *Lagerkapelle*: A musical "grey zone"?

The *Lagerkapelle* was, according to Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a "small community, which was to generate the warmest friendships and camaraderie as well as hatred in equal measure".⁵⁹ As Helena Dunicz-Niwińska noted: "Similarly, in the circles of former prisoners or even among people who had never experienced anything of the kind, we were frequently confronted after the war with unmasked opprobrium for having played in the orchestra."⁶⁰ For numerous survivors, and even for orchestra members themselves, the music played by the *Lagerkapelle* in the camps morning and evening was intertwined with the suffering of thousands of people in the *Kommandos*. For Halina Opielka: "Although we tried to concentrate on the performance, it was impossible not to think of the bodies of those beaten to death at work. Of the blows raining down, kicks, and shots into the ranks of prisoners."⁶¹

57 Laks, *Music of Another World*, 64-65.

58 *Ibid.*, 65.

59 Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth: A Memoir of Survival and the Holocaust* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2000), 74.

60 Helena Dunicz-Niwińska, *One of the Girls in the Band: The Memoirs of a Violinist from Birkenau*, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2014), 84-85.

61 Halina Opielka, quoted by Knapp, *Das Frauenorchester in Auschwitz*, 291.

The orchestra members were often perceived as people enjoying privileges, as many of them played for the entertainment of high-ranking prisoners, and even for the SS. As Szymon Laks writes about his activities in Birkenau: “The kapos and other dignitaries relished this kind of music and in the evenings would summon three or four musicians to their private Stube (room) for their own pleasure. [...] The musicians returned from their moonlighting loaded down with all sorts of goodies and cigarettes.”⁶² This additional means of resisting death by starvation, which also allowed them to share food with less privileged comrades, was seen by some inmates as a form of collaboration.

It has been reported by several survivors that SS officers from Birkenau, including the commandant Josef Kramer or the doctor Josef Mengele, regularly visited the men’s or women’s orchestra barrack, ordered that music be played for them, and sometimes cried.⁶³ Simon Laks wondered: “Could people who love music to this extent, people who cry when they hear it, be at the same time capable of committing so many atrocities on the rest of humanity?”⁶⁴ It seems that the regenerating power of music was used as such by the Nazi administration for the SS men. As the ethnopsychiatrist Françoise Sironi explained about the psychology of torture, “Torturers are made, not born; either by a violent deculturation process, or by a specific initiation using traumatic techniques.”⁶⁵ This form of deconstruction of identity was applied in SS training. In this context, spaces where a level of humanity could be restored were the SS barracks and the places around the camps where “camaraderie evenings” (*Kameradschaftsabende*), meaning concerts or musical evenings, took place. In these spaces of what we could call institutionalised conviviality, music played a very important role in the restoration of the “human” integrity of the torturers.

Through a process contributing to the “fragmentation of behavior,”⁶⁶ music enabled the SS to continue performing the inhuman tasks they considered as a “job”. In his Auschwitz diary from 1942, SS doctor Johann Paul Kremer alternated, in the same tone, between observations on the selections

62 Laks, *Music of Another World*, 55-56.

63 Fania Fénelon, *Playing for Time* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 93; Olewski, *Crying is Forbidden Here!*, 28.

64 Laks, *Music of Another World*, 70.

65 Françoise Sironi, *Bourreaux et victimes. Psychologie de la torture* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999), 129.

66 Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 139.

on arrival of convoys (*Sonderaktionen*) and accounts of camp orchestra concerts he attended with great pleasure in the camp garrison.⁶⁷ The music played to provide "troop care" (*Truppenbetreuung*) contributed to the SS's psychic restoration and ensured their efficiency within the concentration camp system. The fact that members of the *Lagerkapelle* contributed to this, and were rewarded with food and cigarettes, gave rise to a strong sense of guilt among them after the war.

* * *

Whereas music helped some of them survive in the concentration camp system, after 1945 most *Lagerkapelle* amateur musicians gave up their activity due to traumatic memories of music performance. For many of them, the simple act of touching their instrument or hearing music they had been forced to play in the camp triggered post-traumatic syndromes or panic attacks. In spite of this, some professional musicians continued their activities and chose to use their talent to bear witness and contribute to remembrance.

Music resonated in a wide variety of spaces in the concentration camps: while in the exterior spaces it was mainly used for coercive or even torturous purposes, the interior spaces, and especially the inmate blocks, were places where music was more often linked to various processes of standing up against the Nazi system. Acting as a coping mechanism, musical activities could, temporarily, help assert a sense of humanity, protect against moral disintegration, and provide spaces of solidarity where people could temporarily "escape" from the camp reality. Music provided a framework in which victims "could laugh at, express despair at, or try to make sense of what was happening to them."⁶⁸ It could, on certain occasions, perpetuate the energy of imaginative activity, and reaffirm or strengthen the prisoners' will to live. As the hymn of Buchenwald (*Buchenwaldlied*) put it: "We still want to say yes to life / Because the day will come, when we will be free!"⁶⁹

67 Johann Paul Kremer, Journal from 8 August to 24 November 1942, 4.2/82231223-82231236/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives, <http://www.npdoc.be/Kremer-J.P.>

68 Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 10.

69 "Wir wollen trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen / Denn einmal kommt der Tag: dann sind wir frei!" Lyrics: Fritz Löhner-Beda; Music: Hermann Leopoldi, 1938.

Part 2.
Fighting on Several Fronts?
Women and Resistance

A Ring of Invisibility – Wives and the Resistance Against National Socialism in Germany

Juliane Kucharzewski

Freya von Moltke, née Deichmann, was a founding and engaged member of the so-called Kreisau Circle (*Kreisauer Kreis*)¹ – a German civil resistance group active from 1940 to 1944 that prepared plans for Germany’s democratic reorganisation after the anticipated loss of the war. She held a doctoral degree in law. Her wartime memoirs, published in 1997, demonstrate a remarkable knowledge and awareness of almost all resistance events, connections and members linked to the *Kreisauer Kreis*.² From 1989, she was a leading figure in turning the *Kreisauer Kreis*’ former meeting point in Kreisau into an international youth centre promoting European values of freedom and equity to this day. Despite her indisputable achievements, Freya von Moltke’s German Wikipedia article states that she became known to the majority of the public as the widow of the resistance fighter Helmuth James von Moltke’s.³ Although Wikipedia may not be the most reputable source, it nevertheless gives an impression of how the memory of certain events is transmitted to the general public, since Wikipedia is often consulted for initial information on a topic.

Another noteworthy way in which public historical narratives are created and transmitted is through film. The 20 July 1944 plot is an explicit example of this. Nina Schenk von Stauffenberg, née von Lerchenfeld, whose

1 The name refers to the village of Kreisau (today situated in Poland and named Krzyżowa), where the Moltke family had their residence. It was presumably first mentioned in a report by the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office) in August 1944, see Henric L. Wuermeling, *Adam von Trott zu Solz. Schlüsselfigur im Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Munich: Pantheon Verlag, 2009), 133. For more information on the *Kreisauer Kreis*, see e.g. Volker Ullrich, *Der Kreisauer Kreis* (Reinbek near Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2008). See also footnote 10, below.

2 Freya von Moltke, *Erinnerungen an Kreisau 1930 – 1945* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997).

3 “Freya von Moltke”, Wikipedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freya_von_Moltke (last accessed on 30 October 2023); for more information on Helmuth James von Moltke, see e.g. Günter Brakelmann, *Helmuth James von Moltke. 1907 – 1945. Eine Biographie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007).

husband Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg carried out the unsuccessful assassination attempt against Hitler, is mostly portrayed as an unknowing or even reluctant character in her small amount of screen time.⁴ Nina Schenk von Stauffenberg experienced this representation as an injustice to her character and contribution.⁵ She and 11 other women of the resistance were interviewed by Dorothee von Meding for the book *Courageous Hearts: Women and the Anti-Hitler Plot of July 1944*.⁶ In von Meding's work, they spoke for themselves as individuals, while the choice to cluster their tales in a book acknowledges a distinct female experience of resistance. Through von Meding's book, it becomes obvious that these prominent and widely known men – after whom streets, buildings and barracks were named – did not act in a hermetically sealed setting. They had wives who were privy to the resistance activities, who contributed to them, who suffered the consequences and who did significant work in keeping alive the memories of their husbands' and of the ideas of the resistance. The statements given in von Meding's book are unique, but they contain the usual difficulty of interviews: the interviewer's bias. Dorothee von Meding's interview questions often focused on the wives' husbands and other male members of the resistance. Therefore, their historical importance could not be completely recorded in this publication. In that sense, von Meding explicitly asked Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, née Winter, who herself was a founding member of the *Kreisauer Kreis*, "When did your husband and his [male] friends start to think about what they could do?"⁷ Furthermore, these interviews were neither put in an academic context nor thoroughly analysed. The fact that the historian Klemens von Klemperer wrote, in his preface to von Meding's publication, that the resistance is already fully investigated and the purpose of this publication is not to create new research findings, is a significant statement for the long overlooked importance of including wives of this resistance group in historical research.⁸

4 See e.g. *Stauffenberg*, directed by Jo Baier (ARD: 2004); *Valkyrie*, directed by Bryan Singer (20th Century Fox and MGM Distribution Co: 2008).

5 Susanne Beyer, "Der Tragödie zweiter Teil", *Spiegel*, 20 April 2008, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/der-tragoedie-zweiter-teil-a-fd772076-0002-0001-0000-000056670345>.

6 Dorothee von Meding, *Mit dem Mut des Herzens. Die Frauen des 20. Juli* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1992). The English version was published in 1997 by Berghahn Books, Oxford.

7 Von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*, 201. Original quote: "Wann begannen Ihr Mann und seine Freunde, darüber nachzudenken, was man tun könnte?"

8 Klemens von Klemperer in von Meding, *Mit dem Mut des Herzens*, 12.

Beginning in the 1990s, an increasing research focus on the topic of women in the resistance could be observed. Female contribution was given more credit, both in Germany as well as in other European countries.⁹ In Germany, women of the *Kreisauer Kreis* gained more attention in this context, though a clear differentiation between women in general and wives in particular has yet to be made. While all of them were women, their marital status defined to a great extent their agency, treatment and self-perception from the period in question until today. Despite the unfortunate fact that due to the passage of time, these married women cannot speak for themselves anymore, there are testimonies, statements, letters, memoirs and other primary sources left by them that have not been analysed in a way that focuses on the wives as individual participants, members and contributors to resistance activities. These sources were used to research their husbands or the role distribution between them and their spouses instead of considering these women as contributors to the resistance in their own right.

Therefore, this text deals with the long forgotten and neglected role of wives – as in women who became famous through their husbands' resistance activities – in the German resistance against National Socialism. Furthermore, it seeks to give an impression of why wives acted and perceived themselves as they did and how they were treated by the Nazi regime and later on, in public remembrance. Wives who contributed to the *Kreisauer Kreis* and the 20 July 1944 plot¹⁰ (these groups were notably interconnected) will be compared to wives who were members of the so-called Red Orchestra (*Rote Kapelle*)¹¹ – alleged by the Gestapo to be a communist resistance group – in order to find out why wives of the former two networks were treated differently, both by the Nazi regime and by the culture of remembrance. They will be compared on the grounds of their

9 See e.g. Christl Wickert ed., *Frauen gegen die Diktatur. Widerstand und Verfolgung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1933 – 1945* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1995); Frauke Geyken, *Wir standen nicht abseits, Frauen im Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014); Florence Hervé, *Mit Mut und List. Europäische Frauen im Widerstand gegen Faschismus und Krieg* (Köln: PapyRossa, 2020).

10 For more information on the *Kreisauer Kreis* and the 20 July 1944 plot, see e.g. Wolfgang Benz, *Der Deutsche Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014); Linda von Keyserlingk-Rehbein, *Nur eine "ganz kleine Clique"? Die NS-Ermittlungen über das Netzwerk vom 20. Juli 1944* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2018).

11 For more information on the Rote Kapelle, see e.g. Hans Coppi, Jürgen Danyel, Johannes Tüchel (eds.), *Die Rote Kapelle im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994).

socio-economic background, involvement, treatment by Nazi persecutors and self-perception. In that sense, this contribution attempts to create an intersectional approach to providing explanations for the long invisibility of wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis*. It furthermore wants to reveal the importance of wives as distinct resistance actors which have long been concealed by male-dominated historiography.

Marriage: Wives' self-perception and identification during the Nazi period

In academic discourses, wives in the German resistance against National Socialism are neither forgotten nor overlooked deliberately but rather degraded to secondary roles – if they are given agency at all.¹² This deprivation of agency and recognition of their actual contribution to resistance activities in present-day remembrances is not a new phenomenon but follows a continuity that started in the Nazi period. It derives from a combination of various factors that influenced how and why wives behaved (or had to behave due to social circumstances), how they were recognised and treated in a certain way.

At first glance, a derogative and restrictive image of women seems to have been prevalent in Nazi Germany. Still, the prevailing opinion today seems to be that all women were reduced to being wives and mothers instead of acting as constructive individuals themselves. This reduction does not acknowledge the complexity of different competing ideological strands of the women's image at that time. Starting in the early 1930s, disputes between the male perspective of Nazi ideology – reducing women to wives and mothers while usurping them from public places – and the female perspective of women loyal to National Socialism arose, states Leila J. Rupp.¹³ The latter group, which defended the female perspective, was declared as consisting of “Nazi Feminists” by their adversaries, acknowledged a gender difference but was convinced that so-called “Aryan” women should become more essential members of German society.¹⁴ Since there were overwhelmingly more male

12 See e.g. Martha Schad, *Frauen gegen Hitler. Schicksale im Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 2001).

13 Leila J. Rupp, “Mother of the Volk. The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology”, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 2, (December 1977): 364–365, DOI: 10.1086/493470.

14 *Ibid.*, 365.

Nazi officials, it is likely that the male-dominated view happened to be the most influential version subjugating “Nazi Feminists”.

Here, it is important to state that the wives of the 20 July 1944 plot and the *Kreisauer Kreis* particularly consisted of so-called “Aryan” women, often with educated, higher or middle-class backgrounds. They were married to respected members of the military, aristocracy and/or elites with long-honoured families and raised on Christian values, though the church could sometimes play a minor role in their education.¹⁵ At the time, marriage was a decisive factor for the self-identification of many of these women. In hindsight, Freya von Moltke stated that they were wives of their husbands rather than actual driving forces of the resistance and that she herself followed her husband in many ways.¹⁶ Hence, according to given testimonies, marriage seems to be one of the most decisive influences. The women’s self-perception as wives contributed to how they portrayed themselves and have been portrayed in academia and commemorative culture ever since.

When Marion Yorck von Wartenburg was questioned about the role of women in the *Kreisauer Kreis*, she replied: “I would first like to answer that all friends lived in a particularly good marriage.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, it is rather interesting that she recalls that Julius Leber¹⁸ – a social democrat and loose member of the *Kreisauer Kreis* – did not take his wife Annedore Leber seriously, as he did not fill her in on the activities.¹⁹ Despite this minor critical remark, Marion Yorck von Wartenburg’s own self-perception and identification as a wife become even more evident in *Die Stärke der Stille* (The Strength of Silence), a published story of her life as she told it to Claudia Schmölders, who wrote it down and published it in her name.²⁰ The title itself raises a question; why does it refer to silence? Marion Yorck von Wartenburg participated in the majority of the *Kreisauer Kreis*’ important meetings and maintained contact with influential figures such as Claus

15 The family ties become particularly obvious when looking at the names and backgrounds stated in von Meding’s publication before every individual interview. Here, even statements on early education and family expectations are given. For more information on the education based on Christian values, see e.g. Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, *Die Stärke der Stille* (Moers: Brendow, 1998), 14.

16 Freya von Moltke in von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*, 130–131.

17 Marion Yorck von Wartenburg in von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*. Original quote: “Darauf möchte ich zunächst antworten, daß alle Freunde in einer besonders guten Ehe lebten.”

18 For more information on Julius Leber, see e.g. Claus Jander and Ruth Möller, *Julius Leber. Sozialdemokrat, Widerstandskämpfer, Europäer* (Berlin: Luisenbau-Verlag, 2013).

19 Yorck von Wartenburg, *Stärke der Stille*, 63.

20 Claudia Smölders in Yorck von Wartenburg, *Stärke der Stille*, 7–8.

Schenk von Stauffenberg and Julius Leber.²¹ Does the title of her memoir refer to the importance that silence had in all resistance activities for necessary concealment? Does it refer to her own view of being a silent supporter of her husband more than an individual resistance fighter? There is no definite answer to this question.

When one looks into this publication, traces of her activities and self-perception can be detected. Marion Yorck von Wartenburg describes how her parents and family encouraged her to act in a restrained and conforming way during her childhood and youth.²² Political issues were of no interest to her during her studies of jurisprudence in the 1920s. Because of her lack of interest, she called herself a “bad citizen” in the non-gendered, hence male, version of the German term.²³ Her interest in politics arose with her husband’s resistance activities – another indication of her identification with the role of wife. It almost seems as if her whole personality and activity revolved around her husband. She also defined the other women primarily as being wives, mothers and tacit supporters of their husbands. Despite her advanced legal clerkship, she did not register for the final exam. Her desire to have children took priority – a desire that was never realised.²⁴ Ironically, when she met her future husband, Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, she first refused to deepen their connection because she was afraid of losing her autonomy. Marriage was – in her description – a deep incision in women’s lives.²⁵

Actions: Wives’ participation in the resistance

Soon after Hitler’s seizure of power, as early as 1933, Marion Yorck von Wartenburg and her husband were aware of the existence of concentration camps. These early atrocities as well as the mass-murder of Jews starting in 1941 and further war horrors committed by Germans were some of the main reasons for her husband’s resistance activities.²⁶ Remarkable in Marion Yorck von Wartenburg’s records are her early connections to prominent

21 Von Moltke, *Kreisau*, 52–72.

22 Yorck von Wartenburg, *Stärke der Stille*, 16–17.

23 *Ibid.*, 20. Original quote: “schlechter Staatsbürger”.

24 *Ibid.*, 27, 36.

25 *Ibid.*, 27.

26 *Ibid.*, 37.

persons such as the Protestant theologian and resistance figure Dietrich Bonhoeffer,²⁷ who died in Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945, and later relations and friendships to several aristocratic and/or famous families.²⁸ For instance, Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg was her husband's cousin. Her records demonstrate that she was very aware of all the connections and contributors in the resistance, such as the aforementioned Helmuth James von Moltke and Julius Leber as well as Ludwig Beck,²⁹ chief of the German General Staff, who actively participated in the 20 July 1944 plot. All of them met later in the couple's apartment on Hortensienstraße in Berlin. The von Moltkes and the von Wartenburgs made up the core of the *Kreisauer Kreis*, as most of the meetings took place either at von Moltke's residence in Kreisau, today Krzyżowa, or the von Wartenburgs' apartment in Berlin. According to Freya von Moltke, the term "resistance" was not used by her or her husband, probably not even by other members. She and Marion Yorck von Wartenburg explained how all of them called themselves (or rather the men) a group of friends.³⁰

However, Freya von Moltke's husband explicitly asked her if she would like to support his activities against the injustice of the Nazi state: "Now comes the time one can do something against it; I'd like to do it but I can only do so if you go along with it".³¹ She agreed and was aware of the dangers and actions right from the beginning. Being in the resistance fell into natural everyday tasks like writing letters or keeping the business, their farm in Kreisau, running. For her, "resistance was everyday life".³² Overall, three major planning meetings were organised and held in the von Moltkes' mansion in Kreisau, during which various topics were presented and passionately discussed by invited members and supporters. Topics and focal points included the educational system, the relationship between state and church, the economic and state structure as well as the future dealing with

27 For more information on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, see e.g. Christiane Tietz, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologie im Widerstand* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013).

28 Ibid., 13–15, 28, 31, 39.

29 For more information on Ludwig Beck, see e.g. Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Generaloberst Ludwig Beck. Eine Biographie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008).

30 Ibid., 58.

31 Freya von Moltke in von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*, 132. Original quote: "Jetzt kommt die Zeit, daß man etwas dagegen tun kann; ich möchte das machen, aber das kann ich nur, wenn du es mitträgst [...]".

32 Ibid., 132. Original quote: "Widerstand war Alltag".

Nazi perpetrators, and foreign policy.³³ Both Freya von Moltke and Marion Yorck von Wartenburg attended all meetings in Kreisau. At least two other women attended the meetings as well, until one of the husbands forbade his wife from attending any further reunions since it would be too dangerous for her and “she can, after all, do little more than listen.”³⁴

This shows how even husbands of that group underestimated their wives’ capabilities and agencies, using safety as a justification. Freya von Moltke however was in close contact with Helmuth James von Moltke and aware of all the events and discussions, even when smaller meetings took place in Berlin with only her husband attending while she stayed in Kreisau. The spouses wrote each other letters regularly, keeping each other updated, even while both stayed in Kreisau.³⁵ Protocols of the larger discussions were handled carefully and typewritten by Katharina Breslau, Helmuth James von Moltke’s secretary. According to Freya von Moltke, Katharina Breslau knew exactly what she was typewriting. However, there were no legal consequences for her when the *Kreisauer Kreis* was discovered by the Nazi regime, which was most likely a result of the regime’s underestimation of female contribution in general. Freya von Moltke’s husband gave her a copy of the combined plans of the *Kreisauer Kreis* to hide in Kreisau where even her husband would not be able to find them for security reasons. She hid the papers and took them with her after 1945 when she had to leave the property, which the occupying Soviet army had confiscated.³⁶

Resistance and everyday life: Wives’ dual roles

It is noteworthy that Freya von Moltke and Marion Yorck von Wartenburg were two of the few wives of the group that had regular and close contact with each other due to their husbands’ close companionship. Occasionally, Freya von Moltke interacted with other female (and male) guests in Kreisau, showing hospitality and, in that sense, created an image of everyday life to the outside. This hospitality, evident to the whole neighbourhood, and the resulting distraction from everything else that went on inside the premises

33 Von Moltke, *Kreisau*, 54–63.

34 Ibid., 59. Original quote: “[...] sie könne ja doch nicht viel mehr tun, als zuzuhören”.

35 Ibid., 58.

36 Ibid., 65–66.

is in turn another contribution to resistance. This was not just a minor contribution, since secrecy was an essential prerequisite and basis for all activities. In that sense, wives were important actresses – here, stressing the word act – as they had to play their roles in order to keep the resistance going. It is furthermore noteworthy that they were the most important figures when it came to feeding the family. Wives constantly ensured the supply of food, a task that became even more difficult with wartime shortages.³⁷

Nevertheless, there was no organised network of wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis* or 20 July 1944 plot. This was mostly due to them not seeing the need for an all-female network, as they perceived their husbands' relationships as sufficient. Regular meetings with other members' wives could even have turned into a threat to the maintenance of secrecy. Despite the aristocracy of the aforementioned core members, they were able to gather supporters from a social democratic and theological background. Originally, their goals and ideology largely varied, which made collaboration only possible in the context of the overall goal of resisting the Nazi regime. It was considered that they could not meet in public spaces or on a regular basis as it would have been too suspicious for members of such disparate groups to be in close contact. What counted for the men was even more pivotal for their wives. How could they have explained regular meetings with wives of different social and political backgrounds, whom they would not have met in their everyday lives? Therefore, the reason for the absence of female networks was a combination of practical and sociocultural factors that would have hindered the discretion necessary for resistance.

***Sippenhaft*: Wives as perceived non-contributors to the resistance**

According to Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, she was aware of the assassination plans early on as her husband was related to Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg and knew the actual date since the beginning of July 1944.³⁸ Peter Yorck von Wartenburg was arrested immediately after the assassination attempt. His wife's requests to receive visiting permission remained

37 Frauke Geyken, *Freya von Moltke. Ein Jahrhundertleben 1911 – 2010* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2011), 105.

38 Yorck von Wartenburg, *Stärke der Stille*, 68.

unsuccessful. When she was questioned by a Gestapo officer about what she had known, her answer was that her husband was very reserved about his actions.³⁹ On 9 August 1944, Marion Yorck von Wartenburg was arrested under so-called kin liability (*Sippenhaft*) and released in October 1944.⁴⁰ *Sippenhaft* was the Nazi term used for arresting the accused's family members. These relatives were often not regarded as individually responsible, but could be used to pressure the accused or to gather additional information. Often, these arrests were used to set an example to the public. Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, however, was never arrested or prosecuted as an individual contributor nor accused on a "racial" basis, although she had a Jewish grandfather. She was perceived by the Nazis as an "Aryan" woman from a civic-noble family background who was foremost a devoted wife.

The nobility of von Moltke and von Wartenburg was noted by Gestapo members, who examined the meeting place on Hortensienstraße. According to Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, Gestapo men were surprised that two male counts – Helmuth James von Moltke also temporarily lived there – could reside in such a simple apartment.⁴¹ Freya von Moltke, on the other hand, was not arrested on the grounds of any contribution to the resistance despite her constant participation, organisation, personal relationships and knowledge. She was also not arrested in *Sippenhaft*, and was even allowed to visit her husband once a month at Ravensbrück concentration camp during his imprisonment there. Furthermore, they were allowed to exchange letters.⁴² From September 1944 on, he was imprisoned in the prison in Tegel, Berlin. Here, they were able to frequently exchange secret letters via the prison's pastor, Harald Poelchau, which Freya von Moltke gave to Helmuth James von Moltke's secretary Katharina Breslauer, who in turn kept them hidden until further notice.⁴³ These last letter exchanges between September 1944 and January 1945 were published in 2011 after Freya von Moltke's death.⁴⁴ Within that clandestine communication, the spouses were able to be more frank. While official letters contained private statements, descriptions and questions regarding Freya von Moltke's everyday life, business of

39 Ibid., 74.

40 Ibid., 81.

41 Ibid., 58.

42 Von Moltke, *Kreisau*, 70–71.

43 Ibid., 73–74.

44 Helmuth Caspar von Moltke, Ulrike von Moltke (eds.), *Helmuth James und Freya von Moltke. Abschiedsbriefe Gefängnis Tegel September 1944 – Januar 1945* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2011).

the farm in Kreisau and other rather mundane topics, these hidden letters contained important questions regarding the resistance's future. Here, Helmuth James von Moltke discussed the topic with his wife in a very honest and outspoken way that proves how much she must have known before and how much he trusted her.⁴⁵

However, even exchanging official letters and the possibility of visiting were privileges, as was the fact that Freya von Moltke was never arrested in *Sippenhaft*. Whether the Nazi regime granted her a certain innocence on the grounds of her being a wife and mother or deemed her husband's alleged connection to the 20 July 1944 plot as lesser than others' (Helmuth James von Moltke was already arrested on 19 January 1944 due to a denunciation that had nothing to do with the *Kreisauer Kreis*⁴⁶) is unclear. Most probably, it was a combination of both, as well as the timing of her husband's imprisonment – the majority of arrests under *Sippenhaft*, children and other family members occurred after the 20 July 1944 plot.⁴⁷ However, Helmuth James von Moltke was ultimately sentenced to death and executed on 23 January 1945 when other interrogations resulted in the identification of him as a leading opposition figure.⁴⁸

Current research suggests that at least 180 people were included in the network that participated in the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt.⁴⁹ At the time, the Nazi prosecutors identified 132 relevant people who contributed and/or were responsible for the conspiracy, of which around 100 were then sentenced to death.⁵⁰ Margarethe von Oven was the only woman among the arrested, and she was released within two weeks, since the Nazi prosecutors did not find enough evidence nor deem the available evidence as sufficiently conclusive. Again, it is unclear on what grounds her early prosecution was based. At that time, she was Henning von Tresckow's secretary.⁵¹ Von Tresckow was major general of the Wehrmacht and, together with Claus

45 See e.g. Helmuth James von Moltke's letter to Freya von Moltke on 30 September 1944, *Abschiedsbriefe*, 39–45.

46 Von Moltke, *Kreisau*, 70.

47 See e.g. the fates of Nina Schenk von Stauffenberg and Clarita von Trott zu Solz in von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*.

48 Von Moltke, *Kreisau*, 72.

49 Antje Vollmer and Lars-Broder Keil, *Stauffenbergs Gefährten. Das Schicksal der unbekanntesten Verschwörer* (Munich: Hanser Berlin, 2013), 13.

50 Von Keyserlingk-Reihbein, *Nur eine "ganz kleine Clique"?*, 142.

51 For more information on Henning von Tresckow, see e.g. Bobo Scheurig, *Henning von Tresckow. Ein Preuße gegen Hitler. Biographie* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2004).

Schenk von Stauffenberg, one of the assassination's main coordinators. Margarethe von Oven got the position as his secretary due to her close friendship with his wife, Erika von Tresckow.⁵² Here, it is noteworthy that she was unmarried and childless at the time of her work and that her family situation made it necessary for her to earn money. In comparison to other women in the network, she held an official position and was connected to the plot through acquaintances and work – not because of her marriage. Though she was the only woman arrested individually, in contrast to wives who were arrested in *Sippenhaft* at most, her work was still not considered important enough, which led to her release.

Comparing wives of different resistance groups: Treatment by the Nazi regime

The Nazi regime based many of its verdicts on gendered role assignments, which tended to deny or exaggerate female agencies in accordance with how dangerous the regime defined each deed of resistance, as well as women's agencies in it. This arbitrariness gives a first – although unsatisfactory – explanation for why wives of the 20 July 1944 plot and *Kreisauer Kreis* were spared individual prosecution, why the only woman working for the plot, Margarethe von Oven, was released and, in contrast to the former, why wives of the *Rote Kapelle* experienced a different fate. One noteworthy example, though it will not be discussed further here: Sophie Scholl was executed within a week of the revelation of her action because of mere leaflet distribution.⁵³ Verdicts furthermore depended on how the Nazi prosecutors defined the type of resistance and, hence, which political importance they attributed to the various groups, as becomes clear when comparing the aforementioned groups to the *Rote Kapelle*.

The previously discussed prevalent reduction of women to being wives and mothers and the associated negligence of wives' possible contribution

52 Von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*, 99–102.

53 One noteworthy example, though it will not be discussed further here: Sophie Scholl was executed within a week of her action's revelation because of mere leaflet distribution. For more information on Sophie Scholl, see e.g. Maren Gottschalk, *Wie schwer ein Menschenleben wiegt. Sophie Scholl. Eine Biographie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2020); Barbara Beuys, *Sophie Scholl. Biographie* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2010); Ulrich Chaussey and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *„Es lebe die Freiheit!“ Die Geschichte der Weißen Rose und ihrer Mitglieder in Dokumenten und Berichten* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2013).

to resistance is insufficient when one compares it to the way women – the majority of them married – of the *Rote Kapelle* were treated and perceived. Freya von Moltke herself stated that she felt adoration for the activity of the women who were “actual resistance fighters” and that she wished she had had the same courage at that time. She was – in her own words – too invested in being a wife, even though she wished she could have played a more active role.⁵⁴

The *Rote Kapelle* is nowadays the most widely used name for the Berlin network dominated by two couples – Mildred Harnack and her husband Arvid Harnack together with Libertas Schulze-Boysen, née Haas-Heye, and her husband Harro Schulze-Boysen – though there were many more members, contributors and supporters.⁵⁵ The name was used by the Gestapo in order to define an alleged organised group of resistance fighters who were in radio contact with the Soviet regime. Nowadays, it is known that there was never a strictly structured group with the purpose of widespread espionage for the Soviets. Affiliated members were not only in contact with the Soviets but also with other groups and diplomatic services, which means that it was never an exclusively communist resistance group, even if it was defined as such by the Gestapo.⁵⁶ It did have various connections to the Soviet regime, as well as to other regimes and authorities, such as US diplomats, which perhaps made it look solely communist at first glance.

Several married women who are acknowledged as actual resistance fighters today (e.g. when looking at their official representation in the German Resistance Memorial Centre) joined and sometimes acted together with their husbands. Most famous are probably the aforementioned Mildred Harnack and Libertas Schulze-Boysen. What is an important difference between these wives and the ones of the *Kreisauer Kreis* and 20 July 1944 plot? These two women could never speak for themselves about their activities and legacies after 1945. They were sentenced to death for their contribution in the resistance. When the *Rote Kapelle* was detected and its members arrested by the Gestapo in 1942, amongst the more than 130 arrested were at least 36 women, of whom 19 were put on a trial (while 49

54 Freya von Moltke in von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*, 131.

55 See e.g. Johannes Tüchel, “...wenn man bedenkt, wie jung wir sind, so kann man nicht an den Tod glauben.” Liane Berkowitz, *Friedrich Rehmer und die Widerstandsaktionen der Berliner Roten Kapelle* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2022).

56 *Ibid.*, 13–35.

men were tried and five executed immediately).⁵⁷ Overall, 19 women and 35 men – those without a trial already included – were sentenced to death and executed between the end of 1942 and 1943.⁵⁸ Libertas Schulze-Boysen was executed on 22 December 1942 in Plötzensee, Berlin, together with her husband,⁵⁹ while Mildred Harnack was sentenced to death on 16 January 1943 and executed within a month.⁶⁰ How can this harsher treatment by the Nazi prosecutors be explained? How and why did they differ from those of the *Kreisauer Kreis*?

Comparing wives of different resistance groups: Actions and self-perception

Most female members of the *Rote Kapelle* worked as journalists, physicians, teachers, lawyers, writers and translators, among other jobs.⁶¹ Therefore, some women held a similar academic status to those of the *Kreisauer Kreis*. They differed from each other in the sense that more women in the *Rote Kapelle* actually worked in their academic field. The actions of these women also differed from those of the *Kreisauer Kreis* and the 20 July 1944 plot. Predominantly organisational and logistical work fell into the hands of women, such as writing and distributing leaflets informing about Nazi atrocities. Women furthermore held important positions as messengers or hid other resistance fighters.⁶² Since these women were in more active positions – superficially at least – and were treated similarly to their husbands by the Nazi prosecutors, one can assume that their self-perception was different from that of the aforementioned wives and that they regarded themselves as equal to their husbands. These two groups are partly comparable in their cultural imprint.

Libertas Schulze-Boysen came from an aristocratic family background as well, though her parents were – uncommon for that time – divorced.⁶³

57 Schad, *Frauen gegen Hitler*, 222–223.

58 Christian Mrowietz et al., “Die Rote Kapelle”, in *Mildred Harnack und die Rote Kapelle in Berlin*, ed. Ingo Juchler (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2017), 67.

59 *Ibid.*, 60.

60 Schad, *Frauen gegen Hitler*, 233.

61 *Ibid.*, 222–223.

62 *Ibid.*, 223; for more information, see Tuchel, “...wenn man bedenkt”, 141–192.

63 Christian Mrowietz et al., “Die Rote Kapelle”, in *Mildred Harnack und die Rote Kapelle in Berlin*, ed. Ingo Juchler (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2017), 60.

She joined the NSDAP early in 1933 and worked as a press officer for Nazi propaganda. Her pro-Nazi attitude changed when she met her husband. The importance of the prevalent opinion of a role reduction for women came into play when she left the NSDAP in 1937, stating that she was now too busy being a wife and could not be a worthy member of the party anymore.⁶⁴ This explanation was sufficiently credible for the NSDAP to accept.

Another case in which the role of being a wife was used in favour of women is Mildred Harnack's. Growing up in the USA, she experienced a completely different social imprint and childhood. She came from a lower-middle class background and had three siblings. Her father died while she was still in high school. From an early age, Mildred Harnack was independent and worked her way to a master's degree in the USA and a PhD in Germany, where she had moved with her German husband, Arvid Harnack.⁶⁵ In December 1942, both were tried for their membership in the *Rote Kapelle*. Mildred Harnack's defence lawyer exculpated her contribution by framing her as a good wife dutifully following her husband's orders. These circumstances were attributed as mitigating. While her husband was sentenced to death immediately and executed within a few days, she only received six years of prison time.⁶⁶ However, she was tried again on the orders of Hitler himself. This second trial took a different turn. While she was defended as the obedient and caring wife before, she was now accused of bigotry and seduction of German men. Her reputation was sexualised.⁶⁷ She was ultimately sentenced to death, the only American civilian executed by the Nazi regime on the grounds of her resistance activity.

Academic research: Acknowledgment and importance

According to Martha Schad, women of the *Rote Kapelle* were informed about every event and participated in important meetings and discussions,

64 Rainer Blasius, "Ein Weihnachtseengel vor der Hinrichtung", *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 22 December 2012, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/menschen/libertas-schulze-boysen-ein-weihnachtseengel-vor-der-hinrichtung-12000641-p2.html>.

65 Kären Knutson, "Mildred Fish-Harnack honored as hero of resistance to Nazi regime", University of Wisconsin-Madison, written on July 11 2019, <https://news.wisc.edu/mildred-fish-harnack-honored-as-hero-of-resistance-to-nazi-regime/>.

66 Schad, *Frauen gegen Hitler*, 231.

67 *Ibid.*, 231–233.

which gave them major agency in the resistance. This knowledge and contribution distinguished them from wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis* and those associated with the 20 July 1944 plot, who were rather left in the dark and remained in their roles as wives, summarises Schad.⁶⁸ This article strongly disagrees with Schad's interpretation.

Despite the difference in self-perception, actions and treatment between the women of the *Rote Kapelle* and those of the *Kreisauer Kreis* and 20 July 1944 plot, one should not underestimate the role of the latter two for the activities of the resistance. Their self-perception came from a different cultural imprint. As Frauke Geyken proposes, current research should not make the mistake of adapting today's understanding of feminism to their thinking at that time.⁶⁹ The fact that they took the wives' perspectives does not deny them any agency or capabilities. Freya von Moltke stated that she went along with the resistance from the beginning and wanted her husband to continue despite all dangers and potential consequences.⁷⁰ Helmuth James von Moltke introduced almost every participant or possible supporter to his wife and asked for her assessment, as he believed her knowledge of human nature was more pronounced.⁷¹ References to the importance of a functioning and supportive marriage were made by almost every wife and spouse interviewed by von Meding. Since marriage played such a key role in the lives of these couples, just as it did in their social stratum, one can assume that this key role continued to further the resistance's progress. In Helmuth James von Moltke's letters to his wife during his imprisonment, he constantly referred to her strength and resilience and the fact that none of his deeds would have been possible without her.

As Geyken states in her biography of Freya von Moltke, women and men had different tasks and roles here. "In the bourgeois resistance, women operated more in the background."⁷² This supposed operating in the background does not mean, by any means, that their contribution was less important or irrelevant. On the contrary, without their silent and constant provision for the family and the creation of an everyday life, the *Kreisauer Kreis* would not have been possible. These wives fell into a strenuous double

68 Ibid., 222.

69 Geyken, *Freya von Moltke*, 106.

70 Freya von Moltke in von Meding, *Mut des Herzens*, 126.

71 Ibid., 131.

72 Geyken, *Freya von Moltke*, 104. Original quote: "In der bürgerlichen Opposition agierten die Frauen mehr im Hintergrund."

position when their duties increased; being a mother and wife became intertwined with their participation in the resistance. This interrelation turned them into the backbone of the resistance. Without their support and approval, their husbands could not have acted like they did in the first place. This made wives indispensable.

This paper argues that wives should be considered a distinct group of resisters and therefore, should receive the acknowledgment that they have been entitled to but long denied. The reason for their exclusion was, first and foremost, that historical periods have often been reduced to allegedly important men and their important deeds. The Nazi period is no exception. Due to its own ideology, so-called “Aryan” women were considered only capable of having children and doing housework. Wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis* were not held responsible individually but were arrested in *Sippenhaft*. In short, wives were regarded as posing almost no threat to the Nazi regime if they did not belong to a communist resistance group. Resistance research, at least in Germany, for a long time focused too much on obvious acts meant to overthrow the regime or create a new one.⁷³ Very polemically speaking, only those who directly took up and used arms – or explosives in the case of the 20 July 1944 plot – and those who were directly held responsible by Nazi prosecutors were defined as resistance fighters, while those responsible for the logistics in the background were reduced to secondary roles.

As the military adage goes: “Amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics”. In the *Kreisauer Kreis* and the 20 July 1944 plot, most wives were aware of the activities. They provided ideological support and intellectual exchange. They were responsible for the logistics, prepared and cared for the premises so that meetings could take place, they fulfilled administrative duties as well as created an unobtrusive environment for the group’s secrecy. Wives were the basis of the resistance. Everything that followed originated from their personal support while they were aware of the potentially life-threatening situation.

When comparing their tasks to those of wives of the *Rote Kapelle*, one can clearly see a difference in their activity. This difference should not – and this is key – lead to an assumed reduction of importance of wives in

73 See e.g. Detlev Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde. Anpassung, Ausmerze und Aufbegehren unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1982) for research that defines resistance as an act to overthrow the regime.

the *Kreisauer Kreis* and hence, their contribution. The difference arose due to varieties in their cultural imprint and self-perception, which led to a conflicting understanding of their own roles. Almost all the wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis* and the *Rote Kapelle* received excellent or good education. While the *Kreisauer Kreis*' wives' motivations did not differ from their husbands', they still refrained from defining themselves as active resistance fighters and regarded themselves only as listeners at most. Their capabilities were restricted due to their own upbringing and family background and even more due to the expectations that came with marrying into aristocratic families. Nevertheless, they used all their capabilities to support the resistance, which was – and this cannot be emphasised enough – essential.

This distinct role expectation led to a different perception by the Nazi regime, which regarded them as more dependent and subservient to their husbands than those of the *Rote Kapelle*, who were defined as actual threats. Most probably, this assumption was based on Nazi ideology, which regarded communists as one of the most threatening groups of all. This assumed communist background led to a harsher prosecution of wives of the *Rote Kapelle*. The wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis*' different treatment by the Nazi regime was not caused by their lesser degree of involvement, motivation or knowledge, but by the disparate political nature of the resistance and the Nazis' contradictory perceptions. The same ideology that regarded communist women as politically active threats with their own agency assumed that "Aryan" women could be hardly more than their husband's appendage.

Historical research has often adapted to this ideology by neglecting wives of the *Kreisauer Kreis* as a group that contributed to the resistance. Their husbands' legacies overshadowed them from the beginning. Wives were able to spare themselves and their children further punishment due to their pretended innocence and ignorance. This fact was later used to justify their unawareness and non-participation in commemorative culture and research. In that sense, it was their marriage that created a metaphorical ring of invisibility around wives in the *Kreisauer Kreis*.

Berty Albrecht and Her Role in the French Resistance: An Exceptional Case?

Robert Belot

By decree of 26 August 1943, Berty Albrecht was made a posthumous “Companion of the Liberation”, the highest honour in the system established by Charles de Gaulle in 1940 to reward individuals and groups for their role in liberating France. Albrecht was acknowledged as “a Frenchwoman of exceptional courage and unrivalled patriotic faith. She ceaselessly supported and inspired the Resistance movement from 1940 onwards, willingly sacrificing her position and her family to her ideal. [...] She has acquired an enduring right to the recognition of the nation through the example she set and the services she rendered.”¹

This early recognition seems to contradict the all-too-common belief that women were not acknowledged in the accepted narrative of the French Resistance. At the same time, of the 1.038 individuals who received this exceptional honour between 1941 and 1946, only six were women, a very small number given the role that women *de facto* played in the Resistance. This highlights the fact that in public representations resistance and heroism were initially – and for a long time – mainly associated with masculinity and armed combat, focusing less on other dimensions. However, there have also been early efforts to paint another picture. One illustration is a book written by Élisabeth Terrenoire, a member of the Resistance who had survived deportation, published in 1946 with the title *Les femmes dans la Résistance. Combattantes sans uniforme* (The women in the Resistance. Fighters without uniforms).² In this book, for example, Terrenoire asserts that “originally, the Resistance was spontaneous, instinctive, individual”

1 “Décision d’attribuer la Croix de la Libération à titre posthume”, Algiers, 26 August 1943, signed by Charles de Gaulle. (Copy of the document in possession of the author, given by Mireille Albrecht).

2 Élisabeth Terrenoire, *Les femmes dans la Résistance. Combattantes sans uniforme* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1946).

and that “initially, it is likely that more women were involved than men”. Berty Albrecht was also among the described women figures.

Who was Berty Albrecht? In short, she was the co-founder of and a key figure in one of the most important French resistance movements, known as *Combat* (Fight). Her engagement ended dramatically; on 30 May 1943, after being arrested and tortured by the Gestapo, she took her own life in her prison cell in order not to speak to her persecutors. This text aims to explain Berty Albrecht’s journey in the French resistance, by connecting it with her pre-war life. Indeed, we can see a continuity between her choices in the 1920s and 1930s, when she stood up for feminist, social and international causes, and her resistance against the occupation of France by Nazi Germany and the collaborating Vichy regime during World War II. In all this, she was led by her conviction that it was possible to improve humanity and her belief that Europe could one day be united and peaceful. I will also talk about the evolution of Berty Albrecht’s place in France’s collective memory, from her death until today, since this is key to understanding her historical significance and is also indicative of how women in general have been acknowledged in history. To conclude, I will discuss whether Berty Albrecht’s story can be seen as typical or exceptional regarding the role of women in the resistance in France.

Engagements and encounters in the inter-war period

Berty Albrecht’s life in the interwar period is marked by her embrace of feminist and social causes and illustrates her will to make her own choices, emancipating herself from the traditional role French society attributed to women. Her first encounter with Henri Frenay, which would prove to be of particular importance for both of them as individuals and to their journeys towards and within the resistance, also happened in this time.

London and Paris: A commitment for the feminist struggle

Berty Albrecht was born into a wealthy Protestant family in Marseille in 1893. Her parents refused to allow her to follow a musical career, so she chose to be a nurse in an early illustration of her concern for others. Social pressures led her to agree to an engagement to a German-born Dutch

businessman in London in 1914. However, as soon as war commenced, she returned to Marseille, where she worked in a hospital. She witnessed the horrific effects of war on soldiers' wounded bodies. Letters to her fiancé that we have only recently discovered reveal how her attitude changed, from bellicose anti-German patriotism to pacifism. In one letter she wrote, "this morning I saw several hundred German prisoners [...]. The wounded are a very sorrowful bunch, without legs, lame, bandaged, crippled. They are a sorry sight." She spoke of "this ignoble war".³

After her marriage in Rotterdam in 1918, Albrecht gave birth to two children, Frederic and Mireille, before the couple settled in London in 1924. But the bourgeois way of life, in which women focused on household tasks, did not suit her. Albrecht discovered the work of English feminists and made the acquaintance of Sylvia Pankhurst, a member of the Workers' Socialist Federation. She joined figures from the "birth control" movement alongside Norman Haire, the famous sociologist and author of *The Encyclopaedia of Sexual Knowledge*.

Seeking to distance herself from her husband, she returned to France in 1931. She joined the ranks of French feminists and became acquainted with the left-wing Parisian intellectuals who gravitated to the Human Rights League. She knew its president, Victor Basch, an aesthetics professor at the Sorbonne, well. She was also a friend of Gabrielle Duchêne, a feminist figure even before 1914, a pacifist during the Great War, and president of the World Committee of Women against War and Fascism, which was formed in 1934. Albrecht was a feminist and became a member of the Executive Committee of the "World League for Sexual Reform". In November 1933, she and Paul Langevin, a leading physician, created a journal, *Le Problème sexuel* (The sexual problem). Although very short-lived due to a lack of funds, it was intended for "free spirits, those enamoured with truth, seeking to make mankind less unhappy and create a better humanity".⁴ The first issue hailed the law proposed by the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français* – PCF) demanding social maternity protection, the introduction of sexual education, contraceptive freedom and the right to abortion. As a member of the Secretariat of the Association for Sexology Studies, she spoke at the World League for Sexual Reform conference held in Brno (then-Czechoslovakia)

3 Marseille History Museum/Musée d'histoire de Marseille, Berty Albrecht Collection.

4 *Le Problème sexuel. Morale. Eugénique. Hygiène. Législation, Revue trimestrielle*, no. 5, (November 1933).

in 1932. In 1934, she travelled to the USSR to learn more about Soviet family policy, which appears to have appealed to her.

Working to improve social conditions

In 1936, under the Popular Front regime, Albrecht decided to focus on improving social conditions by helping women in their everyday lives. Despite her age (43), she trained at the School of Factory Superintendents (*École des surintendantes d'usine*), run by a priest's daughter named Jeanne Sivadon. The school would become the nucleus of the developing *Combat* movement in Northern France at the beginning of the Nazi occupation. According to her close friend Henri Frenay, "she worked in a factory in the years before the war and it is with great emotion that I recall the dedication of this magnificent woman to the workers' cause, her profound generosity and her unshakeable energy, the most sensational proof of which she would soon go on to demonstrate".⁵

Albrecht discovered the concept of automated workflow when she was training as a worker in the handling department of Galeries Lafayette. She wrote a lengthy report to reveal the "truth" about the life of women in this "great machine". The report ended thus: "Although a few criticisms can be made here and there, the individuals concerned are in no way the target. Indeed, this is not a matter of individuals but rather a system, and I would consider it fundamentally wrong to say anything other than what I believe to be the truth."⁶

She would go on to work in various factories after war was declared in September 1939. War struck France in spring 1940. France's defeat was followed by the German occupation of Northern France and the establishment of the Vichy regime. First, she joined the Barbier, Benard and Turenne factory (producing optical instruments for the navy) where she created a department for social conditions. In November 1939, she was transferred to factories for arms and cycles in Saint-Étienne, where she fought to make hot soup and safety goggles compulsory for workers. Between April 1940 and January 1941, she worked at the Fulmen factories in Clichy, which

5 Henri Frenay, "Vie et mort d'une Française", *Combat*, 28 August 1943, Algiers.

6 Berty Albrecht, "Rapport de stage effectué au service Manutention des Galeries Lafayette", Paris, 1937, reproduced in Annie Fourcaut, *Femmes à l'usine en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Maspero, 1982), 221-248.

produced batteries. In 1940, the factory withdrew to Vierzon, situated on the demarcation line between the German occupied Northern part of France and the so-called “free zone” in the South. There, she took escaped prisoners across the demarcation line, which can be considered as her first concrete resistance activity after the occupation.

Without sufficient resources and needing to provide for her children in the absence of her husband, who remained in England, she took a post at the Unemployment Prevention Commission created by the Vichy regime but led by a humanist, Henri Maux. Its headquarters were in Villeurbanne, near Lyon, and her task was encouraging unemployed women to work. She hired women who were involved in the Resistance, including Yvette Baumann, a factory superintendent, who would be arrested and deported in 1944. The movement that would become *Combat* began in this Vichy institution.

The partnership with Henri Frenay

In 1935, Berty Albrecht met Henri Frenay (1905-1988), a young officer, for the first time.⁷ They became partners, both romantically and later in the Resistance. They formed an unlikely duo, first because their partnership transgressed social conventions: She was married and 12 years older than him; furthermore, she was Protestant while he was Catholic, a distinction that was still very relevant in France at this time. Furthermore, they incarnated very different ideological universes: She clearly situated herself on the left while he was part of a conservative-military milieu.

In November 1935, Henri Frenay began his studies at the prestigious *École de guerre* (War College) in Paris. He saw Albrecht every day. She introduced him to a world that was very different from his familiar environment of provincial lower middle-class officers. Frenay later recounted these initial encounters: “In Berty’s sitting room, I met people who were like an alien species to me: left-wing and far left free thinkers and freemasons who introduced me to political and psychological moral possibilities that were entirely different to those I had known thus far. My life would have been very different if I had not met her.”⁸

This partnership brought Frenay in conflict with his education, his past, and his milieu. His choice can indeed be seen as a first affirmation of his

7 On Frenay see Robert Belot, *Henri Frenay, de la Résistance à l'Europe* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

8 Henri Frenay, *La nuit finira: Mémoires de résistance 1940-1945* (Paris: R.Laffont, 1973), 44.

will for freedom, which would manifest during the war. The partnership that developed between Berty Albrecht and Henri Frenay was very close and complementary. One uniting feature was their non-conformism and that both were at odds with their family environment's dominant values. For them, resistance was already a reality, a state of mind. It was an ability to refuse to submit to what is and an acceptance of risk-taking.

Against a Nazi/Fascist Europe

Welcoming anti-fascist refugees

Berty Albrecht combined her feminist commitment with support for a humanitarian and ideological cause. Many people forced into exile from anti-democratic Europe – the anti-Nazis, anti-fascists and anti-Francoists – had become refugees in France. Albrecht decided to act on a new front and to help those fleeing Nazi Germany. Intellectuals, in particular, found themselves on the Côte d'Azur in the village of Sanary-sur-Mer, which had become the “capital of exiled German literature”. As she had a villa on the Mediterranean coast, she established a support network in the region. In Paris, Albrecht and Madeleine Braun created a Welcome Committee for anti-fascist refugees. Albrecht spoke Goethe's language fluently and welcomed the emigrants in her apartment, enabling young officer Frenay to meet key anti-Nazi figures exiled from Germany. These included the Communist novelist Gustav Regler who later left to fight Franco in Spain, the chair of the Association of Exiled German Writers, Rudolf Leonhard, who would later fight in the French Resistance, the novelist Anna Seghers and the psychologist Magnus Hirschfeld. Carl Heil, who came for lunch at her home twice a week and who taught German to her daughter and son, was also among her regular guests.⁹ Heil, a teacher and theatre actor, participated in the “battle of airwaves”, as a German speaker for French radio from 1937 to 1939 to combat the influence of Nazi propaganda in France.¹⁰

For Berty Albrecht and Henri Frenay, these Germans' fates became concrete proof of the danger of Hitler's regime. They learned to distinguish

9 Mireille Albrecht, *Berty. La grande figure de la Résistance* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1986), 86. She writes his first name incorrectly as “Karl”.

10 Éveline Brès and Yvan Brès, *Carl Heil, speaker contre Hitler* (Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 1994).

between ordinary Germans and the Nazi regime. Germans had been its first victims. Little by little, the idea grew that the cycle of endless wars could only end with European unity. After Frenay had obtained his diploma from the École de guerre, Albrecht encouraged him to study at the prestigious Strasbourg Centre for German Studies. Between 1936 and 1937, highly qualified academics such as René Capitant¹¹ revealed the reality of Nazism to him.¹² “I have read the original text of *Mein Kampf* and Rosenberg’s *Myth of the 20th Century*. I know what the cult of race and blood, the supremacy of Aryans over races of slaves, means.”¹³ Frenay learned and shared the “exact nature and importance of the danger hovering above Europe” with Albrecht, as well as how to “distinguish between Germany, where most of our professors studied and then taught, and its dreadful caricature created by Nazism.”¹⁴ This led Frenay to affirm: “I am not fighting the German people, but a diabolical ideology.”¹⁵

Even before the German occupation of France both of them were already “resisting” Nazi ideology. The stakes were not purely national. They concerned civilisation more broadly, not simply Germany and France.

When Mussolini’s Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935, Albrecht helped create an Aid for Ethiopia Committee to raise money and organise public meetings on this subject. When Spain subsequently fell into civil war, a victim of the same fascist wave, Albrecht was a member of the International Committee of Coordination and Information for Assistance to Republican Spain. She became also involved in the Anti-Fascist Intellectual Vigilance Committee and the Peace and Democracy movement in 1937, created by their friend, Jean Baby. Finally, Albrecht was active in the Women’s World Committee Against War and Fascism.

11 René Capitant, *Face au nazisme. Écrits 1933-1938*, ed. Olivier Beaud (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2004).

12 Robert Belot, *Observer l’Allemagne hitlérienne à travers ses minorités à l’étranger. Henri Frenay au Centre d’études germaniques de Strasbourg (1937-1938)* (Lyon: Presse Fédéraliste, 2022).

13 Frenay, *La nuit finira*, 27.

14 Henri Frenay, “Hommage au Centre” (Association des anciens du Centre d’études germaniques, January 1972).

15 Testimony by Henri Frenay, in Claude Jamet, *Le rendez-vous manqué de 1944* (Paris: éditions France-Empire, 1964), 234.

In resistance, she co-founded the Combat movement and became “Victoria”

Initially after France’s military defeat in June 1940, resistance activities were very scarce against the German occupier and also the new Vichy regime, which then engaged increasingly in open oppression and collaboration with Nazi Germany. One of the factors that accelerated the development of resistance in France was Germany’s attack on the USSR on 22 June 1941. This ended the German-Soviet Pact from August 1939, which had paralysed parts of the political left. Albrecht and Frenay were sitting at the terrace of a café in Paris that day. She told her friend:

Hitler will never defeat the Red Army. It’s over for him now. It might take one, two, three or even ten years... I don’t know... but he will be beaten. I know the USSR. I’ve spent time there. That country can’t be beaten, those admirable people... But you know, Henri, I am also just so, so happy for all those Communists you met at my home [...]. For them, for the whole party, it’s all becoming clear now. They’re coming back to us!¹⁶

Berty Albrecht and Henri Frenay had not waited until that day to engage in resistance. The *Combat* movement, which became known in 1942 under the name of its newspaper, *Combat*, actually started in late 1940. Both Albrecht and Frenay began activities to counter official information and propaganda, through “bulletins” they wrote together to reveal to the French public what the press could not say because of censorship. A dozen copies were inserted into magazines (for example *Marie-Claire*) and delivered discreetly to like-minded persons who in turn produced further copies and circulated them. In this very first period, Frenay worked for several months at the Intelligence Bureau of the general staff in Vichy. He left the position in February 1941. After the establishment of the Vichy regime, Frenay had first thought that the new head of state, Philippe Pétain, would oppose Germany, but then lost his faith in him when Pétain engaged in open collaboration from late 1940. Frenay used his good contacts in Vichy military circles to gather information and to look for potential support. Berty Albrecht, on

¹⁶ Frenay, *La nuit finira*, 100.

her side, used her wide network of pre-war contacts to distribute the bulletins and to look for people who would join them in their fight.

Little by little, this initial cell around Frenay and Albrecht grew and became organised, under the name of the National Liberation Movement (*Mouvement de Libération Nationale*). In May 1941, the initial “bulletin” became a newspaper, first with the title *Les Petites Ailes de France* (The little wings of France), then *Verités* (Truths), and from December 1941 under the name of *Combat*, with a print run of tens of thousands of copies. In 1941/2, the *Combat* movement became a clearly structured organisation, divided into three main sections: political, military and what was known as the “general services” department for which Albrecht was responsible. This department covered false documents, social conditions, accommodation, contacts and finances. These services were key for organising the work of the movement, whose members often lived underground with false identities and under very difficult circumstances. One of her original contributions was a social service she created in 1942 after the first members of *Combat* had been arrested. Its task was helping the families of those who had been imprisoned. It also directly helped the interned by facilitating their escape, thanks to relations established between social assistants and some prison personnel. Albrecht was also crucial for developing contacts and enlarging the basis of *Combat*. Her friendship with Jeanne Sivadon, the director of the *École des surintendantes d’usine* in Paris where she had studied before the war, was particularly important. The school became the centre of *Combat* in the Northern zone of France. Also thanks to Albrecht, a printing company was founded in Lyon-Villeurbanne in June 1941 in order to clandestinely print the movement’s newspaper.

Furthermore, Albrecht replaced Frenay as head of *Combat* during his absences. Her role can also be seen in the establishment of the movement’s “doctrine”. I found evidence of her writing in one of the first manifestos I discovered, from November 1941, proving that she played a part in its conception. The manifesto began thus: “Liberating the country from the enemy is good, but it is not enough”. Conditions needed to be created to “establish a politically, economically and spiritually united Europe, a step towards world unity”. They sought to eradicate from Europe “the myth of the superiority of one race, a negation of human dignity [...] [and] mortal enemy of our humanist and Christian civilisation”. However, they also sought to reduce inequalities. She wanted to incorporate a social dimension into the

manifesto: “The same inequalities essentially separate our country into two groups: the exploiters and the exploited. While the first only have rights, the second only have duties. The same causes have resulted in the same effects: internationally, war; within France, the class struggle.”¹⁷

Frenay later acknowledged Albrecht’s importance in the development of their resistance group: “It was mainly thanks to her dedication and courage that the Movement grew at a time when everything seemed lost, when only a few crazy, reckless people were continuing the hopeless fight.”¹⁸ Claude Bourdet, a member of the Resistance and a close friend of Frenay, confirmed her importance for Frenay personally: “Above all, his close friend Bertie Albrecht contributed to enlightening him politically, eliminating his class prejudices and opening his eyes to the left, to socialism and communism. Having joined him in Lyon at the end of 1940, she continued to expand his horizons and became the movement’s second kingpin.”¹⁹

Death at journey’s end

Berty Albrecht was aware that fighting both the Vichy regime and the occupier exposed her and her friends to the worst, yet she was ready to do whatever it took for her cause. In January 1942, she was arrested following a denunciation, along with other members of *Combat*. Frenay ensured her release, but a judicial procedure was initiated. She was arrested for the second time in May 1942 and confined in Vals-les-Bains where she was the only woman among 22 detainees and 30 gendarmes. Her daughter was worried about what would happen to her, but Albrecht replied stoically, having read La Fayette’s memoirs: “These small problems must be borne philosophically. One must be able to accept anything for the great Ideal being served. For those who have failed in neither their duty nor their honour, imprisonment is just a nuisance, like breaking a leg. The most important thing is to be able to hold one’s head up high before everyone.”²⁰

17 Preamble of the *Mouvement de Libération Française*, November 1941, private fonds of Mireille Albrecht.

18 Henri Frenay, “Vie et mort d’une Française”, *Combat*, 28 August 1943, Algiers.

19 Claude Bourdet, *L’aventure incertaine* (Paris: Stock, 1975), 67.

20 Letter from Berty Albrecht to Mireille Albrecht reprinted in *Berthie Albrecht. Une maman de 2 enfants, une courageuse française* (Paris: Éditions de l’Union des Femmes Françaises, coll. “Héroïnes d’hier et d’aujourd’hui”, 1949), 15.

Such an ideal can require taking maximum risks. As she wrote to Frenay, "... as for me, I have decided to see it through to the end. In losing life, I would gain a peace that seems indescribable... This time, my life is in the hands of God."²¹

During her imprisonment, she began a hunger strike in which she lost 12 kg, resulting in a hospital stay and then a transfer to Saint-Joseph Prison in Lyon. On 30 October 1942, she learned that she had been sentenced to six months in prison. The charges were: "distribution of foreign-inspired tracts; publication of information or statements likely to exert an unfortunate influence on the minds of the French army or population; membership of a clandestine organisation whose aims and means of action are clearly subversive."²² She decided to escape and pretended to be insane, leading to her transfer to the Vinatier psychiatric hospital, which was not guarded like a prison. On 23 December 1942, a commando unit of *Combat* organised her liberation.

She was not of a cautious nature and she decided to return to the fight. Frenay thought that for her safety, it would be best for her to go to London, but she did not agree. Her husband also tried to dissuade her from continuing her dangerous activities. She replied to him on 15 May 1943: "Life is of little value, dying is nothing serious. The most important thing is to live honourably and in line with the ideal one has chosen."²³

Since she had been tried and had escaped, Berty Albrecht could not lead a double life anymore. She lived a fully clandestine life under the pseudonym Victoria. But she was arrested again on 28 May 1943 in Mâcon, near the place in which she was secretly living with Frenay, and again following a denunciation. She was transferred to Montluc Fort in Lyon and then to the Fresnes Prison near Paris. We do not have much information about her final moments. On 31 May 1943, the Germans informed the Mâcon Préfecture and the Dutch Ambassador in London (the Netherlands being her husband's country of birth) of the death of Berty Albrecht, without any specifications. Her body was buried in the prison cemetery where it was found and exhumed in May 1945. Soon after her death, different speculations circulated about her death, mainly that she had been executed by the

21 Cited by Mireille Albrecht, *Berty*, 226.

22 Extrait des minutes du Greffe du Tribunal de Première instance de Lyon, département du Rhône. 30 October 1942. Jugement Ministère Public C/ FRENAY et autres. (Copy of the document in possession of the author). The arrest warrant for Berty Albrecht is dated for 27 June 1942.

23 Quoted by Annie Fourcaut, "Berty Albrecht", in *Femmes extraordinaires*, eds. Christine de Pisan and Elisa Lemonnier (Paris, éditions de la Courtille, 1979), 246.

Germans, by gunfire or by axe. After the exhumation in May 1945, Frenay ordered an autopsy which revealed an injury at her neck: this led to the belief that she had committed suicide by hanging, an assumption which was later confirmed by a German report. The assumption that she took her own life is also faithful to her constant desire to be in control of her own destiny and not simply to endure.

How Berty Albrecht's fate came to be included in French collective memory

In the public memory in France, Berty Albrecht has become one of the major symbols of women's contribution to the French resistance. Very early on, her memory became institutionalised by governmental structures, though the French Communist Party also tried to appropriate her name. In later decades, her feminist commitment from the prewar period also received more attention.

Early recognition within the institutional martyrology of the Resistance

Already during the war, Berty Albrecht was celebrated as a heroine and a martyr of the Resistance. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, a few months after her death, in August 1943, she was made a posthumous "Companion of the Liberation" by de Gaulle, becoming one of the very rare women to receive this honour. At the same time, Frenay wrote a vibrant tribute to her, which was published on the front page of *Combat* under the title "Vie et mort d'une française" (Life and death of a Frenchwoman), and the subtitle "Madame Albrecht".²⁴ Beyond being nominated for the "Companion of the Liberation" order, she also received other prestigious awards posthumously: the *Médaille Militaire*, the *Croix de Guerre avec palme*, and the *Médaille de la Résistance*. Shortly after the end of the war, memory of Albrecht also became institutionalised through commemorative rituals. Her public recognition was mainly due to Frenay and his influential role in the French Resistance, which also led him to join General de Gaulle's

24 *Combat*, 28 August 1943, Algiers.

Government at a very young age, serving as his Minister for Prisoners, the Deported and Refugees in 1944-1945. On 12 May 1945, Frenay requested that the second anniversary of Albrecht's death be marked with a ceremony in "every region, every *département*, every area". He specified that "speeches to mark the occasion should extol the memory of all the women in our movement who gave their lives for their country".²⁵

Some months later, de Gaulle asked Frenay to organise the events to be held on 11 November 1945 commemorating the "victory" of 1918 and honouring the memory of the heroes who died under the Occupation. Frenay proposed establishing a place of remembrance at Mont-Valérien near Paris "in honour of the French men and women of mainland France and the overseas territories who died for France during the recent war". The German army had executed many members of the Resistance and hostages – approximately one thousand – in the fortress of Mont-Valérien. The ceremony took place over the course of three days. On 10 November, 15 bodies that had been chosen to be laid to rest in the Mont-Valérien vault were transferred to Les Invalides. They included two women: Berty Albrecht and Renée Lévy, a Jewish French teacher who had been deported and guillotined in 1943 in Cologne for her acts of resistance. All 15 people had been chosen to represent different parts of society and of the resistance, as part of an effort to reconcile France with itself.

The following day, the coffins were taken to Place de l'Étoile, where de Gaulle, as head of the government, gave a short speech paying tribute to those who had died for France whether "they fell in the light or in the shadows" and who "recall our pain but also our victory".²⁶ After cannon fire and the sounding of the *sonnerie aux morts* bugle call, the bells of Notre Dame and all the churches of France rang out. Henri Frenay thought of his comrades killed in action, but also of Berty: "It was indeed for France to live that you fell on our path – you, Berty, whose coffin is here in front of me; you, the tortured of Cologne; and you, Jacques Renouvin, Marcel Peck, Jean-Guy Bernard and Claudius Billon. All of you from *Combat*, friends known and unknown... And here we are, we, the survivors, who have made it to the final destination we had set ourselves."²⁷

25 Henri Frenay, "Célébrons la mémoire de nos morts", *MLN. Bulletin intérieur du Mouvement de libération nationale* 12 May 1945.

26 Quoted in Frenay, *La nuit finira*, 557.

27 *Ibid.*

The first book to pay homage to Berty Albrecht was published in 1945 in Switzerland: *Le Sacrifice du matin* (The morning's sacrifice), a wonderful volume of memories written by Guillaïn de Bénouville, one of Frenay's closest friends during the Resistance. He provided us with a compelling character study of Albrecht:

She had been suffocating inside the overly narrow circle of a claustrophobic world. She was a prisoner of material assets, all with a specific name marking out the space reserved to those believed to be the favoured ones. She wanted something else, something more than human happiness, something she could not name but that required the transformation of everything around her that revolted her and that seemed unbearable – beginning with the poverty and destitution of the men over whom injustice reigned.²⁸

In 1947, the Ministry for Youth, Arts and Literature produced a small pamphlet in homage to the “heroes of the Resistance”. It began with Berty Albrecht, who was hailed as “the great Frenchwoman”, “the patriot”, “the heroine”.²⁹

Communist glorification and exploitation

Berty Albrecht quickly became a figure of legend, even beyond official government structures. Her death was immediately perceived as a scandal. The poet Louis Aragon, for example, wrote in *Le crime contre l'esprit* (The crime against spirit), his underground pamphlet published in autumn 1943: “They will ask in astonishment what could have caused this distinguished and intelligent woman to become a victim of the executioner, a first martyr of the axe, as if that barbaric instrument sought to make her a symbol of our culture that it wanted to behead.”³⁰ It was therefore Aragon who played a role in spreading the myth that Albrecht had been executed with an axe, when it was still not clear that she had committed suicide.

28 Guillaïn de Bénouville, *Le Sacrifice du matin* (Geneva: La Palatine, 1945), 408.

29 “Heros de la Resistance”, *La Documentation française illustrée*, no. 5, (february-march 1947).

30 Louis Aragon, *Le crime contre l'esprit (les martyrs) publié pendant l'illégalité par le témoin des martyrs* (Paris: Comité national des écrivains, 1944), 3.

Aragon was a member of the PCF and it is indeed in communist circles that we can also see efforts during and after the war to promote the memory of Berty Albrecht. An important role was played by the Union of French Women (*Union des femmes françaises* – UFF), which gathered several French Resistance women’s committees that had developed since 1941 with the support of the PCF and that published underground newspapers, especially *Femmes françaises* since January 1944. Already in the first issue, before the war had ended, the newspaper referred to Berty Albrecht: “May her name remain in your memories. Let us remember her example, like that of all our martyrs. On dark days and in times of anxiety, let them give us the courage to be worthy of them.”³¹

After UFF was established as an official association in November 1944, its first congress was held in June 1945 in Paris. It paid tribute to three women who had paid their commitment to the Resistance with their lives: Danielle Casanova, Berty Albrecht and Suzanne Buisson.³² Four years later, the UFF published pamphlets as part of a project called to celebrate “Heroines of Yesterday and Today”. One issue concentrated on Berty Albrecht. The front cover focused on her motherhood as well as on her courage: “A mother of two, a courageous Frenchwoman.” The cover also included the following information, to emphasise her role as a martyr: “Beheaded by axe on 9 June 1943.” The brochure’s content was well-researched. It included a letter Berty sent to the secretary general of the French police (René Bousquet) on 19 June 1942 explaining why she was going on hunger strike while being imprisoned. Mireille Elbaz-Albrecht, Berty Albrecht’s daughter, had given this letter to the UFF so that it could be included in the commemorative book to be given to Joseph Stalin for his 70th birthday in December 1948.³³

It is clear that the PCF sought to annex Berty Albrecht’s legacy even though she had never claimed to be a communist herself, despite having communist friends. The political context is important in this respect. The PCF had set itself against Frenay, who had engaged in politics after the war as a humanist socialist and European federalist. It moreover sought to present itself as the party that had done the most for the Resistance cause, declaring (wrongly) that “75.000 of its members had been shot”. Like this, it

31 *Femmes françaises*, no. 1 (January 1944).

32 Danielle Casanova was a communist resistant who was deported to Auschwitz in 1943, where she died of typhus. Suzanne Buisson was a socialist resistant and was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.

33 *Berthie Albrecht. Une maman de 2 enfants* (see footnote 20 above).

wanted to appropriate the martyrology of patriotic sacrifice, to conceal its organic ties with the USSR and position itself as a legitimate political force. In this context, it was a purportedly Soviet-supporting French patriot who was honoured. This attempt to “nationalise” the resistance struggle also explains why the Communist Daniele Casanova, who died during deportation, was compared to Joan of Arc.³⁴

The UFF described Berty Albrecht as follows: “Berthie (sic) Albrecht was good, intrepid and a courageous patriot.” The UFF’s narrative sought to show that, although she was from a “privileged” background, “she was sympathetic to the destitution of the lives of others and the injustice of the human condition. She wanted her need for action, her unused youthful strength and her knowledge to serve the disadvantaged.”³⁵

Emphasising the traditional female gender role when talking about Berty Albrecht aligned with the UFF’s general focus on promoting maternal values.³⁶ “A good wife and mother, and an unrivalled mistress of the house”, she and her husband (his profession as a banker is not mentioned and he is presented as a “parasite”) played their part in society life in London. However, this did not quell “the impetuous and passionately generous woman” within her. She therefore left London for Paris to “improve the lives of others”, first and foremost the situation of women and children. According to this story, that is why she visited the Soviet Union. She returned “full of enthusiasm” and decided to focus on “the life of workers and their needs”, joining the School for Factory Superintendents. The Resistance period in this version of her story is incomprehensible because it is not made clear to which movement she committed or with whom. The reason for such obfuscation is that Frenay had been a sworn and public enemy of the Communists since 1944. An attempt to politically exploit Albrecht’s memory therefore laid behind this tribute of the UFF, which was close to the PCF.

34 See Dominique Loiseau, “L’Union des femmes françaises pendant les Trente Glorieuses: entre “maternalisme”, droit des femmes et communisme”, *Le Mouvement Social* 265, no. 4 (2018), 38.

35 *Berthie Albrecht. Une maman de 2 enfants*, 5-6.

36 Loiseau, “L’Union des femmes”; see also Dominique Loiseau, “Mères ou combattantes, les aléas de l’héroïsation”, in *Le panthéon des femmes, figures et représentations des héroïnes*, eds. Geneviève Dermenjian, Jacques Guilhaumou and Martine Lapied (Paris: Publisud, 2004), 185-198.

Since the 1980s: Emphasising Berty Albrecht's role as feminist besides the resistance

In the 1950s and 1960s, the memory of Berty Albrecht received less public attention. This changed again gradually in the following decades, during which several books were published about her.

A first step first was marked in 1973 by the publication of Henri Frenay's memoirs, *La Nuit finira*.³⁷ In this important book, he addressed his differences with Jean Moulin – an iconic figure in the French Resistance who had been de Gaulle's delegate to unify the resistance movements within France – but also told his story of Berty Albrecht, from before the war to the Resistance. He was not afraid of revealing how she influenced his life and awakened in him a new political awareness of the dangers of fascism and Nazism in Europe. Albrecht appears in this book in the role of Pygmalion to Frenay, hero of the Resistance and herald of a federal Europe.

Frenay also encouraged Berty Albrecht's daughter Mireille, who had lived through the drama of the resistance struggle as an adolescent, to write about her mother's experiences. She wrote a biography published by Frenay's publisher in 1986. It is a personal but well-researched account, revealing not only more of the story behind the heroine of the Resistance, but also her previous causes and particularly her feminist commitment. The book was republished in 2001 under the title: *Vivre au lieu d'exister: La vie exceptionnelle de Berty Albrecht, Compagnon de la Libération* (Living instead of existing: The exceptional life of Berty Albrecht, Companion of the Liberation).³⁸

Two years after that book's first publication, in 1988, François Mitterrand, the then-president of France, inaugurated a statue dedicated to Berty Albrecht in the new district of Bercy in Paris, opposite the new Finance Ministry. The statue by the artist Michèle Forgeois consists of a two-metre-tall oblong white marble flame and a lower part that includes small reliefs of Albrecht's face.³⁹ The statue was intended to increase the visibility of

37 An English translation was published some years later: Henri Frenay, *The Night Will End: Memoirs of the Resistance* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1976).

38 Mireille Albrecht, *Vivre au lieu d'exister: La vie exceptionnelle de Berty Albrecht, Compagnon de la Libération* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2001).

39 For photos of the statue, see: Rédaction, "Paris: Hommage à Berty Albrecht, une oeuvre de Michèle Forgeois, monument hommage à une militante féministe, à une grande résistante – XIIème", *Paris la Douce*, 8 October 2021, <https://www.parisladouce.com/2021/10/hommage-berty-albrecht.html>.

the women of the Resistance, who thus far had been poorly represented in the public arena.⁴⁰

The same year, on 15 March 1988, Mitterrand presented Frenay with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour in the courtyard of Les Invalides. This was the ultimate honour for Berty Albrecht's companion and a pioneer of the Resistance in France, who died a few months later. Mitterrand had always had a close relationship with Frenay, who had had underground connections with the family of his wife, Danielle Gouze; they had hidden Frenay and Albrecht in 1942. It was also not altogether displeasing to Mitterrand, the socialist president, that the Resistance might not be reduced to de Gaulle's contribution alone and to make clear that other people and groups also played a crucial role.

There are different reasons for the new attention received by Albrecht and more generally women in the Resistance from the 1970s on. One of them is the development of the feminist movement and stronger attention French society and political culture placed on equality between men and women. Another one lies in the evolution of historiography, which is itself connected to social sensibilities seeking to push back a kind of *résistancialisme* that focused on men bearing arms and military confrontation. Such a focus meant that it neglected civilian resistance such as demonstrations, strikes, propaganda activities or the rescue of Jews which had been less visible actions.⁴¹

All together, Berty Albrecht's role as a feminist has been brought more to the fore in the last decades. In 2005, the historian Dominique Missika published a biography on Berty Albrecht, which was republished in 2014, with the subtitle *Féministe et résistante* (Feminist and resistant).⁴² In Marseille, the city where she was born and grew up, different efforts were made to promote her memory, emphasising her role as a feminist beyond her role as resistant, and also foregrounding her local identity. A square overlooking the old port of Marseille, next to her family home, was inaugurated on 27

40 Catherine Lacour-Astol, "Résistantes et résistance féminine: une mémoire chaotique" in *Images des comportements sous l'Occupation: Mémoires, transmission, idées reçues*, eds. Jacqueline Sainclivier, Pierre Laborie and Jean-Marie Guillon (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016); Michèle Cointet-Labrousse, "Gender ou politique: le déficit d'image des femmes de la Résistance", in *Images militantes, images de propagande*, ed. Christian Amalvi (Paris: éditions du CTHS, 2010), 305-313.

41 Jacques Semelin, *Sans armes face à Hitler. La résistance civile en Europe, 1939-1949* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1989-1998), 44-45.

42 Dominique Missika, *Berty Albrecht* (Paris: Perrin, 2005/2014)

September 1991. A marble plaque reads: “Berthie⁴³ Albrecht. Woman from Marseille (*Marseillaise*). 1893-1943. Companion of the Liberation. National Resistance Heroine. Co-founder of the *Combat* movement. Women’s rights activist.” Opposite is another plaque dedicated to Henri Frenay, who had been the head of the military garrison in the city during some months in 1940. Later on, a space in the Marseille History Museum was created for her, with different artefacts linked to her life in Marseille, her feminist commitment and her resistance activities. With the museum’s support, a new biography of Berty Albrecht was also published in 2022, written by the Marseille-based historian Robert Mencherini, involving new sources especially about the first decades of her life and her activities in the interwar period. The subtitle brings together her commitments before and during the war: “A feminist *in* the resistance”.⁴⁴

Mencherini’s book also includes an inventory of the plaques and monuments in France bearing the name of Berty Albrecht: There are over 80 of them, mainly in towns where she lived. One of the latest inaugurations of a street with her name occurred in Lyon in January 2006. Thanks to the efforts of Lily Eigeldinger, a member of the Resistance, the local authorities renamed *rue Alexis Carrel* (an extreme right-wing Vichy-supporting eugenics doctor) as *rue Berty Albrecht*.⁴⁵ Besides more traditional commemorative forms, Berty Albrecht has also inspired street artists such as C 215 (Christian Guémy) who painted a living and moving portrait of her in a street near the Pantheon, as part of his 2019 “Illustres” collection that aimed to give a face to famous names.⁴⁶ She has also become a character of graphic novels: The publishing house Casterman launched the “Femmes en Résistance” (*Women in resistance*) series in the 2010s. Of the four volumes in the series, one is dedicated to Berty Albrecht.⁴⁷

43 Her first name is written in two ways: Bertie and Berty. I have used Mireille’s preferred spelling, with whom I have had a number of conversations.

44 Robert Mencherini, *Berty Albrecht. De Marseille au Mont Valérien. Une féministe dans la Résistance* (Marseille: Gaussen, 2022). Emphasis in the title on “in” by me.

45 Robert Belot, “Géographie de la vie clandestine à Lyon du fondateur du mouvement Combat, Henri Frenay”, at Actes du colloque Les Compagnons de la Libération du Rhône, Préfecture de Lyon (Musée de l’Ordre de la Libération, 2019), 51. https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/sites/default/files/media/fichers/Actes%20du%20Colloque%20de%20Lyon%20-%20DEF%281%29_0.pdf.

46 For more information see Ruby Comet, *Street Art Paris*, 26 August 2018, <https://streetart-paris.fr/documentary-illustres-c215-autour-pantheon-series-artworks-artist-christian-gue-my-street-art-paris>.

47 Benoît Cassel, *Femmes en Résistance. Berty Albrecht* (Bruxelles: Casterman, 2015). The other volumes are dedicated to Sophie Scholl, Amy Johnson and Mila Racine. For more information see: <https://www.casterman.com/Bande-dessinee/Catalogue/femmes-en-resistance-integrale/9782203224834>.

Conclusion

In the last decades, numerous historiographic studies have allowed us to get much deeper insights into the place and the role of women within the French resistance. There were not many resistance activities in 1940. However, among the first groups that developed in these early times, women often played crucial roles. Yet when the resistance movements became more institutionalised, especially from 1942 on, women were only rarely part of the highest deciding structures. Nevertheless, until the end of the war, they continued to fulfil numerous often less visible but crucial roles within the resistance.⁴⁸

Berty Albrecht largely reflects this reality. Similar to other women, she began to develop resistance activities early and was pivotal in creating and developing first resistance networks.⁴⁹ She was among the few women in leading roles; other examples were Lucie Aubrac, who co-founded the movement *Libération-Sud* and Geneviève de Gaulle, the niece of the General, who was member of the directing committee of another resistance group, *Défense de la France*.⁵⁰ More women were active in social and logistical functions, which were essential for the day-to-day life of the resistance, for example as liaison agents. This more social dimension and tasks such as organising a support system for interned resistance members and their families, was also an important part of Albrecht's clandestine work.

All in all, Berty Albrecht can be seen simultaneously as exceptional and representative regarding the role of women in French resistance. This can also be said regarding her memorialisation. We have seen that she was one of very few women who were officially honoured, and this from a very early stage on. We also see that her memorialisation continued in different ways and phases until today. Fortunately, the public recognition of women and their part in the resistance became stronger in the last decades. At the same time, there has also been a certain tradition of downplaying her role by

48 For a good overview on the current state of research, see: Fabrice Grenard, "La place des femmes dans le phénomène résistant", *La Lettre de la Fondation de la Résistance*, no. 101 (June 2020), online: <https://www.fondationresistance.org/documents/lettre/LettreResistance101.pdf>. In English language, see: Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the shadow. A New History of the French Resistance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), chapter 5: Une affaire de femmes.

49 Another example is the "réseau du Musée de l'Homme" in Paris, which was initiated in July 1940 by the librarian Yvonne Oddon, who recruited first members. Before it was dismantled in spring 1941, the group counted 11 women from 32 members in total. Grenard, *La place des femmes*, III.

50 Ibid.

calling her “the secretary of Henri Frenay”. Her daughter Mireille mentions this for example in her biography and how much this description irritated her to the point that it was one of her motivations for writing her book.

The role of secretary is definitely not accurate for describing the relationship between Berty Albrecht and Henri Frenay. Their complementary partnership played a decisive role in both lives and in the development of the resistance movement *Combat*; at the same time, both had their own existence before and during the war. Frenay also saw Berty Albrecht as a person on her own, for example when he wrote that she “gave everything to the Resistance and to France: her comfort, her liberty, her family and now her life”.⁵¹ From her early adulthood on, Berty Albrecht chose to not be limited by social conventions and to live a life to improve humanity. We can see her entry in the resistance as a logical step in continuity with her previous beliefs and commitments. It is rare for someone’s fate to be sealed by such consistency between their action and the ideal for which they are prepared to risk their life and cut themselves off from comfort and conformity.

51 Frenay, *La nuit finira*, 344.

Women in the Partisan Movement from the Territory of the Independent State of Croatia: Quantitative Analysis of the Regional, National, Urban, Age and Professional Structure of Losses

Dragan Cvetković

The present paper¹ deals with the gender structure of the Yugoslav Partisan movement in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska* – NDH). It focuses on the role of women in the movement (*partizanke*), through a quantitative-statistical analysis.

The target group in the study is the fallen members of the liberation, antifascist, and revolutionary movement from NDH territory, which was mainly organised and led by members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ). Members of the Partisan movement (Partisans) are understood as all members of units that changed names several times during the war, from the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia (*Narodnooslobodilački partizanski odredi Jugoslavije* – NOPOJ) in 1941 to the Yugoslav Army (*Jugoslovenska armija* – JA) in 1945. The analysed time frame covers the period of the Partisan movement's existence from July 1941 until the end of the war in May 1945. The spatial framework considered in the study was determined by the division of Yugoslavia carried out by the Axis Powers after the brief April War in 1941, of which the NDH represented the largest part.

The historiography in Yugoslavia and in its successor states, as well as in other countries, did not bypass the issue of women's participation in the Partisan movement. The published works mostly constitute qualitative research or belong to memoir historiography, allowing for a better knowledge

¹ The views and conclusions contained in this paper do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Genocide Victims Museum.

of different aspects of the role of women in the Partisan movement.² However, various questions remain. For example, we lack comprehensive quantitative data about participants of the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia or its parts, and therefore also of the women who participated in it. In the aforementioned works, there were quantitative attempts to show the national, age, professional, and urban structure of female Partisans. There were also attempts to analyse their representation in the Partisan movement as a whole, in certain parts of the observed territory, or in certain units. But these analyses were based on smaller quantitative and not necessarily representative samples.³ The problem also comes from the fact that the existing data in the archival material on women's participation in the Partisan movement mainly refer solely to their presence in the units, while in other segments of the movement, they are invisible. Also regarding the presence in the units, the available archival documents do not equally cover various parts of the army and different time periods. We know, for example, that in November 1942, women were 2,24% of the overall number in six and a half brigades under the Operational Headquarters for the Bosnian Krajina.⁴ In December 1944, in the 3rd Corps of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (*Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije* – NOVJ), women made up 6,05% of the composition. In the same period, in two brigades (10th and 14th) of the 29th Herzegovinian Division, women were 2,29% and 4,96% of the overall total, respectively; cumulatively, the number was 3,56%.⁵ However, in the overviews of the 5th Corps, no data were given on the number of women in the units, while a little earlier, in the Third Detachment (Srem)

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- 2 We highlight some of the titles: Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Barbara Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia* (Denver: Arden Press, 1990); Ivana Pantelić, "Yugoslav female partisans in World War II", *Cahiers balkaniques*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2013), 239-250, <https://journals.openedition.org/ceb/3971>; Marija Šoljan, ed. *Žene Hrvatske u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*, Volumes 1-2 (Zagreb: Glavni odbor Saveza ženskih društava Hrvatske, 1955); Rasim Hurem and Jasmina Musabegović, eds. *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi 1941-1945. godine: sjećanja učesnika* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977); Mila Beoković, *Žene heroji* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967); Daško Milinović and Zoran Petakov, eds. *Partizanke. Žene u narodno oslobodilačkoj borbi* (Novi Sad: Cenzura, 2010); Danilo Kecić, ed. *Žene Vojvodine u ratu i revoluciji* (Novi Sad: Historical Institute, 1984).
- 3 For example, in Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, the statistical conclusions are based on a sample of 525 women, mostly KPJ members. However, most women (and men) who were part of the Partisan movement were not KPJ members.
- 4 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* (ZNOR) (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1954 – 1968), IV-8, 10-11.
- 5 ZNOR, IV-31, 533, 813, 782.

of the 3rd Operational Zone of Croatia in May 1943, the documents indicate that there 4,75% of the Partisans were women.⁶ A few things are certain: many women joined the Partisan movement and army during the war, their presence varied through the years, and their presence was not equal in different parts of the NDH. It is also certain that the available archival data provide us only with partial insights in their representation in the Partisan movement in the NDH.

This paper aims to partially eliminate the lack of quantitative data in research, through statistical analysis of women Partisan casualties from NDH territory, in order to provide insight into the women in the movement, more precisely their regional, national, urban, age, and professional structure. The basic source for this research is the listing “Victims of the War 1941-1945”, which was established in 1964 and which has been partially revised since the 1990s. The original listing was compiled by the Federal Bureau of Statistics of Socialist Yugoslavia with the intent of collecting war damages from Germany. It determined that 597.323 people were killed on the territory of socialist Yugoslavia, roughly a third of whom (30,70%) lost their lives as members of the Partisan movement (183.256).⁷ The listing commission considered that the results covered 56% to 59% of the overall number of deaths, which was estimated to be between 1.016.000 and 1.066.000, not counting deaths of “collaborators”. The obtained result was far from the 1.700.000 war losses that was the officially proclaimed and generally accepted number in socialist Yugoslavia. Therefore, using the listing data was banned until 1992. Using a variety of archival material, literature, and survey forms, the Federal Statistical Office (*Savezni zavod za statistiku* – SZS), assisted by the Genocide Victims Museum (*Muzeja žrtava genocida* – MŽG) in Belgrade, worked from 1995-1999 on revising the listing, cross-checking the existing data in the listing with data from other sources. The idea is that the revision should include all people who lived in the territory of Yugoslavia, regardless of their national, religious, political, and military affiliation, and to also determine the number of Roma people who were not listed as a separate nationality. Since 2003, the MŽG has independently revised the listing. To this point, the revision process has

6 ZNOR, I – 6, 310.

7 *Žrtve rata 1941-1945 (rezultati popisa)* (Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1966, reprint Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1992), 10.

landed on the number of 657.194 victims, 173.549 of which were part of the Partisan movement from the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.⁸

To analyse the regional, national, urban, age, and professional structure of the 173.549 Partisans who lost their lives, specifically the women within this total number, we have compared these numbers mainly with the data produced by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's 1931 census, the last pre-war census. Of course, statistical analysis of the losses and the produced results do not allow a one-to-one transcription of percentages to the totality of all Partisans from NDH territory and from other parts of Yugoslavia. Furthermore, we need to be aware that statistical analysis also has its limits, and that in our case, we compare deaths from 1941 to 1945 with demographic data from 1931. Since it is difficult to establish precise numbers for the 1941-1945 period, we prefer to use percentages of the population in our work instead of raw numbers.⁹ Also, we are aware that not everything can be quantified. One example of this is the important role of persons who were not part of the Partisans but assisted Partisans in various ways. However, this statistical analysis has a value in and of itself and certainly constitutes a stimulating indicator for further discussion about the regional, national, age, and professional structure of Partisans in the NDH and in Yugoslavia all together.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia's military collapse in the short April War of 1941 led to the disintegration of the country. The country was divided into eight parts, each of different sizes and demographic potential, and with different legal statuses. According to the 1931 census, 13.934.038 persons lived in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at that time, and the territory on which the NDH was formed in 1941 had 5.559.420 inhabitants, 39,90% of Yugoslavia's population.¹⁰ The national structure of the population in the newly formed state was heterogeneous, consisting of 47,58% Croats, 13,00% Muslims (who were treated as members of the Croat nation of the Islamic faith),

8 For more information on the listing of "Victims of the War", see Dragan Cvetković, "Gubici pripadnika partizanskog pokreta sa teritorije Jugoslavije 1941 – 1945" (PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2016), 6-10.

9 From 1931 to 1941, there was an estimated population growth from 11% to 13%. However, the number ratios among the observed territories and nations did not change much.

10 The calculation for the NDH population and the size of the settlements was based on the 1931 census. *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31.3.1931. godine knjiga I; Prisutno stanovništvo, broj kuća i domaćinstava* (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1937).

32,02% Serbs, and 7,40% of other and unknown nationalities.¹¹ Women were half the population on the territory of the NDH (50,70%), 2.818.626 persons in all. Their positions were determined by the restrictive framework of a state and society with conservative and traditionally oriented national communities. Women had no voting rights and were mostly financially dependent, with the beginning of the emancipation limited to the small portion of them who lived in larger cities.

The 1941-1945 war in Yugoslavia was not only a war of liberation against the occupation forces, but also a civil war, and the war on the territory of the NDH was more violent and complex than in any other part of Yugoslavia.¹² All the national, political, ideological, religious and economic contradictions and divisions that existed in this territory before the war were amplified by the wartime circumstances. The creation of the NDH led by the fascist Ustasha movement, with its systematic terror against the Serb, Jewish and Roma populations, reactions against these politics and the cycle of violence and counter-violence, repression by the German and Italian occupation forces, and emergence of different forces fighting against each other, created the conditions for mass suffering. Of the 657.194 identified war deaths in Yugoslavia, 70,81% (465.366) were civilians. Just under three-quarters (73,39%) of the civilians killed came from the NDH.¹³ In the

11 The calculation of nationality was made based on *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31. marta 1931. godine*, vol. 2, *Prisutno stanovništvo prema veroispovesti* (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1938) and *Demografska statistika, Stanovništvo predratne Jugoslavije po veroispovesti i maternem jeziku po popisu od 31-III-1931. god., pregled po srezovima* (Beograd: Državni statistički ured Demokratske Federativne Jugoslavije, 1945).

12 More in Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia 1918 – 2008*, (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2008); Rasim Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu 1941 – 1945* (Zagreb: Plejada – BNZG – University Press, 2016); Enver Redžić, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu* (Sarajevo: OKO, 1998). Stevan K. Pavlović, *Hitlerov novi antiporedak, Drugi svetski rat u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Klio, 2009) (Cyrillic); Jozo Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, Okupacija i kolaboracija* (Zagreb: Liber, 2010); Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, vol. 2 (Beograd: Nolit, 1988).

13 Most civilian casualties from the NDH were Serbs (66,48%). Their representation in losses was 2,07 times higher than their share in the population. Civilian losses of Croats and Muslims were 4,66 and 1.67 times lower, respectively, than their share of the NDH's population. The Jewish and Roma communities were almost entirely destroyed. Dragan Cvetković, "Jasenovac Concentration Camp and its Role in the Destruction of the NDH People – Calculation of the Possible Number of Victims Based on the Partially Revised 1964 Census", in *Jasenovac Concentration Camp. An Unfinished Past*, eds. Andrijana Benčić Kužnar, Danijela Lučić and Stipe Odak (London: Routledge, 2023), 138-187. More on losses in this area: Dragan Cvetković, "Geostatistical analysis of human losses in Jasenovac concentration camp", *History of the 20th century*, 1 (2019): 93-120; Igor Graovac and Dragan Cvetković, *Human losses in Croatia 1941-1945: Questions, examples, results...* (Zagreb: Naklada Dijalog, 2005); Dragan Cvetković, "Bosna i Hercegovina – numeričko određenje ljudskih

war on NDH territory, women made up 35,89% of the perished civilians (116.065).¹⁴

Women among Partisan losses from NDH territory

Out of 173.549 persons killed as members of the Partisan movement in the entire Yugoslavia during the war, the revised listing “Victims of the War 1941 – 1945” identified 89.221 persons from NDH territory. This is 51,41% of the total losses. Starting and developing already at the beginning of the war, the Partisan movement on NDH territory went through several phases. Its main feature was permanent numerical and organisational strengthening. The movement was extremely active through constant fighting with the enemy, and as a result, its total losses during the war constantly increased. The dynamics of the losses suffered were not constant; the biggest losses were recorded in 1943 and 1944, during which two-thirds of the total number of killed Partisans died. The national structure of losses of Partisans from the NDH territory shows that Serbs were 67,35% (60.093) of the victims, Croats were 23,16%, (20.665), and Muslims were 6,89% (6.146). 62,32% of the Serb victims lost their lives during the war’s first three years, while roughly two-thirds of Croats (68,90%) and Muslims (69,08%) each, were killed in the last two years of the war.¹⁵ Acting as a guerilla movement during most of the war, and switching to a combination of frontal and guerilla warfare at the end of 1944, the Partisan movement mostly suffered losses in battles or as a result of them (people who were wounded and then died). Furthermore, Partisans were often shot immediately after capture, or died in concentration camps, later in prisoner of war camps. Also, many died of infectious diseases.

gubitaka u Drugom svetskom ratu”, in *Godišnjak muzeja žrtava genocida – tematski broj: Prilozi istraživanja zločina genocida i ratnih zločina*, ed. Jovan Mirković (Beograd: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2009), (Cyrillic), 79-156.

14 Among the female civilian victims of the NDH, Serb women accounted for 65,30% of the losses, Jewish women 8,24%, Croat women 7,06%, Roma women 6,80%, Muslim women 5,77%, and other and unknown nationalities 6,82%.

15 For more information on the national structure of the losses suffered by the Partisan movement from the NDH, see: Dragan Cvetković, “The National Components of the Losses of the Partisan Movement of Yugoslavia from the Territory of the Independent State of Croatia”, in *Anti – Axis Resistance in Southeastern Europe 1939 – 1945*, eds. John Paul Newman, Ljubinka Škodrić and Rade Ristanović (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 105-125.

Guided by the principle of gender equality, the KPJ, as the Partisan movement's future ideological leader, was eager to address both men and women from the beginning of the war. The KPJ Central Committee's first war proclamation on 15 April 1941, for example, directly addressed "working men and women".¹⁶ The war fought by the Partisans required participation of members of both sexes. Women were active in different ways. They participated in combat units, as nurses and as fighters – the latter from 1942 on. Indeed, in February 1942, the Commander of the Yugoslav People's Army insisted on the importance of women being "accepted into the units not only as nurses but also as fighters".¹⁷ Women were also active behind the frontlines. Since the Partisans largely depended on built-up logistical support in the rear, women were engaged in various jobs that were vital for the movement's survival such as medical service, political work, transporting the wounded, supplying units with food and clothing, and performing courier services.¹⁸

The inclusion and active participation of women in the Partisan movement in the NDH appears in the fact that 6.811 of them were killed during the war. This is 7,63% of the total losses suffered by Partisans on NDH territory.¹⁹

16 The same was repeated in the declarations of the Regional Party Committee of Bosnia–Herzegovina from May and the Central Committee of Communist Party of Croatia from June of the same year. ZNOR, V – 1, 7 and 35; IV – 1, 3.

17 Letter from the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav People's Army, dated 23 February 1942, addressed to the delegates VŠ Kardelj and Ribar, ZNOR, II – 2, Belgrade, 1954, 436. According to the recommendation, women were engaged in combat units. In Lika in 1942, the first combat units – three companies – composed exclusively of women were formed. Nikola Anić, Sekula Joksimović and Mirko Gutić, *Narodno oslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Institute of Military History, 1982), 176; Desanka Stojić, *Prva ženska partizanska četa* (Karlovac: Historijski arhiv, 1987). However, these were not permanent units and women fighters usually became part of mixed combat units.

18 Vedrana Adamović and Marina Ljubičić Bogunović, *U borbi rođene* (Priedor: Muzej Kozare – Memorijalni muzej na Mrakovici, 2023); Xavier Bougarel, *Kod Titovih partizana. Komunisti i partizani u Bosanskoj krajini 1941-1945* (Sarajevo: Association for Modern History, 2023), 92-96. This was especially pronounced in the case of women in *zbeg* (refuge): Fleeing the enemy, part of the population would temporarily leave their settlements and hide in the mountains under the protection of armed units, in this case, Partisan units. Most of the medical personnel in Lika in August 1942 were women (ZNOR, V-30, 343-349). The same was true in the Partisan movement throughout NDH territory. Đorđe Dragić, "Sanitetska služba u oružanim sangama NOP-a u Bosni i Hercegovini u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu 1941-1945"; Ivan Kralj, "Nastanak i razvoj sanitetske službe u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu u Hrvatskoj", in *Sanitetska služba u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu Jugoslavije 1941-1945*, vol. II (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1989), 9-142 and 199-432; Dino Dupanović, *Partizanske bolnice u Drugom svjetskom u ratu Bihačkoj krajini*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Sanja Horvatinčić (Bihać: JU Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona, 2023), 11, 18, 35.

19 Cvetković, *Gubici pripadnika partizanskog pokreta*, 841.

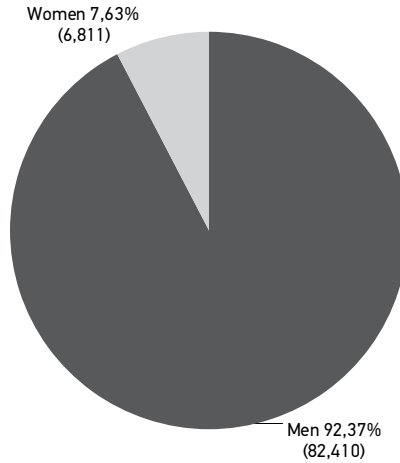


Chart 1. NDH, Partisans – Gender structure of losses

From the Kingdom of Yugoslavia’s entire territory, 9.504 women were among the 173.549 registered Partisan deaths.²⁰ Women partisans from NDH territory were therefore almost three-quarters (71,66%) of the total number of women killed in Yugoslavia’s Partisan movement. Thus, their losses were 2.53 times higher than those of women Partisans from the rest of Yugoslavia. Considering NDH territory’s population relative to that of all Yugoslavia, women Partisans from NDH territory suffered 3,81 times higher losses in real terms.

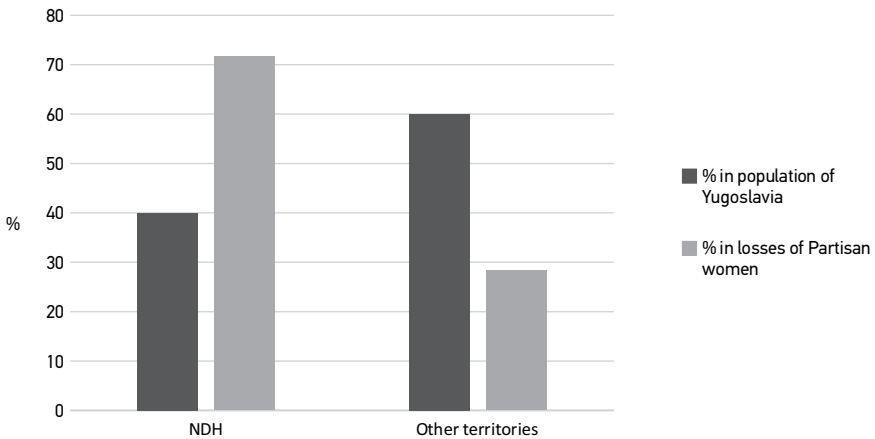


Chart 2. Yugoslavia, Partisans, women – Proportion of population and losses in NDH compared to other territories of Yugoslavia

²⁰ Ibid.

Women were constantly present among the Partisans from the NDH territory, on a smaller or larger scale, and their losses increased consistently. However, there were important variations in the losses of women Partisans in the five year span from 1941 to 1945.

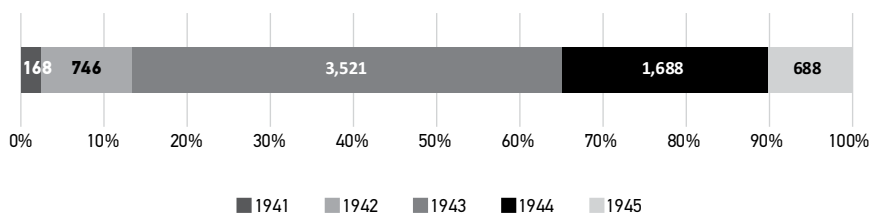


Chart 3. NDH, Partisans, women – dynamics of losses

Losses during the second year of the war (746 dead, or 10,95%) were nominally 4,43 times higher than in the year of the uprising (2,47%). However, given the different periods of existence of the movement in these years (12 versus six months), the loss in 1942 was 2,22 times higher in real terms. The decisive battles for the Partisan movement's survival in 1943, the Battle of the Neretva in the first months of the year and the Battle of Sutjeska in May-June, in which women Partisans played an important role, increased the death toll to 3.521, just over half the total losses (51,69%), and 4,72 times higher than the previous year. The overcoming of the crisis in the middle of 1943, followed by the significantly increasing involvement of supporters in the Partisan movement, reduced the need for mass participation of women in the units during the war's last two years. Losses (1.688 persons or 24,78% in 1944 and 688 persons or 10,10% in 1945) decreased by 2,08 and 2,45 times compared to previous years.²¹ This appears also in the fact that in the final period of the war, women were not invited to training centres for new fighters. In all five corps operating on Croatian territory in October 1944, there was not a single woman among the newly mobilised personnel in the training centres.²²

21 The death rate of female Partisans in the four and a half months of war in 1945 was 1,09 times higher than in the previous year, but it was still almost twice as low (1,91 times) as in 1943.

22 ZNOR, V-34, 560. Since 1944, there had been a planned withdrawal of female nurses from combat units and their sending to hospitals in the rear or to various political duties in working with the people, especially with those women who had a longer service in the movement, as with experienced and proven staff loyal to the movement. Barbara N. Wiesinger, "Rat partizanki – žene u oružanom otporu u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945", *Historijska traganja*, 4, 2009.

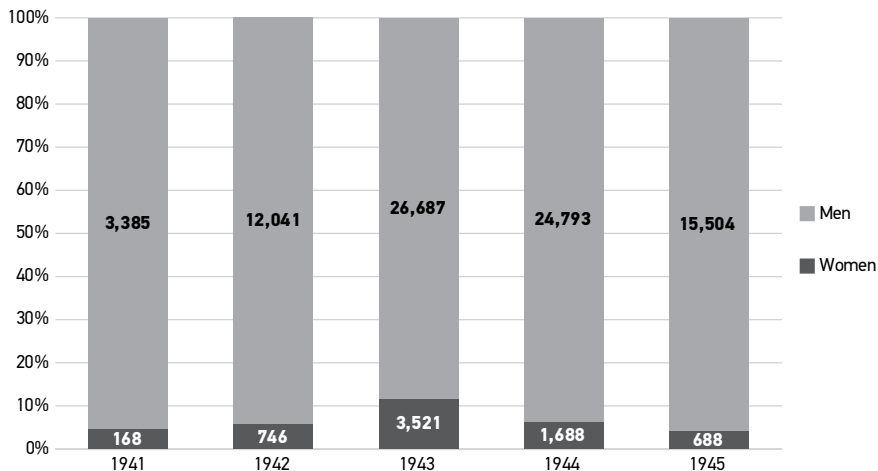


Chart 4. NDH, Partisans – Losses according to gender and year of death

The absolute dominance of men in the Partisan movement lasted throughout the war. The percentage of women among Partisan losses in the NDH was stable for most of the war. Women accounted for between 4,25% and 6,38% of the casualties, annually. The exception was 1943, when the need for women amid the movement's crucial struggles for survival was exceptionally great and the percentage of Partisan losses that were women doubled, reaching 11,66%.

The share of women Partisans who were killed during the first two years of war (13,42%) was 1,39 times lower than the share of men killed in that period (18,72%). In the last two years of the war, it was 1,40 times lower (34,88% vs. 48,89%), but in 1943, it was 1,60 times higher than the share of men killed in the same year (51,69% vs. 32,38%). This underlines 1943's importance for the Partisan movement in general, and the significant contribution of women in combat this year.

Regional structure of the losses of Partisan women from the NDH

NDH territory included most of Croatia (with major parts of Dalmatia and Croatian Littoral annexed by Italy and Međimurje and Baranja annexed by Hungary), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srem, in Vojvodina. Overall, we can distinguish 12 regions in this territory: Northwestern Croatia, Slavonia, Banija, Kordun, Lika, Gorski kotar with Croatian Littoral (partially),

Dalmatia (partially), Bosnian Krajina, Central Bosnia, Eastern Bosnia, Herzegovina and Srem.²³ The Partisans acted across the whole NDH territory and succeeded in engaging women in all regions. However, the engagement and the loss rates of *partizanke* varied significantly in different parts of the territory.

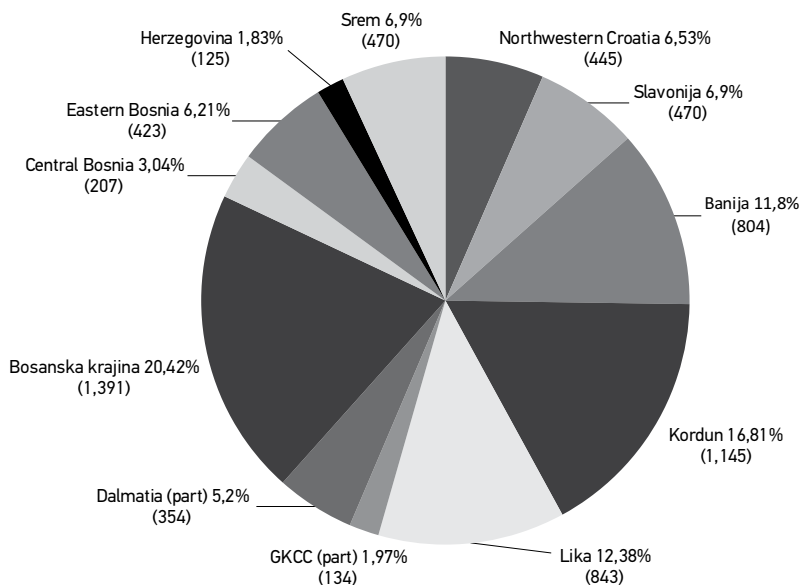


Chart 5. NDH, Partisans, women – Losses according to regional affiliation

Out of 12 regions in NDH territory, the majority of perished female Partisans originated from the following four regions: Bosnian Krajina (20,42% of the overall losses), Kordun (16,81%), Lika (12,38%) and Banija (11,80%). If we compare the population in these regions with the overall population in the NDH, we can also see that in all these four regions the proportion of the losses of female Partisans was higher than the population average: 4,99% times higher in Kordun, 3,94 times in Lika, 3,69 times in Banija, and 1,74 times in Bosnian Krajina. For the other regions, the proportion of perished women was below the general population average, except for Srem, where it was 1,21 times higher. All together, Partisan women from Bosnian Krajina, Kordun, Lika and Banija accounted for 61,41% of female losses,

23 These regions were not administrative units during the NDH. I created them for this research to categorise Partisan deaths from those regions. They consisted of municipalities or their parts according to the administrative division of 1964.

while these four regions accounted for 21,47% of the NDH population. A possible explanation for the high percentage of female recruits from these four regions is that Kordun, Lika, Banija and Bosnian Krajina were particularly exposed to Ustasha terror and were one of the Partisan movement's strongest bastions in the NDH from 1941.

The national structure of killed female Partisans from NDH territory

The Partisan movement in the NDH brought together members of all the territory's nationalities. There were many motivations for women to join the Partisan movement, ranging from ideological commitment (especially for the minority who were KPJ members), to escaping from war-ravaged villages, to various personal reasons.²⁴ Overall, the presence of women of different nationalities in the Partisan movement was influenced by a range of factors: the development of the Partisan movement as a whole and/or in certain areas, the women's degree of emancipation and willingness to join the movement, and their degree of vulnerability, which played a key role for Serb women involved in the movement.

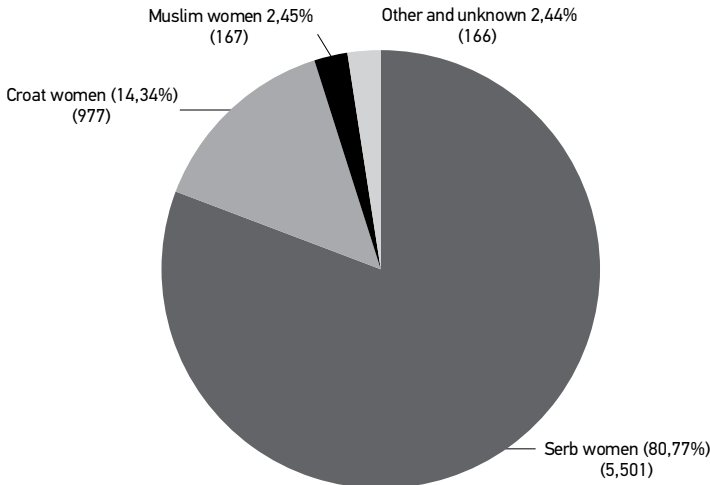


Chart 6. NDH, Partisans, women – National structure of losses

²⁴ For more about various reasons for which women joined the Partisan movement see, for example: Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 226-230.

The losses suffered by women Partisans from NDH territory were not the same according to their nationality. The most numerous were Serb women (5.501), who represented roughly four-fifths of them (80,77%). Croat women represented 14,34% (977), Muslim women 2,45% (167) and members of other and unknown nationalities 2,44% (166). Among the killed female Partisans of other and unknown nationalities, Jewish women (54) made up a third of the losses (32,53%). In comparison to their representation in the population of the NDH, the proportion of Serb women killed as Partisans was 2,52 times higher, while the proportion of Croat and Muslim women was 3,32 and 5,31 times lower, respectively.

Looking at the total Partisan losses of women and men within national groups, women accounted for 9,16% of Serb losses. A significant share was also among members of other and unknown nationalities (7,17%), while women were 4,73% of Croat Partisans' overall losses, and women made up 2,72% of the total deaths of Muslim Partisans.

In comparison with the losses of Serb Partisans among men of all national groups (66,24%), the proportion of Serb women among female Partisans was 1,22 times higher (80,77%). Compared to the proportion of Croat and Muslim men in the total losses of male Partisans (23,89 and 7,25%, respectively), the proportion of Croat women and Muslim women in the losses of Partisan women was 1,66 and 2,96 times lower, respectively. Among members of other and unknown nationalities, the participation of men and women in the losses of comrades of the same sex was almost equal.

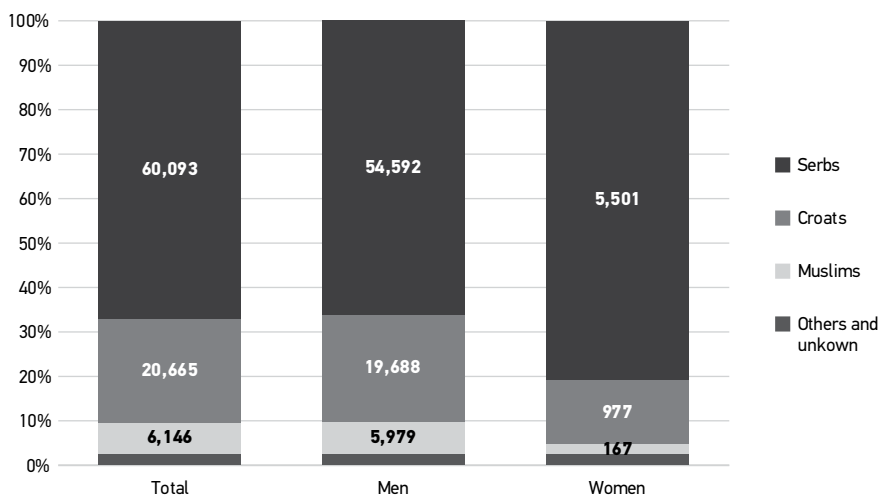


Chart 7. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in gender losses according to nationality

When looking at the chronology of the losses, a majority of Serb and Muslim female Partisans lost their lives in 1943 (55,10% and 41,29%, respectively), while the most important losses among Croat women occurred in 1944-45 (55,68%). Serb women always represented the large majority of Partisans womens' total losses (86,32% in 1941-2, and 70,75% in 1944-5). However, the share of women from other groups grew over the time, especially for Croat women (from 7,88% in 1941-42 to 22,90% in 1944-45), reflecting the general increase of Croats among the losses of Partisans from NDH over the years.²⁵

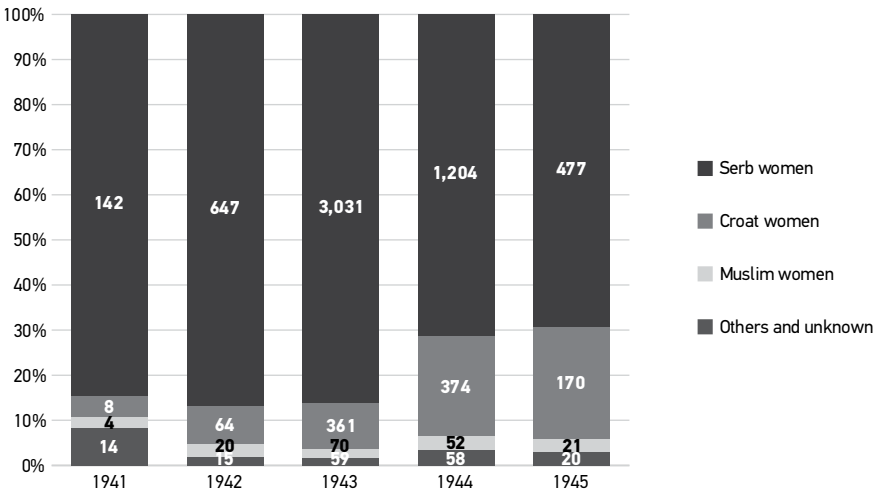


Chart 8. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in losses according to nationality and year of death

We can also see some regional differences. In Lika, for example, where according to the 1931 census, 96.468 Serbs lived (55,32% of the total population) and 77.470 Croats (44,43%), the percentages of the losses were 95.14% and 4.77%, respectively; in Eastern Bosnia, with 361.527 Muslims (41,77% of the total population), 348.224 Serbs (40,24%), and 128.176 Croats (14,81%), the percentages of the losses were 14,89%, 71,87% and 7,56%, respectively. The Muslim population lived almost exclusively in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the four regions there, female Muslim Partisans made up 7,69% of the overall total of Partisan deaths, 3,14 times more than their share in the entire NDH, but also 4,02 times less than their representation

25 See: Cvetković, “The National Components of the Losses”.

in the population of these four regions (30,90%).²⁶ Also, we need to keep in mind that a particularly important number of Croat Partisans, including women, came from the large parts of Dalmatia annexed by Italy in 1941, but they do not appear in the present statistical analysis since these territories were outside of the NDH.

The overall high percentage of Serb women among the losses reflects the general high percentage of Serb Partisans among the Partisan movement's losses in the NDH.²⁷ The direct and existential threat the Ustasha regime presented to the Serb population resulted in the Partisan movement mainly being joined by Serbs – both men and women – at the outset. This contributed to slowing the inclusion of women from other national groups.²⁸ Additionally, there was often a conservative male resistance against women making any political or military commitments, especially in rural areas, and particularly in Muslim communities.²⁹ However, the Partisan leadership was eager to attract men and women from all nations and ethnic groups, and the number of Croat and Muslim women in the Partisan movement grew over time. One motivation for these women to join the Partisans was certainly that they were also affected by interethnic violence, particularly attacks by Chetniks. Joining Partisan forces was a way to gain protection against such violence and/or seek revenge.³⁰

The urban structure of the killed women Partisans from NDH territory

The NDH was a mainly rural society. The vast majority of the population lived in settlements under 10.000 inhabitants.³¹ This was true for all nation-

26 If we look only at the four regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Partisan women who were Serbs (1.841) made up 85,79% of the victims, Muslim women (165) 7,69%, Croat women (89) 4,15%, and women of other and unknown nationalities (51) 2,37% (of which 15 or 29,41% were Jewish women).

27 See: Cvetković, "The National Components of the Losses".

28 Cf. Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 169-70: "The initial preponderance of Serbs proved an obstacle in attracting other groups, who perceived the Partisans primarily as a Serb movement. On the other hand, Serbs were often hostile to the peoples of other ethnoreligious backgrounds, particularly toward Croats and Muslims, whom they indiscriminately considered pro-Ustasha."

29 Marko Attila Hoare, *Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60-61.

30 Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 227.

31 Of the 11.343 settlements on NDH territory, 21 towns had over 10.000 inhabitants: Zagreb, Sarajevo, Zemun, Osijek, Banja Luka, Karlovac, Mostar, Bjelovar, Slavonski Brod, Sisak, Varaždin,

al communities and ethnic groups (94,48% of Serbs, 88,03% of Croats and 89,02% of Muslims). The proportion of Serbs in rural areas was particularly high, while relatively more Croats, Muslims and other groups lived in towns. These realities are also reflected in the losses of Partisan women.

Of the total losses of female Partisans, most were from smaller settlements, while 6,47% of the victims (411) came from settlements with over 10.000 inhabitants. This is 1,61 times less representation in the losses compared to the part of the NDH population that lived in these cities (10,42%).

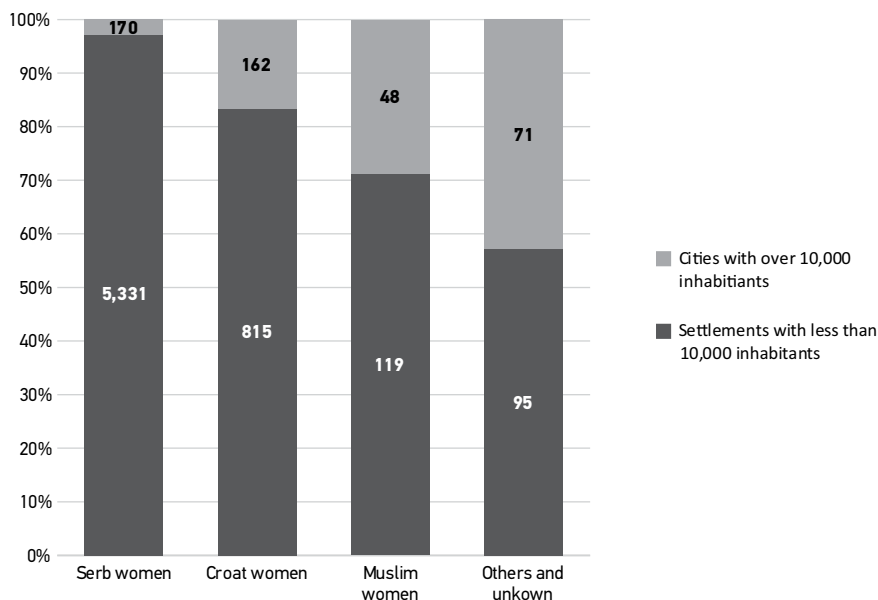


Chart 9. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in losses according to nationality and settlement size

Almost all the Serb women (97,10%) who were killed in the Partisan movement and were from the territory of the NDH came from settlements with under 10.000 inhabitants. Their representation in the losses was 1,16 and 1,36 times higher than that of Croat women (83,42%) and Muslim women (71,26%) from settlements of the same size, and it was 1,70 times higher than that of women of other and unknown nationalities (57,23%). On the other hand, more than a quarter of all killed women Partisans of Muslim (28,74%) and 16,58% of Croat nationalities came from cities with

Vinkovci, Virovitica, Vukovar, Dubrovnik, Sremska Mitrovica, Ruma, Bijeljina, Konjic, Tuzla, and Kozarac. There were also 27 smaller towns with between 5.000 and 10.000 inhabitants.

over 10.000 inhabitants. That was 9,91 and 5,72 times higher representation than among women Partisans who were Serbs (2,90%) from settlements of the same size, while the representation of Muslim women was 1,73 times higher than that of Croat women. The highest representation in the losses of female Partisans from settlements with over 10.000 inhabitants was among women of other and unknown nationalities (42,77%), 1,49 times higher than among Muslim women Partisans and 14,75 times higher than among female Partisans who were Serbs.

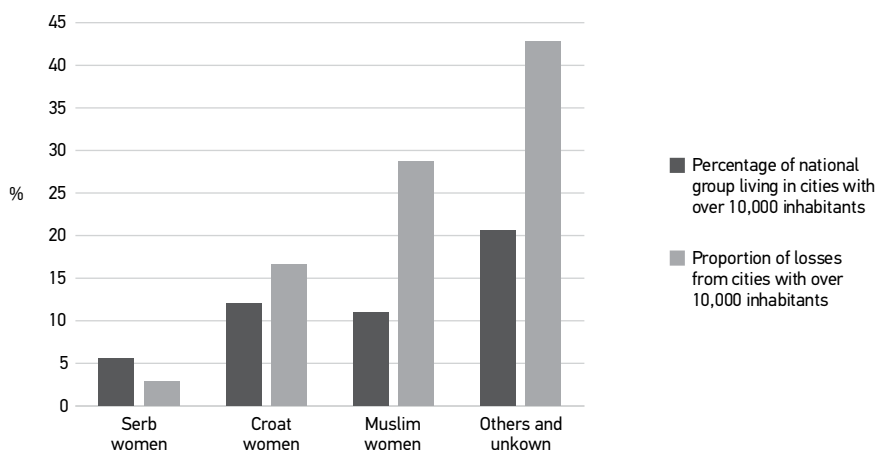


Chart 10. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in the population and share of losses of cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants by nationality

Representation in female Partisan losses among those who came from cities of over 10.000 inhabitants did not follow the size of the population that lived in them. It was 1,38 times higher among Croat women victims, 2,07 times higher among other and unknown nationalities, and 2,62 times higher among Muslim women, while their representation among killed female Partisans who were Serbs was 1,92 times lower. Thus, the loss of Croat Partisan women from cities with over 10.000 inhabitants, compared to Croat women from settlements with under 10.000 inhabitants was realistically 1,46 times higher. For Muslim women and members of other and unknown nationalities, it was 3,27 and 2,87 times higher, while it was realistically twice as low (1,98 times) in the case of Serb Partisan women who were killed.

Age structure of women Partisans from NDH territory

The Partisan movement accepted people of all ages into its ranks. When looking at the age structure of female Partisan losses from NDH territory, the most striking is their very young age. Over half (52,44%) of the Partisan women killed were between 15 and 24 years old (3.572 persons), while 12,55% were between 25 and 34 (855 persons) and 8,20% were between 35 and 44 (706 persons). The remaining 26,81% of female Partisan losses belonged to other age groups or were of unknown age. The young age structure was characteristic of the losses in the partisan movement as a whole, as the proportion of losses among men between the ages of 15 and 24 was at 53,75%, very similar to the proportion of women in this age group.³²

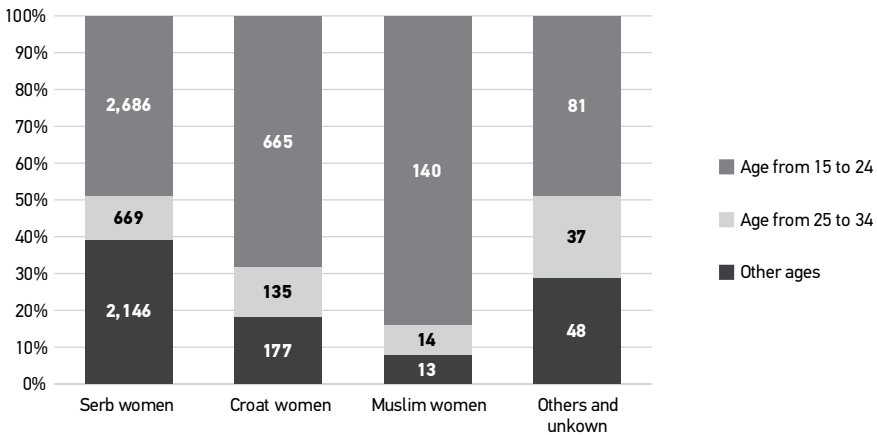


Chart 11. NDH, Partisans, women – Age structure of losses according to nationality

Women Partisans between 15 and 24 years of age were the largest group among all nationalities, though the proportion varied among them. Young women in this age group accounted for just over four-fifths of Muslim women who were killed (83,83%), around two-thirds of Croat women (68,06%), and almost half of the losses of Serb women (48,83%) and members of other and unknown nationalities (48,79%).

³² However, there were significant differences among other age groups. Losses between the ages of 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 among male victims (23.040, or 27,96% and 10.166, or 12,33%) were 2,23 and 1,50 times higher than among women. On the other hand, losses of other and unknown ages among women were 4,50 times higher than among men (4.910, or 5,96%).

The professional structure of the killed women Partisans from NDH territory

The women Partisans from NDH territory who were killed belonged to different professional groups. Almost three-fifths (57,66%) of them were dependents (housewives, children, elderly, people with special needs), while a quarter were farmers (25,43%). A smaller part of the losses was made up of schoolgirls and students (7,50%), business women (mainly artisans and retailers) and workers (4,77%), experts, civil servants, members of liberal professions (journalists, artists, lawyers...) (1,82%) and of other or unknown professions (2,82%).

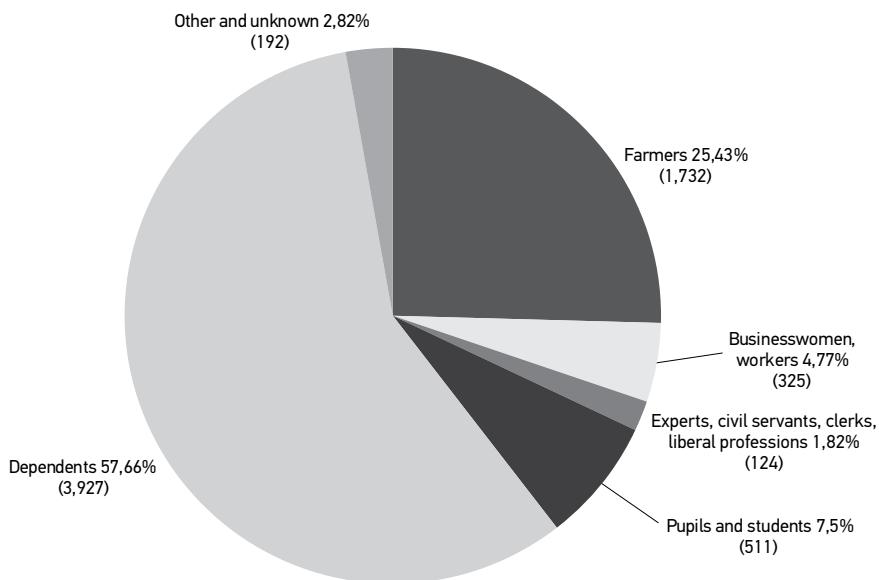


Chart 12. NDH, Partisans, women – Professional structure of losses

Social structure in pre-war society meant that women represented almost three-quarters of the killed Partisans who were dependents (72,62%), which was 9,52 times higher than the average representation of dependents in the movement's total losses. Among the dependents, housewives were the most numerous, though there were also a lot of girls under 18 who are not part of the student category since most girls did not attend school.³³

³³ In the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, only a small portion of girls between the ages of seven and 18 attended school. In the Vrbaska and Drinska banovina, for example, less than a third of

When directly comparing men and women, the proportion of dependents in the losses of women was 32,03 times higher than it was in men (1,80%). Also, the share of schoolgirls and students in their losses (7,50%) was 1,34 times higher than that of male Partisans (5,59%). Among killed male Partisans, roughly two-thirds were farmers (66,47%), while that proportion was 24,43% for women, 2,16 times less than for the men. Members of liberal professions had equally low representation in the losses of Partisans of both genders (0,16% each), and it was also very low regarding civil servants, experts and clerks (1,82% for women and 2,42% for men). When looking at the proportion of workers and businesswomen (artisans

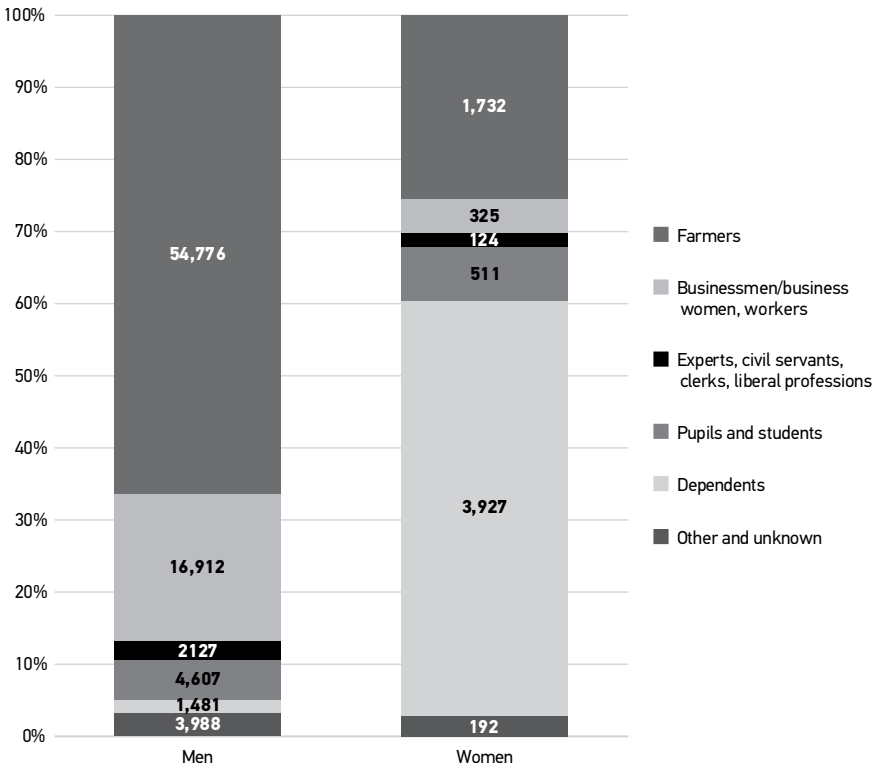


Chart 13. NDH, Partisans – Professional structure of losses according to gender

the children were included in the education system, and the percentage of girls among them was minimal (especially among Muslim girls). Cf. Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, 1918-1941*, vol. II (Beograd: Stubovi Kulture, 1997) (Cyrillic). Therefore, female literacy was one of the main wartime tasks of the Antifascist Front of Women (*Antifašistička fronta žena – AFŽ*). This opens up the problem of the reliability of drawing conclusions about female participation in the Partisan movement based on memoir literature published in post-war Yugoslavia. Testimonies were left, mostly, by educated women from urban areas, who joined the movement at the end of the war, mostly KPJ members. They do not reflect the real situation on the ground during the war and create a distorted picture of women's participation in the movement.

and retailers) among the killed women (4,77%), their share was 4,30 times lower than that of men (20,52%).

Partisan women from all three majority nationalities represented in the Partisan movement in the NDH had in common that more than half of the victims within each nationality were dependents (Serb women 58,61%, Croat women 56,09% and Muslim women 54,49%). Slightly less than a third of the killed Serb Partisan women (29,19%) were farmers. This profession was 2,64 and 6,97 times less represented among the killed Partisan women who were Croats (11,05%) or Muslims (4,19%). Other professions – workers, businesswoman (mainly artisans and small traders), schoolgirls and students, officials and those in liberal professions – accounted for over a quarter of the Croat women Partisans (28,86%) and nearly two-fifths of the losses of the Muslim women Partisans (37,13%). Compared to the female Serb losses (9,75%) they had 2,96 and 3,81 times less representation, respectively. Nearly half (47,59%) of the killed women Partisans of other and unknown nationalities from the NDH belonged to these professional groups.

Conclusion

Following the KPJ's ideology and doctrine, women were a group that the Partisan movement of Yugoslavia, and therefore its branch on NDH territory, tried to attract from the first days of the war, promising them political and economic equality in the future society. In the complex social circumstances of a rural multinational community, before and during the war, the inclusion of women in the Partisan movement was not simple. In the extremely complex war fought on NDH territory, more women joined the Partisans than in the rest of Yugoslavia. This led to their greater death rate; women made up 7,63% of the losses suffered by the Partisan movement in this territory. Engaged mostly in the background activities, but also the military units, women were killed throughout the entire war, with half of the losses suffered in 1943, the most murderous year for the Partisans from the NDH territory. In this year, the percentage of women killed among all Partisans reached 11,66%.

There were various reasons for women to join the Partisan movement, and the movement managed to attract women of all nationalities. Serb women, facing the threat of annihilation in the NDH, were pushed

to massively participate in the fight, accounting for 9,16% of Partisan losses within their national group. Over 90% of the killed female Serb Partisans were from rural areas and settlements with under 10.000 inhabitants. They were of all ages, and most were dependents. Serb women, who were four-fifths of the overall losses suffered by women, were the largest portion of the killed women Partisans on NDH territory, thus making an immeasurable contribution to its maintenance during the war and its final victory.

Joining the Partisan movement slowly, Croat women represented 14,34% and Muslim women 2,45% of the total losses of female Partisans from the NDH, accounting for 4,73% and 2,72%, respectively, of the Partisans' total losses in their national group. Although mostly from smaller settlements and being dependents, certain differences are visible among the killed female Partisans of Croat and Muslim nationality compared to the losses suffered by their Serb comrades. The ideas of freedom, antifascism, the struggle for social and economic equality of women in the future state of equal nations, attracted a significant number of young Croat and Muslim women from urban areas and a professional structure that was closer to the Partisans' ideological basis. Most of the losses of female Partisans of Croat and Muslim nationality were between 15 and 24 years of age (68,06% and 83,83% respectively), which was 1,39 and 1,72 times higher representation than among female Partisans who were Serbs. Among the victims, 16,58% of Croat women and 28,74% of Muslim women came from cities with over 10.000 inhabitants. This was 5,72 and 9,91 times higher representation in losses than the share of residents of these settlements in the population of these nationalities. Ideologically desirable professions in the Partisan movement – workers, artisans, merchants, schoolgirls, students, officials, experts, liberal professions – were over a quarter of Croat women Partisan victims (28,86%) and two-fifths of the losses of the Muslim women Partisans (37,13%). This was 2,96 and 3,81 times higher representation than among the Serb women who were killed (9,75%).

Women from the NDH comprised three-quarters of all Yugoslav women Partisan losses. Their involvement in a critical period for the movement's survival in the middle of the war was particularly significant. They participated in the battles in which the Partisan movement's fate was decided, as well as the survival of the entire antifascist struggle in Yugoslavia. With their sacrifice, they made an exceptional contribution to the final victory in the war and laid a solid foundation for the future path of women in socialist Yugoslavia.

Both Woman and Partisan: Emancipation and the Partisan Movement in Syrmia (1941-1944)

Aleksandar Horvat

It's quite simple things we want.

We don't want the men to have the right to beat us: that's the main thing.

And then we want to have some say in how things get done and to be listened to.

Unknown Partisan woman from Syrmia in a conversation with Basil Davidson¹

Before becoming a prominent writer and journalist, Basil Davidson (1914-2010), an officer in the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) intelligence service, came to Yugoslavia during World War II as part of an Allied military mission. In 1943 and 1944, he spent several months among the Partisans in the province of Syrmia,² mainly on Mount Fruška Gora, where he got to know the members and sympathisers of the resistance movement, their qualities, virtues and flaws. At a Partisan political gathering in winter 1943 in the village of Sremska Rača, near the Bosut forests, he met a certain “comrade Mara”, the local leader of the Women’s Antifascist Front (*Antifašistička fronta žena* – AFŽ). According to Davidson’s memoirs, which he wrote immediately after the war, Mara was born in eastern Syrmia and was “a broad square-jawed young woman of about twenty-five” who “clenches her fists tight against her skirt”. Also, she was “tremendously in earnest about what she has to say. She talks about the emancipation of women”, shouting in front of the assembled peasants from the Bosut forests: “We’re fighting against those bad old ideas, we’re fighting for women to have a decent place in society, so that their work’s respected: yes, friends,

1 Basil Davidson, *Partisan Picture* (Bedford: Bedford Books LTD, 1946), 235-236.

2 Syrmia (Srem) is a historical and geographical area located between the Danube and Sava rivers, in the fertile Pannonian plain. Today it is divided between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia. In Serbia, together with Banat and Bačka, it is part of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

respected. So that she isn't just a drudge, a slave, a person with no rights." Observing Mara's fiery speech, Davidson wrote:

For Comrade Mara the issue is not simply to throw the Germans out of Yugoslavia. She would merely think you mad, or very misguided, if you were to try to explain that the English and the Americans and the Russians are interested primarily in that, and that only. The contrast between an English officer who wants to see trains blown into the air, and nothing else, and finds the whole thing rather a pantomime, and Mara, who sees the war as comprehending every aspect of her life – political, economic, social, artistic – is some measure of the misunderstanding which probably exists. How could outsiders understand? Still, they might try; and perhaps they will.³

How could "outsiders" understand the struggle for women's equality in the traditional village communities of Syrmia during World War II? Even today, this is a legitimate and significant question for understanding the Partisan resistance movement's various dimensions, not only in Syrmia, but across the entire Yugoslavia. Outsiders could also add questions about the Partisans' mechanisms for spreading the idea of equality between women and men, about the forms of their work and propaganda, or about the effects of emancipatory politics. To fully understand the process of emancipation, it is crucial to look firstly at the historical context that framed the relationship between the traditional village community and the Partisan movement, and then at the interrelation between these two structures, from which the main dynamics of these social changes arose. There were also important differences in the experiences of individual regions of Yugoslavia, conditioned by local specificities in terms of economic development, social status or the level of literacy. But for most geographical areas, including Syrmia, the Partisan movement mostly relied on small rural communities, which were particularly traditional and patriarchal social structures. The "new woman", or at least the idea of a new woman, arose and developed in the triangle of action and influence between the villages, the Partisans and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ), which in 1941 became the leader of the antifascist uprising.

3 Davidson, *Partisan Picture*, 125-126.

Traditional society and women in resistance

When the uprising in Yugoslavia began, the KPJ, in accordance with its pre-war policies on women's issues, called for women to join the fight against the occupiers. Along with the struggle for liberation and social justice, the party's goal was realising its program regarding the emancipation of women, through encouraging their direct participation in the Partisan movement and in military units. The KPJ in Syrmia, as one of the three geographical regions of today's province of Vojvodina, relied to some extent on the Vojvodina labour movement's pre-war legacy and activity. In 1934, party instructions circulated in Vojvodina, carrying a highlighted slogan: "We treat women as equals to men." In Sremska Mitrovica, the largest city in Syrmia, even before the war there were women members of both the party and the Union of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* – SKOJ), who at a meeting of workers demanded suffrage and equality with men.⁴

During the war, when Syrmia became part of the Axis-puppet state Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH), the Partisans had the dual tasks of winning over women to their ideas and to the fight, while simultaneously seeking to overcome the traditional social norms and prejudices that were especially prevalent in the countryside, which served as the resistance movement's main base. Among the peasants in Syrmia, the influence of the KPJ and its emancipatory ideas before the war was very low; the prevailing opinion was that women were less valuable than men. In accordance with the traditional, patriarchal understanding of family relations, parents and husbands believed that their daughters and wives were destined to exclusively be housewives and mothers and that their place was in the house – doing household work and raising children was their main occupation.⁵ For centuries, women were in a subordinate and unequal position, with pre-assigned roles in the patriarchal village community. It was considered inappropriate for an unmarried girl to leave the house at night without an escort, go to a pub or engage in politics.

4 Radomir Prica, "Organizacija antifašističkog fronta žena u Sremskomitrovačkom srežu", in *Žene Vojvodine u ratu i revoluciji 1941-1945*, ed. Danilo Kević (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1984), 569; Dušan Popov, "Novi smisao ženskog pitanja u štampi narodnooslobodilačke borbe", in *Žene Vojvodine u ratu i revoluciji 1941-1945*, ed. Kević, 207-208.

5 Srbislava Kovačević Marija, "Antifašistički front žena u Vojvodini", in *Žene Vojvodine u ratu i revoluciji 1941-1945*, ed. Kević, 97.

Josip Hrnčević (1901-1994), a prominent fighter from Croatia and post-war communist official, wrote about the partisan-communists' encounters with villagers in Syrmia and women's position in the traditional social hierarchy in his memoirs. During 1941 and 1942, he stayed in Syrmia and on one occasion, spent the night in the village of Grabovo, with an elderly married couple, otherwise supporters of the resistance movement, who received him with suspicion yet nevertheless in a homely manner, according to the rules and customs of the time. Hrnčević testified that the host put an axe under the headboard, just in case, and the hostess cleaned his shoes. It "was embarrassing", he wrote, "that she was cleaning his – a partisan and communist's – shoes. But she answered him calmly: That is our custom."⁶

This was the kind of society to which the leadership of the Partisan movement in Syrmia addressed its messages and invitations. From the uprising's first days, Partisan documents stated that women should be included in the military units, "that young partisan women should enter the strike groups" and that "no woman comrade [*drugarica*] should be left without certain duties". In the proclamations, women were called to "join the ranks of fighters against fascism, for national freedom, for a better and happier future, side by side with their husbands, brothers and sons." During the the first two years of war, however, the results were not satisfactory, as was stated in a report on the situation in the Syrmian units in December 1942: "You did not pay enough attention to the establishment of proper relations between men and women comrades, and the consequence was that women comrades who wanted to join the military units as fighters were seen as a burden."⁷

Why were the Partisans "stingy" towards women, as Syrmia Partisan Dušanka Jovičić (1923-1998) wrote in her memoirs?⁸ Jovan Beljanski Lala's (1901-1982) memoirs provide an answer to the question of what exactly happened on the ground and what the position of women in military units looked like. Lala was a prominent Partisan commander and recipient of the highest Yugoslav award, the Order of People's Hero. During the war, he

6 Josip Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 72.

7 *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda. Borbe u Vojvodini 1941-1943*, I-6 (Beograd: Vojno delo, 1955) (Cyrillic), 22, 37, 110, 117-122.

8 Dušanka Nađ, "U Jasku i Vrdniku u Sremu 1941. godine", in *1941-1942 u svedočenjima učesnika narodnooslobodilačke borbe*, vol. 8, ed. Radomir Petković (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1975), 246.

became a committed fighter for the equality of women, but when he first received the directive that they should also become part of the Partisan detachments, he was not sure of the justification of such a decision. During the campaign to establish the first Partisan squads in remote villages on Fruška Gora in 1941 and 1942, he mentioned to the new Partisans the need to include young women in the units. The men did not want to accept it, telling him that “war is not a woman’s job”. He continued to insist that women be talked to and that they at least engage in combat as medical staff, which was acceptable to the men. However, in some places, not a single woman was admitted to Partisan squads. The fighters in the village of Krušedolski Prnjavor put up a particularly strong resistance and did not want to accept the possibility of women fighting together with them, guns in hand. After much persuasion, three young women were accepted into their squads, without the slightest enthusiasm from their comrades. When those units were sent to the field, as part of the Danube Partisan Detachment, all three Partisan women were left in the village. Beljanski persistently continued with his demands and faced repeated failures. When he proposed that prominent female fighters be appointed to the duties of party delegates for platoons and squads in one of the battalions’ headquarters, the fighters laughed loudly, because they could not understand why they should be commanded by women. Beljanski interpreted such phenomena as being due to the fact that the Partisan movement in Syrmia in 1941 and 1942 was almost entirely made up of local (male) peasants, who were, as he wrote, “traditionally distrustful of women as fighters. According to their understanding at that time, a woman is first and foremost a mother, a housewife and a wife who should, as in all previous wars, guard the hearth while the men fight.”⁹

Resistance to including women, not only in military units, but also in other tasks and functions in the Partisan movement, occurred in all phases of the uprising and the war. Among the men in the villages of Syrmia, it could be heard at that time that women should not interfere in men’s affairs and that politics is not for them.¹⁰ Parents said that women should not go to war because they had never done it before, and they did not want to allow their daughters to go to evening meetings of members of the Partisan movement, considering it inadmissible and risky, because mostly younger

9 Jovan Beljanski, *Sećanja* (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1982), 168-171.

10 Đorđe Momčilović, *Zlatne niti zajedništva* (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1982), 167.

men gathered in such places. Men in the village of Prhovo claimed for a long time that women with their activism were in fact leading “anti-men’s politics” and “threshing empty straw”.¹¹

However, the attitude towards women changed over time, influenced by Partisan propaganda. In the uprising’s first year, there was an intermediary between women and the movement: They cooperated with the Partisans indirectly, through their fathers or husbands,¹² and if they were allowed to attend evening meetings of underground activists (*ilegalci*),¹³ they would come accompanied by their mothers. At that time, men avoided giving their female colleagues more specific or responsible tasks. If they gained trust, they were allowed to carry secret messages between two villages as couriers, and the most trusted were given party material to read and keep.¹⁴ Even when women were directly involved in the movement, it happened that in some places they were the victims of harsh attitudes from fellow soldiers. Thus, in the village of Adaševci, a young female underground activist who had long hair and a neat hairstyle, was ordered by her superior to cut her hair.¹⁵

The fact that emancipation took place gradually – often in accordance with the title of Lenin’s book *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* – is evidenced in the case of the local People’s Liberation Committee (*Narodnooslobodilački odbori* – NOO) in Ledinci at the beginning of 1943.¹⁶ Partisan authorities in Sylvania analysed the board members’ attitudes and actions, concluding that “individuals cannot break with backward ideas about the position of women in society”. Their “sectarian attitude towards the inclusion of women and female youth in the NOO” was sharply criticised, and it was concluded that “because of those mistakes, the NOO must dissolve and a new one be elected.”¹⁷

11 Vasilije Petković and Živko Vasić, *Visovi ravnice: Prhovo u ratu i revoluciji* (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1988), 100.

12 Milorad Babić, *Hronika Starih Banovaca* (Sremska Mitrovica: Sremske novine, 1989), 179.

13 In Partisan terminology, the term *ilegalac* was used for members of the Partisan movement acting mainly in occupied cities and territories.

14 Kovačević, “Antifašistički front žena u Vojvodini”, 95.

15 Svetislav Nenadović, *Adaševački ustanak* (Šid: Opštinski Savez udruženja boraca, 1989) (Cyrillic), 185.

16 The NOO were authorities formed and organised by the KPJ in the liberated or partially liberated territories.

17 Miloš Lukić, *Ledinačke vatre* (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1982) (Cyrillic), 286.



Fig. 1: Three generations of women from the Matić family in the Partisan movement, Irig (1944); from left to right: Gina Matić, paramedic of the Sremska Mitrovica command; Danica Matić, member of the County Board of AFŽ for Irig; Živka Matić, associate of the Partisan movement since 1942; granddaughter of Živka Matić, name unknown. In the middle is Petar Matić Dule, one of the leading figures of the Partisan movement in Syrmia, who received the Yugoslav People's Hero award in 1951. (Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection)

However, striking changes began to take place from 1943. At the beginning of that year, the first armed woman was accepted into the ranks of the Danube Partisan Detachment, and in the second Syrmia unit, the Fruška Gora Partisan Detachment, some women already carried weapons. In March 1943, it was noted that several young women held high military-political positions in the units. One such example was Partisan Janja Bogičević, who was appointed as a corporal, causing astonishment among the men. Bogičević quickly advanced and became a battalion commander in the Third Vojvodina Brigade. The traditional understanding that women had no place in combat units lost its foothold, as more and more female Partisans showed courage and ability, a key argument for breaking the pre-war systems of thought and entrenched prejudices.¹⁸

18 Beljanski, *Sećanja*, 237.

From the traditional to the emancipated woman

Women's direct participation in the resistance movement and Partisan units was the main means of emancipation for two reasons: first, women's contributions as warriors, nurses, underground activists or couriers became obvious to the men, and second, women gained self-confidence and awareness of their own worth. Understandings, ambitions, attitudes toward men and relations between women were gradually changing. In certain situations, the air of emancipation and a new self-perception among women fighters was noticeable, as was female Partisans' insistence that Partisan leadership treat men and women equally, and that their commanders and comrades did not discriminate against them on the basis of gender.

In this context, the Partisans' instructions for the territory of Syrmia from November 1943 are particularly indicative. They ordered that only women who really wanted to be nurses be sent to the hospital courses, as there were many cases of those who completed the course refusing to work as nurses and demanding to go to the units as fighters. The same document noted that "some women comrades even take a backpack with the necessary things and then irresponsibly leave it somewhere" and added that "the belief should be dispelled that nurses are less valuable than soldiers and that they are supposedly looked down upon."¹⁹

Over time, disobedience and resistance to certain decisions by superiors appeared among the female fighters. Such attitudes were quite unusual at the beginning of the uprising and to that point, had been exclusively associated with men. Dušanka Jovičić, a female Partisan from Syrmia, recalls in her memoirs a discussion between men and women in the detachment in which the men claimed that only women could be paramedics and that this task suited them best. In the discussion that followed, she said that women could be fighters and asked why men shouldn't be paramedics, much to the astonishment of all the men in the detachment. A more dramatic situation occurred when Dušanka's company decided to disarm all the women due to the lack of weapons and give the confiscated rifles to the male soldiers who had just finished their military training. The women fighters protested, calling for equality, saying that they had captured the rifles in battle at a time when the comrades who were to be armed were not even Partisans,

¹⁹ *Zbornik dokumenata*, 462.

but in the end, in tears, they still had to obey the order. At the same time, the resistance in the second company of the same battalion had an effect, because the commander decided that the rifles should be taken only from the armed nurses, and not from all the women in the unit.²⁰

The rise of the idea of male-female equality is indirectly evidenced by the case of a soldier from the town of Irig who fell ill, and during his absence from the detachment, entered into a romantic relationship with a nurse and then did not return to his unit. In the village of Dobrinči alone, the couple was chased out of five houses in which they were hiding, because of their consistent repetition of sexual relations, which were generally forbidden in the Partisan movement and seen as “immoral behaviour”. A consultation was held among the fighters in the detachment to discuss this issue. There were divided opinions: the men thought that only the nurse should be shot, but the women came forward with a common opinion that both of them should be punished, explaining that “there can’t be only a female whore, without male”.²¹

Obviously, the policy of emancipation, despite all the obstacles, led to more and more tangible results in a very short period of time. The degree of women’s militancy and open rebellion against the male dominated order grew, as did the number of women fighters. At the end of 1942, there were no more than 150 women in the Syrmia Partisan detachments. In 1943, there were already 1.220, and in 1944, there were 2.123. There are estimates that women in military units made up between 5,5% and 12,5% of combatants.²²

At the same time, in parallel with the process of building the idea of gender equality through the participation of women in military units, emancipation took place through mass involvement in the Antifascist Women’s Front (AFŽ). This organisation, crucial in the fight for women’s equality in Yugoslavia, was founded in Bosanski Petrovac in 1942. A network of local committees quickly spread throughout Syrmia. Membership existed in almost every village and was divided into groups, with at least three members

20 Nad, *Sremci*, 84.

21 Museum of Vojvodina/*Muzej Vojvodine* (MV), Collection of Documents, 22.987. *Stenografske beleške razgovora sa Jovanom Beljanskim Lalom*, 18. 9. 1965.

22 Nikola Božić, “Vojvođanke u partizanskoj uniformi”, in *Žene Vojvodine u ratu i revoluciji 1941-1945*, ed. Kecić, 642-643. For women in Partisan military units in Yugoslavia more generally, see: Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans. A History of World War II Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), specifically the chapter “The Heroic and the Mundane. Women in the Units”.



Fig. 2: AFŽ members from Syrmia sew clothes in a Partisans workshop. (Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection)

in each street, who met several times a week.²³ In the third year of the war, nearly 20.000 women from Syrmia were members of the AFŽ. They performed various tasks: from cooking food for fighters, sewing clothes and collecting contributions, to hiding illegals in houses and participating in Partisan guards in villages.

For women who joined the AFŽ, the term used to describe them in communications between members of the Partisan movement, was “organised”. This term was defined in one instruction to local AFŽ organisations in Syrmia, as being “every [female] comrade who reads our press, comes to meetings and contributes to the army”, even when she is temporarily prevented from coming “but tries to come when she can”.²⁴

AFŽ organised courses for their members in which participants learned about the development of society, women in history, the peasant question, the role of women in World War II, and concepts such as slavery, feudalism, capitalism, fascism and socialism. At the end of the course, they were expected to answer, based on Marxist literature, questions such as: What characterised a woman’s life before patriarchy? Is patriarchy a social

23 Petar Vukelić, “NOP u Staropazovačkom srežu 1942. godine”, in *1941-1942 u svedočenjima učesnika narodnooslobodilačke borbe*, knj. 24, ed. Radomir Petković (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1975), 409.

24 MV, 11.923, *Dopis Sreskog odbora za Sremsku Mitrovicu svim mesnim odborima AFŽ*, 7. 3. 1944.

arrangement in which women experience complete enslavement? Has capitalism opened the way to freedom for women? Have women achieved their centuries-long dream in socialism and what does that system provide a woman throughout their lives? What are the achievements of women in today's struggle? What are the forms of women's struggle in this war?²⁵

Most of the course participants in Syrmia were peasant women, mostly without prior theoretical knowledge and reading experience. This is why there were proposals to simplify the programs. Otherwise, as written in a report from February 1944, "the material would be inaccessible and difficult for the majority". The same report stated that all the participants of the course showed effort, willingness and interest, and that in their moments of rest they recounted the contents of Soviet films and sang revolutionary songs.²⁶

What characterised those women who attended the courses and then became heads of the Partisans' movement in the places they lived? We can begin to understand how their virtues, flaws and human weaknesses were perceived by the courses' organisers, when reading the thoroughly written reports about individual participants. Among them is comrade Sejka, who is "very loyal to the fight, but quite dead and non-authoritative and still somewhat biased when it comes to family, but she is trying to improve". Then, comrade Milka, who is "loyal, but does not show much agility in work or personal initiative"; comrade Dobrila who "seems rather quiet at first glance"; comrade Biljana was "agile, active, shows a great desire to learn, receives corrections and advice without complaint". Comrade Stojanka is described as "penetrating, active, bright, but a little vain and doesn't interpret criticism correctly".²⁷ And so the series of names and character analyses continued: "quickly gets to the heart of things", "expresses herself well and easily", "has difficulties in expressing herself", "has difficulty understanding", "unfocussed in class", "emotionally close to her comrades", "combative", "serious", "affectionate", "modest", "obedient"...²⁸

25 MV, 670, *Kontrolna pitanja na završnoj konferenciji kursa AFŽ*, August 1944.

26 MV, 2.338, *Izveštaj o kursu AFŽ u rumskom srezu*, 4. 2. 1944.

27 MV, 11.926. *Izveštaj o radu AFŽ za srez sremskomitrovački za mesec mart 1944*, April 1944.

28 MV, 2.338. The courses were usually organised by women and the reports were written by the organisers and the lecturers, for example the report MV, 11.926, by Ana, regional president of AFŽ in district Sremska Mitrovica, or document MV, 2.338, by the women lecturers Lela and Vida. Only first names were mentioned in such documents, probably for security reasons.

Women gained new knowledge about life and the world at the meetings, reading groups and courses held by the AFŽ's local committees. Previously, they could not access this information in their homes, that is, in the traditional community from which they came. Changes in their attitudes are evidenced by a letter from the activist Drinka, in which she writes about a Slovak woman, a villager from Stara Pazova, and her understanding of literature and her attitude towards other women in the town:

A young, bright woman. Her husband has been in the detachment for more than a year. She is a member of AFŽ. She is interested in theoretical material. She tells how she got married early and did not understand her husband when he left home. Then he invited her too, he taught her and she no longer listened to gossip but became his partner in work. She is happy that she will be able to build herself up and make her husband happy, because she continued his work. "I went out into the street," she says, "among women who are not organised. I can't get close to them yet because they are timid, but I had to go into the yard right away. They talk about such small things that I feel sorry for wasting time. I entered the room and took the book. I read how the first people lived. I came to feudalism and then I stopped because I don't know what it is." I explained feudalism to her. When I finished, she said, like a child, with joy: "Now I will continue reading, and if I don't know, I will ask again."²⁹

Based on the recommendations of the leadership of the Partisan movement in Syrmia, women like the Slovak woman from Drinka's letter became mandatory speakers at assemblies, and an equal part of both the local authorities and people's courts that were formed in the territories liberated and controlled by the Partisans. AFŽ members spoke at meetings in the villages about the struggle for emancipation and equality with men, about women's rights to make decisions in politics, to be able to vote and to get elected, to which the peasant women of Syrmia listened to "breathlessly", because they "liked each word", as it was written in one description of a rally in Ledinci in 1943.³⁰ Also, the reports from such gatherings say that at the beginning, some members of the AFŽ were reserved, confused or excited

29 MV, 18.665, *Drinka Mariji. Pismo o Slovačkinji*, without date.

30 Lukić, "Ledinačke", 285.



Fig. 3: The front pages of *Vojvođanka u borbi* (Vojvodina women in battle) visually presented the idea of equality between women and men. The author of the drawing is Vojislav Nanović (1922-1983), an illustrator in the Partisan printing house in Syrmia, and after the war a director and one of the pioneers of Yugoslav cinema. (Museum of Vojvodina, Collection of newspapers)

and that it was necessary to persuade them to take initiative and to actively participate.³¹ Their insecurity, insufficient self-confidence and shyness were noticeable, because they were not used to being truly equal.³²

The spread of ideas about women's equality was called “ideological-political elevation” (*ideološko-političko uzdizanje*) in party vocabulary. Partisan newspapers played an important role in this process, in which the authors of the texts addressed women as subjects equal to men, encouraging them to join the resistance movement while highlighting examples of heroines who defiantly opposed the occupier, sacrificing their lives for higher goals. In the AFŽ's newsletter, *Vojvođanka u borbi* (Vojvodina women in battle), numerous letters from peasant women from Syrmia were published, among others from Zora O., who stated that “women also hate fascism”. One mother wrote: “Fascists killed what is dearest to me, my only son. And I am proud to be the mother of a daughter who went to avenge

31 *Istina*, no. 40, 15. 11. 1943.

32 *Vojvođanka u borbi* (Cyrillic), no. 4, June-July 1944.

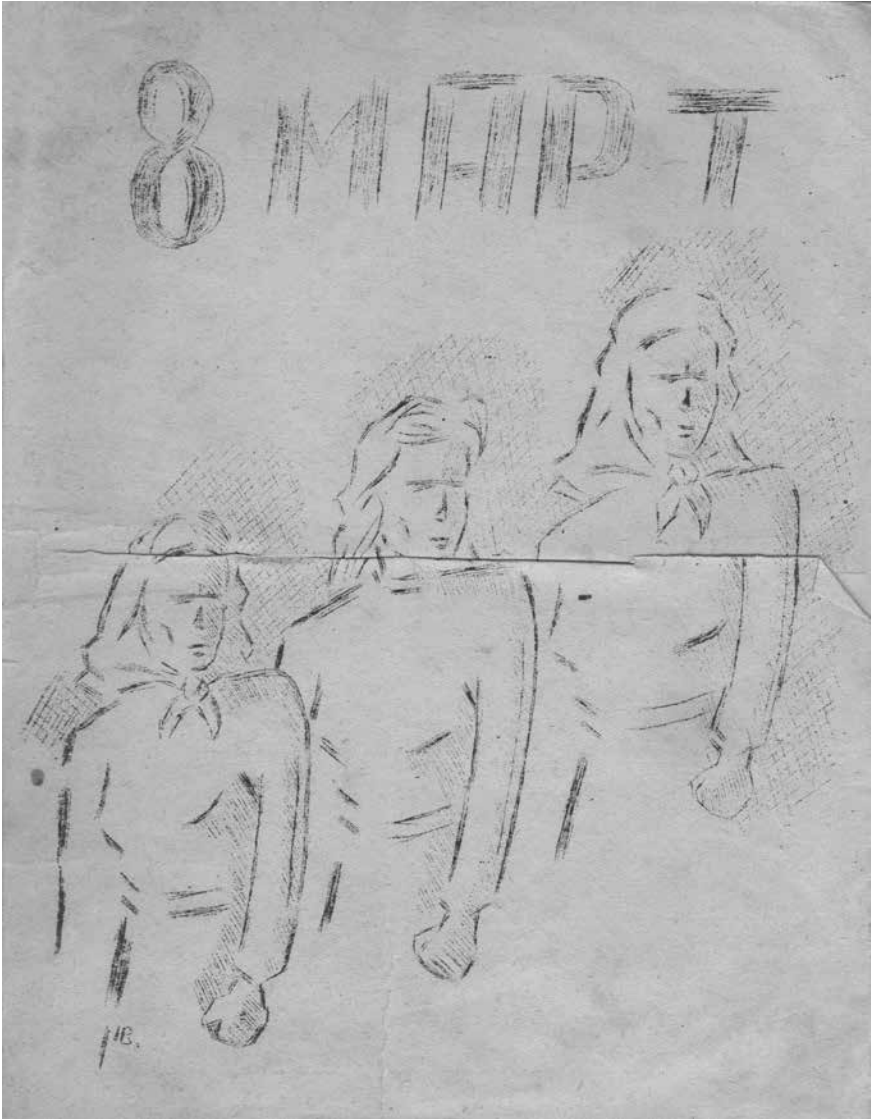


Fig. 4: “8 March” brochure, printed on the territory of Syrmia in 1944. (Museum of Vojvodina, Collection of brochures)

her brother.” Another mother sent the lyrics “I constantly think of revenge / Of the victory of the partisans.”³³

In Partisan propaganda, the Soviet woman was shown as a role model and was presented to the public as the sister of the Yugoslav woman. Readers were informed that in the USSR, pregnant women received 56 days of

³³ Ibid., no. 1, January 1944.

paid leave before and after giving birth, which enabled Soviet women to build a new society and be good mothers.³⁴ The massive celebrations of 8 March were of great importance for the Partisans, both as a specific women's holiday and a day of "fighting for solidarity of women of the whole world".³⁵

As an integral part of the widely organised process of emancipation of women in the countryside, the Partisan movement paid particular attention to organising mass literacy courses for women, even those of an older age. Thanks to this program, and motivated by the desire to write to their family members among the Partisans or in captivity and camps, many women wrote their own letters for the first time. They also wrote their first "essays", one of which began with the words: "I am a fifty-year-old woman, so I am struggling, I am studying first grade."³⁶

However, the men did not surrender so easily. In Partisan newspapers, there are reports about gatherings where Partisans refused to listen to women's speeches.³⁷ At youth meetings, while the girls were reading the news aloud, the boys argued, talking frantically, humming, shouting, teasing them and not paying attention to what they were saying.³⁸

Basil Davidson also attended one such meeting in the village of Vizić, near the town of Ilok. As he writes in his memoirs, the AFŽ committee convened a public gathering to discuss "politics". The term "politics" could mean anything, from sewing shirts for Partisans to the attitude to be taken towards their husbands' drinking. When the meeting started, one of the women pounded her hand on the table and appealed for silence, while the men "listened in resentful silence, belching every now and then to emphasise their independence and their perfect right to interrupt a woman's conference if they had a mind to." The discussion was about the sunflower harvest, and Davidson remarked about one older man: "Yovan [sic] has held his peace for long enough. Never before, probably, has he seen such a thing as a woman's meeting. His contempt for it curls round every word that he utters." At the same time, "several old gaffers murmur their approval and belch more loudly than ever". Observing this, for him, very unusual event, the Briton concluded:

34 Ibid., no. 4, June-July 1944; no. 1, January 1944.

35 8. mart (1944, no specific month).

36 Kovačević, "Antifašistički front žena u Vojvodini", 112.

37 *Plamen: džepne novine Starih Banovaca*, no. 1, 26 December 1943.

38 *Posavski osvjetnik*, no. 6, 10 September 1943.

The Pankhursts³⁹ would have rejoiced for this embryo of a woman's movement was a good deal more promising than it seemed on the surface. The men... whom these young women, still embarrassed and unsure of their freedom, would one day marry, were growing daily used to the notion that women might be individual and independent beings – they had women, intensely individual and independent, fighting in their own ranks.⁴⁰

New privacy and a new woman

Numerous obstacles appeared in the fight for women's equality. However, although the structures of the old traditional society were not easily surrendered, the process of emancipation continued. Encompassing different social spheres, the process finally began encroaching on privacy and family relations. In its depth, the social structure rested on the patriarchal model and the idea of male superiority. This was the way families functioned, with women's status and roles assigned in a strict family hierarchy. Therefore, a particularly important dimension of the emancipation process related to freedom in the sphere of privacy, by creating new family relationships, a new awareness and view of one's own rights and marriage, including the free choice of a marriage partner and protection from the arbitrariness of men – that is, husbands and parents.

When Basil Davidson spoke about the motives behind women's mass involvement in the fight with a Partisan in the village of Vizić, she immediately highlighted physical abuse as the main reason: "It's quite simple things we want. We don't want the men to have the right to beat us: that's the main thing. And then we want to have some say in how things get done and to be listened to."⁴¹ Violence in the family was a frequent phenomenon, and some commanders of units and political commissars, aware of the scale of the problem, condemned the abusers, explaining to the fighters that this was not in accordance with the moral character of the Partisans. Since 1941, it was a principled position that fighters and underground activists who

39 Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and her daughters were British suffragettes who advocated a militant approach in the fight for women's rights.

40 Davidson, *Partisan*, 232-236.

41 *Ibid.*, 235-236.

repeated violent behaviour were excluded from the movement, deemed “unworthy to be a Partisan”.⁴²

A typical case with a family abuser happened in the village of Krušed-ol. A Partisan named Slavko stood out as a brave fighter and even volunteered for difficult tasks, but at home he beat his wife sadistically every day. When the corporal admonished him, he replied that it was an “old Syrmian custom..., a woman should be beaten as often as possible”, because, as he believed, “the more you beat her, the more she loves you”. After admonitions and threats to kick him out of his squad did not have any effect, the already well-known defender of women, Jovan Beljanski Lala, was involved in solving the problem. He came to the violent fighter’s house and found him beating his wife with his fists and feet in the middle of the yard, holding her by the hair, while the children were crying helplessly. When he saw the visitor, Slavko kicked the woman once more and, as if nothing unusual had happened, went to meet Beljanski. The commander was very angry and in the name of the Partisan movement ordered his fighter to stop beating and harassing his wife, telling him that the Partisans should not behave like that and that if he did not obey the order, he would be expelled from the unit. Beljanski wrote in his memoirs that the bully “watched him not believing his ears. He could not believe that Lala had come to lecture him on how to behave in his house.” However, the intervention was completely successful: Slavko no longer beat his wife, because he was very anxious not to be excluded from the Partisan movement.⁴³

Apart from a violent husband, women also often needed protection from his parents who lived in the same household. Representatives of the Partisan government in liberated villages were often called upon to judge in such cases. Private problems stemmed from her position at the bottom of the traditional family hierarchy. In one such case, there was a conflict between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, between whom there had already previously been tensions because the son had married without the mother’s permission. When he joined the Partisans, the mother-in-law immediately started insulting, slapping and beating her daughter-in-law. However, she was an activist in the AFŽ, so after the intervention of the

42 Jovan Beljanski, “U istočnom delu Iriškog sreza 1941. godine”, in *1941-1942 u svedočenjima učesnika narodnooslobodilačke borbe*, volume 3, ed. Radomir Petković (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1975), 319.

43 Beljanski, *Sećanja*, 175-176.

organisation and the threat that she would be shot, the mother-in-law got scared and stopped the abuse.⁴⁴

The Partisan authorities tried also to protect women in divorce cases, or in cases where (as per the vocabulary of the time) the husband would “chase away” (*oterati*) the wife from the home. In the village of Buđanovci, for example, a conflict took place in 1942 between married partners, both aged 35, because the wife allegedly could not give birth to a child. The husband wanted an heir and started living with another woman, but his original wife demanded to be accepted back into the household. When the husband refused, arguing that his new wife was pregnant, she asked for the return of the dowry she had brought with her when she got married. In the end, it was only after the intervention of the Partisan authorities and their support for the woman that he accepted the agreement and compensated his ex-wife.⁴⁵

A similar situation happened with a member of a Partisan squad who got married, but “chased away” his wife from the house after only two days. His actions became a topic of discussion in his squad and were judged immoral, the main argument being that “he thinks he can change women like gypsies change horses”, for which he was punished by expulsion from the unit.⁴⁶

The change in the understanding of their own position, including matters involving family, private and future married life, appeared in the reflections of young women engaged in the resistance movement. Partisan member Dušanka Jovičić testified about this in her memoirs, writing that she could hear in intimate conversations that, unlike before the war, women no longer thought about marriage, but that now their main preoccupation was reading party material and activism in the villages. In the village of Jankovac, a young woman, 19 years old, made a series of statements demonstrating the changes in perceiving the authority of parents and the institution of marriage: “They say that we will no longer marry those we do not love. That’s good. They say that even dowry will not play any role in love. Good!” This young woman was also looking forward to a new time, when their fathers would no longer choose their husbands, but she also feared that girls in the villages would remain unmarried, because fighters would only marry Partisan women.⁴⁷

44 MV, 21.693. *Memoarska grada: Jefta Jeremić.*

45 Ibid.

46 MV, 22.987.

47 Nad, *Sremci*, 52, 204-205.

Jovičić also mentions an interesting, and at the time unpleasant, episode in her memoirs, about a request that female Partisans in the unit in which she was a commissar undergo a gynaecological examination. This request was linked to the fear among the unit's commanders of the spread of syphilis within the fighters. But Jovičić understood this problem not only as a medical issue, but also as a matter of insulting the personal dignity of female fighters. Explaining that this type of examination for young girls in the detachment is an unknown and taboo topic, she wrote in her memoirs that she answered as follows to the Partisan doctor who had requested the examination:

Who will force them to undergo an examination? I don't believe that any of them has ever been to such an examination. Many of them have certainly never even heard of such a disease. These are all young girls... from our villages. And as for newcomers, they went through our medical commissions in Fruška Gora. I can guarantee for all of them, comrade doctor, if this is enough. I do not agree with such an examination. It is an insult to personality.⁴⁸

Highlighting the insults against members of the Partisan movement in the private and intimate sphere was an important part of the report written by the AFŽ in March 1944 about its work in the villages of Syrmia. This report summarises the results of two years of work and the state of the organisation just a few months before the liberation of Syrmia, and illustrates how different aspects of the AFŽ's work were connected and that the private life of women was also one of the key factors for the movement's functioning.

The report shows that in some places, the organisation functioned flawlessly, but there were also places where there were problems. In the village of Šuljam, the AFŽ leadership was replaced due to a lack of discipline. In Grgurevci, some male fighters "conspired" and spread rumours about the "unexemplary life of some women", which "had a very unfavourable effect on the growth and development of the organisation". In Šišatovac, the president of the local AFŽ resigned due to rumours that she was in a relationship with a comrade from the shoe workshop who was staying with her. She completely lost her authority in the village and could no longer be engaged

48 Dušanka Nađ, *Cvet nikao iz smrti* (Novi Sad: Savez udruženja boraca, 1967) (Cyrillic), 44-45.



Fig. 5: Dušanka Jovičić with comrade Steva Žutić (Bogatić, 1944); after the war, she married the general and future People's Hero, Kosta Nađ. (Museum of Vojvodina, Photo Collection)

in even less important jobs in the organisation. In the same place, it was noted that the men from the NOO:

[...] do not take the local AFŽ seriously. During the celebration of 8 March, one member of the NOO interrupted the woman comrade while she was reading out the brochure, saying that it was enough. Also, a comrade from NOO who was supposed to take part in a theatrical performance, was made fun of by other comrades from the place and left the celebration... All this started to strongly demoralise the women comrades. [Male] Comrades should support them.

The report also noted that the members of the Partisan movement from the shoe workshop in the village “do not behave nicely” and that “obscene expressions and ambiguous jokes rain down on women at every step”. In the village of Laćarak, the president of AFŽ was dismissed “because she acted in a dictatorial manner and did not want to improve”. In Kuzmin, the organisation’s growth was disturbed by the behaviour of two NOO members, who at the same time maintained intimate relationships with several women. Also, the report stated that it was necessary to take certain measures to strengthen the organisation, and, for example, to criticise not only women, but also men in cases of “unexemplary behaviour”; that many women were not included in the organisation even though they were antifascist; that there was low “political awareness” among certain women leaders and members of AFŽ, which is why they were prone to demoralisation and wavering, and that “hesitant and ineffective women who have not improved should be replaced”.⁴⁹

* * *

The strength of this continuous process of emancipation, despite all the problems and obstacles, is convincingly evidenced by the fact that in 1944, the Partisan leadership stated that the AFŽ in Syrmia tended towards separating into a completely independent organisation and that some AFŽ members openly resented when other party leaders would interfere in their work.⁵⁰

49 MV, 11.926.

50 Ljubica Vasilić, *Pokrajinski komitet KPJ za Vojvodinu: 1941-1945* (Sremski Karlovci: Arhiv Vojvodine; Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine; Istorijski arhiv PK SK za Vojvodinu, 1971) (Cyrillic), 323.

Many women remained outside this process of emancipation during the war, or accepted only much later the idea of equality with men, but many of them went from traditional to emancipated women precisely through the Partisan movement. A particularly striking illustration is the conversation between Basil Davidson and a Partisan woman known as Baba, a field worker who was in charge of transferring volunteers from the nearby province of Bačka to Sylvania.

In his book, Davidson paints a portrait of Baba as a strong-willed, capable, tough and optimistic person. She was a 23-year-old widow, and her late husband had been a village merchant who died a Partisan. When she joined the Partisan movement, furious and desperate because of her husband's death, Baba was just a frightened girl, with no knowledge of politics and war, except that as a wife it was necessary to accompany her husband. As Davidson notes, "for her the movement had a personal significance that was far more than political: she had found in it the materials of a new and larger life and she cleaved to it as if she had conceived it and created it herself. She saw that she had become through it a changed individual, larger and better and stronger than before." Over time, she adopted the slogans about equality and spoke them with conviction in discussions with her comrades:

We don't help the men. We fight alongside them, equal with them... We're fighting for women's dignity... We're in the movement because the whole of society's changing, and it can't change without the women being there too. It's a new society we want – new right through, men and women too... You think women are inferior to men, only good for sleeping with you and having babies. But women are individuals, too, and they have their part in our revolution just as much as the men.

Impressed by Baba's personality and attitudes, Davidson recorded her words, paradigmatic for interpreting the role of the Partisan movement in the process of women's emancipation:

I was a fat-headed peasant girl two years ago with no more idea of the world than the price of bacon and the best way to get the better of tax-collectors... But I didn't read books or do any more writing

than to reckon up the shop accounts; and my husband was about the same... The movement's like a university for me. The movement's done everything for me. Or perhaps I've done everything for the movement. I don't know. But I see things differently now. I'll never be a simple shopkeeper again. I'll see more in life than that. Perhaps I'll marry again: but not yet – I loved my husband. And then only if I find a man who'll share his life with me, and not expect me to bend myself always to him. I want to live. I want to make something in the world. There's so much we've got to do.⁵¹

Conclusion

The Yugoslav women's antifascist struggle in World War II had two main motives and goals: 1) liberation from the occupier; 2) emancipation in relation to men and traditional society. Overcoming the norms, morals and rules of that social environment from which the majority of Syrmian Partisans came was the primary goal of the emancipatory policy held by the KPJ and the Partisan movement, with its military, ideological and political dimension.

As we have seen, it was a painstaking process, with a series of obstacles and problems on the ground. There was a constant need to explain the politics of emancipation again and again to the Partisan movement's fighters and supporters. By participating in the struggle and being a member of AFŽ, through mass engagement, women gained new knowledge, self-confidence and conviction in their own worth. To a certain extent, the changes affected the sphere of private life, the attitude towards marriage, the man as a spouse, the parents and domestic violence. The idea of women's equality gradually changed the traditional understandings, deeply rooted among the population of Yugoslavia, Vojvodina and Syrmia, including new consideration for the areas of privacy and the personal emotions of the individual.

At the end, let's return to the question: how should "outsiders" understand the struggle for women's equality in the traditional village communities of Syrmia during World War II? There is no doubt that in such a short period of time it was not possible to erase the traditional understandings

51 Davidson, *Partisan*, 255-264.

that had existed for centuries, but at the same time, space was created for the largest and fastest step that had ever been taken, with concrete results and consequences, not only in public speech and propaganda, but also in the consciousness of many individuals, both men and women. Physical and verbal violence was not eradicated, but it was marked as unacceptable from a new angle – ideological, political and military. A good Partisan could not be a bully and could not underestimate and insult his female comrades and other members of the liberation movement. Viewed by the standards of that time, this was a new dimension, important as a foothold for changing the firmly-established traditional structures. It goes without saying that the process of emancipation did not end with the end of the war, but the position of women was redefined, and space was opened for their broader political and social activism, including gaining the right to vote in the 1945 elections.⁵² At the same time, during the war, numerous women, with their antifascist orientation and combativeness, conquered new areas of freedom by themselves and for themselves.

52 On the position of women in Vojvodina and Serbia in the post-war years see Ivana Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke. Društvena emancipacija partizanski u Srbiji 1945.-1953.* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju i Evoluta, 2011); Gordana Stojakovic, *Rodna perspektiva u novinama Antifašističkog fronta žena (1945-1953)* (Novi Sad: Zavod za ravnopravnost polova, 2012)

Part 3.
“Grey Zones” of Resistance and
Collaboration

SS-Men Against Nazism? The Controversial Case of the Mutiny in Villefranche-de-Rouergue (17 September 1943)

Xavier Bougarel

On the outskirts of Villefranche-de-Rouergue, a town in southwestern France, a monument stands representing four men shot dead. Next to it, a plaque honours the memory of “freedom fighters who rose up against Nazism on 17 September 1943”. This tribute is made in the name of “their compatriots from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina” and the people of Villefranche themselves. However, it is not specified that these insurgents coming from afar actually belonged to the Waffen-SS. This raises several questions: Who were they, really? What were their motives? Did they act alone? To answer these questions, we must go back to February 1943, consult various archives, books and newspapers, and try to put together the puzzle of the Villefranche mutiny.

* * *

On 10 February 1943, Adolf Hitler signed a decree creating the 13th SS Division, commonly known as the *Handschar* Division.¹ At that time, the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH), led by the Ustasas (Croatian fascists) covered roughly the territory of present-day Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It considered not only Catholics, but also Muslims in these regions to be Croats. Against this background, the Nazi leaders planned to create an SS division of Muslim volunteers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by German officers from the Reich or from the German minorities of southeastern Europe. However, not enough Muslims were willing to join this division, and the Waffen-SS leaders had to re-

1 On the 13th SS Division, see Xavier Bougarel, *La division Handschar: Waffen-SS de Bosnie 1943-1945* (Paris: Humensis, 2020); George Lepre, *Himmler's Bosnian Division: The Waffen-SS Handschar Division 1943-1945* (Atglen: Schiffer, 1997).

wise their plans, taking several thousand Muslim soldiers from the ranks of the NDH's regular army, on the one hand, and admitting Catholic recruits into the 13th SS Division, on the other.

In July 1943, the 13th SS Division was sent for training to southwestern France. Its pioneer battalion, numbering around 1.000 men, was billeted in Villefranche-de-Rouergue. On the night of 16 to 17 September 1943, a serious mutiny broke out, during which the insurgents executed five of their six German officers and took control of the town for a few hours, before part of the troops turned against the mutineers, and reinforcements arrived from Rodez. The ensuing battle was followed by severe repression, with an unknown number of executions. An equally unknown number of insurgents managed to escape; some would join the French Resistance.

The Villefranche mutiny was an important event because it was the first case of armed rebellion within the Waffen-SS. In the following weeks, the 13th SS Division was transferred to Germany to complete its training. In March 1944, the division returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it brutally fought Tito's Partisans, before disintegrating in the autumn of 1944 under the effect of massive desertions. These are, roughly speaking, the facts that historians who have worked on the 13th SS Division or on the Villefranche mutiny agree on. But what else do we know?

* * *

Let's begin by looking at the French sources.

The first written account of the mutiny comes from Louis Fontanges, then mayor of Villefranche-de-Rouergue.² In his journal, he recounts the mutiny as seen from the French side: the street fights; the only surviving German officer, Dr. Wilfried Schweiger, commanding the soldiers hostile to the mutiny and sounding the alarm; the arrival of reinforcements. According to Fontanges, the Germans suspected that the "communists" or North African soldiers hospitalised in the town were behind the mutiny. For his part, the mayor was mainly concerned with exonerating the local population of responsibility, to avoid reprisals. He estimates that some 20 SS soldiers died in combat and that 10 to 50 others were executed and buried in the

2 Louis Fontanges, *Journal de l'occupation allemande à Villefranche en août et septembre 1943*, unpublished and undated document, Municipal Archives/Archives municipales de Villefranche-de-Rouergue, dossier 4H11.

Sainte Marguerite field (which we will refer to again in the following pages). He also notes that, on All Saints' Day, anonymous people laid flowers on the mass grave of the executed soldiers. Thus began the commemoration of this mutiny, just as the pioneer battalion had left the town.

At an undetermined date, but close to the end of the war, Jean Baudin – the new mayor of the town, elected after the Liberation in 1944 – also compiled his memories.³ Baudin attributes the mutiny to the harsh discipline imposed by the German officers on their men. He also mentions a “secret order from Marshal Tito” and the presence in Toulouse of a representative of the Yugoslav government. According to Baudin, the French Resistance helped some SS soldiers desert, but never envisaged a mutiny. He estimates that this mutiny resulted in the execution of 300 to 400 mutineers, 20 to 25 of whom were shot and buried in the Sainte Marguerite field.

An article published by Paul Gayraud in 1947 in the *Revue du Rouergue* provides little new information, but assumes that the SS soldiers had mutinied for fear of being sent to the Eastern Front.⁴ He estimates that about a hundred of them managed to hide with help from the population, and reports the rumour that Schweiger escaped execution because that night, he was at his mistress' house. But the author doubts the truthfulness of many of the eyewitness reports, and hopes that the German archives, once opened, would provide much more information on the event.

Finally, a report written in the 1950s by André Pavelet, a former Resistance leader for the Languedoc-Roussillon region, largely repeats Louis Fontanges' journal and Paul Gayraud's article, but explains that Schweiger was spared by the mutineers because he pretended to support their actions.⁵ Moreover, Pavelet claims to have met personally at that time a Yugoslav who spoke perfect French, and whom he identified wrongly as the owner of the hotel where the officers were staying. With this unnamed Yugoslav's help, he wrote a leaflet urging the SS soldiers to be patient. In fact, according to him, the French Resistance did not plan to push them to revolt unless the Allies landed on the French coast.

3 Jean Baudin, *Note pour servir au récit de la tragédie du 17 septembre 1943*, unpublished and undated document, Archives municipales de Villefranche-de-Rouergue, dossier 4H11.

4 Paul Gayraud, “La mutinerie des Croates à Villefranche-de-Rouergue”, *Revue du Rouergue*, no. 1, 1947, 228-238.

5 André Pavelet, *La rébellion des Croates à Villefranche de Rouergue le 17 septembre 1943*, unpublished and undated document, Defence Historical Service/Service historique de la défense (SHD) (Vincennes), dossier GR 13 P 155 (région R 3).

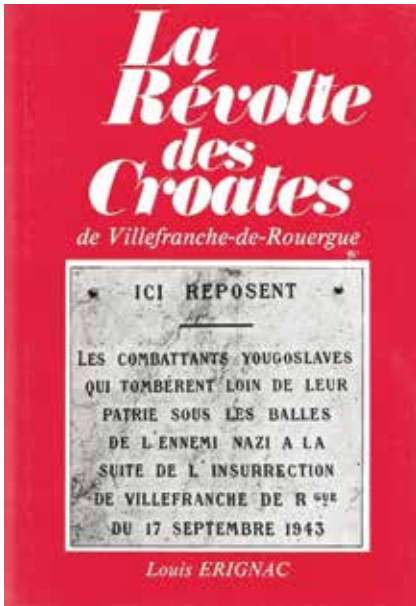


Fig. 1: Cover of the book published by Louis Érignac in 1980. (© Louis Érignac)

Although these various documents provide a certain amount of information, they are incomplete and somewhat contradictory, and they say little about the identity or motivations of the mutineers. It was not until 1980 that a semi-official French account of the mutiny appeared, namely the book *La révolte des Croates de Villefranche-de-Rouergue* (The Revolt of the Croats of Villefranche-de-Rouergue) by Louis Érignac, a history teacher, communist activist and president of the local branch of the National Association of Resistance Veterans (*Association Nationale des Anciens Combattants de la Résistance* – ANACR).⁶ This

book repeats the previous accounts but is also based on the Yugoslav press – to which we will return – and on the testimony of Božo Jelenek, a former member of the 13th SS Division. He cites as leaders of the mutineers Ferid Džanić, the only Muslim officer in the battalion; Nikola Vukelić, a Catholic Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO); and Božo Jelenek himself, another Catholic Croat. Érignac writes that Dr. Schweiger, an ethnic German (*Volksdeutscher*) from Slovenia, is said to have introduced himself to the mutineers as a Yugoslav, and points to SS Imam Halim Malkoč as the one who allegedly persuaded some of the troop to oppose the mutiny. He also presents the Yugoslav Milan Kalafatić and the Brazilian Apolino de Carvalho, two former members of the International Brigades, as outsiders who helped organise the mutiny. Finally, he refers to the mutineers as “Croats”, the term used by the SS soldiers when they introduced themselves to the townspeople, but also speaks of “Bosnian Croats and Muslims”, and believes that the most appropriate term would be “Yugoslavs”. Moreover, on the book’s cover, a photo of the commemorative plaque erected in 1950 to honour the mutineers refers to the “Yugoslav fighters” (Fig. 1).

⁶ Louis Érignac, *La révolte des Croates de Villefranche-de-Rouergue* (Villefranche-de-Rouergue: L. Érignac, 1988).



Fig. 2: Press clipping from 1946, the legend reads: “View of the Croats’ grave after the ceremony”. The text on the provisional monument reads: “To the Yugoslav patriots who died for their country and for freedom”. (Source: Božidar Vitković’s personal archive, origin unknown)

* * *

Now let’s have a look at the commemoration of the mutiny.

On 17 September 1944, shortly after the liberation of Villefranche-de-Rouergue, a first public commemoration was held on the Sainte Marguerite field, with members of French Resistance organisations participating. At the request of the Yugoslav Military Mission in Paris, the decision was made not to exhume the bodies. It was not until 1946 that an official ceremony was organised by a Franco-Yugoslav Remembrance Committee, in the presence of Resistance veterans’ associations, local and departmental authorities, and a large Yugoslav delegation. A provisional monument was erected, with Yugoslav flags and wreaths (Fig. 2). At that time, the Yugoslav authorities seemed to attach some importance to the Villefranche mutiny, and planned to erect a monument on the Sainte Marguerite field by the Croatian artist Vanja Radauš, representing four men falling under German bullets. But their interest quickly waned, and Radauš’s statues were eventually used for a war memorial in the town of Pula, in Croatia.



Fig. 3: The old monument in Villefranche, established in 1950. (Source: Zvonimir Bernwald's personal archive, origin unknown)

This first memorial phase ended in 1950 with the installation of a more modest monument on the Sainte Marguerite field, now called the Field of the Yugoslav Martyrs (*Champ des martyrs yougoslaves*). This monument paid tribute to the “Yugoslav fighters who fell far from their homeland under the bullets of the Nazi enemy” (Fig. 3). From this time onwards, there was an ambiguity concerning the national identity of the mutineers: while the people of Villefranche spoke of the “revolt of the Croats”, the official name was “Yugoslavs”. This blurring of identities did not create any major difficulties

at the time, as Croatia was then part of Yugoslavia, but it would be at the centre of the controversies of the 1990s, as we shall see later on.

In the following years, the Yugoslav authorities stopped attending the annual commemoration. However, Croatian anti-communist organisations took advantage of this absence to join the ceremonies, leaving the French authorities perplexed as to how they should react. This explains why the Yugoslav embassy again sent its representatives to the 17 September ceremonies from 1960 onward. Around the same time, the left-wing municipality led by Robert Fabre took two important decisions. Firstly, at the suggestion of a Croat living in France, the road leading to the Field of the Yugoslav Martyrs was christened... Avenue of the Croats (*Avenue des Croates*). Secondly, the town's elected officials asked the Yugoslav authorities to organise the twinning of Villefranche with a Croatian town. From 1968 onward, the Yugoslav authorities emphasised the role played by Božo Jelenek, a member of the pioneer battalion who, after the mutiny, joined the maquis of the Montagne Noire, located south of Villefranche. Jelenek was presented as one of the leaders of the mutiny, and he took part in the annual commemorations until his death in 1987. This second memorial phase was characterised by a broad consensus that the Villefranche mutiny was both Yugoslav and anti-fascist – a consensus barely disturbed by the (Catholic)

masses organised by the anti-communist association *Amitié France-Croatie* in homage to the (mainly Muslim) victims of German repression.

* * *

Now let us look at the Yugoslav sources.

In Yugoslavia, certain aspects of the Villefranche mutiny were known from the early post-war years. In 1947, the State Commission for the Establishment of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Local Collaborators stated that the mutiny had been led by the Muslim officer Ferid Džanić, who had ties with the French Resistance and the British secret services.⁷ According to the same commission, the mutiny was supposed to spread to other units of the division, but the surviving German officer and Imam Halim Malkoč thwarted this plan. A few months earlier, the district court in Bihać had sentenced Malkoč to death, citing his role in the events in Villefranche, among other misdeeds.⁸

In the following years, Božo Jelenek wrote several confidential reports about the Villefranche mutiny.⁹ He attributed it to the harsh discipline and poor rations, and also mentioned the impact of the Italian surrender on 8 September 1943. Jelenek claimed to have infiltrated the 13th SS Division at the request of the Yugoslav Communist Party and to have organised the mutiny with Džanić, Vukelić and two NCOs whose names he had forgotten. According to him, contacts had been established with the French Resistance, which was to provide guides to help the mutineers reach the maquis, but the date of the mutiny had to be brought forward because of the growing suspicions of the German officers and, in the absence of the guides, the mutineers had to fight in the town. Jelenek estimated that around 50 mutineers were shot dead. Finally, he told of having joined the maquis of the Montagne Noire with help from Villefranche residents and Yugoslavs enrolled in the French Resistance, including Milan Kalafatić.

7 Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, *Referat o 13. SS diviziji 'Handžar'*, 20 March 1947, Military Archives/*Vojni Arhiv* (Belgrade), Reich Collection, carton 9, fascicle 4, document 25.

8 District court Bihać, 5 November 1946, no. 320/46, Archive of Bosnia-Herzegovina/*Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine*, Provincial Commission for the Establishment of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Local Collaborators, Verdicts, box 3.

9 See in particular Božo Jelenek, *O herojskoj pobuni bataljona prinudno mobiliziranih Hrvata u Villefransu*, unpublished and undated document, author's personal archive.

Until the late 1960s, however, the Villefranche mutiny was unknown to the Yugoslav public. At that time, in a context of political liberalisation and recognition of a specific Muslim nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, several Croatian and Bosnian newspapers began writing about the event.¹⁰ The journalists relied on the eyewitness accounts of former SS soldiers living in Yugoslavia – including Božo Jelenek – or went to Villefranche to meet French witnesses and consult the municipal archives. But the results of their investigations do not make things any clearer. Several serials focused on the personality of Ferid Džanić, who was actually a Partisan captured in the spring of 1943 by the Germans before reappearing shortly thereafter as a Waffen-SS officer. From then on, some believed him to be an agent infiltrated into the 13th SS Division by the communists, and others thought he was a traitor. The question of the mutineers' links with the French Resistance was just as controversial; some believed that there were no such ties, and others questioned the absence of the guides supposedly promised by the Resistance. More generally, all journalists debated whether the mutiny was spontaneous or premeditated. Some points of agreement nevertheless emerged, such as the harmful role played by Imam Malkoč. In one of the serials published in the press, Jelenek stated that Džanić had given up on plans to execute Malkoč, for fear of sparking a negative reaction from Muslim soldiers. Finally, the journalists seemed to agree on the number of 60 executions at the end of the revolt. Louis Érignac drew on these articles to write *La Révolte des Croates*, cherry-picking the facts that suited him and adding his own. In this way, French and Yugoslav sources were intermingled.

At the same period, French and Yugoslav memorial practices also converged, before rapidly diverging. Indeed, Yugoslav journalists who had stayed in Villefranche echoed the request for twinning with a town in Croatia. But the official response was evasive. The Standing Conference of Yugoslav Cities proposed the city of Slavonski Brod in Croatia, but the latter showed no interest; later, the city of Bihać in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Ferid Džanić was born, was put forward, but with no more success. Above all, the associations of former Yugoslav Partisans were openly hostile to these plans, as they deemed it inappropriate to honour the memory of SS

10 See in particular *Večernje novine* (Sarajevo) 8-16 May 1967, 17 May-16 June 1967 and 27 July-18 August 1967; *Vjesnik* (Zagreb) 31 March-2 April 1968; *Vjesnik u srijedu* (Zagreb) 21 August-16 October 1968.

soldiers. The twinning project therefore remained stillborn. This hostility to the promotion of the Villefranche mutiny was also visible in the press. Thus, in October 1967, shortly after publishing three successive serials on the revolt, the Sarajevo newspaper *Večernje novine* had to publish a fourth one devoted to the crimes of the 13th SS Division.¹¹ In the following decades, attacks on Muslim political and religious elites during World War II gathered strength, as they were accused of having been complicit in the creation of this division.¹² As the Yugoslav federation slowly disintegrated, the consensus around the Villefranche mutiny also began to crack.

* * *

Let us now turn to the 1990s, when this consensus was ultimately shattered.

Several decades of peaceful commemorations were followed by a third memorial phase from 1990 onwards, marked by heated controversy over the nationality of the mutineers, their motives, and their real or supposed links with the French Resistance. The Yugoslav federation finally collapsed in 1991-1992, and war broke out in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the young independent Croatia, a new reading of the mutiny was put forward: as the Croatian-born historian Mirko Grmek declared, it had to be shown that the revolt was “the work of Croatian nationalists and not of Yugoslav communists”.¹³ To do this, some played on the fact that in 1943, Catholics and Muslims were considered “Croats” by the Ustasha regime. The Croatian embassy in Paris therefore denounced the reference to “Yugoslav fighters” as a communist lie, and demanded that the Croatian nationality of the mutineers be emphasised during the annual commemorations.

After the presence of Croatian delegations caused various incidents, the municipality of Villefranche decided to withdraw from the official ceremony in 1993. The ceremony was then organised by the National Association of Resistance Veterans (ANACR) and reduced to a commemoration to the tune of the *Chant des Partisans* (Partisans’ Song), without any speeches. In 1997, the ANACR decided that it would no longer organise the annual ceremony, which was taken over by the association *Solidarité France-Croatie* of

11 Jeso Perić, “Krv na kućnom pragu”, *Večernje novine* (Sarajevo) 14 October-5 December 1967.

12 See in particular Derviš Sušić, *Parergon* (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 1980).

13 “Hrvatski nacionalisti, a ne jugoslavenski komunisti”, *Nedjeljni vjesnik* (Zagreb), 19 November 1995.

Toulouse, with no official French delegation in attendance. The controversies were not limited to the nationality of the mutineers. In 1993, the leaflet accompanying a commemorative stamp of the Croatian postal service repeated the thesis that the French Resistance had not provided the promised guides to lead the mutineers to the maquis.¹⁴ This assertion provoked an indignant reaction from the ANACR and partly explains its decision to no longer organise the commemorations.

It was not until the 2000s that a new memorial consensus took shape. At that time, the independence of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were facts accepted by all. Additionally, there was an important local factor: the election of a right-wing municipal government in Villefranche in 2001 led by the new mayor Serge Rocques. He decided to attend the annual 17 September commemorations again, alongside the Croatian delegation. In 2005, the appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Philippe Douste-Blazy, a right-wing politician from southwestern France who was very involved in supporting Croatian independence, further facilitated the rapprochement that was then taking shape between the French and Croatian authorities.

The final shift came in 2006, when the monument installed in 1950 was replaced with a memorial including a copy of Vanja Radauš's statues and the plaque mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (*Fig. 4*). It should be noted that the expression “compatriots of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina” made it possible to overlook the Croatian and/or Bosniak (i.e., Muslim¹⁵) national identity of the mutineers, since only their geographical origin is indicated. This persistent blurring of identities was obvious in the speeches made at the inauguration of the memorial on 17 September 2006: Philippe Douste-Blazy spoke of “young Croats and Bosniaks”, but Ivo Sanader, the Prime Minister of Croatia, referred to insurgents “of Muslim or Catholic faith”.¹⁶ This ushered in a fourth memorial phase wherein the Croatian delegation occupied a central, even dominant, place, before representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Bosniak community in France joined the commemoration. This new memorial consensus was sealed by

14 *Prigodna poštanska marka Republike Hrvatske: pobuna hrvatskih vojnika u Villefranche-de-Rouergue 1943*, Zagreb: Hrvatska pošta i telekomunikacije, 17 November 1993.

15 The national name “*Musliman*” (Muslim), adopted in the 1960s to designate Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was replaced by “*Bošnjak*” (Bosniak) in 1993.

16 Speeches delivered at the commemorative ceremony on 17 September 2006 in Villefranche-de-Rouergue (Aveyron), accessed on 15 April 2010 on the website of the Croatian Embassy in France: http://www.amb-croatie.fr/actualités/villefranche_allocutions2006.htm.



Fig. 4: The new monument in Villefranche established in 2006. (Photo: Xavier Bougarel)

the twinning of Villefranche with the Croatian town of Pula in 2008 and the Bosnian town of Bihać in 2010. But it remained incomplete, as in 2006, the ANACR opposed the decision to take down the former Yugoslav monument and decided to boycott the inauguration of the new one.

* * *

We shall now focus on how historians viewed the event over this same period.

As the commemorations in Villefranche were being transformed, a vast effort was under way to rewrite the history of the mutiny. In 1993, the historian Zdravko Dizdar published an article in the *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* (Journal of Contemporary History) in Zagreb entitled “The First Uprising in the Nazi Army”.¹⁷ Based on the sources already mentioned, plus the Croatian archives, this paper reconstructs in detail the creation of the 13th SS Division, as well as the mutiny, step by step. According to Dizdar, the mutiny’s leaders were in contact with the French Resistance and the

17 Zdravko Dizdar, “Prva pobuna u nacističkoj vojsci: pobuna 13. pionirskog bataljuna 13. SS divizije ‘Croatia’ u Villefranche-de-Rouergueu 17. rujna 1943”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 25, 1993, 117-142.

British secret services, and the absence of the promised guides was one of the reasons for their failure. Dizdar estimates the number of mutineers shot at 150, and further reports that 300 others were deported to the Sachsenhausen camp, where most perished. He insists that the mutiny was premeditated and describes it as “Croatian and anti-fascist”. This account is thus partly an extension of the communist narrative, while nationalising it. Writing during the war in 1993, Dizdar considered that casting light on the Villefranche mutiny was a good way to fight against the perception in France of the Croatian people as “Ustashas”.

Around the same time, on 26 November 1993, a conference entitled *The Revolt of the Croats of Villefranche-de-Rouergue* was held in Zagreb, organised jointly by the Croatian Institute of History and the French Embassy in Zagreb. As the title of the conference suggests, the emphasis was on the Croatian identity of the mutineers. Several speakers also emphasised the mutineers’ links with the French Resistance, asserting that these ties proved the premeditated, and therefore political, nature of the mutiny. Among the participants, the French historian Christian Font was the only one who rejected this thesis. He underlined that, in the autumn of 1943, the maquis were almost non-existent in the Villefranche region, and considered that ties between the mutiny’s leaders and the French Resistance were highly improbable.¹⁸

Henrik Heger, a professor at the Sorbonne of Croatian origin, attacked Fadil Ekmečić, a Bosniak living in Paris, who had published a book in 1991 entitled *La révolte des Bosniaques à Villefranche en 1943* (The Revolt of the Bosniaks in Villefranche in 1943).¹⁹ In this book, which never reached a large audience, Ekmečić relies on familiar sources to tell the story of the mutiny, but he presents it as the work of Bosniaks, not Croats; some Sarajevo newspapers promoted the same narrative. Besides this competition between Croats and Bosniaks to take ownership of the events of Villefranche, the most interesting detail in Ekmečić’s book is that he claims to have spoken on the telephone with the former Resistance fighter Milan Kalafatić. Kalafatić is said to have denied any involvement in organising the mutiny, although he did admit that he later helped some of the mutineers join the French maquis.²⁰

18 Christian Font, *Résistance et troupes allemandes au moment de la révolte des Croates de Villefranche-de-Rouergue*, unpublished and undated document, author’s personal archive.

19 Fadil Ekmečić, *Pobuna Bošnjaka u Vilfranšu* (Paris: Librairie Ekmečić, 1991).

20 *Ibid.*, 133.

However, it was not until 1998 that a comprehensive Croatian account of the Villefranche mutiny appeared, with the book *Les révoltés de Villefranche* (The Villefranche Insurgents) by Mirko Grmek, a Croatian-born medical historian based in France, and Louise Lambrichs, a novelist.²¹ In this book, the two authors draw on a variety of sources, in particular German and local archives. Among the German sources, they cite SS documents already used by other historians, and refer to the diary of Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, plenipotentiary general in the Independent State of Croatia, but omit the passage in which he attributes the mutiny to the harsh treatment by the officers, the refusal by the ethnic German ones to use Croatian language and a lack of food.²²

Grmek and Lambrichs' main discovery is a set of documents originating from Karl Rachor, the intelligence officer of the 13th SS Division, and concerning the Villefranche mutiny. While probably authentic, these documents do not come from a clearly identifiable archive, but were circulated as photocopies within the circles of German veterans of the 13th SS Division. They include first-hand accounts by Willfried Schweiger and Halim Malkoč, which shed light on their role in the failure of the mutiny, and a (comprehensive?) list of fourteen people sentenced to death. But Grmek and Lambrichs are most interested in Rachor's report, which lists Ferid Džanić, Nikola Vuletić and two other NCOs (Luftija Dizdarević, a Muslim, and Eduard Matutinović, a Catholic) as leaders of the revolt.²³ Armed with these four names, the two authors accuse Božo Jelenek of lying about his role in the mutiny, and thus their narrative excludes the individual who was allegedly the link to the Yugoslav Partisan movement.

Karl Rachor also states that Ferid Džanić saw himself as the "liberator of Croatia", and that Nikola Vuletić was a "fanatical supporter" of an independent Croatia that would rid itself of the Ustashas and join the Allies. Grmek and Lambrichs thus point to this as proof that the Villefranche mutiny was not the work of Yugoslav communists, but of Croatian patriots. In their haste, they neglect the fact that Rachor also accuses Spanish prostitutes,

21 Mirko Grmek and Louise Lambrichs, *Les révoltés de Villefranche. Mutinerie d'un bataillon de Waffen-SS, septembre 1943* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

22 Peter Broucek ed., *Ein General im Zwielficht. Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaises von Horstenau, volume 3* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1988), 296.

23 "Rapport de Karl Rachor, officier de renseignement de l'état-major de la 13^e division SS sur les événements du 17 septembre 1943 à Villefranche-de-Rouergue", in Grmek and Lambrichs, *Les révoltés*, 318-322.

Balkan Jews, North African soldiers, “Gypsies” and “two Negroes and a Negress” of having been involved in the preparation of the mutiny. His report obviously contains a strong dose of paranoia, as is often the case in such documents. Nor do Grmek and Lambrichs question how Rachor could have been aware of the real motivations of Džanić, who died in battle, and of Vukelić, who was captured, tortured and shot shortly afterwards.

Yet this is not all that our two authors discover. In the Villefranche municipal archives, they find a *Vitkovitch file* containing information on Božidar Vitković, a Serbian doctor who had lived in Toulouse since 1937 and was cited in various official certificates as the instigator of the Villefranche mutiny. Here again, Grmek and Lambrichs have what they need: If this Serb linked to the French Resistance was behind the mutiny, then he must also be the Machiavellian man who betrayed the mutineers by not providing them with the promised guides! The two authors also believe that Vitković was a Serbian nationalist linked to the Yugoslav royal government in exile in London and manipulated by the British secret services, without providing any evidence of this. Falling deeper into more or less convoluted conspiracy theories, Grmek and Lambrichs also suggest that the mutineers had ties with high-level Ustasha officials who wished to join the Allies, and believe that the Yugoslav secret services – eager to cover up the truth about these events – were actually responsible for the seemingly accidental deaths of several protagonists of the Villefranche mutiny. Should we regard this new version of the Villefranche mutiny as the definitive story?

* * *

To find out, let's go back to the French archives.

When he died in 1985 in Toulouse, Božidar Vitković left behind his personal papers, consisting primarily of press clippings about the Villefranche mutiny and its commemoration, official certificates confirming the involvement of several Yugoslavs in the French Resistance, and scattered handwritten notes about his life history, political commitments and his role in the preparations for the mutiny.²⁴

These documents contradict the image of Vitković conveyed by Grmek and Lambrichs: He was not a Serbian nationalist linked to the royal

24 As Božidar Vitković's handwritten notes are written on unnumbered loose sheets, it is impossible to give a precise reference.

government in exile, but a Yugoslav patriot who admired Tito's Partisans and was a member of the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP), a Resistance movement linked to the French Communist Party. This political choice of Vitković during the war years is confirmed by the fact that after the Liberation, he participated in the creation of the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavs in France, and then of the Association of Yugoslavs in France, two organisations closely linked to Tito's communist regime.

Among the press clippings, several are articles written by Vitković himself in the early post-war years, dealing with the Villefranche mutiny. These articles show good knowledge of the mutiny as it unfolded, at a time when the sources mentioned in the previous pages did not yet exist, or were not accessible. Vitković's knowledge of the events of 17 September 1943 can therefore be explained either by his participation in its preparation, or by his meeting with former mutineers – or both. In *Le Patriote du Sud-Ouest* of 17 September 1945, he presents the mutiny as having been organised by "Yugoslav Resistance fighters in the French ranks".²⁵ However, his version of the facts diverges from those we have encountered so far. In particular, in *La République du Sud-Ouest* of 17 September 1946, he explains that the Yugoslav officers were spared by the mutineers, unlike the German officers.²⁶ Therefore, according to Vitković, Džanić, Vukelić and the others merely took over the leadership of a mutiny started by others.

Vitković's account becomes even more surprising if we look at his handwritten notes. Indeed, he explains that he first came into contact with soldiers of the 13th SS Division while waiting outside the brothels of Toulouse, and that he became friends with a young Croatian soldier who introduced himself as "Zvonimir" and belonged to the Villefranche pioneer battalion. After several days of discussions, Vitković says that he managed to convince "Zvonimir" to organise a mutiny, and also demanded that the mutineers execute their officers so that there could be no turning back from joining the French Resistance. In the face of "Zvonimir's" hesitations, he finally agreed that the Yugoslav officers should be spared. In other words, Džanić, Vukelić and the others narrowly missed being executed by the mutineers! Vitković also explains his goals in organising this mutiny, namely to break the morale of the soldiers of the 13th SS Division and to sow discord within their ranks, in order to force the Germans to withdraw this division, which

25 "Le soulèvement de Villefranche-de-Rouergue", *Le Patriote du Sud-Ouest*, 17 September 1945.

26 "Le soulèvement des Croates", *La République du Sud-Ouest*, 17 September 1946.

Vitković believed had come to southwestern France to fight the French Resistance. He ends this account published in *La République du Sud-Ouest* with these words: “A month later, all these units left for Germany: they were considered useless for the repression of the French maquis. The goal of the mutineers had thus been achieved.”²⁷

Unfortunately, Vitković’s handwritten notes have many gaps and are sometimes hard to believe. Above all, they tell us nothing about the day of 17 September 1943 and the role that Vitković might have played in it. But, in any case, the scattered facts gathered from Božidar Vitković’s personal papers undermine all of the existing accounts of the Villefranche mutiny. So how should the events of 17 September 1943 be interpreted? And where can we find the answer?

* * *

Let’s try our luck in the files of the French military archives.

In his personal file as a former Resistance fighter, Božidar Vitković recalls the Villefranche mutiny.²⁸ He recollects that his first contacts with SS soldiers were on 29 July 1943, that he called on them not to fight the French Resistance and to rise up against German oppression, and that the mutiny of 17 September resulted in 84 deaths, including five German officers. He adds that “more than 150 of the mutineers, after checks, [were] directed towards the French Resistance (Carmaux and Mende)”.²⁹ In a letter to the Ministry of Veterans’ Affairs dated 30 November 1977, Vitković further states that the mutiny “resulted in the death of 47 Germans, including five officers” and that, “judging this unit to be unreliable following this revolt, the German High Command decided to withdraw it from France on 1 October 1943. Apart from the state of siege [...], the people of Villefranche suffered no damages, no internments, no deportations, no executions.”³⁰

The files of the Yugoslav Resistance fighters mentioned in Božidar Vitković’s personal papers also reveal that he did not act alone. Janko Dragančić, Sava Ilibašić, Bogdan Madjarev and Stevo Mihanović all refer to their

27 Ibid.

28 SHD (Vincennes), file GR 16 P 597770 (Božidar Vitković).

29 FFI rank certification, certificate of membership, 6 January 1949, SHD (Vincennes), file GR 16 P 597770 (Božidar Vitković).

30 Letter from Božidar Vitković to the Minister for Veterans and Victims of War, 30 November 1977, SHD (Vincennes), dossier GR 16 P 597770 (Božidar Vitković).

participation in the preparations for the mutiny, confirmed in some cases by an attestation from Božidar Vitković as president of the Yugoslav Liberation Committee in Toulouse.³¹ There is nothing of the sort in the file of Milan Kalafatić, who did, however, participate in the defection of Soviet soldiers in Carmaux in July 1944.³² According to these files, the “revolt of the Croats” was therefore prepared by a group of Yugoslavs acting without consultation with French Resistance organisations. Subsequently, these men joined the 35th brigade of the FTP and participated in the liberation of Toulouse in August 1944. The files kept at the French Ministry of Defence history department also give us some information on these men’s activities after the Liberation. In particular, Vitković, Draganić, Madjarev and Mihanović were commissioned by the Yugoslav Military Mission to interrogate German prisoners from Yugoslavia and identify possible war criminals. This official function held by Vitković also attests to his close ties to the Yugoslav authorities of the time.

The French military archives also preserve an interesting exchange of letters between Božidar Vitković and André Pavelet, author of the report mentioned at the beginning of this chapter on the Villefranche mutiny, and assigned to work in the Ministry of Defence history department. On 17 February 1959, Pavelet asked Vitković to share his memories with him, promising that they would remain confidential.³³ In a letter dated 25 February, Vitković replied:

Further to your letter concerning the uprising of the Croats on 17-9-1943 in Villefranche de Rouergue, I have the honour to confirm that I am indeed fully aware of it. Not only did I arrange the dispersion and accommodation of the rebels after the uprising – planned, moreover, before the uprising itself – but along with my former compatriots, I had taken a certain part in its very organisation, as a French Resistance fighter. [...] While it is generally considered that this uprising was a failure – especially in Villefranche – I have to tell you that it was a complete success despite its appearance, a great success even, because there was a well-determined goal, militarily

31 SHD (Vincennes), files GR 16 P 191807 (Janko Draganić), GR 16 P 301136 (Sava Ilibašić), GR 16 P 382402 (Bogdan Madjarev) and GR 16 P 418862 (Stevo Mihanović).

32 SHD (Vincennes), file GR 16 P 316218 (Milan Kalafatić).

33 Letter from Colonel André Pavelet to Božidar Vitković, 17 February 1959, SHD (Vincennes), file GR 16 P 597770 (Božidar Vitković).

speaking, which we had set ourselves in July and August 1943, and which we achieved. [...] Why was it ignored? For a simple security reason, thanks to an absolutely watertight divide, the only condition for its success! We didn't publish it because we risked very serious consequences through the "vendetta" commonly practised in Yugoslavia. I felt that there were enough dead not to add others to the list of the dead of these magnificent men. There are also our families there. Believe me, despite the great success, I am not proud of having sent so many men to their deaths – although it was absolutely necessary – because I am a physician and a physician's duty is to save human lives, not to destroy them. [...] Please accept, Colonel, my deepest respects. Doctor Vitković.³⁴

But Božidar Vitković apparently never sent his account to Colonel Pavelet.

* * *

So in the end, what do we know about the Villefranche mutiny?

The question of the nationality of the mutineers, which was at the centre of the memorial crisis of the 1990s, is the easiest to answer. The Catholic and Muslim soldiers alike identified themselves as Croats, but the latter undoubtedly had a strong Muslim religious identity, as evidenced by Imam Malkoč's influence over them. This ambiguity allowed for their national identity to be reassessed after the event, following the formation of socialist Yugoslavia in 1945, the recognition of a Muslim nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1968, and the independence of Croatia in 1991. It should also be noted that this kind of identity blurring allowed the ethnic German Schweiger to present himself as a Yugoslav, and thus to escape the firing squad.

While Schweiger and Malkoč's role in the failure of the mutiny is relatively clear, this is not the case with its real or supposed organisers. Ferid Džanić appears to be an ambiguous character, having moved from the ranks of the Partisans to those of the Waffen-SS, without any satisfactory explanation for his changing sides. Božo Jelenek and Božidar Vitković left their own, more or less complete, accounts of the mutiny or its preparations, but

³⁴ Letter from Božidar Vitković to Colonel André Pavelet, 25 February 1959, SHD (Vincennes), dossier GR 13 P 155 (region R 3).

their two versions of events are totally incompatible. The German documents seem to support Jelenek's view, but it is still possible that the Germans only noticed a second phase of the mutiny, after Džanić, Vuletić and the other NCOs had taken command of it.

The motivations of the mutineers and their leaders also remain mysterious. As we have seen, they were initially presented as Yugoslav anti-fascists linked to Tito's Partisans, and then as Croatian nationalists aspiring to a democratic Croatia. But apart from Rachor's report and its wild imaginings, there is nothing to tell us about the possible political convictions of Džanić, Vuletić and the others. Maybe the Italian surrender on 8 September 1943 had a role in their decision. As for the ordinary mutineers, they were probably motivated by mundane issues such as frustration at being sent far away from home, the excessive discipline imposed by their German officers, or the fear of being sent to the Eastern Front.

This brings us back to the question of whether the mutiny was spontaneous or organised, and whether it was linked to the French Resistance. The latter apparently established contacts with the SS soldiers and helped some of them desert, but without having participated in the organisation of the mutiny. The most credible hypothesis is that Yugoslav resistance fighters based in France, on their own initiative, pushed for the revolt. In this context, Božidar Vitković appears to have been the mutineers' main contact. Was he the "representative of the Yugoslav government" referred to by Jean Baudin? Or the perfectly French-speaking Yugoslav whom André Pavelet met? Whatever the case, his exact role remains mysterious: Did he promise guides to the mutiny organisers? Was it a well-meaning lie intended to push them into action, or did the precipitous change in the date of the uprising explain the absence of guides? Was he simply trying to cause the departure of the 13th SS Division, in which case his action succeeded, or did he have more ambitious plans, which did not succeed?

So many questions to which there are no answers. Perhaps the missing piece of the puzzle is stored in an archive box somewhere between Paris, Berlin, Sarajevo and Belgrade. Or perhaps it is lost forever, if it ever existed. The Villefranche-de-Rouergue mutiny remains a mystery, and its interpretation as a revolt of freedom fighters against Nazism is fragile, to say the least.

Soviet Prisoners of War Between Collaboration and Resistance: Stalag III D Berlin as a Case Study of the “Grey Zone”

Kolja Buchmeier

Stalag III D Berlin was established in August 1940 as the only prisoner of war (POW) camp in the German capital. Initially, mainly French, but also Polish and Yugoslav POWs were interned there. However, from autumn 1941 on, tens of thousands of Soviet POWs were transported to Berlin.¹ The reason for this was the extreme labour shortage in the German economy, especially in the armaments industry. In Berlin, the largest armament production site in the Reich, the POWs were mainly used in large factories, often for private companies such as Siemens, Bergmann or AEG. The imprisonment and forced labour deployment of Soviet soldiers in German custody have already been studied in detail.² However, less research has been done on the individual and collective experiences of the POWs, some of whom spent several years in an existential predicament. How did these people experience their captivity? What strategies did they pursue to improve their situation? What room for action did they have? Through a systematic evaluation of personal cards (*Personalkarten*) issued for every single POW in the German Reich by the Wehrmacht, it is possible to re-

- 1 Cf. Marc Buggeln, “Stalag III D”, in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945, Volume IV: Camps and Other Detention Facilities under the German Armed Forces*, ed. Geoffrey Megargee, Rüdiger Overmans and Wolfgang Vogt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 410-412. See also Christine Glauning and Roland Borchers, eds., *Past and Forgotten? The Lichterfelde Camp and the French Prisoners of War* (Berlin: Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Center of the Topography of Terror Foundation, 2022).
- 2 See Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangene 1941-1945* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1991); Reinhard Otto, *Wehrmacht, Gestapo und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im deutschen Reichsgebiet 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1998); Rolf Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich 1941/42. Behandlung und Arbeitseinsatz zwischen Vernichtungspolitik und kriegswirtschaftlichen Zwängen*, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011); Margot Blank and Barbettes Quinkert, eds., *Dimensions of a Crime. Soviet Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (Berlin: Metropol, 2021).

construct both various forms of resistant behaviour and collaboration.³ The spectrum ranges from escapes and sabotage on the one hand to propaganda activities and combat operations in German service on the other. By consulting additional sources such as Wehrmacht and police files as well as memoirs, a fragmentary but diverse picture of types of actions and motives emerges. In my case study, I would like to trace these types of actions and motives, considering the questions raised above. After introductory remarks on the history and special features of Stalag III D and the labour deployment of Soviet POWs in Berlin, my paper will explore the prisoners' scope for action based on various file studies.

Forced labour of Soviet POWs in Berlin

While Soviet POWs were used for forced labour in the occupied territories of the Eastern Front from the very beginning of World War II, the use of Soviet POWs in the German economy, and thus also in Berlin, was not initially planned. Hitler made it clear in several meetings with representatives of the Office of Defence Economics and Armament (*Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt*) and the Labour Ministry (*Reichsarbeitsministerium*) in July 1941 that he did not want any Soviet prisoners in the Reich.⁴ The order of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – OKW*) on the “Registration and Treatment of Russian Prisoners of War” of 26 June 1941 also stated clearly: “No employment of Kr.Gef. [POWs] within the economy.”⁵ Soviet soldiers were seen as a potential security risk. Additionally, Hitler and Wehrmacht leadership expected a quick victory over the Soviet Union through the “Blitzkrieg” strategy. The expectation of an early military victory made the use of labour seem secondary, as it was hoped that reducing the eastern army to occupation troops would bring workers back to the armaments industry.⁶

3 Cf. Reinhard Otto, Rolf Keller and Jens Nagel, “Sowjetischer Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich. Zahlen und Dimensionen”, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56, no. 4 (2008): 565.

4 Cf. Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 152.

5 *Order of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW) on the Registration and Treatment of Russian Prisoners of War, 26 June 1941*, Federal Archives/*Bundesarchiv*: BArch, RW 59/142.

6 Cf. Walter Naasner, *Neue Machtzentren in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1942-1945* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 1994), 28; Cf. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 192.

But these objections were clearly contradicted by the economic reality in the Reich, namely the shortage of manpower. An initial ban by Hitler on the transport of Soviet POWs into the Reich was therefore gradually softened in the course of the second half of 1941 and finally dropped.⁷ However, the use of Soviet POWs remained bound to specific guidelines, such as the exclusive use of closed columns and strict isolation from other prisoner groups and the civilian population.⁸ The first transport of Soviet POWs to the Reich arrived in July 1941. By the end of the month, 65.000 prisoners were in the Reich. By 10 August, their number rose to 171.000.⁹ These prisoners were initially housed in particular Stalags,¹⁰ so-called "Russian camps" (*Russenlager*), specifically and exclusively set up for Soviet prisoners.¹¹ However, prisoners were also transferred to regular Stalags in military districts of the Reich without "Russian camps" as early as August 1941.¹² This also included *Wehrkreis III*, one of the military districts within the Reich.¹³ In one of the camps located there, Stalag III D Berlin, 14 Soviet POWs were already registered in August 1941.¹⁴ By the beginning of 1942, their number rose significantly, to 3.703.¹⁵ In the neighbouring Stalag III B

7 Cf. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 193; Keller, *Ein notwendiges Übel*, 198.

8 Cf. *Guidelines for the Use of Russian Prisoners of War*, BArch, R 41/168.

9 Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich*, 465.

10 The structure of the German Camp System for POWs was the following: After their capture, prisoners were first gathered and then assembled in transit camps in the rear army areas, the *Durchgangslager*, or Dulags (transit camps). After long marches and train rides, they reached the *Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschaftsstammlager*, or Stalags (enlisted men's camps), the main camps for enlisted men, or the *Offizierslager*, or Oflags (officers' camps), the camps for officers. Furthermore, each Stalag had several, sometimes hundreds of external labour detachments, so called *Arbeitskommandos* (labour units). For an overview on the camp system for Soviet POWs in English see Andreas Hilger and Esther Meier "Forced Labor of Soviet Prisoners of War during the Second World War", in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Issue 72, Fall 2023 (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2023), 69-90.

11 *Decree of the OKW*, 26 June 1941, BArch, RW 59/142, 34. On the "Russian camps" see Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich*.

12 Cf. Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich*, 76.

13 The German Army divided German territory in territorial administration units, so called "Wehrkreise" (military districts). At the beginning of WWII there were 15 Wehrkreise numbered I to XV. Wehrkreis III included the territory of Brandenburg and Berlin and contained four Stalags, numbered III A to D and three Oflags numbered III A to C (Stalag III A Luckenwalde, Stalag III B Fürstenberg/Oder, Stalag III C Alt Drewitz, Stalag III D Berlin, Oflag III A Luckenwalde, Oflag III B Tiborlager and Oflag III C Lübben/Spree).

14 *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/784. These lists, in which the number of prisoners for each POW camp is broken down by nation, were compiled monthly by the OKW and have largely been preserved.

15 *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/450.

in Fürstenberg/Oder, 1.999 Soviet prisoners arrived on 10 November, and ten days later they were supplemented by another 1.000.¹⁶ In December 1941 there were already 222.000 Soviet POWs deployed for work across the Reich. The number continued to rise as the war progressed, reaching 631.559 in August 1944.¹⁷ In Stalag III D itself, the peak was reached in October 1944 with 11.536 Soviet prisoners.¹⁸

The special treatment of Soviet POWs

It has already been mentioned that the use of Soviet POWs in the German war economy was subject to certain restrictions and conditions. These restrictions aimed at isolating this prisoner group, which was perceived as a security threat.

To meet the special treatment guidelines and security needs for the Soviet POWs, the Wehrmacht resorted to a system of independent “Russian camps”. In other regular Stalags such as Stalag III A Luckenwalde, spatial separation was achieved by segregating Soviet soldiers in their own camp sections.¹⁹ Unlike other Wehrmacht POW camps in the Reich, Stalag III D did not have a large main camp to house tens of thousands of prisoners, but was rather a network of camps.²⁰ Although there were also larger camp complexes with their own infrastructure, for example in Lichterfelde, the majority of the prisoners were distributed directly to the hundreds of labour units scattered throughout the city.²¹ Accordingly, a different solution for isolating Soviet prisoners had to be found in these.²² There are many indications that separate labour units for Soviet POWs were set up in the area of Stalag III

16 Cf. *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/784.

17 Der Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan/Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz, eds., *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Großdeutschen Reich*, No. 10 of 31 (October 1944).

18 Cf. *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/452.

19 Cf. Dallas Michelbacher, Meyer Schwarz, and Patrik Tobin, “Stalag III A”, in Megargee et al., *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 410-412, here 402. Cf. Uwe Mai, *Kriegsgefangene in Brandenburg. Stalag III A in Luckenwalde 1939-1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 1999), 32.

20 Thomas Irmer, “Französische Kriegsgefangene in Berlin. Zur Geschichte des Kriegsgefangenenlagers Lichterfelde”, in Glauning and Borchers, *Past and Forgotten?*, 32-41, here 33.

21 Buggeln speaks of at least 120 labour units. Irmer speaks of 200 labour units for French POWs alone. Cf. Buggeln, *Stalag III D*, 410; Irmer, *Französische Kriegsgefangene*, 36.

22 Cf. *Meeting at the Reich Chamber of Commerce on 5.9.1943 in the large meeting room*, 5 September 1943, BArch, RW 21-4/15, 81.

D in order to comply with the guidelines of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW), which demanded segregation of Soviet POWs from all other groups of prisoners. An OKW list from April 1942 shows that only Soviet prisoners were deployed in Kommando 103, which was located in Berlin Staaken in the western outskirts of Berlin and housed up to 1.700 Soviet POWs.²³ Kommando 600 Zehlendorf also consisted of Soviet POWs only.²⁴ In June 1942 a separate camp for 3.000 Soviet prisoners was built at Adlergestell in northern Berlin. In December 1942, 2.300 POWs to be used in the nearby Reichsbahn repair works were already imprisoned there.²⁵ Isolation from other prisoner groups could thus be guaranteed, at least in the verifiable cases. This spatial separation went hand in hand with a distinct, significantly worse treatment of the prisoners, which already began in the Stalags before the transfer to Berlin. Continuous malnutrition since their capture, miserable conditions in camps and poor or completely absent medical treatment led to rapid exhaustion.²⁶ Prisoners were often already so physically weakened that a work deployment was doomed to fail. For example, when the first Soviet POWs were transferred to a Siemens factory at the beginning of 1942, 200 of the 400 prisoners were not able to work at all because of their poor health.²⁷ Five percent of the remaining prisoners died during transport to the accommodation camp.²⁸ And the Siemens camp was not an isolated case. Of the 300.000 Soviet POWs who were in Stalags in the Reich in December 1941, only a small proportion were fit for work at all.²⁹ Werner Mansfeld, Ministerial Director and head of the Labour Deployment Business Group of the Four-Year Plan himself unsparingly summed up the disaster of the labour deployment on 20 February

23 *Numerical List of the OKW*, German docs in Russia, Fond 500 Findingbook 12450 Folder 41, 110. Available online at: <https://wwii.germandocsinrussia.org/de/nodes/2179-akte-41-zahlenm-ige-nach-weiselisten-der-sowjetischen-franz-sischen-belgischen-holl-ndischen#page/1/mode/grid/zoom/1>.

24 *Numerical List of the OKW*, BArch, R 4606/4613.

25 Cf. Memorial Plaque "Forced Labour Camp at Adlergestell", photo available online at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Gedenktafel_Neltestr_1_%28Adler%29_Zwangsarbeitslager_am_Adlergestell.jpg.

26 On the conditions in the camps, see Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*; Streit, *Keine Kameraden*.

27 Cf. *Quarterly Report on the Employment of Soviet Prisoners of War in the Small Construction Plant of Siemens-Schuckert A.G. in Berlin-Siemensstadt*, 29 August 1942, available online at: <https://wwii.germandocsinrussia.org>.

28 Cf. *ibid.*

29 Cf. Mai, *Kriegsgefangene in Brandenburg*, 92.

1942: “There were 3.9 million Russians available, of which only 1.1 million remain. From November 41 – January 1942 alone, 500.000 Russians died.”³⁰

Scope for action and the “grey zone”

Up to this point, the internment and forced labour of Soviet POWs in Berlin have been briefly described. In the following chapter, I would like to focus on prisoners as actors themselves. How did they deal with these harsh conditions and what room for action did they have? Such research questions are much more difficult to answer. There are hardly any first-person documents available that allow access to the history of experience. Rather, most surviving documents, such as the personal cards by the Wehrmacht, are bureaucratic perpetrator sources that can reveal little about both the individual and collective experience of the prisoners. Nevertheless, even based on these documents, it is possible to trace diverse forms of action with which prisoners attempted to improve their situation. These actions moved between two extremes: cooperation with the enemy on the one hand and resistance on the other.

Cooperation with Nazi institutions is generally subsumed under the term collaboration, which is controversial in research. I use the term here not in a moral sense, but to categorise, following Mark Edele, all actions that support the enemy’s war effort through service in the military, police, or other agencies of the enemy.³¹ This also includes activities not obviously related to combat, such as working as a translator. I argue that one must understand the transition between these forms of action and seemingly opposing resistant behaviour as fluid, occasionally contradictory and full of grey zones.

Training and use of Soviet POWs as propagandists

The largest group of potential collaborators registered in Stalag III D were the so-called “propagandists” of the Wehrmacht. The “Wehrmacht

30 Quoted from Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland. Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), 138. Mansfeld refers to the total number of Soviet POWs in German custody.

31 See Mark Edele, *Stalin’s Defectors. How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler’s Collaborators, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 125.

Propaganda Department at the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht" (OKW/WPr.) was responsible for agitation during the war and thus also for propaganda among Soviet POWs.³² A letter from the OKW dated 23 March 1944 summarises the tasks of propaganda among Soviet POWs in retrospect: "1) Increasing labour productivity 2) Promoting anti-Bolshevik attitudes 3) Combating Soviet agitation [...] 4) Restricting escapes and preventing sabotage 5) Eliminating shortcomings and abuses in the treatment and management of POWs."³³ The enumeration and further writing make the motivation of the propaganda efforts very clear; it was primarily about achieving the "best possible work performance".³⁴ The last point should therefore not be misunderstood as a plea for humane treatment. The author pointed out that these were not "sentimental motives" but purely "sober considerations"³⁵ for the sake of increasing productivity. In addition to this central motive, the suppression of resistance also played a central role.³⁶ Beyond sending propaganda agents to Stalags, the Wehrmacht recruited "voluntary Propagandists" (*Freiwillige Propagandisten*) among the Soviet POWs.³⁷ These POWs were to be deployed in Stalags themselves to motivate their fellow prisoners to work and cooperate.³⁸ In exchange they enjoyed considerable privileges. They were not assigned to forced labour, could receive German newspapers such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the *Illustrierte Zeitung* and listen to the radio.³⁹ The OKW set up so-called training camps (*Ausbildungslager*), namely Wuhlheide and Dabendorf for training these persons.⁴⁰

32 *Transcript of the OKW on the Tasks and Aims of Propaganda among Soviet POWs*, 23 March 1944, BArch, RH 49/35, 138.

33 *On the Tasks and Goals of Propaganda among Soviet POWs*, 23 March 1944, BArch, 58/9015.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 Cf. *ibid.*

37 Cf. *ibid.*

38 *Letter from the Bremen Labour Office on the use of Soviet POWs as "Voluntary Propagandists"*, Bremen State Archives, 4, 29/1-1293, reprinted in *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Arbeitseinsatz 1941-1945. Dokumente zu den Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen in Norddeutschland*, ed. Rolf Keller and Frauke Petry (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013), 346.

39 Cf. *Propaganda among Soviet Prisoners of War*, 28 January 1943, BArch, 58/9016, 139.

40 There is little knowledge about these training camps to date. A brief overview can be found in Keller, *Wehrkreis III*, 34. Short sections on the individual camps can also be found in the *USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos Volume IV*. On the "Voluntary Propagandists", see also Reinhardt Otto and Rolf Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im System der Konzentrationslager* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019), 275-293.

Under which criteria were these propagandists selected? According to the OKW, persons were to have an “anti-Soviet attitude” and “appear to be propagandistically capable”.⁴¹ Personal cards of Stalag III D indicate that, from the Wehrmacht’s point of view, the possible qualification was linked to the prisoner’s education and rank. Of the 34 persons recorded in Stalag III D who were verifiably recruited as propagandists for the Wehrmacht, 20 held above-average ranks. This corresponds to almost 60 percent of entries and is thus a significantly higher proportion than among all recorded prisoners of Stalag III D (24 percent higher ranks, 70 percent ordinary soldiers). Even more striking are the propagandists’ occupations. While, with 35 percent, the proportion of peasants among the entire sample is clearly the highest, there is not a single peasant among the propagandists. Instead, teachers and engineers make up the largest share.

The conclusion is obvious that the Wehrmacht selected particularly educated Red Army soldiers to be active in propaganda. Internal reports from Wuhlheide training camp confirm this. Instructor Georg von der Ropp made written suggestions for prisoner selection on 20 March 1942.⁴² According to these, if possible, “people from ‘intellectual’ professions [...] especially teachers” should be selected.⁴³ In principle, he only recommended candidates who had at least seven years of Soviet secondary school education.⁴⁴ The second criterion for recruitment seems to be more difficult to determine: the “anti-Soviet attitude”. The Wehrmacht presumably resorted primarily to interrogations to determine the suitable attitude of the candidates. There is evidence of numerous interrogations.⁴⁵ Mark Edele also proves that so-called “defectors”, i.e. Red Army soldiers who voluntarily surrendered to the Wehrmacht, were systematically interrogated.⁴⁶ Here, too, there was the possibility of recruitment for propaganda purposes.

On 9 July 1942, Alexej S. was taken prisoner near Yelnya in Smolensk Oblast. The addition “defector” is noted on his personnel card.⁴⁷ He was

41 *Tasks and Goals of Propaganda among Soviet POWs.*

42 *Proposal Concerning the Principles for the Selection of Prisoners for the Special Camp Wuhlheide*, 20 March 1942, BArch, MSG 2/3089.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Cf. ibid.*

45 *Cf. for example in activity reports of Wehrmacht units. Cf. a survey cited by Christian Hartmann in Christian Hartmann, “Massensterben oder Massenvernichtung? Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Unternehmen Barbarossa”, Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte 49 (2001): 97-158.*

46 *Cf. Edele, Stalin’s Defectors*, 11.

47 *Cf. Personal Card Alexei S.*

initially registered in Lamsdorf camp and transferred to III D Berlin on 24 January 1943. On the same day, he was registered in Wuhlheide training camp and finally transferred to Dabendorf camp on 29 March.⁴⁸ A CV on Georgij P's personnel card also suggests detailed interrogation. The officer, assigned as an engineer, was transferred to Stalag III D on 9 April and came to Wuhlheide a month later.⁴⁹

In some cases, POWs might also have volunteered for such purposes on their own initiative. There is a case from Oflag (officers' camp) XIII D Hammelburg in which several officers expressed their wish "to be united in volunteer formations for the fight against Bolshevism".⁵⁰ Overall, there are only a few sources available that provide insight into training camps and the course of the training itself. Since existing sources again only refer to Wuhlheide camp, I will limit myself to it here. The lawyer and university lecturer Tarmurbek Dawletschin from Kazan came to the Wuhlheide camp in May 1942. He had been called up to the front from the Tatar Soviet Republic shortly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, became a POW and, after a long march, was interned in Bergen-Belsen camp. There, as a clerk in the military hospital, he survived the winter of 1941-1942, which was fatal for most of his fellow prisoners.⁵¹ In his memoirs, translated and published in German in 2005, he reports: "From Bergen-Belsen we were taken by train to the Wuhlheide camp near Berlin. [...] Most of the prisoners received political training, others went to work outside the camp every day."⁵² According to his recollections, the food was hardly any different from other POW camps, and he, who had already received privileged treatment in Bergen-Belsen, did not consider accommodation in rooms of 12 persons each to be particularly good.⁵³ For prisoners who had previously been housed in Stalags under ordinary conditions of extreme confinement and the constant threat of hunger and disease, Wuhlheide camp may well have made a good impression.

48 Cf. *ibid.*

49 Cf. Personal Card Georgij P.

50 *Note for the Führer of 23 January 1942*, Political Archive of the Foreign Office (PAAA) R 105184, quoted from: Otto/Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 276.

51 Tamurbek Dawletschin, *Von Kazan bis Bergen-Belsen. Erinnerungen eines sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941/1942* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 206.

52 *Ibid.*, 206-207.

53 *Ibid.*, 208.

Starting in the training camps itself, the propagandists were promptly involved in the Wehrmacht's work. Some wrote articles for the prisoner newspaper *Klitsch*, a propaganda newspaper distributed in POW camps and which had already reached a circulation of 100.000 copies in 1941.⁵⁴ But the real work began when they were transferred to regular labour units. Peter K., for example, remained in Stalag III D after his stay in Wuhlheide training camp, but in May 1943, he was transferred to unit 261 Friedrichsfelde-Ost and then to unit 766 Berlin-Staaken, where he worked as a "propagandist".⁵⁵ The 34-year-old accountant was then sent to Stalag Luckenwalde in the summer of 1944. His further life is unknown. The Russian student Sergej K. was also initially in Wuhlheide training camp in autumn 1942, before he was assigned as an "active propagandist"⁵⁶ in Greifswald camp from February 1943. He was then transferred again to a Stalag III D training camp and finally released from captivity in January 1945.⁵⁷ Others also became active in the occupied territories. For example, Alexander I.'s personnel card shows that after a three-month stay in Wuhlheide training camp, he was transferred to the propaganda department of the German military administration in Smolensk's security force in June 1943.⁵⁸

The camps of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories

The second large group of Soviet POWs used in German service entered the service of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (*Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* – RMfdbO). The RMfdbO, established in 1941 for the civil administration of the occupied eastern territories under the leadership of Alfred Rosenberg, was not formally responsible for POWs.⁵⁹ However, it was involved in propaganda activities in the

54 Cf. Letter from the RMfdbO on Propagandistic Processing of All Soviet Prisoners of War, 24 November 1941, BAArch, RW 6/276, 4.

55 Cf. Personal Card Peter K.

56 Personal Card Sergei K.

57 Cf. *ibid.*

58 Cf. Personal Card Alexander I.

59 Cf. Andreas Zellhuber, "Unsere Verwaltung treibt einer Katastrophe zu...". *Das Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete und die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006); Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005).

war against the Soviet Union and thus was interested in staff for the administration of the occupied territories.⁶⁰ Shortly after the invasion of the Soviet Union, the RMfdbO began inspecting POW camps and selecting suitable candidates.⁶¹ These candidates were then transferred to the RMfdbO's own special camps (*Sonderlager*) for training, namely the camps Wustrau, Wall, Wutzetz and Ziethenhorst, which were all located in the Rhinluch region in northern Brandenburg.⁶²

As early as August 1941, several selection committees visited POW camps in Nesterow, Pagegiai, Cholm, Lviv and Bergen-Belsen.⁶³ Afterwards, the selected prisoners were gathered in Stalag III A Luckenwalde and then transferred to special camps. The training sessions here were very similar to these in Wuhlheide camp. A special feature of training in the Rhinluch, however, was the specific preparation of prisoners for deployment in their countries of origin. In particular, the Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians were to be deployed in the administration of the already occupied territories. Accordingly, they were prepared for the situation on the ground with a focus on the respective "national concerns" and with specialised instructions. On 20 July, the first 40 Belarusian collaborators were released into "home service". Those designated for release were first transported to the commandant's office of Stalag III D in Berlin, where the deputy commandant handed them their release certificates. They were then taken to Minsk and assigned to German service posts. Another transport with Ukrainians left for Kyiv on 6 November 1942, where some of them were deployed to "fight partisans" in Ukrainian police formations. Others worked in police formations and the administration in Kyiv itself. In contrast to the primarily propagandistic deployment for the Wehrmacht, these former Red Army soldiers were thus directly involved in the German occupation regime, including the participation in war crimes that went along with it. Beyond deployment in the "fight against partisans", this was particularly true of some candidates from Wustrau who were drafted into the "Kurt Eggers" SS-Division in October 1943.⁶⁴

60 Cf. *Propagandistic Processing of All Soviet Prisoners of War*, 4.

61 Sebastian Cwiklinski, "Die Panturkismus-Politik der SS", in *Fremdeinsatz. Afrikaner und Asiaten in europäischen Kriegen 1914-1945*, eds. Gerhard Höpp and Brigitte Reinwald (Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 1999), 149-166, here 150.

62 *Ibid.*, 151.

63 Cf. *Three Years of Work in Wustrau*, 1944, BArch, R 6/592, 3. I thank Rolf Keller for pointing out this source to me.

64 Cf. *ibid.*, 22. For this propaganda unit, see BArch, RS 16/30.

Motivations

As has been shown, Stalag III D, being the administrative headquarters for several Wehrmacht and RMfdbO training camps, occupied a prominent position in the system of POW camps. German authorities' motivation for recruiting collaborators has been demonstrated. They expected the prisoners to be useful in the proclaimed *Weltanschauungskrieg*. That Soviet POWs, otherwise stigmatised and treated as "subhumans" and "enemies", once selected according to questionable criteria, suddenly enjoyed such astonishing privileges, is remarkable. But what were the motivations to collaborate from a prisoner's point of view?

First, one should not be deceived by the Nazi term "volunteer Propagandists". In the reality of the POW camps, which were characterised by hunger, physical and psychological violence and bad medical treatment, it is fundamentally questionable whether one can consider the recruitment process voluntarily at all. Many prisoners saw cooperation with the Germans as the only way out of the life-threatening situation in the camps. Nevertheless, the anti-Soviet attitudes that Nazi leadership hoped for did exist within the Red Army. In her comprehensive study of the Red Army in World War II, Catherine Merridale shows that the Soviet military was deeply divided in its political attitudes.⁶⁵ In his study on defectors, Mark Edele also convincingly demonstrates that anti-Soviet attitudes were a significant factor in the decision to defect to the Germans for some of the Red Army soldiers. However, he also concedes that assessment of survival chances played an equally important role.⁶⁶ In the specific case of the collaborators recorded, it can be assumed that their motivation for cooperating with the Germans ranged somewhere between the poles of "survival" and "political conviction". Due to the lack of ego-documents and information about their lives before and after imprisonment, more precise statements are only possible to a limited extent. However, it is possible to prove that not all the recruited Red Army soldiers identified with their new task. On the contrary, there are several references to resistance and escapes from Stalag III D on the part of propagandists.

Alexej L., for example, came to Wuhlheide training camp in June 1942. He was then assigned to labour unit 261 in Berlin-Zehlendorf, from which

65 Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War. The Red Army 1939-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

66 Cf. Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 94-119.

he escaped on 20 January 1944.⁶⁷ The Lithuanian car mechanic Wasilij S. even fled from Wuhlheide training camp itself. Only six weeks after his transfer to Wuhlheide, the escape was recorded on his personal card.⁶⁸

Furthermore, there are indications that recruited POWs used their special position to resist. A report by the SS Security Service on the mood and attitude among Soviet POWs dated 2 September 1943 quotes a report from Blankenburg. A prisoner who had obviously been used as a voluntary propagandist spoke to his comrades in Neumühle camp. He was supposed to advertise here for joining volunteer associations. However, his speech turned out to be more pro-Soviet agitation, as he was later quoted as saying: "I know you are being beaten by the Germans but let yourselves be beaten. In four weeks, we will beat them again."⁶⁹

The responsible authorities were well aware of this danger. Thus, in March 1942, Rupp, the instructor of Wuhlheide camp, explicitly pointed out the "internal danger of infection"⁷⁰ among prisoners and suggested that only those prisoners be assigned for training who had already "passed through the lock of the SD with results that were not doubtful."⁷¹ In other words, the commissioner feared infiltration, and apparently not entirely without reason.⁷² There were also cases of resistance among Red Army soldiers recruited by the RMfdbO. Some prisoners temporarily assigned to work for local winegrowers in southern Styria joined the partisans based there in the Croatian border region.⁷³ And in Commissariat White Ruthenia there were also reported defections of Red Army prisoners deployed there.⁷⁴

Finally, the hoped-for improvement in the situation for Red Army collaborators by no means always materialised. The return of unsuitable candidates to regular POW Camps and punishment for alleged offences make

67 Cf. Personal Card Alexei L.

68 Cf. Personal Card Wasilij S.

69 *Extract from the reports of the SS Security Service, 2 September 1943, quoted from: Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945*, ed. Heinz Boberach, Vol. 14 (Herrsching: Pawlak 1984), 5702-5704.

70 *Proposal Concerning the Principles of Prisoner Selection for the Special Camp Wuhlheide*, 20 March 1942, BArch, MSG 2/3089.

71 *Ibid.*

72 Otto and Keller also refer to examples that suggest a targeted infiltration of resistance fighters into training camps. Cf. Otto/Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 293.

73 Cf. *Three Years of Work in Wustrau*, 14.

74 Cf. *ibid.*, 21.

it clear that the relationship between German authorities and prisoners was purely instrumental.

Consequently, it is too simple to one-dimensionally label the recorded cases as collaboration. The examples described above already make it clear that many POWs chose both collaborative and resistant behaviours. For selected POWs, the obligation to serve in Germany represented one possible option for improving their situation. The patterns of behaviour oscillated between cooperation and refusal. If we look at the reconstructable spectrum of acts of resistance, however, it becomes clear that in most cases it was primarily a matter of improving one's own living situation.

Forms of resistance

The most frequently documented form of resistance by Soviet POWs in Stalag III D was self-help.⁷⁵ Hunger forced the prisoners to resist the conditions imposed by the Stalag's administration. Sergej W., who was assigned to the railroad repair works in Berlin-Wilhelmsruhe, vividly recalls the prisoners' efforts to find additional food in a letter from 2013: "Sometimes we ran through the entire compound to the rubbish bin at the works canteen, where we hoped to get hold of potato peels or an infusion of substitute coffee. [...] Once I too ventured out to the dustbin."⁷⁶ In addition to food, prisoners also tried to make or steal tools to improve their supply situation. For example, a German engineer from the Siemens-Schuckert factory reported that prisoners tried to make knives to cut their bread.⁷⁷ A surviving letter from the management office of the AEG turbine factory in northern Berlin from May 1944 documents that prisoners repeatedly stole factory property such as yarns and fabrics to improve their clothing.⁷⁸

All this happened under the threat of harsh punishment. The management of the AEG works pointed out in the same letter that thieves would be

75 Here I follow the four-stage model of resistance established by Detlef Garbe. Cf. Detlef Garbe "Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand in den Konzentrationslagern", in *Neuengamme im System der Konzentrationslager. Studien zur Ereignis- und Rezeptionsgeschichte*, ed. Detlef Garbe (Berlin: Metropol, 2015), 237-264.

76 *Letter from Sergej W.*, 17 December 2013, Archiv Kontakt-Kontakty e.V.

77 *Quarterly Report on the Labour Deployment of Soviet Prisoners of War in the Siemens-Schuckert A.G. in Berlin-Siemensstadt*, 32.

78 *Letter from the AEG Management*, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) A Rep. 227-05 AEG, 137.

"brought to the Gestapo for punishment in any case" if they were discovered.⁷⁹ Sergej W. reports abuse after he was caught by a guard with coffee he had previously snatched:

When I came back to the factory hall, I saw that we were being checked: the prisoners had to line up for roll call. The guard, an older, well-fed corporal, waved me over. I went up to him, he yelled: "Russian pig!" and hit me in the face with the hand on which he was wearing a heavy ring.⁸⁰

The examples clearly show that self-help by prisoners in Stalag III D was certainly possible, but that prisoners' room for action depended on the strictness of guards in individual labour units and ultimately on the favour of guards and foremen.

Another form of self-help was escape. Escape attempts by Soviet POWs in German custody were a "mass phenomenon".⁸¹ It is estimated that tens of thousands of prisoners attempted to escape.⁸² There is also evidence of escapes in various Stalag III D labour units, even multiple times, in some cases. The Russian agronomist and first lieutenant in the Red Army Pavel G. fell into German captivity in July 1942 at the age of 28.⁸³ Initially registered in Stalag Alt-Drewitz, he was assigned to a labour unit in Berlin. He escaped from there on 17 July 1943. 11 days later he was captured again in Buckow, 50 kilometres east of Berlin, and brought back to Stalag III C. On 23 February 1944, however, he managed to escape again. The OKW recorded the escape as successful on 15 May.⁸⁴ But not all escape attempts were so successful. The Ukrainian First Lieutenant Mefodij D., for example, was punished on 28 July 1942 with 14 days of closed arrest "for escape".⁸⁵ Afterwards he was able to return to work.⁸⁶ In other cases, the recaptured were

79 Cf. *ibid.*

80 Cf. *Letter Sergej V.*

81 Quinkert and Blank, *Dimensions of a Crime*, 64.

82 Cf. Daria Koslova "Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in den Konzentrationslagern", in Quinkert and Blank, *Dimensionen eines Verbrechens*, 221. Keller and Otto cite a list from the OKW according to which 66.694 Soviet soldiers were considered to have successfully escaped as of May 1944. Cf. Otto and Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 176.

83 Personal Card Pawel G.

84 Cf. *ibid.*

85 Personal Card Mefodij D.

86 Cf. *ibid.*

handed over to the Gestapo.⁸⁷ The carpenter Alexej L. escaped from unit 261 in Friedrichsfelde-Ost on 20 January 1944.⁸⁸ He was only recaptured more than half a year later and was handed over to the Gestapo in August 1944. His further fate is unknown. Vasily S. escaped from Wuhlheide camp on 12 June 1943.⁸⁹ In September, however, he was recaptured and “released to the Gestapo Potsdam”.⁹⁰ It is also not possible to reconstruct his further fate. In the case of some of these prisoners, however, it can be proven with the help of documents from the administration of the concentration camps that their handover to the security authorities meant imprisonment in a concentration camp. This was the case with Fedor E.. After his escape in October 1942, he was recaptured in Brandenburg on 13 November and finally handed over to the Gestapo in December.⁹¹ The Gestapo arranged for him to be sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There he was registered with the prisoner number 53116 and worked in Klinkerwerk sub-camp, infamous for its hardship. He died there on 29 December 1942, only a few days after his arrival.⁹²

The forms of self-help described above are by no means to be considered in isolation, but were often starting points for solidarity and mutual help.⁹³ However, mutual aid was only possible if resources and room for actions were available. The surviving cases suggest that medical staff in particular had such possibilities. Ilya E. was forced to work in the quarry in Rüdersdorf from 1943. He reports that work standards were almost impossible to meet and that he had to do hard physical labour while working with stone.⁹⁴ In the end, he could only survive with the help of the staff in the camp hospital.⁹⁵

87 Cf. Otto/Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 175-181.

88 Cf. Personnel Card Alexej L.

89 Cf. Personnel Card Wasilij S.

90 Ibid.

91 Cf. Personnel Card Fedor E.

92 Cf. Book of the Dead KZ Sachsenhausen, available online at: <https://www.stiftung-bg.de/totenbuch/main.php>.

93 Cf. Garbe, “Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand”, 238.

94 Cf. Letter from Ilya E., 26. March 2006, Archive Kontakte-Kontakty e.V.

95 On camp hospitals as “resistance hotbeds” see the chapter “Camps as Crucibles of Transnational Resistance”, in *Fighters across frontiers. Transnational Resistance in Europe 1936-48*, ed. Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 49-69, 64.

At the end of November 1944, I was completely exhausted and had to die. But two people saved me. They were the Russian prisoner of war Dr. Georgij S., who worked in the military hospital, and the German translator, Corporal Helmut T.. Thanks to them I came back to the camp. They put me in a room for tuberculosis patients, which the German staff avoided entering.⁹⁶

Another impressive case of assistance by medical staff is that of Doctor Boris S., who was a medical officer in the Red Army captured in Kharkiv in May 1942. His personal card shows that he was transferred from Kielce special camp to Stalag III D the same year, where he was deployed as a camp doctor. Boris S. was sentenced to imprisonment at least three times before 1944, at least once because he had kept three fellow prisoners from going to work against the orders of his German superiors, presumably in order not to endanger their health. Boris S. disobeyed orders and therefore had to spend 14 days in closed detention. This form of resistance also took place under the threat of punishment, including transfer to a concentration camp. Boris S. paid a heavy price for his solidarity. On 9 January 1945 he was handed over to the Gestapo and was then transferred to Neuengamme concentration camp.⁹⁷ Boris S.'s case shows the fluid transition between different forms of collaboration and resistance. It was his privileged position as a doctor that initially enabled him to resist. However, his solidarity with his fellow prisoners led to his eventual refusal to obey orders.

The available sources reveal other forms of refusal. The personal card of Fjodor W., who was deployed in labour unit 261 in Friedrichsfelde-Ost, shows that he stayed away from his workplace several times.⁹⁸ Aleksandr A., who worked in the Meltow factories in Weidmannslust, reports that he hid in the changing room with fellow prisoners to avoid work.⁹⁹ Another form of refusal was self-mutilation. Sergej W., who also worked in Friedrichsfelde-Ost, reports such a case: "Once G. asked me to cut the skin between his index finger and thumb with the chisel on his left hand. After that, he no longer came to the factory."¹⁰⁰

96 Ibid.

97 Personal Card Boris S.; Individual Prisoner Records – KL Neuengamme, Arolsen Archives (ITS), 11002 os.

98 Cf. Personal Card Fjodor W.

99 Cf. Letter from Aleksandr A., 4 February 2006, Archive Kontakte-Kontakty e.V.

100 Cf. Letter from Sergei W.

When refusal was organised and carried out collectively, it took the form of political resistance. Leonid T., who remembers his time in a camp on the outskirts of Berlin that unfortunately can no longer be determined, tells of such a case: “There were small, prefabricated houses where we lived. The rations were very poor, for lunch we got three potatoes. We went on hunger strike.”¹⁰¹ This astonishing example of collective refusal, however, was to no avail. In response, Wehrmacht units stormed the camp with machine guns and beat the prisoners to get them to return to work.¹⁰²

Conclusion

As this brief case study was able to show, despite strict isolation and guarding, Soviet soldiers chose a broad spectrum of behaviours when trying to improve their situation in German custody. Particularly noteworthy in the Berlin area were the numerous forms of collaboration that began in training camps administered by Stalag III D. To this point, these have been sparsely addressed by historical research. Red Army soldiers committed themselves to propaganda activities among their comrades, worked in the German administrative structure or served in German armed units. However, research should not stop at this insight but explore the grey areas of these activities and the contradictions and fluid transitions between collaborative and resistant behaviours. As demonstrated, what first appears as collaboration was not necessarily always ideologically motivated but even linked to resistance in many instances. Of course, individual actions can only be understood in a spatial and temporal context. A completely “free” decision was not possible in German custody. Rather, as the escape attempts studied clearly demonstrate, the limited room for action had to be used according to the situation. Particularly when it comes to individual and generalisable motives behind the actions depicted, research reaches its limits, not least due to the fragmentary nature of the sources.

101 *Letter from Leonid T.*, 12 February 2005, Archive Kontakte-Kontakty e.V.

102 Cf. *ibid.*

From Resistance to Collaboration: The Evolution of the Chetnik Movement in Serbia in 1941

Milivoj Bešlin

Introduction

The first year of World War II in Yugoslavia was a turning point for the Chetnik movement. The entire wartime history of the movement, whose representative and commander was Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović, was determined by the political, ideological, and subsequently military choices they made in the period between April and December 1941.

In April 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as a stagnant, poor and largely illiterate society on the periphery of Europe, had been attacked and defeated by the Axis powers led by Nazi Germany. The Kingdom became easy prey for the external enemy; during its two decades of existence, it was torn by internal conflicts due to the failure to resolve the problems at the heart of the state’s structure, especially those arising from national issues of identity-deprivation for everyone (except Serbs) at varying levels. The government of the Kingdom, which had been established in 1918, was steeped in corruption and repression, especially after the introduction of the dictatorship by King Alexander in January 1929. Its damaged legitimacy was further undermined by the assassination of the authoritarian monarch in 1934, and completely devastated after Prince Regent Paul removed Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović from power. Although he was prone to fascist forces, Stojadinović was the last regime politician with any authority. After that, the government, in face of the internal crisis and frightened by the growing pressure from fascist states in Europe, signed an agreement in August 1939 with the opposition leader of the Croatian Peasant Party on the formation of the Croatian Banovina, a state within a state, which irreversibly defeated the centralist order in the Kingdom.¹ Fierce resistance by Ser-

¹ Ljubo Boban, *Sporazum Cvetković – Maček* (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1965).

bian nationalists (who were traditionally centralist and unitarian), as well by significant numbers in the military, led to dissatisfaction with the first man of the regime, Prince Regent Paul.² Under pressure from Nazi Germany, the government signed the Axis Tripartite Pact on 25 March 1941, which led to mass demonstrations in Belgrade and other cities, mostly in Serbia. Two days later, Royal Army forces led by General Dušan Simović carried out a military coup, removing the ruler-regent Prince Paul from power and placing the still-minor King Petar II Karađorđević on the throne and at the head of Yugoslavia. The coup did not create any external or internal discontinuity; the Tripartite Pact remained in force, as did the decree on Banovina Croatia. But Adolf Hitler saw the events of 27 March 1941 in Belgrade as treason and deemed that those responsible for it needed to be punished. 10 days later, Nazi Germany and its allies began their attack and invasion of Yugoslavia. After only 11 days of resistance, the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated on 17 April 1941. The government, with Prime Minister Dušan Simović and King Petar not formally accepting this act, escaped and after a period of wandering, settled in exile in London, until the liberation of the country.³

The Chetnik movement and its relations towards the Partisans

After the Royal Army's capitulation and the state of Yugoslavia's de-facto dissolution, three positions crystallised in Serbia, which was occupied and placed under German military administration.⁴ Firstly, a group of Royal Army officers refused to recognise the capitulation and gathered in mid-May 1941 on the Ravna Gora plateau in western Serbia, led by Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović. This marked the beginning of the Chetnik movement in World War II as an anti-occupation resistance movement. The Chetniks' ideological position cannot be qualified as antifascist, but their character as an anti-occupation and liberation movement in the very first

2 Miodrag Jovičić, *Jako srpstvo – jaka Jugoslavija. Izbor članaka iz Srpskog glasa, organa Srpskog kulturnog kluba* (Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1991).

3 Branko Petranović and Nikola Žutić, *27. mart 1941. Tematska zbirka dokumenata* (Beograd: Nicom, 1990); Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1945* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992), 19-85.

4 For more information about these three positions see: Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1945*, 132-176.

months cannot be questioned. Anti-communism was also an important element of the Chetnik movement, but in the initial stage, this was not yet a dominant characteristic of the movement.

Another resistance movement gathered around the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ). The KPJ, banned and persecuted during the Kingdom, had formulated clear antifascist beliefs in the mid-1930s, when the party had started to develop a “National Front” strategy. On 4 July 1941, the KPJ called on the Yugoslav people to rise against the fascist occupiers. This marked the creation of the Partisan movement, and what was later called the People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (*Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije* – NOVJ), the only anti-fascist movement on the territory of occupied Yugoslavia.

The third political grouping active in Serbia after the destruction of the Kingdom, were the fascist and quisling forces that officially collaborated with the occupiers. Their leaders were Milan Nedić and Dimitrije Ljotić. In August 1941, Nedić became the head of the civilian administration in Serbia established by the German military authorities, called the Government of National Salvation. Ljotić was the leader of the fascist party Zbor. This grouping’s armed formations were the Serbian State Guard (*Srpska državna straža*), the Serbian Border Guard (*Srpska granična straža*) and Ljotić’s Serbian Volunteer Corps (*Srpski dobrovoljački korpus*).

Chetniks’ relation to the two other groups defined their attitude and evolution in the year 1941. However, the history of the Chetnik movement began not in this year, but decades before the start of World War II in Yugoslavia. Initially, they existed as paramilitary formations organised and financed by the authorities of the Principality and the Kingdom of Serbia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, tasked with asserting, through their armed actions, the claim of the newly formed Serbian state to the territories of the Ottoman Empire predominantly inhabited by Christians. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, between the two world wars, the Chetnik movement played the political role of a radical paramilitary organisation in defence of the monarchist order. From 1918 to 1941, Chetnik detachments operated in multi-ethnic areas in Macedonia, Sandžak, and Kosovo to terrorise and ethnically cleanse the Muslim and Albanian population (“nationalisation of southern areas”). Chetnik associations were notably active in provoking inter-ethnic conflicts in Croatia, where they found similar Croatian extreme-nationalist

organisations to enter into conflict with. Due to their militant activity and extreme right-wing orientation in the 1920s, Chetnik associations served as the Yugoslav regime's striking fist in dealing with the labour movement. After the change in the throne in 1934, the ruling Prince Paul Karađorđević, unlike his predecessor, was not in favour of the Chetnik organisations' violent methods, and efforts were made to limit their influence in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, primarily in Croatia.⁵

The war brought the movement again to the forefront. After the group of Royal Army officers who refused to recognise the capitulation gathered on the Ravna Gora plateau, they elected Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović as their commander in mid-May 1941. They originally called themselves the Chetnik detachments of the Yugoslav Army (*Četnički odredi Jugoslovenske vojske*) and then Military Chetnik detachments (*Vojno-četnički odredi*). After establishing a connection with the Yugoslav government in exile in London and the official recognition they received from it, they renamed themselves the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (*Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini* – JVuO) in mid-November 1941.⁶

Operating as an anti-occupation movement, the Chetniks first cooperated with the Partisans in the summer of 1941 in the fight against German troops. From September 1941, the uprising flared up. The weakened Germans, whose key forces were focused on Operation Barbarossa and the attack on the Soviet Union, retreated from Serbian cities, which often fell as a result of the cooperation of Partisan and Chetnik units. They were successful in the battles around Gornji Milanovac, Šabac, Valjevo and Kraljevo. The liberated territory created in autumn 1941 in western Serbia was later called the Republic of Užice, because of its centre in the city of Užice. Its territory spread almost from the Danube in the north, to the Uvac in the south and represented one of the larger territories freed from the Germans in enslaved Europe. Within this territory, power was shared on a parity basis between Chetniks and Partisans, with for example two commands for each place. All together, the Republic of Užice was marked by duality of power and command, within which the Partisan forces were in a dominating position.⁷

5 For more about the Chetnik movement before 1941, see: Nusret Šehić, *Četništvo u Bosni i Hercegovini 1918–1941* (Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 1971).

6 Kosta Nikolić, *Istorija Ravnogorskog pokreta 1941–1945*, vol. 1 (Beograd: Srpska reč, 1999), 42–75.

7 Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945*. (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992), 228–244; Jovan Marjanović, *Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački pokret u Srbiji 1941*. (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka – Odelenje za istorijske nauke, 1963).

Very soon, it became clear that there were fundamental disagreements and insurmountable differences between the Partisans and the Chetniks. This concerned their strategic choices: to directly and constantly fight against the occupiers, as advocated by the Partisans, or to adopt a strategy of waiting until the Germans were defeated on the main fronts, as advocated by the Chetnik movement. Their disagreements were also ideological and concerned the character of the state, its organisation and the orientation of society after the war. The Partisans, led by the communists, were a revolutionary organisation that intended to change the pre-war social order in the direction of social justice and national equality, while the Chetniks advocated the position of single-nation domination and uniting the Serbian ethnic space by creating a Greater Serbia within Yugoslavia and ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs from that area. Insurmountable differences also existed in all other social and political issues, from the place of religion to the position of women.

The first informal program issued by the Chetnik movement in June 1941 was called “Homogeneous Serbia” (*Homogena Srbija*) and its author was Stevan Moljević, a pre-war lawyer from Banja Luka and one of the leaders of the nationalist Serbian Cultural Club and member and president of the Central National Committee under Mihailović. As one of the key ideologues of the Chetnik movement, Mihailović appointed him as his special advisor for political issues, and during the war, he took over the leadership of the political wing of the Chetnik movement. In his well-known document, Moljević stated very openly that the “first and basic duty” of the Serbs is to “create and organise a homogeneous Serbia that has to encompass the entire ethnic area in which the Serbs live”. This meant the ethnic cleansing and eradication of all non-Serb peoples and identities that lived in the area that Moljević clearly defined, for the first time, as Serbian ethnic space.⁸ Although Moljević speaks of “Serbia” in the document, the territories he lists as being Serb had nothing to do with the historical or legal framework of Serbia. The leading ideologue of the Chetnik movement believed that only the creation of a new, large and ethnically cleansed state would guarantee

8 It is indicative that already with Moljević, in June 1941, a pattern is visible that will persist to this day: crimes against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II are a justification for the concept of ethnic cleansing and crimes against non-Serb peoples, especially against the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandžak. Cf: Dejan Ilić, “Ko tebe Srebrenicom, ti njega Jasenovcem”, 14 May 2024, <https://pescanik.net/ko-tebe-srebrenicom-ti-njega-jasenovcem/>. All internet sources last accessed on 14 May 2024.

Serbs “free economic, political and cultural life and development for all time”. Moljević’s great Serbian state was supposed to include, apart from Serbia and Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, significant parts of Croatia, but also the western parts of Bulgaria and northern Albania.⁹

Moljević sharply criticised the “unlimited liberalism” of the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and advocated the introduction of state corporatism, a key characteristic of fascist regimes in southern Europe. In this way, apart from the national program that had strong elements of fascism, Moljević also advocated for the socioeconomic arrangement implemented in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Capital “must be the means by which the Serbian people will realise their historic mission in the field of national defence, national economy and national culture, and ensure their national survival, but the bearer of capital and capitalism must first and foremost be the state”.¹⁰

The positions articulated in Moljević’s document, which were repeated in later programmatic documents of the movement, clearly show that the Chetniks also stood for a radical restructuring of the former Yugoslav state and socio-economic system. This means that not only the Partisans, but also the Chetniks advocated a radical change of the pre-war monarchist order. The difference was that the Partisans wanted to implement left-revolutionary ideas, and the Chetniks, far-right and ultra-conservative ideologies. These differences increased the two groups’ distance from each other, and influenced the Chetniks’ approach to the occupation regimes. Hence, the claim often reproduced in historiography, that the Partisans were in favour of revolutionary changes and the Chetniks were in favour of maintaining the previous order, is incorrect. The stated attitudes towards national politics, but also towards liberal capitalism and generally anti-liberal rhetoric in a large number of programmatic documents of the Chetnik movement, render historiography’s efforts to ascribe post-factum a liberal or even anti-fascist connotation to them pointless.

Precisely because of these ideological differences, but also because of the strengthening of the Partisan movement, who rejected the wait-and-see strategy, the Chetniks increasingly began to see the Partisans as their key

9 Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije (ZNOR), XIV-1 (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1981), 1-6.

10 Ibid.

enemies, and their anti-communist stance strongly intensified. Between July and November 1941, we can witness the step-by-step transformation of the Chetnik movement from an anti-occupation force to a collaboration force. October and November were key moments, in which Chetniks began to directly attack Partisan forces and when Mihailović, promising that he would “cleanse” Serbia of communists, expressed his desire to fight against the Partisans alongside the Germans and Nedić. As a consequence, an attack by German and quisling forces at the end of November 1941 led to the destruction of the Užice Republic and the uprising in Serbia was crushed. The surviving Partisan troops and their commanding staff retreated through the Sandžak towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, which became the centrepiece of their military operations. Thus, concluding with the first year of the war, Serbia was left to the occupiers and quislings, apart from its southern part, which retained a sizable Partisan presence throughout the war, until the year of liberation in 1944. The main Chetnik forces remained in Serbia and applied a completely different strategy than did the Partisans.¹¹

First steps towards collaboration (July-September 1941)

What were the concrete steps in the Chetniks’ transformation from a liberation movement to a collaborationist movement in the second half of 1941? The first signs can already be seen in summer 1941 and are linked to Mihailović’s well-known position on the need to “unify national [Serbian] forces”. This was already his position in the first weeks after the occupation of Yugoslavia, and this relativised the basic division between anti-occupation and collaboration forces. For the purpose of “national unification”, Mihailović, soon after arriving at Ravna Gora, established contact with the head of the quisling administration in Serbia, at this time Milan Aćimović, who would become one of the most trusted people through whom Mihailović would connect with the Germans.

11 For different opinions about the Chetnik movement and its evolution, see: Marjanović, *Ustanak i Narodnooslobodilački pokret u Srbiji 1941*; Jozo Tomasevich, *Četnici u Drugom svjetskom ratu 1941-1945* (Zagreb: Liber, 1979); Nikolić, *Istorija Ravnogorskog pokreta 1941-1945*; Bojan Dimitrijević and Kosta Nikolić, *Đeneral Mihailović. Biografija* (Beograd: Srpska reč, 2000).

Aćimović's position was that "discreet coordination" with Mihailović's Chetniks was needed, not confrontation. The only real enemy and thus rallying point for the Chetniks, quislings and occupiers was the "fight against the communists." Aćimović, president of the Council of Commissioners and the Commissioner of Internal Affairs of occupied Serbia, stressed that "Draža's goal must be our goal as well". The argument he used in front of the Germans was that while the occupation lasted, a number of people would always go "into the forest", and that it was better to be led there by a "national and sober man" such as Mihailović than by communists.¹² Believing that "national unity" could be an instrument in preserving the "biological substance" of the Serbian people, Mihailović was in a situation where, at the beginning of the war, he still did not have a clear connection with the British or the support of the Allies. Witnessing the Partisan movement's daily strengthening, he decided to establish a relationship with the local quislings and then enjoyed their support throughout the war. Also, already in the summer of 1941, it was clear to Mihailović and to the Serbian quisling politicians, but also to the Germans, that they were connected by two strategic goals: the necessity of destroying the Partisan movement and the necessity of pacifying Serbia. In order for the Chetnik non-combat strategy of waiting to prevail, and given that this kind of passivity was also in the interests of the occupation, the existence of a competitive, combative and liberation movement like the Partisans could not be tolerated.

There is no agreement in historiography at which moment Mihailović, as the Chetnik movement's commander, came into contact with the German occupiers. On 17 July 1941, the Chief of the Administrative Staff of the Military Commander of Serbia, Harald Turner, informed Aćimović, in a confidential document, that he had entered into contact with an "official representative" of Mihailović's movement, without providing details about that representative's identity. The document states that Mihailović's unnamed representative condemned "terrorist and communist actions". And in his monthly report from December 1941, Turner mentions July as the month when Aćimović and Mihailović negotiated, with German approval, during which Mihailović avoided signing the agreement previously reached with Kosta Pećanac, a rival Chetnik commander. This first contact took place before the uprising spread in Serbia, and also before Mihailović

12 Jovan Marjanović, *Draža Mihailović između Britanaca i Nemaca*, Vol. 1: *Britanski štitećenik* (Zagreb: Globus, 1979), 121-122.

established a connection with British intelligence, which first happened in September 1941.¹³ In July 1941 and in the following months, Mihailović avoided a written commitment to an agreement with the Germans and refused to directly and publicly put himself at the service of the occupiers, but persistently sought to cooperate with them with the common goal of destroying the Partisan movement. The German response remained constantly the same: pressuring Mihailović to enter into open collaboration, showing distrust towards him, and trying to use the Chetnik movement to destroy the opposing Partisan movement. At the same time, Mihailović also did not trust the Germans and tried to reach an agreement that would be kept secret, yet would guarantee cooperation and the delivery and use of German weapons to destroy the Partisans.

It is reliably known that on 10 August 1941, Mihailović met with the commander of the gendarmerie in occupied Serbia, Jovan Trišić, with the aim of coordinating the actions of the quisling structures and the Chetniks. According to testimonies, Mihailović also advocated a strategy of waiting towards the occupiers at that meeting, but asked the commander of the quisling gendarmerie to better arm his units, in which he would include as many members of the Chetnik movement as possible. The connection with the quisling apparatus was intensified by the arrival of General Milan Nedić, acting as the so-called president of the government of national salvation, under German auspices. Immediately after taking office at the end of August 1941, Nedić sent a letter to Mihailović through an intermediary (Živojin Đurić) inviting him to come to Belgrade for negotiations. Mihailović did not go, but sent a three-member delegation (Colonel Dragoslav Pavlović, Major Aleksandar Mišić and Major Radoslav Đurić) who held several meetings with Nedić at the beginning of September. Mihailović's conditions for cooperation were: the end of the uprising and establishment of "order and peace" in Serbia; a common fight against the Partisans; that Nedić's government enables the Chetnik movement to communicate with the Germans and to de facto legitimise them towards the occupiers; that Nedić's government provides financial resources to Chetnik officers. Milan Nedić accepted all the preconditions, provided financial resources for the Chetnik officers, and the German occupiers approved this agreement.¹⁴ This was the de facto start of Chetnik collaboration. At the same time,

¹³ Ibid., 124.

¹⁴ Ibid., 125-26.

Mihailović was negotiating with the Partisans and also established contacts with the British.

On 19 September 1941, Mihailović met with the Partisan commander Josip Broz Tito in the village of Struganik. The two concluded a verbal agreement on non-aggression in this meeting. Mihailović also tried to convince Tito that the uprising against the occupiers was premature, while at the same time refusing the Partisan offer to stand at the head of the uprising forces. It should be noted that at that time, two of Mihailović's men, Colonel Branislav Pantić and Captain Nenad Mitrović, as liaison officers with the Germans and General Nedić, were already regularly travelling from Ravna Gora to Belgrade, preparing the ground for closer cooperation with the occupiers. In simultaneously negotiating with the quisling authorities and the Germans in Belgrade, trying to get the support of the British and the Yugoslav government in exile, and cooperating on the ground with the Partisans, Mihailović and the leadership of the Chetnik movement in September 1941 put themselves in a position in which they wanted to remain throughout the war, yet one that was unsustainable.¹⁵

The decisive steps towards collaboration (October-November 1941)

October 1941 was the peak of the liberation uprising in Serbia, and a crucial month when it came to the future orientation of the Chetniks. The situation was becoming complicated and sitting on so many chairs was no longer sustainable for Mihailović and his movement. Despite the fact that Hitler ordered the suppression of the uprising in Serbia, and the arrival of additional troops, the German forces still suffered defeats. The free territory, centred in Užice, which was liberated at the end of September, was growing. At the beginning of October, the Republic of Užice had around one million inhabitants and included industrial facilities and other material assets.¹⁶ More and more people were mobilised into the liberation army, and there was no shortage of weapons either, as production was renewed at the weapons factory in Užice. Health and sanitary services were organised, as well

15 Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein, *Tito* (Profil: Zagreb, 2015), 212-215; Dimitrijević and Nikolić, *General Mihailović*, 153-162.

16 Venceslav Glišić, *Užička republika* (Beograd: Nolit, 1986), 46.

as a whole network of new local authorities. At that time, the British sent the first military mission to the free territory where, although with Partisan supremacy, the two movements still cooperated in their fight against the occupiers. Nevertheless, during September and more intensively in October, Mihailović sent messages through emissaries to the Germans, assuring them that he did not want to fight against them and asked for an agreement with the Partisans as a common opponent. However, all these efforts were not enough because the German military command had no confidence in the Chetniks, until the appearance of the Austrian professor of Slavic studies and Abwehr intelligence officer, Josef Matl.

Matl was most responsible for establishing trust between the German authorities and the Chetnik movement's leadership. Secret talks were held between 28 and 30 October in occupied Belgrade with Matl and Mihailović's authorised representatives, Colonel Branislav Pantić and Captain Nenad Mitrović. Matl's reports on the talks, sent to his superiors, were titled: "Making available the group of General Staff Colonel Draža Mihailović for the fight against communists in cooperation with the German Wehrmacht". In these talks, it was agreed that Mihailović would meet with the authorised officers of the German command in Serbia. The occupation apparatus issued a written security guarantee for Mihailović. Pantić and Mitrović's mission in Belgrade was successfully completed and they returned to Ravna Gora on 30 October with German consent to talks and a written guarantee for the commander of the Chetnik movement. Following this, on the last day of October, Mihailović issued an order to attack Partisan positions in the free territory of western Serbia, Užice, Ivanjica, Čačak, and Gornji Milanovac. By doing so, Mihailović wanted to strengthen his negotiating positions towards the occupiers and his argument that the "communists" were his only enemy and that he was ready to actively fight against them, which he also used as an argument for why he needed weapons.

Thus, on 1 November 1941, the internal war in Serbia, which was fought within the liberation war, began.¹⁷ The Chetnik movement opened a front against the Partisans, and Mihailović believed that he had thereby legitimised himself as a negotiator with the German command in Serbia. However, the events did not develop according to his plans. On the one hand,

17 About the character of the war in Yugoslavia and the dilemma of whether it was a liberation or civil war, see Boro Krivokapić's explanation: "Nema građanskog rata u prisustvu – okupatora (1941–45)", Boro Krivokapić, *Bes/konačni Tito* (Beograd: Novosti, 2006), 298.

the Chetnik movement soon started to suffer defeats from superior and more motivated Partisan forces. On the other hand, representatives of the German military command in Serbia soon disputed Abwehr and Matl's assertion about the necessity of negotiations with the Chetnik leadership. Representatives of the German military command, above all General Turner, continued to believe that Mihailović could not be trusted, that he was facing destruction and that he was trying to gain time and use German forces through negotiations without any real intention to help the efforts of the occupiers. However, since the talks were already scheduled, the rank of the German delegation was lowered, the seat was moved from Belgrade to the province, and the German position in the talks was significantly different from the tone in which the negotiations between Mihailović's envoys and Matl had taken place.¹⁸

Finally, the meeting took place on 11 November 1941 in the village of Divci in western Serbia. Although the German delegation came without the intention of actually negotiating with Mihailović, his appearance was undoubtedly a turning point in the Chetniks' transition from a liberation movement to a collaborationist movement. The Chetnik delegation was led by Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović and the German one was led by Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Kogard. The delegations also included: Military Administrative Advisor Georg Kissel, Captain Jozef Matl and two other officers from Germany and Major Aleksandar Mišić, Colonel Branislav Pantić and Captain Nenad Mitrović from the Chetnik side.

At the beginning of the meeting, Kogard said that he was authorised by the German Military Command in Serbia to read the official German statement on Mihailović's request for cooperation. The statement first said: "Two weeks ago, you told us through your confidants in Belgrade that your intention is 'that you will no longer allow Serbian blood to be shed uselessly and Serbian property to be further destroyed'. At the same time, you offered to fight communism together with the German Wehrmacht and the organs of the Nedić government." Mihailović's offer was rejected by the German Command because, as it was said, the Wehrmacht would suppress the Partisan uprising on its own, while the Chetniks could not be fully trusted "as allies". In order to win the trust of the German occupation authorities, the Chetniks were to look up to the quisling administration ("government") of

18 Tomasevich, *Četnici u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, 180-182; Dimitrijević and Nikolić, *Đeneral Mihailović*, 163-166; Marjanović, *Draža Mihailović između Britanaca i Nemaca*, 133-152.

Milan Nedić, because it “put itself in the fight against communism from the beginning”. Unlike Nedić, the Chetniks, as formulated in the statement, sided with those who wanted to “drive the Germans out of the country and who already at the end of September made a solid fighting alliance with the Communists”. The Chetniks were especially criticised for using ruses in attacking “peaceful German troops”, some of whom were captured near Krupanj, Loznica and Gornji Milanovac. With this, the Chetniks had caused damage to the German Wehrmacht, from whom they now sought an alliance in the fight against the Partisans. It was incomprehensible to the Germans that “after all mentioned above”, Mihailović was trying to portray the Chetniks as “allies of the German Wehrmacht”, and they considered his declarations insincere and unconvincing.

Considering that they were doing well on the ground, the Germans told Mihailović that “the German Wehrmacht cannot burden itself with such allies” who join it out of pure opportunism and without enough real faith in what the German Reich represented. The Germans also objected to Mihailović because he was negotiating with them and Tito at the same time, in other words: that he participated in attacks on German positions and at the same time sent an “offer to the German Wehrmacht”. As a condition for starting strategic cooperation, the Germans issued an ultimatum to the Chetniks, demanding cessation of fighting and unconditional surrender, including the surrender of their weapons and military equipment, as well as the release of all German prisoners. Kogard even used the term “capitulation”. An additional reason for distrust towards the Chetniks which was put forward was that Mihailović’s superiors, “who pull the strings”, were the government in exile, now based in London.¹⁹

In his response to the German note, Colonel Mihailović replied that he was not a “representative of London”, but that he could not act openly like Milan Nedić.

Nedić’s government came out completely openly and sided with the occupiers, and that was its mistake. It is not my intention to wage war against the occupiers, because as a general staff officer I know the strengths of both forces. I am not a communist, nor do I work for them. But I tried to mitigate and prevent their terror. The Germans

19 ZNOR, XIV-1, 871-873.

themselves handed over Užice, and with that the race between me and the communists began. After the Germans withdrew their weak garrison, the communists attacked Gornji Milanovac, and therefore I had to do the same. They went to Čačak, so I had to too. They went to Kraljevo, I had to too. The attack on Krupanj is not my work, but the work of the renegade Lieutenant Martinović. But my men went to Loznica so that the communists would not occupy it. The attack on Šabac was the work of disobedient elements. There I ordered a retreat, because it is pointless to attack Šabac, if the left bank cannot be captured. I never made serious agreements with the communists, because they don't care about the people. They are led by foreigners, those who are not Serbs...²⁰

Mihailović strongly denied that he sided with those who wanted to expel the German occupiers from Serbia, claiming that the only reason for his struggle was the desire that the Serbian people, "who love freedom", do not go over to the Partisans as liberation fighters.

Denying that he had ever used tricks, he said decisively:

I demand that I be allowed to continue the fight against communism that began on 31 October.²¹ We know how to fight in the forest, especially against the elements that want to hide. Ammunition is a must! Counting on that, I came here. Communism in the country represents a danger for the Serbian people and for the German Wehrmacht, which has a different task than suppressing it here. I was hoping to get a limited amount of ammunition this night and I thought this matter would be addressed first! I am not aware that my Chetniks used illegal means. The fight against the occupiers was a necessary evil so that the masses would not go over to the side of the communists.

20 When talking about the Partisan leadership, Mihailović sometimes gave the wrong names or information, which indicates that even though he was an intelligence officer before the war, he did not have basic information about the until recently Partisan allies, or that he deliberately misled the Germans.

21 He is referring to the Chetnik attack on Partisan positions throughout the liberated territory of the Republic of Užice.

Mihailović emphasised that “I would never have engaged in raids if there had not been communist raids” and if the Germans had not retreated. Underlining that the Partisans had a weapons and ammunition factory in Užice, he begged the representatives of the German command “to deliver ammunition to him tonight, if possible, in the interest of the Serbian people, as well as in the interest of Germany.” He guaranteed that those weapons would never be turned against the Germans, even if that struggle were imposed on him. Mihailović also denied that he ordered the attack on Kraljevo on 1 November 1941, because that was not possible, since “I just ordered my troops to withdraw and gather for the fight against communism”, referring to the order he issued the day before to attack Partisan positions.

Since the Germans, in addition to Nedić, also cited Kosta Pećanac as a positive example of cooperation with the occupiers, Mihailović emphasised that he did not agree with Pećanac, because he concluded “an open agreement that the people could not accept”. Mihailović believed that Pećanac had lost his legitimacy among the people. He stated as a key argument: “If I had followed his example, I would also have lost my reputation and influence.” In the situation of an occupied country, Mihailović asked the representatives of the German command, “can a person openly take the side of the occupier, and want to openly fight against those who took the tempting name of ‘freedom fighters?’” In order to avoid the stigma of betrayal, Mihailović stated that one must “act secretly”, meaning that any cooperation with the German Nazis in the joint fight against the Partisans had to remain secret, so that the Chetniks would not compromise themselves and bear the mark of treason like the quislings who came forward openly. Mihailović ended his address to the German occupation command with the words:

I suppose that after this statement, more trust can be placed in me when it comes to my correctness and my intentions, as that I can be provided with support. I ask my position to be understood as it is beneficial for both parties. I am asking once again that a certain amount of ammunition be delivered to me tonight! It goes without saying that all this should be kept in the utmost secrecy on both sides. I would like, if possible, to receive an answer tonight regarding the aid with ammunition. All my forces are gathered to fight communism.²²

22 ZNOR, XIV-1, 873-875.

Despite Mihailović's insistence, Kogard's answer was clear: the Chetnik struggle was illegal, opportunities for cooperation had been missed, and the only question that interested the German commander-in-chief in Serbia was whether Mihailović was ready to capitulate unconditionally and indulge in open cooperation with the Nazis. The leader of the Chetnik movement was clearly depressed by the German intransigence and asked for more time for a final answer, in order to consult with the commanders in the field. Kogard emphasised that the fight against the Chetniks would continue if Mihailović's response to the German conditions was negative. To this, the commander of the Chetnik forces replied: "We will not fight against the Germans, not even if this fight is imposed on us."²³

Major Aleksandar Mišić, one of Mihailović's closest collaborators, invoked the German origins of his mother Lujza and the military honour of his father Živojin Mišić, the most decorated commander of the Serbian army from World War I; he asked the German officers to "trust" and give weapons to the Chetnik commander, stressing: "We will not be unfaithful to you." In order to support his claims with arguments, Mišić asked if the Wehrmacht representatives were aware of the fight "that we are currently waging against the communists?" After Kogard's negative answer, Mišić proposed that the German occupation command send liaison officers to the Chetnik headquarters, in order to ascertain the scale of the Chetnik fight against the Partisans. This was the only proposal of the Chetnik delegation that was not negatively received by the Germans. However, the Germans were interested in why the Chetnik attack on the Partisan positions had come "so late". When Mihailović and his associates tried to explain their tactics of simultaneous negotiation, cooperation and armed struggle against both the occupiers and the Partisans, Kogard stated that further explanations were "superfluous", and a little less than an hour and a half later, the meeting ended with polite greetings but without a concrete result.²⁴ Although this meeting did not produce the desired results, it was the de facto beginning of Chetnik-German cooperation and Mihailović's clear and direct collaboration. What followed after that was the establishment of the trust that had been missing in the meeting in Divci. From the beginning of 1942, the Chetniks moved into increasingly open collaboration, which was first reflected in their so-called legalisation within Nedić's quisling apparatus, when a part of their units became auxiliaries of the Serbian State Guard.

²³ Ibid., 876

²⁴ Ibid, 876-878.

Another important document on this path was the Instruction of 20 December 1941, which Mihailović addressed to the field commanders Pavle Đurišić and Đorđe Lašić, and wherein the then-commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland explained the movement's objectives. The instruction started with the statement that Yugoslavia was at war with "our age-old enemies, the Germans and Italians", while the members of the anti-Hitler coalition were labelled as "our allies". The Chetnik movement's key goals were: the fight for the freedom of "our entire people under the sceptre of His Majesty King Peter II"; the creation of a great Yugoslavia and, within it, demarcating the borders of a great Serbia, which would be "ethnically pure within the borders of Serbia – Montenegro – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Srem – Banat and Bačka". The instruction also went on to describe the movement's further goals as being: the struggle for the annexation of "unliberated, Slovenian territories under the Italians and Germans (Trieste – Gorica – Istria and Carinthia) as well as Bulgaria, northern Albania with Shkodra"; the "cleansing the state territory of all national minorities and non-national elements"; the creation of an "immediate common border between Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Serbia and Slovenia by cleaning Sandžak from Muslim population and Bosnia from Muslim and Croatian population"; and finally, to "punish all Ustaše and Muslims who mercilessly destroyed our people in the tragic days".²⁵ The instruction stipulates that Montenegrins will settle in the territories where the inhabitants will have been removed, but only "nationally correct and honest families". The document stated that "there can be no cooperation with communists-partisans", which was an already-known position. In the special part of the instruction that referred to Montenegro, the key task was to "clean Pešter of Muslim and Arnaut [term used for Albanians] population", as well as the "cleansing" of Metohija from the Albanian population. Specific emphasis was placed on the "procedure with the Arnauts, Muslims and Ustashas", who should be handed over to the "people's court" due to their "heinous crimes".²⁶

Although revisionist historians repeatedly declared this Instruction to be a forgery, latest research has refuted this claim.²⁷ Ultimately, the actions

25 Ibid., 93-94.

26 Ibid., 97.

27 The instruction was first published in *ZNOR*, III-1 (Beograd, 1953), with the explanation that it is a copy of an authentic document and that the copy was certified by Pavle Đurušić. It was also published in Dragoljub M. Mihailović, *Rat i mir đenerala: izabrani ratni spisi*, eds. Milan Vesović, Kosta Nikolić and Bojan Dimitrijević, vol. 2 (Beograd, 1998), 359-363, with the claim that the

of the commanders in the field, to whom the document was addressed, were in complete agreement with the instruction's stated goals. The commander of the Chetnik movement manifested identical intentions, undoubtedly of a genocidal character, in the program he sent to the government in exile September 1941. Although this document is less well-known and influential than the above-mentioned Instruction, it also underlines that one should not engage in "direct combat" with the occupier, and the creation of an ethnically pure state is mentioned as the key goal. The main political task during the war was to punish those who, while serving the enemy, "consciously worked for the extermination of the Serbian people". The second most important war objective that Mihailović communicated to the Yugoslav government in London was: "To delimit the 'de facto' Serbian lands and to make sure that only the Serbian population remains in them", and he especially underlined the need for "radical cleaning of the cities and their filling with fresh Serbian elements". In particular, a plan had to be made for "clearing or moving the rural population with the aim of homogeneity of the Serbian state union". And finally, Mihailović cited the existence of the Muslim population in this imagined greater Serbia as a "particularly difficult problem" that had to be resolved "at this stage".²⁸ It is clear that these goals and objectives were by no means compatible with the ideas of anti-fascism and could not be achieved in an alliance with the Partisans, and in the fight against the occupier. These goals were rather compatible with the occupier and the fight against the Partisans. The Partisan antifascist movement, based on the leadership of the Yugoslav communists and its ideology with national equality and social justice as its fundamental principles, have to be legally and politically on a different level than the Chetniks, who were the bearers of opposing ideas, values and goals.

The choices Mihailović made during the last three months of 1941 traced the path and destiny not only for him personally, but for the entire Chetnik movement, and also much more broadly, for the mass casualties

document was a forgery fabricated with the intention of portraying Mihailović as "a man who plans genocide against Muslims, Croats, Albanians and national minorities in general". However, the forgery narrative has convincingly been repelled by Milan Terzić, see: Milan Terzić, "Falsifikat ili ne? Instrukcija Draže Mihailovića od 20. decembra 1941. Đorđu Lašiću i Pavlu Đurišiću", *Vojno-istorijski glasnik*, no. 1-2 (Beograd, 2004), 209-214.

28 "Program četničkog pokreta od septembra 1941. za vreme i posle završetka Drugog svetskog rata upućen izbegličkoj Vladi Kraljevine Jugoslavije." ZNOR, XIV-1, 26-29; See: Arhiv Jugoslavije, *Fond Državne komisije za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača*.

that would follow, primarily among civilians.²⁹ Collaboration, as the Chetnik movement's strategy, was intensified from the beginning of 1942. The German offensive on the free territory in western Serbia at the end of 1941 did not hamper this strategy but on the contrary strengthened it. The advice and instructions from the government in exile in London to expect active resistance to the German offensive and to preserve a single front of resistance between Chetniks and Partisans were worthless. In contrast, in one of the last significant documents of 1941, Mihailović emphasised to his commanders in the field that there could be "no cooperation" with the Partisans. It was a rhetorical mirror image of the order of 31 October 1941, that had been a declaration of war on the Partisan movement.

In mid-January 1942, the Chetnik High Command sent a dispatch to its units in the field, which also stated that the "communist danger is one of the greatest" and that the Partisans as "criminals and executioners" (*zlotvore i krvnike*) must be "destroyed without mercy".³⁰ This confirmed that the antifascist forces of the Partisan movement were the only real enemy of the Chetniks and that all means were allowed in the fight against them, including, even primarily, cooperation with all occupying and quisling forces that fought in a coordinated manner against the Partisans. Bearing in mind that the vast majority of the Partisan army in Yugoslavia in 1941 was made up of Serbs, and almost exclusively in the territories of occupied Serbia, the rhetorical and practical "destruction without mercy" practised by the Chetniks destroyed the only, to some extent, rational argument for their strategy of hesitation and "wait and see", but not collaboration. That argument was "preserving the biological substance" of the Serbian people. Also, at the beginning of 1942, the mass legalisation of Mihailović's Chetniks in Serbia began, as well as the cooperation of Chetnik commander Jezdimir Dangić with the German command in eastern Bosnia and Serbia. Synchronously, all other Chetnik commanders in the field, in Herzegovina, Montenegro, Dalmatia and Lika, as if by order, started open cooperation and more and more direct synchronisation with the different occupying formations on the ground. It was a path of no return and confirmation of collaboration-as-a-strategy in the actions of Mihailović. The strategic

29 Vladimir Dedijer, Antun Miletić, *Genocid nad Muslimanima 1941-1945* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990); Milan Radanović, *Kazna i zločin. Snage kolaboracije u Srbiji* (Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2016).

30 ZNOR, XIV-1, 500, 558.

decision from October 1941 was thus implemented in depth and on the ground and irreversibly directed the former anti-occupation and liberation movement towards a collaboration in which they would see the end of the war in Yugoslavia.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, in the first months of the war in 1941 in Yugoslavia, there were three major and clearly defined groups in Serbia: the anti-occupation movement (the Chetniks), the antifascist movement (the Partisans) and the quislings, i.e. fascist forces (as personified by Nedić and Ljotić). But while the positions of the Partisan movement and the quisling forces were clear and consistent until the end of the war, this was not the case for the Chetnik movement, whose attitude was the most ambivalent and caused the most controversies, both during the war and later as part of revisionist historiography and memory politics.³¹ In comparison to the openly quisling movements in Yugoslavia who believed in the victory of the German Reich, until 1944, the Chetnik movement tied their aspirations for the new Yugoslavia and the place of the Serbian people in it to the victory of the Anglo-American allies. Rhetorically calling representatives of the anti-Hitler coalition allies, and simultaneously directly cooperating with the Axis powers was not the only irreconcilable contradiction when looking at the ideology and practice of Mihailović's Chetniks. Their ambivalence tried to reconcile rhetorical patriotism and collaboration, i.e. betrayal of their country; they proclaimed their desire to avoid German retaliations and "save the people" and yet the slaughtered en masse that same people; they established draconian punishments for military discipline but which was completely absent in the field; they nominally accepted the Yugoslav program, while at the same time rejecting the existence of Yugoslavia through open hatred and striving for the planned destruction or "punishment" of other Yugoslav nations. Further contradictions concern their principled defence of the pre-war order, yet their fierce criticism of the state and social organisation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, along with their plans for its radical restructuring. Chetniks consistently pronounced the harshest condemnations of

31 Marko Škorić and Milivoj Bešlin, "Politics of Memory, Historical Revisionism, and Negationism in Postsocialist Serbia", *Filozofija i društvo* 28, no. 3, (2017): 631-649.

Nedić and Ljotić, yet cooperated with them in the fight against the Partisans. Then there were the 1941 autumn negotiations with the Partisans on joint actions against the Germans, whilst the same time requesting weapons from the Germans to fight against the Partisans; they insisted on the military character of the movement with the simultaneous aspiration to play a primarily political role; a hard-right-wing ideological conception during most of the war with an attempt at pseudo-leftist reorientation during the congress organised in January 1944 in the village of Ba.³²

By using, manipulating and subjectively interpreting historical facts, these aforementioned contradictions and inconsistencies have become the birthplace of revisionist narratives that attempt to reinterpret the history of World War II in Yugoslavia in order to rehabilitate the Chetnik movement, their commander and the ideological postulates on which it was based, and attempting to define him and his movement as antifascist.³³ Regardless of whether the Chetnik cooperation with the German, Italian, Bulgarian occupiers, as well as with Nedić's apparatus, was part of a strategy or just a tactic, the historical facts and sources testifying to the time of World War II in Yugoslavia are unequivocal, as are historiographical results of numerous Yugoslav and of foreign historians, all based on very meticulously researched archival materials. Historian Branko Petranović summarised these results in detail:

Regardless of motivations and tactical moves and strategic ideas – Mihailović is the head of the Chetnik counter-revolution, the bearer of collaboration in the conditions of the occupied country, a sworn anti-communist, interpreter of a different national policy, one of the protagonists of national betrayal in a heterogeneous front of collaborationist forces conditioned by attempts to save the social system of

32 Marjanović, *Draža Mihailović između Britanaca i Nemaca*, vol.1: *Britanski štíćenik*, 11; Milivoj Bešlin, "Četnički pokret Draže Mihailovića – najfrekventniji objekat istorijskog revizionizma u Srbiji", in *Politička upotreba prošlosti. O istorijskom revizionizmu na postjugoslovenskom prostoru*, ed. Momir Samardžić, Milivoj Bešlin and Srđan Milošević (Novi Sad: AKO, 2013), 88. The congress in Ba in January 1944 gathered 300 representatives from Mihailović's Chetnik movement and was mainly organised to counter the post-war plans of the Partisan movement and to convince the Allies to reverse their decision to switch their support to the Partisans from the Chetniks, a decision they had taken after they had become aware of the Chetnik collaboration with Germany.

33 For more information on this rehabilitation, see: Škorić and Bešlin, "Politics of Memory", esp. 636-644, and Jelena Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory of the Second World War in Contemporary Serbia: Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution* (London: Routledge, 2020), esp. 129-164.

their class, restore the monarchy and strengthen the primacy of the Serbian citizenry in Yugoslavia.³⁴

After the victory of the Partisans and the establishment of Socialist Yugoslavia, Mihailović was arrested in March 1946, put on trial in Belgrade and sentenced to death in July 1946. The death sentence on the commander of the Chetnik movement for war crimes and collaboration was a moral and political verdict not only on the movement, but also on the ideology of Serbian nationalism and monarchism in the broadest sense. And it is precisely this fact that would condition several decades later the post-communist, revisionist rehabilitation of the Chetniks and Mihailović in Serbia.

34 Branko Petranović, "Fetišizam izvora i stvarnost", in *Metodologija savremene istorije*, ed. Petar Kačavenda (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1987), 74.

Between Legalism and Convictions: The Langres' Section of Gendarmerie and the Resistance in 1944

Marius Hutinet

In recent decades, studies of French law enforcement's role during the German occupation have tended to partially omit the Gendarmerie's position in the Franco-German repression scheme.¹ Rural gendarmes, due to their profession and geographical situation – mainly operating in the countryside – had a vastly different experience of the war than the police. Intermingled amongst the local population, the men, living in brigades within villages, became the only representatives of the state's law enforcement in remote areas of the French countryside. Therefore, they inhabited a dualism between a collaborating hierarchy and the pressures exerted by the Resistance.

The case of the Langres' section of Gendarmerie, located in the Haute-Marne,² is a startling example of this balance, particularly in 1944. Its location in eastern France and the late liberation of the area in September 1944 imbued these gendarmes with unique historical characteristics and showcased several types of gendarmes' behaviours regarding the development and affirmation of organised resistance. The available sources for studying the Langres' gendarmerie section are both private and public. The official Gendarmerie certification files stored in the French Defence archives gather all forms filled after the war by gendarmes to justify their resistant past and obtain financial aid. Those files, linked to private archives and published – or unpublished – accounts of the history of the Haute-Marne's Resistance, allow us to build a typology of the gendarmes' engagement with the Resistance in 1944.

1 See: Claude Cazals, *La Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation* (Paris: La Musse, 1994).

2 Located on the road between Paris and southern Alsace, this rural department of 6.211 square kilometres was divided from 1940 to 1944 by the demarcation line between the occupied zone and the so-called German settlement area, in northeastern France, where the return of French evacuees was prohibited.

As well as looking at what it meant to be a gendarme during World War II in France, this paper looks at what commitment the Resistance represented for the profession and for these men as individuals. By focusing on one section of the departmental Gendarmerie, we will be able to investigate the complexity of defining the gendarmes' position related to the Resistance and collaboration.

The French Gendarmerie under German occupation

Before focusing on the gendarmes' involvement in the Resistance, it is crucial to highlight the gendarmes' professional culture and the dilemmas they faced as a result of the events of 1944.

On the eve of war: General organisation of the French Gendarmerie

As officially part of the army, the French Gendarmerie was under the War Ministry's direct authority through the National Gendarmerie Headquarters (*Direction Générale de la Gendarmerie nationale*). Those law enforcement forces were divided into several main groups, each of them with their own functions and missions throughout the territory. However, this paper's main focus is on a section of gendarmes belonging to the departmental Gendarmerie. These gendarmes were permanently settled in the heart of rural communities, including the ones covered by other types of police forces.³

Speaking in hierarchical terms, departmental Gendarmerie was divided on a geographical scale, each level being headed by an officer or a non-commissioned officer. This geographical division is represented by the below pyramid diagram, depicting the minister as head and gendarmes as the bottom of the hierarchy (*Fig. 1*).

This simplified diagram voluntarily omits the *Direction Générale*, which was directly affiliated with the Ministry of War and represents this authority on top of the pyramid. This hierarchical modelling appears as it would on all reports' headers, helping chiefs distinguish provenances and gendarmes identify their command chain, mainly for communication purposes.

3 Jean-Marc Berlières, "La gendarmerie en question au début du XX^e siècle", in *Gendarmerie, État et Société au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Noël Luc (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 101.

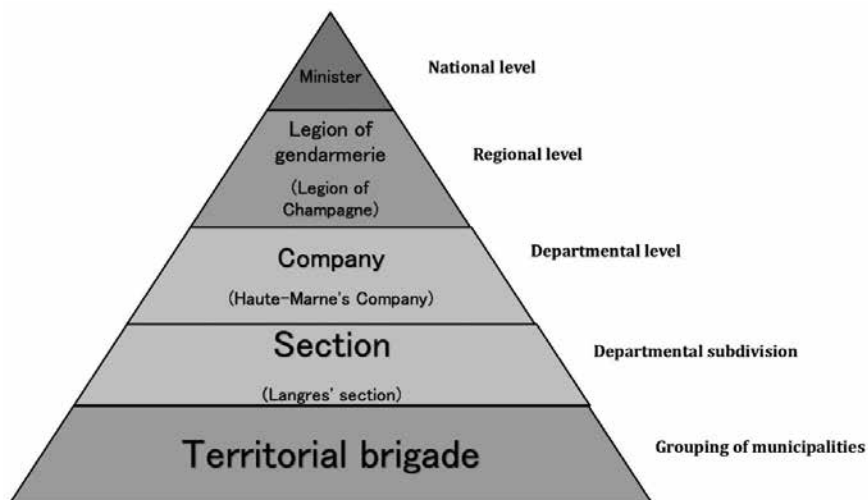


Fig. 1: Hierarchy of departmental Gendarmerie, based on geographical and authority criteria (before 1940). (Source: Author's elaboration, based on official archives, *Service Historique de la Défense*, Vincennes, France.)

In rural areas, gendarmes accomplished common law enforcement missions, all coordinated by brigade commanders holding either *Adjudant* or *Maréchal des logis-Chef* ranks, responding to the authority of their section superior and so on. In the field, they managed to ensure security among communities and inhabitants of their definite areas, operating road assignments, executing economic control, investigating acts of violence and routine patrolling. Despite their daily duty, gendarmes lived in a social and physical sphere distinct from the village or city community in which they were officially stationed. They had to keep a social distance from the latter to maintain relative objectivity during their investigations for the sake of legitimacy. Based on that social model, gendarmes had to minimise contact with external people and maintain, with their family, a rigid regimen of rules. Life inside barracks (*casernes*)⁴ was akin to lock-up for gendarmes and their families, leading historians to describe those places as true phalansteries.⁵ The ambivalent relationships between gendarmes and their social

4 *Caserne* is the common name used to describe the gendarmes' houses.

5 Marc Bergère, "Épouser un gendarme ou épouser la gendarmerie? Les femmes de gendarmes entre contrôle matrimonial et contrôle social", *CLIO, Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, n°20 (2004/2). Developed by the French philosopher Charles Fourier in the 19th century, the term phalanstery (*phalanstère* in French) means a large building structure conceived as self-contained living space for a community.

milieu, torn between institutionally imposed social isolation and visual exposure for all to see, made them both spectacle, subject and object of order.

The Gendarmerie, as previously presented, reveals itself as a tool for the French government to assert its influence on the national territory. However, this law enforcement group's structural organisation suffered the consequences of the 1940-1944 German occupation of France. As far as occupation is concerned, the conditions of the Gendarmerie's survival under Vichy's collaborating government and German authorities were constantly under negotiation, as gendarmes proved themselves useful in implementing Nazi and collaborationist policies in the country. This period was therefore marked by numerous changes in the corps' organisation.

New transformations

The German invasion of France in 1940 drastically changed the fate of law enforcement units. After the Armistice Commission held in Wiesbaden in 1940 and 1941, the agreement on keeping the departmental Gendarmerie effective both in the occupied and the non-occupied zones led to a wave of re-settlement of gendarmes in rural brigades, which had been cleared during the German invasion of May-June 1940. Limited in number – on a national level, around 40.000 men were allowed after the Commission, compared to 54.000 in August 1939⁶ – for strategic and security reasons, they experienced constant changes in their command chains from their return to *casernes* to the German withdrawal of 1944 summer.

During four years of occupation, a hierarchical struggle occurred between the German and Vichy administrations to control the departmental Gendarmerie. Firstly, concerning the Vichy government, the negotiations on keeping this unit effective led to an agreement to transfer the authority from the War Minister to the Ministry of the Interior, thus erasing all direct links between gendarmes and the army. On 2 June 1942, Vichy's chief of government, Pierre Laval, decreed the attachment of the Gendarmerie to his office.⁷ He therefore became the new head of police forces, including the Gendarmerie, which remained under his control until the end of

6 Jean-François Nativité, "La gendarmerie durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale: le piège d'un engagement légaliste", in *Le soldat volontaire en Europe au XX^e siècle. De l'engagement politique à l'engagement professionnel*, eds. Hubert Heyriès and Jean-François Muracciole (Montpellier: Presses de la Méditerranée, 2007), 3.

7 Cazals, *La Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation*, 101.

1943. However, Joseph Darnand's arrival as the head of the General Secretariat for Law Enforcement (*Secrétariat général au maintien de l'ordre*)⁸ on 1 January 1944 marked the ultimate fascist turnaround of Vichy's forces and deepening collaboration between German and French security units. This new title, specially created for the fanatical French Waffen-SS, allowed Darnand to lead the entire French police and Gendarmerie corps.

Secondly, German occupying forces placed themselves above the whole French hierarchical scheme. On the French side, at a local level, prefects became the direct superiors of their departmental gendarme's units, bringing them to refer all activities to the state official. More directly, gendarmes had to report to the German administration, depending on the case they investigated, addressing their documents to both the Military Commander in France (*Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich*) and Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*).⁹ This link allowed the German Intelligence and administration to gather a maximum of information about their "enemies", French public opinion and all elements that might have allowed them to secure their position and if needed, to strengthen repression. Gendarmes experienced double hierarchical pressure – triple if adding their proper direct superiors (section commander, company commander and so on) – considering that other law enforcement units such as the *Milice*¹⁰ defied them increasingly.

These changes in how the departmental Gendarmerie engaged with German forces impacted public perception of the gendarmes. As the Vichy regime's popularity declined, especially from 1943, so did that of the gendarmes. From the end of 1942, the sending of young French men to Germany as forced labourers under the Compulsory Labour Service (*Service du Travail Obligatoire* – STO) laws – officially adopted in February 1943 – resulted in a significant drop in people's confidence in the Vichy regime. This measure led many of those men to enter clandestine lives, hiding in forests and farms, thus initiating the appearance of secret camps known as *maquis*. This increase in desertion forced police forces to intervene and searching for fugitives became one of the gendarme's main activities. Gendarmes' participation in such actions led to the development of a general defiance

8 The General Secretariat for Law Enforcement was head of all French repression forces from January 1944.

9 These organisations represented the heads of German repression forces in occupied France.

10 The French *Milice*, initiated by Joseph Darnand in January 1943, were fascist law enforcement troops tasked with tracking enemies of the Vichy regime and German occupying forces, such as Resistance members or even Jewish people.

towards them, given how unpopular those laws were. Consequently, some agents decided to slow down investigations or divert the attention of overzealous colleagues. Such defiance gradually became a general pattern in 1943-1944 France. As a result, their superiors, especially Joseph Darnand in 1944, became more and more suspicious of gendarmes and doubtful of their ability to follow increasingly fanatical orders.

To raise the impacts of the occupation on a departmental scale, working on the Langres section of Gendarmerie illustrates those changes at a microhistorical scale. It also provides insights, at an individual or a brigade level, into the gendarme's position towards their hierarchy and their social environment.

At the departmental level: The Langres' Gendarmerie section under the occupation

The German occupation's impacts did not bypass the Langres' section gendarmes, individually or as a group. German meddling in the Gendarmerie's internal affairs profoundly reshaped the professional attitudes and habits that the institution used to teach to its men. At a local level, this influence can be seen by studying gendarmes' professional activities in 1944.

Adding the occupier's administration to the equation highly weakened the institution in the field. From then on, men became trapped between, on the one hand, Germans and their thirst for information about their "enemies" and on the other hand, Vichy's administration, which accentuated the surveillance over men who became less and less inclined to carry out the most compromising missions in the public eye. The hardening of rules and controls by the occupier and the Vichy regime resulted in the progressive weakening of the gendarme's power on the field. In southern Haute-Marne, several incidents caused by German soldiers, either killings, stealing, or other kinds of violence, led to investigations of the gendarmes. Between 28 March and 25 August 1944, 25 reports were written by the section's personnel.¹¹ Considering that these reports were sent to German services, gendarmes, in that case, acted more as informants than police agents, considering that they directly sent these reports to German services. This

11 Data obtained from a self-elaborated database gathering reports found at Defence Historical Service/ *Service Historique de la Défense* (Vincennes) – SHD, GD 52 E and at the Haute-Marne's departmental archives/ *Archives départementales de la Haute-Marne* (Chamarandes-Choignes), 342 W.

situation at a brigade level can also be seen at the section level. When studying the section commander's registers, it appears that gathering information transmitted by the brigadiers¹² remained the main subject pointed out.

As such, the Gendarmerie experienced a loss of capacity. On Vichy's side, the pressure over gendarmes appears pivotal to the war's end in France. As a distrust progressively developed between gendarmes and the *Secrétariat général*, the latter reduced and/or seized the provision of resources needed to operate a reliable service. For example, on 9 June 1944, Captain Pierre Stanguennec, leading the section, pointed out that at Chalindrey's brigade, only five pistols were available between eight men.¹³ In a context of extensive sabotages and attacks in the lead up to the summer of 1944's fights for liberation, scenarios such as these prevented gendarmes from defending themselves against better armed partisan groups.

Adopting a new lens to studying the gendarmes' informative mission leads to the next point about how to understand some gendarmes' involvement in resistance. Reading registers written by Stanguennec or brigade heads shows that agents tended to become spokespersons for the villagers, highlighting their concerns and opinions on various subjects. It is easy to imagine that, to get all that information, gendarmes had to take part in discussions and that they established contact with their fellow citizens. In some cases, the captain reported that most of Langres brigade's gendarmes stayed at locals' houses in March 1944.¹⁴ Those hypothetical relationships between them and their neighbours or landlords probably led them to, consciously or not, be aware of the wide range of opinions, not to mention the Resistance. There is no doubt that this, along with other factors, led, for example, to an apprehension of obeying some orders by Germans or Vichy's regime such as tracking the *réfractaires*, as people dodging STO draft orders were called. The main question, then, is for a gendarme, was disregarding orders a concrete act of resistance at any point?

12 In this context, another name is used to define the gendarmes.

13 SHD, GD 52 E 46, section de Langres – registre de correspondance confidentielle au départ – 5 novembre 1940 au 7 juillet 1944, le capitaine Stanguennec (Pierre) commandant la section aux commandants des brigades de la section, 9 juin 1944.

14 SHD, GD 52 E 46, section de Langres, registre de correspondance confidentielle au départ, 5 novembre 1940 au 7 juillet 1944, rapport du Capitaine Stanguennec, (Pierre), commandant la Section de Langres sur l'état d'esprit du personnel de la section, 29 mars 1944.

Being a gendarme in the Resistance: Implications and levels of involvement

Before narrowly focusing on the Langres' Gendarmerie section, it is important to study and consider the different levels of gendarmes' involvement with the Resistance. These levels ranged from active to rather passive engagement. When faced with the choice of supporting the Resistance or not, it appears that these men wrestled with several problems of conscience, torn between professional obligations and sometimes, personal convictions.

Breaking a professional vow

For this point, it is necessary to focus on the personal and professional implications of gendarmes' involvement. The first factor to consider when studying gendarmerie and the Resistance is the strong opposition between these two elements. When a gendarme decided to join the Resistance, his choice implied a brutal rupture between him and his institution. One of the first consequences was abandoning the inherent notion of "corps". From the beginning of their career as interns, gendarmes learned to live as a particular group and developed forms of solidarity and group consciousness of their own. Belonging to the institution as a group was constantly remembered and officially settled by an oath.¹⁵ Considering that most gendarmes began their career at an early stage of their life, it strengthened the difficulty of changing their lifestyle and choosing a path diametrically opposed to the one they had previously followed: obedience.

In addition to breaking their oath, involvement with the Resistance led them to dispute and reconsider the missions they regularly undertook. From its creation, the Gendarmerie had an important role in "the dissemination of the national idea, in the construction of the State and the permanent exercise of its authority".¹⁶ As such, gendarmes were in charge of establishing standards in remote areas where they were assigned.¹⁷ The German occupation structurally disorganised the previous missions, as well as the state's principles and standards. Stating this, in the case of a desertion in

15 Nativité, "Gendarmerie Guerre", 6.

16 Alain Corbin, "Un objet historique aux multiples facettes", in *Gendarmerie, État et Société au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Noël Luc (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 486.

17 Ibid.

favour of the Resistance, those gendarmes who had to ensure the political continuity of the regime were finally denying it and participating in its falling, constituting the ultimate defiance to their home institution.

Further reflection on the implications of desertion deals with a more personal dimension, considering the gendarme as a citizen and not a member of his professional group. On a private level, breaking with the institution meant several consequences, each underscoring the idea of professional and personal risk-taking. Quitting a prestigious institution to live a clandestine life, in addition to being considered an act of treason, represents a risky decision, often compared to “crossing the Rubicon”.¹⁸ This idea of a point of no return is particularly applied to the family situation of the gendarmes who, as well as leaving their institution and colleagues, abandoned their families. This left the families in growing danger of possible arrest by German troops or French police.¹⁹ Adopting a clandestine lifestyle implied periodic visits and inquiries by the occupiers, leaving families in permanent fear of repression measures against them.²⁰ It shows how their professional situation interfered with their personal lives, as deserting a brigade was not discreet and was quickly notified by the authorities, leading to a series of actions, even against family members, like investigations, search raids and interrogations.

Previous research, seeking to point out those keys to understand the implications of gendarmes' involvement, focused on professional consequences, leaving out one crucial factor of desertion: the weight of public opinion.

The weight of public opinion

Since the 19th century, as most French regimes were centralised, rural communities rarely established contact with the state's representatives, who mainly remained in an external social position. The gendarme's absence during the slaughter in the village of Hautefaye in 1870 exemplifies the lack of law enforcement presence in remote areas such as, in this case, Périgord, in southwestern France.²¹ In this situation, representatives of the

18 Nativité, “Gendarmerie Guerre”, 6.

19 Ibid.

20 “Certificate from Madeleine Hutinet,” 8 mars 1948, Hutinet family archives.

21 Alain Corbin, *Le village des cannibales*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 2009). In his work, Alain Corbin asked the question of the role of law enforcement forces in the slaughter of a young noble by local peasants in the village of Hautefaye. Apparently, gendarmes of this area did not intervene as they were unable to react effectively due to a lack of communication and means.

state's legitimate violence did not directly operate in front of the rural population. However, these relationships between rural people and authorities were entirely reconsidered and transformed during the occupation.²² The strong presence of German soldiers in remote areas led the inhabitants to develop a consciousness about a political situation that, this time, directly concerned them. Through this involvement process within the wartime context, rural communities' thoughts on the Resistance formed and spread. Measuring the actions of German troops and Vichy's regime – who, from 1942, forced young men to work in Germany – public opinion started to evaluate the potential of armed struggle, amplified by an increase in reprisals against the population.²³ From then on, a form of solidarity was silently settled between resisting groups and rural communities, leading to the establishment of a supportive network of good exchanges and concealment of information.²⁴ The popular defence of clandestine groupings fighting against the occupier or those who hid from the STO's recruitment logically did not go along with the tracking operated by French and German police, including gendarmes. However, this defiance is not the only factor to understand the complexity of relationships between gendarmes and people living in rural areas. Thus, studying historical representations of gendarmes in French society and confronting it with the evolution of Vichy's regime image in public opinion can constitute a new mode of understanding.

The image of the Gendarmerie is central to the force's concerns. Since the 19th century, its military aspect helped to differentiate it from the "obscure" French police.²⁵ However, this situation changed during World War II and the Gendarmerie's role in the repression overturned this status. As the regime sank deeper into fascism and collapsed, the negative representation of the Vichy regime spread to its representatives on the field. The increase of the Resistance's actions in 1944 against gendarmes or other state

22 Despite the increase in the number of gendarmes – from 24.000 in 1870 to 40.000 in 1940, an increase of 66.67% – the occupation imposed new difficulties on the ex-Third Republic Gendarmerie. Challenges included a lack of communication between villages and authorities, which can be seen in Hautefaye's case.

23 Harry R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 117.

24 Pierre Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy*, 2nd ed. (Paris: éditions du Seuil, 2001), 308. This assertion is, of course, nuanced by betrayals and denunciation that these types of groups often experienced.

25 Jean-Pierre Chaline, "L'image du gendarme", in *Gendarmerie, État et Société au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Noël Luc (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 485.

institutions strengthened the feeling that the state was dying. This is partly why, progressively, the Resistance tried to isolate gendarmes from the rest of the regime's forces.²⁶ Nevertheless, other reasons encouraged gendarme recruitment within clandestine forces, linkable with their position as militaries.

Isolating and recruiting members from Gendarmerie's ranks benefited the Resistance, who gained access to new information and limited weaponry. For dissemination, clandestine press and brochures were used extensively in order to carry out recruitment. For this purpose, the National Front for the Liberation of France (*Front National de lutte pour la libération de la France*)²⁷ published, from 1942 onwards, a leaflet entitled "Aux Gendarmes!", calling them to join the Resistance. In this document, writers established a list of possible resisting acts doable by Vichy's law enforcement men:

Turn away when the patriots act: warn those you know when a danger (search, investigation, arrest) threatens them; help those who are arrested to flee; avoid carrying out rigorous controls; let the peasants deliver nothing to the requisitions; let the townsfolk stock up freely. On the contrary, look for every opportunity to harm the collaborators; tear off their masks of false honesty; arrest their leaders who steal petrol, drive without an S.P., and indulge in black-market activities.²⁸

This list emphasises the gendarmes' potential integration into the Resistance's ranks. On the one hand, gendarmes would allow resisting forces to interfere with the ongoing repression against them and other "enemies" of the Germans. On the other hand, they were asked to directly attack Vichy's supporters in the field, using the legitimate power to "harm" them. The rest of the flyer, filled with threats about consequences of collaborating acts for

26 Laborie, *Opinion Française*, 309-310.

27 The National Front for the Liberation of France was a resistance organisation created by the French Communist Party.

28 Departmental Archives of Haute-Marne/*Archives départementales de la Haute-Marne* (Chama-randes-Choignes) – ADHM, 342 W 298, inscriptions et tracts de propagande des mouvements de Résistance ou des armées alliées: instructions, procès-verbaux d'enquêtes et correspondance avec les autorités françaises et allemandes (24 octobre 1940-14 juillet 1944), tract " Aux Gendarmes ! ", undated. S.P. stands for *permis special*, special authorization, which was necessary for driving a car.

gendarmes who would follow Pétain's regime until the end, constitutes a pamphlet against those "traitors and cowards". This document is a vector of the Resistance's ambivalent thoughts on gendarmes. The Resistance considered gendarmes to be perfect recruits, but at the same time, threatened those who would refuse to join their ranks.

This non-exhaustive list remains, however, optimistic, observing that most French gendarmes did not get involved in direct fights before the summer of 1944.²⁹ However, it provides the researcher with information on the several degrees of involvement in the Resistance between 1940 and 1944.

Levels of commitment

"We are not talking about the resistance of the Gendarmerie but the resistance of a certain number of gendarmes".³⁰ This quote sums up the situation of Gendarmerie and clandestine fighters during the war and settles the difference between those men's individual and collective involvement in the Resistance. Gendarmes resisting as a group represented a minority of those involved, as most of these cases were observable during the last fights of the liberation on a national scale.³¹ Before this period, gendarmes decided to get involved individually, joining groups or as informants or helping the *maquis*. Among 267 fighting networks registered among the Fighting French Forces (*Forces Françaises Combattantes*),³² none were specific to the Gendarmerie.³³ However, to nuance this monopoly of individual commitment, it must be specified that brigades tended to react collectively about the STO situation and largely ignored the presence of *réfractaires* in their constituency. This reaction was heterogeneous and depended on many contextual factors.³⁴ Brigades were told to begin the surveillance of young men in 1943. Some brigadiers, however, decided to prevent arrests of

29 Cazals, *Gendarmerie sous l'Occupation*, 237.

30 Jean-Marc Berlières, *Polices des temps noirs, France, 1939-1945* (Paris: Perrin, 2018), 443.

31 Emmanuel Chevet, "Gendarmerie et maquis en France sous l'Occupation (1943-1944): Force est faiblesse" (PhD dissertation, Université de Bourgogne, 2001).

32 The Fighting French Forces gathered the Free French Forces (*Forces Françaises Libres* – FFL), organised outside France, and clandestine networks of the French Forces of the Interior (*Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* – FFI), in occupied France.

33 Berlières, *Polices*, 443.

34 Limore Yagil, *Désobéir: des policiers et des gendarmes sous l'occupation* (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2019), 279.

réfractaires and facilitate their placement in farms or other safe places, such as the brigade of Beaumont-Hague in Normandy.³⁵ In this way, some gendarmes began slowing down investigations.³⁶ Concerning armed Resistance, some contacts were established between gendarmes and clandestine groups, allowing direct information sharing between them. Near Limoges, the Eymoutiers and Châteauneuf brigades built an informational network with nearby *maquis*, thus settling a *modus vivendi* between both groups.³⁷

Another type of action in favour of the Resistance was, paradoxically, inaction. As resisting groups were founded and started to develop, armed attacks against gendarmes became more and more frequent. As mentioned before, the lack of resources prevented brigadiers from reacting and defending themselves, which incited them to surrender to those groups, sometimes before the first shot. The recurrence of these events brought the *Secrétariat général* to adopt new measures to avoid normalising such acts. On 31 January 1944, Joseph Darnand published a circular defining sanctions applied to gendarmes who did not defend themselves.³⁸ The sanctions ranged from formal warnings to imprisonment. Additionally, on 15 June 1944, special courts were created to judge such passive actions.³⁹

The Langres' Gendarmerie section in the Resistance: Convictions and obligations

As mentioned in the introduction, the sources collected to study the Langres' Gendarmerie section allow us to establish a typology of the gendarmes' behaviour, divided into two main attitudes, reflecting individual and collective involvements. This tool helps analyse the paths of those men in the Resistance and interrogate the concept of the "grey zone" of Resistance linked to this chapter.

35 Yagil, *Désobéir*, 279.

36 Berlières, *Polices*, 440.

37 Fabrice Grenard, *Une légende au maquis: Georges Guingouin, du mythe à l'histoire* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2014), 183.

38 ADHM, 342 W 171, Guerre 1939-1945 1928-1948 – Etat Français 1938-1948 – Ordre public 1938-1948 – Police 1940-1945 – Instructions et correspondance générale (22 février 1940-2 août 1944), le Secrétaire Général au maintien de l'ordre à Monsieur le Directeur Général de la Gendarmerie, 31 janvier 1944.

39 Chevet, "Gendarmerie et maquis", 537.

A minority of precursors

A distinct part of the gendarmes participated in the Resistance before the fights for the department's liberation in September 1944. Such participation included both direct actions and less significant or direct ones. Without judging which behaviour is better than the others, it is possible to designate three categories among them. The notion of silence frames the first category. As previously written, STO's laws had a national effect on gendarmes, including in the Haute-Marne, where many Parisian *réfractaires* were hiding in farms, establishing the first *maquis* of the department, as for example near the commune of Plesnoy. After the war, assisting *réfractaires* or blocking information about their presence was one of the main arguments used by the gendarmes to try to demonstrate their action in favour of the Resistance and thus to secure their future within the post-war *épuration* process.⁴⁰ On 7 December 1944, Adjudant Pointot, commander of Chalindrey's brigade, wrote a report on his and his men's activity before their general desertion to the *maquis* at the end of August 1944.⁴¹ Of the 22 activities listed by Pointot, half consisted of assistance to *réfractaires* by dissimulating their presence to German authorities. Between 11 April and 6 June 1944, the brigades of the section redacted eight investigative reports about the presence of fugitives, all concluded by unsuccessful searches. Despite this general tendency, one brigade remained under serious suspicion after the Liberation, as gendarmes of Laferté-sur-Amance reported the arrest of many fugitives in 1944, thus making it impossible to establish a general conclusion about a shared role in helping the *réfractaires*.

As rumours of a close liberation spread, some gendarmes progressively established contact with the Resistance in the area, fearing direct fights with the latter. This case is pointed out by Captain Stanguennec, who stated on 28 June 1944 that the weakening of the gendarmerie implies, in case of a direct fight with an armed group, that "if there is a reaction, it may be an unequal fight, one against ten".⁴² The case of individual gendarmes participating

40 France experienced a wave of legal and extra-legal cleansing after liberation to punish and judge those who, during the war, collaborated with the German occupier.

41 SHD, GD 52 E 136, brigade territoriale de Chalindrey (section de Langres), registres de correspondance courante au départ, 1 février 1944 au 4 août 1945, compte rendu de l'Adjudant Pointot commandant la brigade sur les services rendus à la Résistance par le personnel avant d'aller au maquis, 7 décembre 1944.

42 SHD, GD 52 E 46, *Ibid.*, rapport du Capitaine Stanguennec (Pierre) Commandant la Section sur l'état d'esprit du personnel de la Section, 28 juin 1944.

in meetings organised by the Resistance remained rare. George Erard from Chalindrey was the first gendarme of the section who participated in sabotage actions. On 10 June 1944, he and other resistance members destroyed Heuilley-Cotton's railway lines.⁴³ The certification files of the section's gendarmes⁴⁴ show that only five of them were officially recognised as resisting before 28 August 1944. However, according to the testimonies gathered for certification purposes, the 32 gendarmes registered in the Resistance Office's files mentioned actions before the collective defection to the *maquis*. Those fragile and unbalanced numbers can also be nuanced through "unofficial", i.e. personal testimonies, made by gendarmes of the area. Throughout the documents and readings, it becomes clear that not all men decided to demand compensation and thus never declared their actions to the state. For example, considering the two gendarmes arrested for hiding refractories and weapons possession on 23 May 1944, only Paul Bauduret officially registered for official certification after his return from deportation in Germany. In contrast, the second one, Gilbert Faucher, cannot be found within those files.

A collective movement?

On 17 August 1944, the first signs of potential group participation in the Resistance appeared. The arrest of ten gendarmes of the section, including the captain, by the German military police (*Feldgendarmarie*), marks the initiation of a link between the Resistance and the section's men. According to Stanguennec's report, this event led him to establish contacts with Lieutenant Henry, the leading commander of the Resistance in the southeast of Langres.⁴⁵

From this moment, the section remained under the Resistance's influence and waited until 28 August to collectively join the *maquis* in Bussières-lès-Belmont, following Henry's orders.⁴⁶ Thus, they adopted a

43 SHD, GR 16 P 210169, dossiers individuels du bureau Résistance, dossier individuel de Georges Érad.

44 Those certification files, compiled after the war, allowed the ex-members of the Resistance to obtain financial compensation as veterans.

45 SHD, GD 52 E 42, section de Langres, registre de correspondance courante au départ, 18 septembre 1944 au 22 juin 1945, rapport du capitaine Stanguennec, Pierre, commandant la section sur la participation de la section à la Résistance, 28 décembre 1944.

46 *Maquis* designs resistance groups in rural areas, often hiding in forests. Members of these resistance groups were called *maquisards*.



Fig. 2: The Bagnotte's forest house, prison of the *maquis* (around 1980).
(Source: Hutinet family archives, Paris.)

clandestine lifestyle, living in the Bussières forest and facing the social and political heterogeneity of the *maquisards'* community.⁴⁷ Their integration within the *maquis* provoked mixed reactions from members of the latter and gendarmes were dispatched in specific sectors, most of them placed in the periphery of the camp. Two missions were devoted to the gendarmes from their arrival. The first mission, linked to their professional skills, was the area's surveillance and prisoner custody, which mobilised most of the gendarme's force in the *maquis*.

After the prison's relocation from Bagnotte's house (*Fig. 2*) to another place outside the forest, gendarmes remained separated from the rest of the clandestine army. They thus constituted their proper organisation and built an annex of the main camp. Some took advantage of the situation to reconnect with their professional habitus by leading preliminary enquiries about their convicts to facilitate their official judgement after the Liberation and further their legitimacy in the clandestine world. The gendarmes' second task in the *maquis* was participating in armed attacks against the German troops stationed in the region. This concerned only a tiny minority of

⁴⁷ Stéphane Simonnet, *Maquis et maquisards. La Résistance en armes, 1942-1944* (Paris: Belin, 2017), 82.

gendarmes, but because of their military past, these gendarmes were often placed as leaders of the FFI fighting units.⁴⁸

Those two missions tend to show a partial integration of the gendarmes in the clandestine society in Bussières. The case of the last-minute switch of the Langres section to the Resistance emphasises the complexity of the gendarmes' collective involvement in the Resistance. On the one hand, it is necessary to point out that, as long as Allied troops remained far from the area, gendarmes were more useful within their brigades and allowed FFI organisations to collect precious information about the occupier or even about the activities of French law enforcement forces. The ambiguity remains in the small number of men who provided those elements to the Resistance and in those who were in direct and confident contact with the latter. On the other hand, the general decision to join a resisting group can also be considered as a moral switch between two legal authorities. As the Vichy regime and German troops were openly overwhelmed by events following the Normandy landing, the gendarmes were left to reconsider their legal hierarchy. On 21 July 1944, the Provisional Government (*Gouvernement Provisoire*)⁴⁹ created a new Gendarmerie's Direction, directly under its command. This official statement allowed law enforcement personnel to embrace a new legitimate institution. In that case, their shift under the De Gaulle administration's ruling can be seen as an official switch and not a statement in favour of the Resistance. This interpretation reflects the difficulty of labelling gendarmes as *Résistants* or collaborators. For those of the Langres section, the real motivation seems to have stemmed more from a group effect, led by men close to the Resistance groups, than from the concrete patriotic impulse that some individuals expressed.

Dealing with the "grey zone": The case of Captain Pierre Stanguennec

As said above, it seems impossible to categorise this group if seen as a whole. This difficulty exemplifies Primo Levi's concept of the "grey zone".⁵⁰ The profiles' plurality and complexities prevents the construction of a definite

48 For FFI, see footnote 32 above.

49 After the end of the Vichy regime, a provisional government was created in order to restore the Republic.

50 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 2nd ed. (New-York: Summit Books, 1988).

conclusion about behaviours as, in most cases, they were subject to evolution depending on general and local contexts. Establishing contact with the Resistance before the collective passage of the section to the *maquis* did not mean that those men always tended to support it, as shown in the case of Captain Pierre Stanguennec. Studying his actions demonstrates the complexity of that type of profile regarding his position during the Occupation.

Captain Stanguennec's 1944 can be divided into four phases based on his behaviour *vis-à-vis* the Resistance. The first phase, encompassing the first six months of this year, can be defined as a professional period marked by devotion and obedience to his hierarchy. Thus, a report addressed by the captain to the legion commander assessed the "beautiful" and successful operations led by the brigades, leading to the capture of five individuals affiliated with the Resistance in January 1944.⁵¹ Completing this report, he mentioned that the general activity of the brigades has been essentially centred on "terrorist" investigations.

Is it during the second phase, between June and August 1944, that the complexity appeared. During those months, some elements make the historian believe that the officer began to build links with the Resistance. In a report to his hierarchy from 28 December 1944, Stanguennec mentioned that he established contacts with the chief of Resistance in August 1944, probably after his own arrest by German police, alongside some *gendarmes*. However, this story can be reconsidered through Stanguennec's certification files compiled after the war to prove his actions in favour of the Resistance. Inside this file, the first document mentions that he participated in the Resistance starting in July 1943. However, his official certification file recognises his acts as a resistor from his desertion to the *maquis* from 28 August to 13 September 1944. About his arrival in the *maquis*, it is also mentioned in many accounts by his former clandestine comrades that he ordered his men to join the *maquis* in Bussières as a group on 27 August. As these sources are contradictory, it is most probable that after his arrest, he established contact with the Resistance to secure both his own position and that of his men.

The third phase corresponds to his life in the *maquis* and his actions as a commander, from 28 August to 14 September, instilling military discipline

51 SHD, GD 52 E 41, section de Langres – registre de correspondance courante au départ – 18 février au 25 août 1944, rapport du capitaine Stanguennec, commandant la section de Langres, sur la physionomie de la circonscription, 18 février 1944.

inside the clandestine group. As such, his authority brought him to a position close to the one he had when he commanded the section. In doing so, it is arguable that utilising the Resistance as a bridge, Stanguennec aimed to secure a passage between one legal authority, the Vichy government, to another, the *Gouvernement provisoire*, as explained above. As such, he managed to secure the actions of his men from accusations of collaboration by suggesting that they always followed the path of legalism.

The last phase corresponds to his return as the section commanding officer in the newly restored republic. During the *épuration* period, investigations regarding his acts were launched without negative conclusions for his position.

The Stanguennec case raises the question of the “grey zone” in the particular context of late participation in Resistance – a bit more than 15 days actively in the field. It also shows the difficulty in defining what can be considered patriotic or not, especially in the case of this profession, which demanded blind obedience to the orders and the chief of state. However, it is possible to state that, through his relationship with the chief of the local Resistance, Stanguennec managed to obey a new legitimate authority and, in doing so, he did not break the gendarmes’ vow of obedience.

Conclusion

The rural Gendarmerie’s position during World War II reveals itself to be paradoxical and the role of gendarmes in the Resistance is constantly thrown into doubt. Unlike other law enforcement units, this group adopted a general behaviour that largely depended on the context of the ongoing war, as the case of the Langres’ section shows. However, the Langres’ section’s case points out a new challenge in studying French law enforcement forces under the German occupation. This chapter, despite using the “grey zone” concept as a basis, reveals the complexity of applying such a reflection to a subject in which the studied group reveals itself as heterogeneous as a clandestine society can be, mixing a tiny minority of staunch patriots with a majority of unconvinced followers. As such, this paper should be a start to a complete redefinition of Primo Levi’s concept to find a new notion that would better be applied to the history of this type of actor.

Part 4.
A Transnational European Space of
Resistance? Crossborder Trajectories of
Resistance

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

Vladan Vukliš

At least 1.800 Yugoslavs fought for the Spanish Republic between 1936 and 1939, most of them as volunteers in the International Brigades.¹ 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.² 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

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.³

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.”⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶ 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.⁷

With this concentration of the antifascist cadre, the camps became “crucibles of transnational resistance.”⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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”.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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”.¹⁸ 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 1941.¹⁹

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 1941.²⁰

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”.²¹ 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.”²² As a KPJ member, he went to Spain, where he served as an artillery lieutenant.²³ 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”.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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”.²⁶ 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”.²⁷

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”.²⁸ 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.²⁹ Five “Spaniards” also formed the first six–member Provincial Staff for Croatia.³⁰ 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.”³¹ 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 1941,³² or the encirclement of the Kozara Mountain in the summer of 1942, followed by a significant loss of civilian life.³³ 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”³⁴

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?³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ “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.’”⁴¹

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.⁴² 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: Vympel, 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.”⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷

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

Yugoslavs’ participation in resistance movements outside of their homeland remains under-researched.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ In total, out of some twenty thousand Yugoslavs with French residence just before the war,⁵⁰ at least 500 took part in the fighting,⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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.⁵³ Other foreigners were also activated and the MOI itself was effectively militarised.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ 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–1943.⁶¹ Similar to his “Spanish” comrade Matija Vidaković in Belgrade,⁶² “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.⁶³ 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, “Cijoint 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.⁶⁴

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”.⁶⁵ 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,⁶⁶ 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”.⁶⁷

Apparently, the case of Major Begović was immediately closed in Saint–Cyprien by Luigi Longo and Franz Dahlem.⁶⁸ He was again used for intelligence activity in the camps,⁶⁹ and, with such credentials, assumed political and organisational duties in the FTP–MOI. In Lyon, he was in contact with the “Carmagnole” group.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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.⁷²

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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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 1944.⁷⁶ Kalafatić, who came to Spain from the USSR and at one point switched from combat to staff translator duty,⁷⁷ as one commendation indicates, used his polyglot skills to persuade the enemy soldiers to lay down their weapons.⁷⁸ As Kalafatić himself would later claim,⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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.”⁸¹

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,⁸² 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.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ 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)⁸⁵ and from October 1944, delegated as liaison to the Allied headquarters.⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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 KPI, 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.

Raymond Schmittlein and Irène Giron: Two Crossed Trajectories in the French Resistance

Corine Defrance

Irène Giron (*née* Roman, 1910-1988) and Raymond Schmittlein (1904-1974) met for the first time at the French National Liberation Commissariat (*Commissariat français de la Libération nationale* – CFLN) in Algiers in November 1943. Their two trajectories converged in the service of Combat, one of the most important French Resistance movements and General Charles de Gaulle’s main relay in North Africa. For eight years, until 1951, they worked together in the Resistance and, after the end of the war, in the French military government in Germany (active from 1945 to 1949) and then in the French High Commission in Germany (which lasted from 1949 to 1955). They were both responsible for education (Heads of the Department of Public Education and then the Department of Cultural Affairs from 1949): he as director, she as deputy director. Schmittlein returned to France in June 1951 after being elected to the National Assembly as a Gaullist deputy for the Territory of Belfort. Giron ensured the transition with a new team and returned to France, at her request, at the end of 1951.

Apart from the connection between the Resistance and the post-war French occupation of Germany that links these two individuals, there are many similarities in their biographies. Both spent their childhoods in binational families; both had German roots, spoke German and had a remarkable knowledge of Germany; both founded families with partners of a nationality other than their own; and above all, Schmittlein and Giron became aware very early of the Nazi regime’s anti-Semitic and expansionist nature and clearly expressed their rejection of the Nazi takeover on Europe. How did these factors influence their involvement in the Resistance and their careers as Resistance fighters?¹ The historian Robert Frank makes a distinc-

1 Pierre Laborie, “L’idée de Résistance, entre définition et sens: retour sur un questionnement”, in *Les Français des années troubles. De la guerre d’Espagne à la Libération*, ed. Pierre Laborie (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003) 65-80.

tion between transnationality and internationality: “International phenomena and relationships are or become transnational when they transcend not the state dimension, but the limits of national identities, when processes of identification with others are put in place through mechanisms of transfer and reappropriation”.² Using this definition, it seems to us that the claim to multiple identities and the ability to commit to international values, because they have a profound impact on players’ feelings of belonging – here Schmittlein and Giron – can be described as transnational ones. This chapter will study the impact of these factors – transnational families and early experiences of Nazi Germany – on the decision to join the resistance and the forms of resistance and willingness to participate in the occupation of Germany in order to contribute to its democratisation.

Transnational families

When France declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, Schmittlein and Irene Giron were aged 35 and 29 respectively. They both belonged to a generation that had lived through World War I as children and came from binational families. Schmittlein was born in Roubaix, in northern France, on 19 June 1904, to an Alsatian mother and a German father born in Mainz and naturalised as a French citizen in 1893.³ Giron was born in Hamburg on 22 September 1910 to a German mother and a British father. According to the nationality rules in force at the time, she had British nationality.

Their age difference meant that they had significantly different childhood experiences of World War I. Schmittlein was left an orphan in 1915 at the age of 11.⁴ He was brought up by an older sister and Catholic institutions: the Collège Saint-Louis in Roubaix and then the junior seminary in

2 Robert Frank, “Émotions mondiales, internationales et transnationales, 1822-1932”, *Monde(s)*, no. 1 (Mai 2012): 67; *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, eds. Pierre-Yves Saunier and Akira Iriye (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

3 National Archives/*Archives Nationales* – AN (Pierrefitte), “dossier de naturalisation de Charles Ferdinand Schmittlein, BB/11/2183, extract no 9439x88”. The request was submitted in 1888 and Charles Schmittlein was naturalised by decree in 1893.

4 Manon Pignot, “Expériences enfantines du deuil pendant et après la Grande Guerre”, *Histoire@Politique*, no 3 (November-December 2007); Stéphane Audouin-Rouzeau, *La guerre des enfants 1914-1918. Essai d'histoire culturelle* (Paris: Colin, 1993); Stéphane Audouin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18, Retrouver la guerre*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

Haubourdin.⁵ For four years, he lived in a region occupied by the Germans. As Manon Pignot points out, “the occupied zone constitutes [...] a specific place and time from the point of view of children’s experience of war”.⁶ Annette Becker has described the occupied northern zone as the “laboratory of total war”, because the region was so significantly affected: not only was the occupation regime particularly rigorous, with numerous requisitions, deportations and forced labour, but various atrocities, looting and rapes terrorised civilians and traumatised children.⁷ Schmittlein himself experienced the evacuation of children from the northern zone and his older brothers’ involvement in the conflict. His childhood was rough and shaped by the war.

In 1924, he interrupted his higher education at the *Missions Étrangères* in Paris (a Catholic College preparing missionaries)⁸ to do military service as a *Zouave* in the Army of the Rhine, near Wiesbaden. At that time, France occupied the west bank of the Rhine with some bridgeheads on the right side, as it had since 1918. He then entered the Reserve Officers’ School.⁹ When he left, he joined as an officer fighting in the Rif War, a colonial war that Spain and then France were conducting in Morocco.¹⁰ Seriously wounded at the

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- 5 Diocesan Archives/*Archives diocésaines* (Lille), dossier 1H231 (petit séminaire d’Haubourdin), 1908-1968; Corine Defrance, “Raymond Schmittlein (1904-1974): Leben und Werk eines französischen Gründungsaters der Universität Mainz”, in *Ut omnes unum sint (Teil 1) Die Gründungs-
persönlichkeiten der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität der Universität Mainz*, eds. Michael Kissener and Helmut Mathy (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 11-30.
- 6 Manon Pignot, “Expériences enfantines d’occupation pendant la Grande Guerre: pratiques et représentations à travers le cas français”, *Revue européenne d’histoire sociale Histoire & Sociétés*, no 17 (2006): 19; *Enfants en guerre. “Sans famille” dans les conflits du xx^e siècle*, eds. Laura Hobson Faure, Manon Pignot and Antoine Rivière, (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2023).
- 7 Larissa Wegner, *Occupatio Bellica. Die deutsche Armee in Nordfrankreich 1914-1918* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2023); James E. Connolly, *The experience of occupation in the Nord, 1914-18. Living with the enemy in First-World-War-France* (Manchester: Manchesterhive, 2018); Annette Becker, *Les cicatrices rouges, 14-18. France et Belgique occupées* (Paris: Fayard, 2010); Annette Becker, “Life in an Occupied Zone: Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing”, in *Facing Armageddon. The First World War Experienced*, eds. Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (London: Cooper, 1996), 630-641; Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée, 1914-1918* (Paris: Colin, 2011); Philippe Nivet, *Les boches du Nord* (Paris: Economica, 2004).
- 8 Archives of the Foreign Missions of Paris/*Archives des Missions Étrangères de Paris* – MEP, DB 4011L, Letter from Raymond Schmittlein to the MEP, 16 May 1922; Corine Defrance, “Raymond Schmittlein”, in *Dictionnaire du Monde religieux dans la France contemporaine*, vol. 12, *Franche-Comté*, eds. Laurent Ducerf, Vincent Petit and Manuel Tramaux (Paris: Beauchesne, 2016), 674-675.
- 9 Historical Service of the French Defence/*Service Historique de la Défense* – SHD (Vincennes), “dossier personnel Raymond Schmittlein, état des services”.
- 10 C. R. Peennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag. The Rif War in Morocco, 1921-1926*, (Oxford: Middle East and North African Studies Press Ltd., 1986); Mathieu Marly, “La guerre du Rif (1921-1926), une guerre coloniale?”, *Encyclopédie d’histoire numérique de l’Europe*, <https://ehne.fr/fr/node/21489>. All internet sources were last accessed 6 November 2023.

end of 1925, he was repatriated to France. He abandoned theology, presumably for disciplinary reasons, for German studies at the Sorbonne, as he had been bilingual since childhood. He successfully passed the *agrégation* – the competitive examination required to become a secondary school teacher in France – in German in 1932 and became a teacher at a lycée in Chartres.

Irene Giron grew up in a wealthy protestant family that was also affected by the war. Her father, Walter Roman, a coffee trader in Hamburg, was interned as a civilian in Ruhleben near Berlin from 1914 until 1918 because he was British. When he was released, he moved to London with his family. Irene attended school there for two years. The family returned to Hamburg in 1920 and Irene attended a secondary school for girls (*Mädchen-realschule*). In 1927, her father committed suicide when his business went bankrupt.¹¹ The economic situation of the mother and her two children was difficult and the family moved to Hesse, where she completed her schooling and passed her secondary school leaving certificate (*Reifeprüfung*) in 1930 at the *Reinhardswaldschule* in Kassel-Land.¹² Fully bilingual, she initially studied German and art history, with minor specialities in history and journalism, at the universities of Heidelberg and Hamburg.¹³ When she registered at Hamburg in the winter semester of 1931/32, she indicated that she wanted to study to become a journalist.¹⁴ She studied in France from autumn 1932 to autumn 1933.¹⁵ At the time, 28 percent of Sorbonne students were women, 15-20 percent of whom were foreign nationals.¹⁶ This was more than in Germany, where in 1932/33, across all universities and all disciplines, only 18.6 percent of those registered at university were female.¹⁷ So even if Giron was not exactly a pioneer, her student career was still very atypical for women of her generation. This reflects the trajectory

11 Charles Giron, interviews with the author, Paris, 1992-1994.

12 University Archive Heidelberg/*Universitätsarchiv Heidelberg* – UA Heidelberg, StudA Roman, Irene (1933), handwritten note from Irene Roman, 4 May 1932.

13 *Ibid.*, StudA Roman, Irene (1933), Anmeldung zur Immatrikulation an der Universität Heidelberg, 13 November 1930.

14 University Archive Hamburg/*Universitätarchiv Hamburg*, Roman, Irene G23368, form dated 30 October 1931.

15 UA Heidelberg, StudA Roman, Irene (1933).

16 Carole Christen-Lécuyer, “Les premières étudiantes de l’Université de Paris”, *Travail, genre et sociétés* 4, no 2, (2000), 35-50.

17 Lothar Mertens, “Die Entwicklung des Frauenstudiums in Deutschland bis 1945”, *APuZ* 28, 1989, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/534903/die-entwicklung-des-frauenstudiums-in-deutschland-bis-1945/>.

of a brilliant, independent young woman with deep interest in analysing contemporary realities, keen to prepare for her professional career.

Education and early experiences of Nazi Germany

Irene Giron and Raymond Schmittlein had decisive early experiences of Nazism and of the Nazi regime. These experiences shaped their path towards the Resistance.

Schmittlein's first direct contact with Germany dates back to when he was studying for his degree in German studies. He went to Berlin in 1931/32 to prepare for the *agrégation*, financing his stay by teaching French at the Berlitz School. It was there that he met a German woman, Gerta Eichholz, whom he married in spring 1932. During his stay in Berlin, he observed with concern the rise of nationalism, militarism and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). Meeting the Catholic historian and writer Jean de Pange, he confessed to being pessimistic about Germany's future.¹⁸ In the Reichstag elections of 31 July 1932, the NSDAP made a spectacular breakthrough, becoming the largest party with 37,3 percent of the vote. The NSDAP had not only won over a significant number of voters who had previously voted for the other parties, but had also managed to attract first-time voters as well as a large number of people who traditionally did not vote. And for the Reichstag elections in November 1932, despite support dropping to 33,1 percent, the NSDAP organised SA marches in Berlin and Brandenburg, demonstrating their power in the capital.

Schmittlein's career then took him to the Baltic states. After obtaining his *agrégation*, he began a PhD in linguistics at the Sorbonne and chose to work on Baltic languages, in particular Lithuanian, which was considered at the time to be one of the languages close to the so-called Indo-European origins. This is why he applied to be a lecturer in French at the University of Kaunas.¹⁹ Schmittlein and his family moved to the then-Lithuanian capital in the autumn of 1934. In addition to working at the university, he became

18 Jean de Pange, *Journal (1931-1933)* (Paris: Grasset, 1967), 20 December 1931 and 8 January 1932, 80-86.

19 Lithuanian Central State Archives/*Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas* (Vilnius), 631/1 vol. 636, "curriculum vitae de R. Schmittlein"; see also the book resulting from his PhD research, a PhD that he never completed and defended): Raymond Schmittlein, *Études sur la nationalité des Aestii* (Bade: Editions Art et science, 1948).

involved in the Lithuanian-French Society and helped to develop cultural relations between the two countries to ensure the “influence of France” in a region that had not always been immune to German influences.²⁰ The beginning of his career was therefore already marked by Franco-German rivalry. What is more, as soon as he arrived in Kaunas, the French press agency Havas recruited him as a correspondent.²¹ Among other things, he reported on the rise of Nazi influence in Klaipėda/Memel. Early on, he understood the danger that Nazism represented for the European democracies, due to Hitler’s expansionist aims. Well aside from his cultural mission and even his role as press correspondent, Schmittlein informed Paris in 1935 about German troop movements on the border between East Prussia and Lithuania.²²

Giron had a very different career path, although there were some similarities. While studying at the Sorbonne in 1932/33, she met a young lawyer, Charles Giron, who later became her husband. In autumn 1933, she returned to Germany, where she enrolled at the Institute for Translation and Interpreting (*Dolmetscher-Institut*) at the University of Heidelberg. In October 1934, she graduated with top honours as a trilingual translator and interpreter of German, English and French.²³ This institute was one of the first structures at the University of Heidelberg to bring itself into line with Nazi government objectives, a process known as *Selbstgleichschaltung*.²⁴ Recent studies have highlighted the extent to which the role of interpreter’s training and profession was politically sensitive; a large part of the interpreter-translator community placed hope in the “Third Reich” to obtain a professional status.²⁵ The Nazi regime needed ideologically reliable men

20 Corine Defrance, “Raymond Schmittlein (1904-1974): médiateur entre la France et la Lituanie”, *Cahiers Litvaniens*, no 9, (Autumn 2008): 18-23, <http://www.cahiers-litvaniens.org/Schmittlein.htm>; Julien Gueslin, “La France et les petits États baltes: réalités baltes, perceptions françaises et ordre européen (1920-1932)”, (unpublished PhD diss., University of Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2004), <https://theses.hal.science/tel-00126331>; Vyngantas Vareikis, “Deutsch-litauische Beziehungen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts”, *Annaberger Annalen*, no. 5 (1997): 6-25.

21 Antoine Lefébure, *Havas. Les arcanes du pouvoir*, (Paris: Grasset, 1992) 240-247; AN, 5AR/386 & 387 [agence Havas] dossiers Raymond Schmittlein.

22 The Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office/*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amtes* (Berlin), R 484947, Brief vom Reichspostminister an das Auswärtiges Amt, 1 February 1935.

23 UA Heidelberg, StudA Roman, Irene (1933), registration form dated 14 November 1933; K-VI-51/72-1, Dolmetscher-Institut, Prüfungsangelegenheiten, 1931-1937, Protokoll der Prüfungsausschuss – Schlusssitzung am. 12 October 1934.

24 Kilian Peter Schultes, “Die Staats- und Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät der Universität Heidelberg 1934-1946” (PhD diss. University of Heidelberg, 2010), 406.

25 Charlotte Kieslich, *Dolmetschen im Nationalsozialismus: die Reichsfachschaft für das Dolmetscherwesen (RfD)* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2018).

and women for diplomacy, the judiciary, the army, and similar institutions. With the war and the German occupations in Europe, the regime needed such people in very high numbers and the number of students at the *Dolmetscher-Institut* in Heidelberg exploded from 84 in 1934/35 to 643 in 1943.²⁶ While Giron was studying at Heidelberg, the administrator of the *Dolmetscher-Institut*, Heinz Walz, came under attack from the head of the students' organisation (*Studentenschaftsführer*) who, in the spring of 1934, called for his dismissal because of Walz's Jewish origins.²⁷

This case particularly impacted young Irene Giron because of her family situation. Her mother, Alice Scheel, had remarried a German Jew, Walther Hildesheimer, in 1932. Also in 1934, teachers and students at the *Dolmetscher-Institut* demanded that the Nazi ideological line be strengthened and denounced the excessive weight of Romance languages at the expense of Germanic ones. According to a former Heidelberg student, the female interpreters and translators were particularly indoctrinated: "Our female guides were largely recruited from the female interpreters. One of the reasons was probably that the interpreters were mostly really NS. [...]. You couldn't get enough foreign language experts for the border service and for checking letters."²⁸

Giron probably went to London after graduating and attended the London School of Economics, where she obtained a certificate, as she later attested to the French authorities.²⁹ According to Charles Giron's testimony, Irene came back to Germany and then worked for two or three years for various German companies as a translator and interpreter.³⁰ We have no further information about her motivations. Giron's mother and stepfather managed to emigrate to South Africa in 1937 to escape anti-Semitic persecution in Nazi Germany. Irene decided to join them. These were very difficult years for the family. Walther died in January 1939. According to Alice's

26 Schultes, "Die Staats- und Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät", 409.

27 Ibid., 153.

28 Ibid., 409.

29 No file for an "Irene Roman", as her name would have been at the time, has been found in the LSE archives, which is not unusual for a student who only passed a certificate at this institution. Correspondence between the author and Daniel Payne, Curator for politics and international relations, LSE Library, London, 19 and 20 May, 2022.

30 Giron, interviews with the author, Paris, 1992-1994; Corine Defrance, "Bericht aus einer verlorengegangenen Quelle: Der Weg Irène Girons in die Französische Militärregierung (1910 bis 1945)", in *Ut omnes unum sint (Teil 1) Die Gründungspersönlichkeiten der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität der Universität Mainz*, eds. Michael Kissener and Helmut Mathy (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005), 43-55.

correspondence, Irene Giron worked for two years as a journalist for two newspapers and magazines published by the Union Magazine publishing company: *Monthly Diary of events* and *Pleasure*. Her employer wrote an excellent review.³¹ There is no doubt that this experience of journalism and editorial responsibilities was invaluable for the young woman's future work in editing and producing *Combat-Algérie*, the press organ of the *Combat* resistance movement in North Africa.

Joining the Resistance and Resistance activities

In the summer of 1938, Schmittlein was reassigned to Latvia as a teacher at the French lycée (*Lycée français*) and director of the French Institute (*Institut français*) in Riga. When war was declared in September 1939, he was mobilised there as head of the French intelligence services in the Baltic. In December, at a time when the Latvian Republic was more fragile than ever, caught between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which had already forced it to accept the installation of military bases on its territory, Schmittlein was arrested by the police for espionage in the port of Riga.³² Expelled from the country after spending two weeks in Latvian jails, he left at the beginning of January 1940 for the French embassy in Stockholm, where he observed the Wehrmacht's advance into Norway. Schmittlein joined the Free French (*Français Libres*) in July 1940.³³ From Stockholm, Schmittlein joined the Free French organisation and his registration was symbolically

31 Private Irène Giron fonds, formerly consulted by Charles Giron (1994): "Miss Roman has shown her great gifts for journalism and her discernment and initiative in editing [...] Owing to her sound judgement, her personality and the originality of her ideas in both the editorial and the commercial side, she has, after a few months' work, created for herself a position for more independent and responsible than the one primarily assigned to her in this concern"; Defrance, "Bericht aus einer verlorengegangenen Quelle: Der Weg Irène Girons in die Französische Militärregierung (1910 bis 1945)".

32 Latvian State Historical Archive/*Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs* – LVA (Riga), Nr. 2570/3 vol. 1250; Jean de Beausse, *Carnets d'un diplomate français en Lettonie, 1939-1940* (Riga: Liesma, 1997).

33 Corine Defrance, "Raymond Schmittlein: un itinéraire dans la France Libre, entre activités militaires et diplomatiques" *Relations Internationales*, no 108 (2001): 487-501; Corine Defrance, "Raymond Schmittlein" in *Ut omnes unum sint (Teil 1) Die Gründungspersönlichkeiten der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität der Universität Mainz*, eds. Michael Kissener and Helmut Mathy (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005); see also private Raymond Schmittlein fonds, by his son Raymond Schmittlein (junior), consulted 2001; Jean-François Muracciole, *Les Français libres. L'Autre Résistance* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009); *Dictionnaire de la France libre*, eds. François Broche, Georges Caïtucoli and Jean-François Muracciole, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010).

dated 14 July (the French national day). He was thus one of the very first Frenchmen to join the Resistance organised from abroad by de Gaulle.

In July 1940, only 7.000 people had joined the Free French Forces (*Forces Françaises Libres* – FFL), a movement that at its peak, had 53.000 members. Schmittlein did not fit the profile of most of the first Free French, more than two-thirds of whom were under 30 years old, single and poorly educated. The fact that he was already abroad and had been working for France from abroad for six years certainly contributed to this extremely early decision. According to research on the motivations for joining the FFL, the main reason was patriotism, while a sense of adventure, ideology, fear of persecution and training by comrades also played a more or less important role, depending on the time of enlistment.³⁴ As with most Free Frenchmen (joining the Resistance was often a discreet affair), Schmittlein left no account of his reasons for joining the FFL in July 1940, but there is no doubt that patriotism and rejection of Nazi ideology were powerful driving forces. On De Gaulle's orders, who was organising the Resistance from outside metropolitan France, Schmittlein made the long and complicated journey to Palestine where he set up a Free French radio station in Haifa to counter the Vichy regime's propaganda in Syria and Lebanon with another diplomat and early Resistance fighter, François Coulet.³⁵

The Middle East was a priority area of operation for De Gaulle and the external resistance. Schmittlein then took part in disarmament operations in Syria and Lebanon after Vichy troops were defeated by British troops helped by FFL.³⁶ In March 1942, De Gaulle nominated him as the Free French diplomatic representative in the USSR. He was the number two in the mission led by Roger Garreau and relocated with the Soviet government to Kuibyshev (today Samara).³⁷ In the USSR, he played an important role in ensuring

34 "Who were the Free French", Chemins de mémoire, Ministère des Armées, <https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/who-were-free-french>; François Broche, Georges Caïtucoli and Jean-François Muracciole, *La France au Combat: de l'appel du 18 juin à la Victoire* (Paris: Perrin, 2007).

35 François Coulet, *Vertu des temps difficiles* (Paris: Plon, 1966).

36 Antoine Hokayem, "La France et le Levant de 1940 à 1943: l'indépendance du Liban et de la Syrie", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* no. 48, (1994): 83-118; Maurice Albord, *L'Armée française et les États du Levant: 1936-1946* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000); Jérôme Bocquet, "La France Libre, de Gaulle et le Liban" in *Le Cèdre et le chêne. De Gaulle et le Liban*, eds. Clotilde de Fouchécour and Karim Emile Bitar (Paris: Geuthner, 2015), 118-119.

37 François Lévêque, "Les relations entre l'Union soviétique et la France Libre (juin 1941-septembre 1942)" in *De Gaulle et la Russie*, ed. Maurice Vaisse (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2006), 17-31; Henri-Christian Giraud, *De Gaulle et les Communistes*, 2 vol., (Paris: Albin Michel: 1988/1989); Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *Le général de Gaulle et la Russie* (Paris: Fayard, 2017).

that the *Malgré-nous* – men from Alsace and Lorraine who had been forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht – were separated from the German soldiers who were prisoners of war of the Soviets. This led to the creation of the Tambov camp, setting up a squadron of French airmen to fight alongside the Red Army on the Eastern Front – the *Normandie-Niemen* – and in negotiating diplomatic recognition of the CFLN set up by De Gaulle in Algiers.³⁸ Schmittlein received this recognition from Molotov in August 1943. In November 1943, De Gaulle called him back to Algiers to join the CFLN.

When war was declared, Irene Giron left Johannesburg to travel by sea on a Dutch cargo ship to her fiancé in Paris. It was a long and perilous crossing to Le Havre.³⁹ When she arrived in Paris in November 1939, Charles Giron had been mobilised. In May 1940, he served in the 4th Armoured Division (*division cuirassée*) led by De Gaulle. Charles Giron served De Gaulle as a lieutenant until De Gaulle left for London on 17 June 1940. From December 1939, Irene Giron analysed German broadcasts and Nazi propaganda at the *Centre d'Écoute de la Radiodiffusion Nationale*.⁴⁰ She resigned on the very day of the armistice, 22 June 1940, which was characteristic of the early Resistance fighters and of De Gaulle's followers. They recognised the military defeat but refused the armistice – a political act – while France still had an army and an empire from which they wanted to continue the fight.⁴¹

Married in Le Puy in southern France at the end of September 1940, the Girons joined one of the first resistance movements in the *Massif Central*,⁴² the *Petites Ailes*, founded by General Gabriel Cochet. Once more, we do not have a document to understand her motivations. But it is clear that she wanted to resist against Nazi Germany and its ideology. Her trajectory – with her decision to leave South Africa and go to France after the declaration of war and her symbolic resignation from her job on the day of the armistice – shows that she came to Europe to fight against the Nazi aggression and that her entry into the Resistance was not simply the act of a wife “supporting” her husband. On the other hand, did their decision to

38 Jacques Bariéty and Corine Defrance, “Les missions de la France libre en Union soviétique et les ‘Malgré nous’, 1942–1944”, *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* 39, no. 4 (2007): 549–566.

39 Private Irène Giron fonds, Correspondence between Alice Scheel, Irène Giron's mother and Eva Hildesheimer, her stepdaughter; Defrance, “Bericht aus einer verlorengegangenen Quelle: Der Weg Irène Girons in die Französische Militärregierung (1910 bis 1945)”.

40 Giron, interviews with the author, Paris, 1992–1994.

41 Jean-François Muracciole, *Histoire de la Résistance en France* (Paris: PUF, 2020), 7.

42 A highland area in south-central France.

marry facilitate their joint underground work? Did it allow her to go more unnoticed than the presence of a young British woman would have done in Vichy France? The sources do not provide a clear answer to this question.

While initially loyal to Marshal Pétain, Cochet was what is known as a *vichysto-résistant*,⁴³ meaning that he was first loyal to the Vichy Regime, but at the same time, supported the Resistance. Indeed, he was one of the first to sign calls for Resistance distributed in the form of leaflets to the armistice army.⁴⁴ Irène Giron was in charge of propaganda and writing a clandestine leaflet, *Petites Ailes de France*,⁴⁵ initially created in the northern zone, then taken over in the southern zone by the Resistance fighter Henri Frenay from mid-May 1941.⁴⁶ It was the forerunner of the underground newspaper *Combat*. Towards the end of 1940, the first Resistance fighters began to pool their efforts and set up the first movements and networks on a political or professional basis.⁴⁷ However, it is still necessary to speak of the Resistances in the plural, given the diversity of currents. The Resistance was still very much in the minority, as French society was Petainist and openly hostile to the first Resistance fighters.⁴⁸ In 1951, the French High Commissioner in Germany, André François-Poncet, testified that Irène Giron had created “the first meshes of a Resistance network in the Massif Central, ensuring liaison herself, gathering the information requested, drafting and distributing leaflets against the enemy”.⁴⁹

Wanted by the Gestapo, the Girons fled to North Africa in May 1941. Perhaps this was because it was more difficult to find them there, despite the fact that the region was loyal to Marshal Pétain at the time,⁵⁰ or

43 Sébastien Albertelli and Johanna Barasz, “Un résistant atypique: le général Cochet, entre vichysme et gaullisme”, *Histoire@Politique*, no. 5 (2008). <https://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-politique-2008-2-page-9.htm>.

44 Muracciole, *Résistance*, 9, 35, 75; Harry Roderick Kedward, *Naissance de la Résistance dans la France de Vichy, 1940-1942. Idées et motivations* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1989).

45 French Diplomatic Archives/*Archives diplomatiques françaises* – ADF, (La Courneuve), dossier de carrière d’Irène Giron, 20 May 1947.

46 Bruno Leroux, “La presse clandestine d’une guerre à l’autre, en France et en Belgique”, *La Lettre de la Fondation de la Résistance*, no. 79 (December 2014), <http://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/media10355-iLes-Petites-Ailes-i-journal-clandestin-cr-par-Jacques-Yves-Mulliez-en-septembre-1940>.

47 Muracciole, *Résistance*, 9.

48 Ibid., 14.

49 ADF, dossier de carrière d’Irène Giron, “proposition de nomination de Madame Irène Emilie Giron, née Roman au grade de Chevalier dans l’Ordre national de la Légion d’honneur au titre de la Résistance”, André François-Poncet, 18 July 1951.

50 Irène’s mother, in her correspondence with Eva Hildesheimer, refers to mid-May 1941 (letter of 26 July 1941, Private Irène Giron Fonds).

maybe because the Resistance and particularly De Gaulle wanted to establish a presence in these parts of the French empire. Irène and Charles Giron worked for *Combat*. *Combat* was one of the first and most important resistance movements created in Lyon in autumn 1940 by Henri Frenay and his companion Berty Albrecht.⁵¹ From spring 1941, *Combat* expanded into North Africa. In Algiers, one of its main leaders, René Capitant, set up a local edition of the underground newspaper under the name *Combat-Algérie*.⁵² Initially it was a handwritten and later a typed clandestine newspaper. In its 1 December 1942 edition, *Combat-Algérie* presented itself as “the irreconcilable enemy of the Vichy regime. It considers the armistice a betrayal and a dishonour. [...] *Combat* is fighting for the liberation of France. By this it means its liberation not only from the invader, but also from the tyrants who usurped power through defeat and hold on to it with the support of the enemy”.⁵³

At Capitant’s side, Irène Giron consolidated the clandestine movement in Algeria and Morocco and took charge of the organisation of *Combat-Algérie*. She was responsible for the newspaper’s editorial secretariat and the movement’s secretariat.⁵⁴ Since the French authorities loyal to Vichy learned about her underground activities, she had to leave and went to Morocco.⁵⁵ She was involved in the immediate aftermath of the Allied landings in North Africa – Operation Torch – on 8 November 1942 which led in the next months to the liberation of large parts of Algeria and Morocco. In Morocco, Irène Giron set up channels for young French fighters to pass through Spain to Tunisia, where the FFL and the Allies were engaged in fierce fighting with the German Africa Corps (*Afrika Korps*).⁵⁶

51 Sebastien Albertelli, Julien Blanc and Laurent Douzou, *La lutte clandestine en France* (Paris: Seuil, 2019), 33; Robert Belot, *Henri Frenay. De la Résistance à l’Europe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003). See Robert Belot’s article in this volume.

52 Muracciole, *Résistance*, 40.

53 *Combat-Algérie*, no 101, 12 March 1944, “Fidèles à nous-mêmes”. – AN (645 AP) – René Capitant Fonds.

54 René Capitant Fonds at the AN (645 AP) enables us to retrace some of Irène Giron’s activities during this period. It also contains an almost complete collection of *Combat-Algérie*.

55 “At the beginning of 1942, to escape the North African militia [the feared legionnaires’ order service, SOL], she went to Morocco”, André François-Poncet attests, 18 July 1951, ADF, “dossier de carrière d’Irène Giron”.

56 François-Poncet reports that she “contributed, through her personal action, to the preparation of [this] landing. She organised the reception centres in Tunis, Algiers, Oran and Casablanca for the FFI and set up the chain of volunteers that led young French Resistance fighters from France via Spain to Leclerc and Koenig’s Free French divisions”, André François-Poncet attests, 18 July 1951, ADF, “dossier de carrière d’Irène Giron”.

The months following the landing were difficult for Combat and the Gaullist resistance. The U.S. was distrustful of an unelected general who President Franklin Delano Roosevelt suspected of dictatorial designs, especially as De Gaulle was inflexible and often rebelled against the decisions that the U.S. wanted to impose. Washington imposed Admiral Darlan in Algiers, who had been Pétain's head of government from February 1941 to April 1942 and had helped to commit the regime to collaboration.⁵⁷ All the Resistance groups were outraged and Darlan's designation had the countereffect of facilitating the unification of the Resistance.⁵⁸ Initially, for *Combat-Algérie*, this nomination meant repression and a return to the underground.⁵⁹ It was only after Darlan's assassination on 24 December 1942 and replacement by General Henri Giraud, imposed once again by the Americans in an attempt to avoid De Gaulle, that *Combat-Algérie* was able to resurface openly.

After De Gaulle established himself in Algiers on 30 May 1943 and the CFLN was founded on 3 June, Giron worked as a press officer in the office of the National Education Commissioner, René Capitant.⁶⁰ This is where she first crossed paths with Schmittlein, who had also been appointed to the National Education Commission on his return from the Soviet Union.⁶¹ Giron and Schmittlein also worked together within the Combat movement: she was a member of the steering committee and he was the general secretary for North Africa. Together they organised the tour of a documentary exhibition entitled "Kollaboration", organised by *Combat-Algérie* in March 1944.⁶² The exhibition consists of thematic panels showing extracts from

57 Muracciole, *Résistance*, 42; Christine Levisse-Touzé, *L'Afrique du Nord dans la guerre, 1939-1945* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).

58 Guillaume Piketty, "La France combattante au cœur du maelström", in *8 novembre 1942. Résistance et débarquement allié en Afrique du Nord. Dynamiques historiques, politiques et socio-culturelles*, eds. Nicole Cohen-Addad, Aïssa Kadri and Tramor Quemeneur (Vulaines-sur-Seine: Editions du Croquant, 2021).

59 *Combat-Algérie*, editorial, 21 January 1943 – AN (645 AP): "We are once again using roneo to distribute our newspaper. We are being hounded again, as in the worst days of the Vichy dictatorship. Our printing house is being watched and our issues confiscated. They want to silence us and make us powerless. [...] We are being attacked because we are appealing for the arrival of General de Gaulle, who has promised us freedom and the Republic, and who will give it back to us. They are after us because we are republicans and we want freedom".

60 AN, F/17/29322, Commissariat à l'Éducation Nationale, Alger, dossier Irène Giron, "fiche de renseignements".

61 AN, F17/13335, Commissariat à l'Éducation Nationale, projet Schmittlein concernant l'enseignement du second degré (no date).

62 *Combat-Algérie*, "L'inauguration de l'exposition Kollaboration", n° 103, 26 March 1944 – AN (645 AP).

collaboration newspapers, posters and photographs with critical commentaries. The aim was to denounce the collaboration of the Vichy regime and demand the purging of those who had served that regime. This *épuration* had already begun in liberated North Africa in 1943. Now the process of purging those mainly responsible of the Vichy regime in metropolitan France had to be prepared. Giron, along with Schmittlein, was commissioned to promote the exhibition in the rest of North Africa and in Tunis in particular.

Giron returned to Paris in September 1944 after its liberation. Schmittlein had volunteered to go to the front. He landed at Toulon in August 1944 with the First Army under General de Lattre de Tassigny. He took part in the fighting to liberate France, making his way up the Rhône valley and distinguishing himself during the liberation of Belfort.⁶³

Continuing the mission in occupied Germany (1945-1951)

In July 1945, the French military government in Germany was set up and Capitant, now Minister of National Education, appointed Schmittlein and Giron to head the Department of Public Education (DEP), Schmittlein as director, Giron as deputy because both were resistant fighters, remarkable experts on Germany and its educational and cultural system and both spoke perfect German. Their main mission was the “re-education of the German people”, i.e. the denazification *and* the democratisation of Germany.⁶⁴ Young people, whose “chains had to be broken”,⁶⁵ were the main focus of their action, in order to ensure the future of a democratic Germany and peace on the continent.

In Algiers, Schmittlein had already taken part in commissions to reform the French education system and, in particular, to set up the future National

63 Schmittlein describes his campaign in France in his book: *La Nationale 83. Extraits d'un carnet de route*, (Mayence: Editions Art et Science, 1951).

64 Raymond Schmittlein, “La rééducation du peuple allemande”, in *La dénazification par les vainqueurs. La politique culturelle des occupants en Allemagne, 1945-1949*, ed. Jérôme Vaillant (Lille: PUL, 1981), 139-145; Corine Defrance, *La politique culturelle de la France sur la rive gauche du Rhin (1945-1955)* (Strasbourg: PUS, 1994); Corine Defrance, “Rééducation du peuple allemande”, in *Encyclopédie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, eds. Guillaume Piketty and Jean-François Muracciole (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2015), 1094-1096.

65 Raymond Schmittlein, “Briser les chaînes de la jeunesse allemande”, *France-Illustration*, no. 205 (September 1949): 17.

School of Administration (*École nationale d'administration* – ENA). These thoughts in 1944 inspired his plans for the French zone in Germany after 1945.⁶⁶ His project was characterised by a distrust of traditional universities, which were considered nationalist and above all by a desire to create something new rather than attempt to radically reform what already existed. In the French zone, Schmittlein and Giron founded a new university in Mainz, inaugurated in May 1946,⁶⁷ a high school of administration in Speyer and an interpreting institute in Germersheim, both opened in January 1947, an institute of European history and an academy of science and literature in Mainz, created in 1950.⁶⁸

Officially, the establishments in Speyer and Germersheim were intended to quickly train “qualified civil servants” at a time when *épuration* had further exacerbated the shortage of administrative staff. They were also intended to “break the monopoly of lawyers”, who Schmittlein considered to be “Prussianised”. According to the DEP, the persistence of lawyers in the administration under Weimar had hindered democracy and the republic.⁶⁹ It was therefore necessary to open up an alternative training system for administrators, as well as for interpreters and administrators.⁷⁰ The Speyer Institute was inspired by the plan to create the ENA in Paris.

It is important to emphasise the extent to which the post-war period, the reforms and in particular the desire to democratise the functioning of societies, was prepared by the Resistance during the war. In the early 1950s, the German Foreign Ministry (*Auswärtiges Amt*) commissioned the school to provide part of the training for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)'s young diplomats. Although the Johannes Gutenberg University (JGU) was

66 Stefan Zauner, *Erziehung und Kulturmission. Frankreichs Bildungspolitik in Deutschland 1945-1949* (München: Oldenbourg, 1994).

67 Corine Defrance, “Das Wunder von Mainz: Die Franzosen und die Gründung der JGU”, in *75 Jahre Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. Universität in der demokratischen Gesellschaft* (Regensburg: Verlag Schnell & Steiner, 2021), 43-55, <https://openscience.ub.uni-mainz.de/handle/20.500.12030/9166>.

68 Corine Defrance, “Mainz in der französischen Kulturpolitik, 1945-1951”, *Mainzer Zeitschrift, Mittelrheinisches Jahrbuch für Archäologie, Kunst und Geschichte*, 98 (2003): 73-84.

69 Corine Defrance, “La politique culturelle”, ed. Corine Defrance. *Les Alliés occidentaux et les universités allemandes, 1945-1949* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000).

70 Peter Schunck, “Irène Giron (1910-1988) und die Gründung der Mainzer Universität”, in *Ut omnes unum sint (Teil 1) Die Gründungspersönlichkeiten der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität der Universität Mainz*, eds. Michael Kissener and Helmut Mathy (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 31-42; Peter Schunck, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Dolmetscherhoschule Germersheim aus den Jahren 1946-1949* (Germersheim: Universität Mainz, 1997).

Schmittlein's "favourite child", Giron was particularly committed to training translators and interpreters at the Germersheim School of Interpreting.⁷¹ She undoubtedly benefited from her own experiences in Heidelberg. She took over the excellent technical language training, with modern facilities, but created "her" school with a radically different spirit: teaching the "living reality of foreign peoples" and encouraging exchange, whereas in 1933/34, the *Dolmetscher-Institut* in Heidelberg taught "knowledge of the enemy" and "German superiority". In 1946, the training Giron had received at the *Dolmetscher-Institut* in Heidelberg was partly a source of inspiration, but above all a counter-model. At one of Giron's last administrative evaluations, in 1950, Schmittlein emphasised: "The success of the institutes in Germersheim and Speyer, where German diplomats are now trained, are particularly attributable to her".⁷² The focus was now only on diplomats and Germersheim had just as important a role to play as Speyer. For the Schmittlein and Giron team, the Germersheim interpreting school was to be the favoured training centre for interpreters and translators for the new German diplomacy. Without being explicitly stated, the aim was to compete with the Heidelberg interpreting institute, which had failed under the Nazi regime. Irène Giron's personal background, her anti-Nazi commitment and her experience of exile and the Resistance led her to rethink the profession of interpreter on the basis of democratic principles and openness to others, contributing to the (re)emergence of translators and interpreters as cultural mediators.

Conclusion

Raymond Schmittlein and Irene Giron are examples of transnational trajectories in Resistance, not only because their Resistance activities took them across many borders in Europe and beyond; not only because they joined the fight against aggression by a country with which they both had strong family ties, or, in the Giron's case, because she joined the Resistance in a country of which she was not yet a national. All this was of course important, but their double commitment against the Nazi and Vichy regimes on the one hand and for the democratic renewal of France and Germany on the other, requires a capacity for analysis that goes beyond the national framework. For

71 Defrance, *La politique culturelle*; Schunck, "Irène Giron".

72 ADF, "dossier de carrière d'Irène Giron": job evaluation by R. Schmittlein, 1950.

them, National Socialism and Vichyism belonged, to varying degrees, to the same transnational fascist and anti-liberal movement. Resistance therefore became a transnational act – both of them had friends among the German émigrés and never harboured any hatred for Germans as a whole. This is why they believed that the democratisation of Germany was possible – even when Resistance movements were organised on an essentially national basis. This was especially true for them, because of their origins and the links they forged with the Anglo-American allies for her and the Soviet allies for him. Their mission did not end with the victory over fascism. It logically continued with a commitment to democratisation, above all to offer a future to German youth. Nazi Germany had to be defeated in order to create a democratic Germany. Their actions therefore went beyond the national framework, even if French political and security interests were important in their function within the French military government in Germany.

Their particular trajectory is the result of early experiences of international mobility. This mobility was sometimes desired and sometimes forced, especially during the war, with the hazards and perils of clandestine action. Such mobility was undoubtedly encouraged by bi-national origins, interest in international relations, a remarkable knowledge of several languages and family choices. While an intercultural family may today be an advantage for transnational work, Schmittlein and Giron experienced the mistrust that affected Franco-German or German-British families in the era of nationalism in the interwar period, but obviously not during the years of Resistance. What they had in common was that their involvement in the Resistance was the result of specific and early experiences of Nazism. For Giron, it was her experience of the *Gleichschaltung* of the Translation and Interpreting Institute in Heidelberg, in violation of all humanist values, and, more importantly, her experience of anti-Semitism, which led her to choose exile in 1937 out of solidarity with her family. For Schmittlein, it was the Nazi regime's expansionist and militaristic aims for northeastern Europe that first alerted him to the regime's nature. Another point in common was their immediate decision to serve France from the moment war was declared – one from Riga, the other from Johannesburg – and to refuse “political defeat” in June 1940. Both immediately joined the Resistance, even though the number of Resistance fighters was quite small at the time. They found themselves in Gaullist networks at both ends of Europe and on its margins.

Lastly, they were both largely forgotten figures of the Resistance: she in particular – who ended her public career in 1951 on her return to France. She had apparently been considering a second career as a journalist or broadcaster. Recurring health problems forced her to give it up. In the interviews I conducted in the early 1990s with key players in the French occupation policy in Germany, while preparing my PhD, she was often presented as Schmittlein’s “secretary” in Germany and almost all the witnesses were unaware of the role she had played in the Resistance.

Women’s role in the Resistance has long been overlooked and has received little recognition. Despite this, Giron is one of the 8,5 percent of Resistance Medal awardees who were women, even as according to some estimates, women accounted for at least 15 percent of Resistance fighters). Giron, a particularly discreet personality, never highlighted her work in the Resistance, unlike Schmittlein, who never ceased to take advantage of it. Schmittlein has nevertheless been partly forgotten because he was a marginal and ambiguous figure in Gaullism as a Member of Parliament (as a social left and pro-Israeli Gaullist).⁷³ After de Gaulle withdrew from politics in 1969, Schmittlein came into conflict with most of his successors. But throughout his political career, which began in 1951 and led him to different positions in government and the parliament, he constantly emphasised his role as a member of the Resistance because it was in those years the most legitimate basis for a political career in France.⁷⁴

Today, in Belfort, a street in a suburban residential area bears the name of Raymond Schmittlein, as does the adjacent bus stop. In June 2023, the main square in front of the JGU in Mainz was named “Irène Giron-Platz” and a plaque with a photograph commemorates her life. The university was keen to pay tribute to the French people who helped to re-found it. Yet it was Schmittlein who was the JGU’s “founding father”, while Irène Giron was the “founding mother” of the Germersheim Interpreting Institute, which had long been part of the JGU. Today, as part of local policies concerned with gender parity in the naming of public spaces, it is Irène Giron’s name that has been put forward by the university and local authorities as a reconstructor and a woman of Anglo-German origin involved in the French Resistance against Nazism.

73 Pierre Vianson-Ponté, *Histoire de la République gaullienne, vol. 1: La fin d'une époque, mai 1958–juillet 1962*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 372.

74 Schmittlein was a long-time deputy for the Territory of Belfort, which he had helped liberate in 1944, briefly Secretary of State for the Associated States and Minister for the Merchant Navy and for many years, Vice President of the National Assembly.

Yugoslav Prisoners of War from Camp No. 43 in Northwestern Italy: Civil Solidarity, Armed Resistance and Post-war Legacies

Alfredo Sasso

Yugoslavs in Italy during World War II: Prisoners, escapers, partisans

The presence of Yugoslavs in Italy as either civilian internees or prisoners of war (POWs) during World War II was on such a scale that it warrants focused attention. This influx of Yugoslavs into Italy was among the most tragic consequences of the April 1941 invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by the Axis forces of Germany, Italy, and Hungary. The Yugoslav prisoners in Italy were diverse. One group of prisoners were civilians detained as Partisans, or suspected Partisans, or Partisan supporters. This sometimes led to large scale internment of civilians in order to cleanse populations from entire areas, particularly in the part of Slovenia annexed by Italy.¹ Another such group was interned Jews hailing from Italian-occupied areas, coming from there or as refugees from German-occupied areas and the Independent State of Croatia;² and prisoners of war (POWs) from the Yugoslav Royal Army (*Jugoslovenska Vojska*) who were captured in the early stages of the invasion in April 1941. The detention conditions varied based on the categories above, the types of camps and the periods. Recent literature approximates

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- 1 Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *Mussolini's camps. Civilian internment in Fascist Italy (1940-1943)* (London: Routledge, 2019), 53-54. First Italian edition 2004; Andrea Martocchia, *I partigiani jugoslavi nella resistenza italiana* (Rome: Odrarek, 2011), 25. A parallel internment also affected the Slovene and Croat minorities who resided in the pre-1941 borders of the Italian Kingdom; fascist authorities defined them with the derogatory term *allogeni* ("allogeneic", "different from the others"). Capogreco, *Mussolini's camps*, 59, 65.
 - 2 Capogreco, *Mussolini's camps*, 77; Barbara Costamagna, "I profughi ebrei jugoslavi in Piemonte e Valle d'Aosta", *Quaderni* no. 16 (2004): 373-374.

the number of Yugoslav civilian internees to be around 100.000,³ while Yugoslav POWs are estimated between 6.500 and 7.500.⁴

These issues have been, and continue to be, absent from Italy's collective memory. This is in line with the general omission of almost every aspect related to the invasion of Yugoslavia.⁵ Despite historical research debunking it, the collective and stereotypical representation of the "good Italian" versus the "bad German" persists in popular opinion.⁶ This amnesia also has implications for the former detention camps for Yugoslavs. The vast majority of them, including POW Camp No. 43 in northwestern Italy – the case study of this article – are mostly devoid of any memorialisation action or process.

In the past two decades, while numerous works have specifically addressed the mass detention of civilians,⁷ certain aspects about Yugoslavs detained in the Italian fascist concentration system remain underexplored. Notably, the imprisonment of Yugoslav POWs and their fate during the war has been the subject of valuable but isolated case studies.⁸ By contrast, the

3 Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *Mussolini's camps*, 59; Alessandra Kersevan, *Lager italiani. Pulizia etnica e campi di concentramento fascisti per civili jugoslavi 1941-1943* (Rome: Nutrimenti, 2008), 8; Eric Gobetti, *Alleati del nemico. L'occupazione italiana in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)* (Bari: Laterza, 2013), 86. In 1946, the Yugoslav Commission for the investigation of crimes of occupiers reported the figure of 109.437 civilian internees. Đuro Đurašković and Nikola Živković, *Jugoslovenski zatočnici u Italiji 1941-1945* (Belgrade: ISI, 2001), 311.

4 The abovementioned commission reported the figure of 7.450 Yugoslav POWs. Official Italian data ranges between 6.569 (May 1942) and 5.760 (March 1943). Costantino Di Sante, "L'organizzazione dei campi di concentramento fascisti per prigionieri nemici", in *Prigionieri in Italia. Militari alleati e campi di prigionia (1940-1945)*, ed. Marco Minardi (Parma: MUP, 2021), 18.

5 In April 2021, on the 80th anniversary of the invasion of Yugoslavia, the National Network of Institutes for History of Resistance in Italy issued an appeal, signed by about 130 scholars, experts and entities. The document called for Italian institutions to acknowledge the army's responsibilities in the invasion, noting the lack of public awareness about those events. There has been no official response nor statement on the appeal, which can be found at <https://www.reteparri.it/comunicati/6605-6605/>. All internet sources were last accessed on 30 March 2024).

6 Filippo Focardi, *The bad German and the good Italian. Removing the guilt of the Second World War* (Manchester: M.U. Press, 2023). First Italian edition 2013.

7 The main ones are: Capogreco, *Mussolini's camps*; Kersevan, *Lager italiani*; ed. Costantino di Sante, *I campi di concentramento in Italia. Dall'internamento alla deportazione (1940-1945)* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001).

8 Some examples: Mauro Gelfi et.al, *The tower of silence. Storie di un campo di prigionia. Bergamo 1941 - 1945* (Sestante: Bergamo, 2010) on Camp no. 62 in Grumello (Lombardy); Claretta Coda, "Serbo-slavi in Canavese", cnj.it, http://www.cnj.it/PARTIGIANI/JUGOSLAVI_IN_ITALIA/NOVO/testi_Coda_Canavese.pdf, 2021, on Camp no. 127 in Locana (Piedmont); Mario Giulio Salzano, "Qui anche i sogni sono morti", in *Prigionieri in Italia. Militari alleati e campi di prigionia (1940-1945)*, ed. Marco Minardi (Parma: MUP editore, 2021), 179-223, on Camp no. 78 in Sulmona (Abruzzo).

experiences of Allied countries' POWs in Italy have been more thoroughly documented through abundant memoirs and recent systematic research, especially about the over 70.000 British POWs.⁹ Additionally, the role of combatants from the dissolved Kingdom of Yugoslavia occupied an uneasy position in socialist Yugoslavia, in which the Partisan movement was the fundamental pillar of national liberation and social revolution. Conversely, royal institutions were generally associated with class despotism, failure to prevent the Axis invasion, and collaborationism.¹⁰

8 September 1943 was a watershed moment in Italy's 20th century history. After Mussolini was overthrown and arrested on 25 July, the armistice signed in Cassibile (Sicily) on 3 September – and made public five days later – between the Italian and the Allies' military commanders was followed by the disastrous collapse of the country's military and civil institutions, which were left without clear instructions. Less than two weeks later, Italy, which had joined the conflict alongside Nazi Germany in June 1940, now saw most of its territory occupied by the Wehrmacht, with a puppet Nazi regime – the Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana* – RSI) – installed in the northern and central half under Mussolini's lead.

In the same period, the Allied forces that had landed in Sicily in July seized control of the southern territory, where the Kingdom of Italy's government had fled. The Allied forces prepared their further advance to the centre-north, where they would act in variable cooperation with the Committee of National Liberation (*Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* – CLN), which was formed on the day after the armistice was announced. The CLN, a multifaceted umbrella organisation of antifascist parties ranging from liberal-conservatives to communists, then began organising and coordinating the Partisan movement (termed in Italian historiography and public memory as *Resistenza* – the Resistance) which surfaced throughout

9 Isabella Insolubile, *La prigionia alleata in Italia, 1940-1943* (Rome: Viella, 2023). The 70.000 British POWs included those from Britain proper and from British colonies (Indians, South Africans, etc.). Estimates of the total number of POWs in Italy at the time of the armistice are generally around 80.000.

10 Various studies on POWs date back to the final period of Socialist Yugoslavia or after its dissolution, e.g. the aforementioned *Jugoslovenski zatočnici u Italiji* by Đuro Đurašković and Nikola Živković or Slobodan D. Milošević, "Zarobljavanje vojnika Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Aprilskom ratu 1941", *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 1 (1991): 159-176. In the late 1990s, some studies were carried out in the context of the intentions of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (composed of Serbia and Montenegro) to demand war compensations from Germany: ed. Božidar Lazić, *Zapisi o ratnoj šteti i obeštećenju ratnih vojnih zarobljenika 1941-1945* (Beograd: Survjz, 1999).

the Nazi-fascist-controlled centre-north. The first armed resistance groups concentrated in the mountainous and semi-mountainous territories. This area between southern Piedmont and western Liguria is where the events covered by this study occurred.

The sheer magnitude of implications from the state's changing sides and its sudden collapse opened a wide range of hope and opportunities and simultaneously disoriented and frustrated the Italian population.¹¹ This was also a seminal point for the foreign prisoners. Besides their own choices and actions, their fate depended, once again, on the type of internment, on the specific camp situations and, above all, on their commanders' attitudes. While some of the Yugoslav internees and POWs in northern and central Italy were handed over to the German occupying forces for re-deportation, most managed to escape. Historian Roger Absalom referred to a "strange alliance" when describing the relationship between the British and American ex-prisoners and the Italian peasants who rescued, hid and nourished their former enemies.¹² This assistance enabled thousands of fugitives to avoid potential recapture by Nazi-fascists and offered the Italian population in the countryside an opportunity to emancipate themselves from the conformism of a two-decade-long authoritarian regime. These acts represented the first spontaneous, "instinctive and pre-political" forms of post-fascist solidarity that would eventually evolve into widespread unarmed resistance and, at times, cooperation with nascent partisan groups.¹³

Against this backdrop, it is essential to consider the Yugoslav POWs, noting both their similarities and unique characteristics in comparison to the other POWs. As will be shown in the context of Camp No. 43, they were also a part of the "strange alliance". What differs is that the ex-POWs from Allied countries maintained institutional structures with hierarchies and orders from their respective armies and governments, thus ensuring continued loyalty and obtaining protection; special search and assistance missions were deployed for them. By contrast, the Yugoslav POWs, who had been captured two and a half years earlier as soldiers or officers of an army that had since dissolved, were in limbo.

11 Claudio Pavone, *A civil war. A history of the Italian Resistance* (London: Verso, 2013). First Italian edition 1991.

12 Roger Absalom, *A Strange Alliance. Aspects of escape and survival in Italy 1943-45* (Florence: Olschki, 1991).

13 Marcello Flores and Mimmo Franzinelli, *Storia della Resistenza* (Bari: Laterza, 2019), 145.

Despite being politically delegitimised and institutionally weakened,¹⁴ the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's government-in-exile in London still operated a diplomatic network in autumn 1943. Various Yugoslav embassies, especially the one at the Holy See, actively provided aid and contacts to interned Yugoslav citizens.¹⁵ However, no structured operation emerged after the September 1943 armistice. To a large extent, the Yugoslav escapees had to independently recreate social order, either as individuals or in affinity groups. The way they renegotiated and rebuilt it after 8 September, together with Italian civilians, demands particular attention.

Hundreds of these Yugoslav escapees, both former civilian internees and POWs, joined the Italian resistance.¹⁶ Prominent authors in *Resistenza* memoirs and historiography have emphasised the Yugoslav antifascist struggle's practical and ideological inspiration for the Italian Partisan movement and how it became a key component of the Italian movement's imagery.¹⁷ This influence has been commonly linked to the impressions of former Italian soldiers who, after coming back from fighting in Yugoslavia during the invasion, later joined the Partisan movement in Italy. The enlistment of Yugoslavs in the Italian resistance adds a more direct aspect to this idealistic connection. However, compared with the more common case of Yugoslav civilian and political internees, who contributed their ideological background and guerrilla experience to the Italian resistance,¹⁸ the POWs (many of whom were officers and career soldiers) present an additional layer of complexity that merits detailed examination.

Camp No. 43 “Miramonti” in Garessio

On 6 October 1942, Second Lieutenant Spasoje Radovanović was transferred from POW Camp No. 78 in Sulmona (Abruzzo, central-southern

14 Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War In Yugoslavia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

15 Đurašković and Živković, *Jugoslovenski zatočnici*, 243-250.

16 The definitive reference on this subject is the aforementioned work by Andrea Martocchia. It is the only work that offers a systematic analysis on a national scale, although it primarily focuses on central and southern Italy.

17 Ada Gobetti, *Diario Partigiano* (Torino: Einaudi, 1956), 31; Pietro Chiodi, *Banditi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 13; Claudio Pavone, *A civil war*, 106.

18 Martocchia, *I partigiani jugoslavi*, 17.



Map 1: Northern Italy in the summer of 1942 (including the annexed parts of Slovenia and Croatia), with the town of Garesio, where Camp No. 43 was located in 1942-43. (Map designed by Iris Buljević for this publication.)

Italy) to the newly established Camp No. 43¹⁹ in Garesio, situated in the Tanaro Valley, a mountainous region of the Maritime Alps bordering Piedmont and Liguria. Camp No. 43 was one of more than 70 POW camps in Italy; at least 15 of them contained Yugoslav POWs.²⁰ It eventually housed about 400 detainees, all POWs from the *Jugoslovenska Vojska* who had been captured at the start of the invasion.²¹ Most of them were officers, including

19 The POW camps' numeration does not seem to correspond to the order of establishment or to alphabetical, geographical or other discernible criteria. As Di Sante explains, the Italian Army General Staff (*Stato maggiore Regio Esercito* – SMRE) introduced this numeration in early 1942 to keep the sites' place hidden in order to limit the chance that, through POWs' correspondence, the Allies could locate relevant military targets. Di Sante, "L'organizzazione dei campi", 16.

20 According to a SMRE document from 30 June 1943, at that date there were 10 "concentration camps" and 5 "working camps" in Italy with Yugoslav POWs. The camps were located throughout Italy. In that moment, Camp No. 43 was the third largest "concentration camp" with Yugoslav POWs, with 381 prisoners, behind Camp No. 62 in Grumello in Piano (near Bergamo, in the north, with 1.672 Yugoslav POWs) and No. 71 in Aversa (near Napoli, in the south, with 442) and the sixth overall, also behind the "working camps" No. 110 in Carbonia (in the island of Sardinia, with 1.554) and No. 115 in Morgnano (in Umbria, in the centre, with 436). Some camps that housed Yugoslav POWs before June 1943 do not appear in this document: they either had them relocated elsewhere and replaced by POWs from other nationalities or had been dismantled. SMRE, "Situazione Prigionieri di Guerra nemici al 30 Giugno 1943/XXI", Campifascisti.it, https://campifascisti.it/documento_doc.php?n=4366.

21 According to documents of the SMRE, the number of prisoners in Camp No. 43 ranged between 381 and 389 (campifascisti.it, https://campifascisti.it/elenco_documenti.php). After the war, Spasoje Radovanović compiled a list of 481 former camp prisoners, specifying that about 80 had been freed or transferred before 8 September. Historical Archive of Città di Garesio/*Archivio Storico Città di Garesio* – ASCG, XLVII-S, 1, 1-9.

professionals and reservists, along with a few dozen conscripts – predominantly Serbs, Slovenes and Montenegrins, but also Croats and Bosnian Muslims.

Radovanović welcomed the transfer in his diary, writing: “Yes, the ‘Miramonti’ will embrace us, unite us and give us a well-deserved break after so much suffering in Germany and other concentration camps in Italy.”²²

This passage marks a shift: the preceding entries in the diary describe a tumultuous journey of captivity, similar to that of many fellow prisoners, in Nuremberg (April-October 1941), Rijeka/Fiume (October 1941-July 1942) and Sulmona (July-October 1942). Widespread mistreatment, cruelty and punishment are reported, particularly during the first and third stages.²³ Radovanović’s entries regarding Garessio, like those from other diaries and letters, depict more tolerable imprisonment and fair treatment.²⁴

Beyond subjective appraisals, two contingent factors likely contributed to this perceived difference. The first is the relatively good material condition of the internment site, the Hotel Miramonti, which was located in the centre of the small town and had been abandoned shortly before being converted into a military site. It was a stark contrast to the overcrowded camp in Nuremberg and the dilapidated barracks in Sulmona. The second is the non-hostile behaviour of the camp command, which avoided punitive attitudes and allowed decent treatment in terms of food and recreation. The camp’s military chaplain also played a role, often interceding with the command itself on behalf of the prisoners.²⁵

These factors were byproducts of the urgency with which Italian fascist camps were set up, as well as the discretion afforded to individual commanders. In the case of Camp No. 43, this situation incidentally led to a positive outcome; in the rest of the country, however, the improvised and inadequate management of the whole camp system and the arbitrary nature of command generally resulted in ill-treatment and torture.²⁶ Already at

22 Spasojne Radovanović, “Diario”, *Il presente e la storia* no. 60 (2001): 124.

23 For more on camp no. 78 in Sulmona: Salzano, “Qui anche i sogni sono morti”.

24 Radovanović, “Diario”, 124-126; Lazar Jovančić and Milan Milutinović, “La vita degli ufficiali jugoslavi al Campo del Miramonti”, 8 July 1964, in ASCG, XLVII-S, 6, 1; “Intervento dell’Avv. Svetoraz [sic] Maksimovic”, 6 September 1970, ASCG, XLVII-S, 4; “Intervento del sig. Alexander [sic] Tamindzic”, 6 September 1970, ASCG, XLVII-S, 4, 12.

25 Radovanović, “Diario”, 124-126; Jovančić, “La vita degli ufficiali”, 1.

26 Isabella Insolubile, “Prigionieri nel paese del sole”, in *Prigionieri in Italia. Militari alleati e campi di prigionia (1940-1945)*, ed. Marco Minardi (Parma: MUP, 2021), 47. The Yugoslav POWs in Italy suffered worse treatment than the already harsh and systematically degrading conditions faced by

this stage, cooperation began forming between prisoners and the population of Garessio, as some inhabitants helped prisoners covertly exchange correspondence with the outside world, and several women expressed concern for the prisoners' condition.²⁷

“Towards the same destiny”: Escapers and helpers

On 9 September 1943, the day after the armistice was announced, the prisoners in Camp No. 43 asked the command to be released before the expected arrival of Nazi German troops, who were swiftly occupying northern Italy. After some hesitation, which incited fierce protests from the prisoners, Commandant Vincenzo Ardu ultimately ordered the gates to be opened on 10 September.²⁸ Hundreds of prisoners began escaping, heading in the direction opposite the valley floor, where the Germans were to arrive. They dispersed through the woods of the semi-mountainous territory between southern Piedmont and western Liguria, covering a range of tens of kilometres. Lazar Jovančić and Milan Milutinović recall how also Italian prison guards escaped with them: “We were surprised and delighted to see next to us some of the officers from the camp, some of them already in civilian clothes; like us, they wanted to save themselves from the Germans. We now became a kind of ‘allies’ in the common danger, but with one big difference: they were at their home, and we were far from ours.”²⁹

Radovanović echoed this, writing: “Together with us, arm in arm, escaped Commander Ardu, officials, sub-officers and sentries, all united towards the same destiny. We were true brothers, as if we’d always lived together and no one thought of what we had been considered until 10 September 1943.”³⁰

Shortly thereafter, in early October 1943, Ardu joined the first Partisan groups forming in the Tanaro Valley area, the same groups later joined by some ex-POWs. The importance of Ardu’s choices becomes evident when considering what happened at the various camps that the commanders

American or British POWs. However, their treatment was generally less severe than that of Yugoslav civilian internees, who lacked formal protection under international conventions.

27 Radovanović, “Diario”, 125; Jovančić, “La vita degli ufficiali”, 1.

28 Vasa Dolinka, “All’Ill.mo Signor prefetto della provincia di Cuneo”; ASCG, XLVII-P, 59, 1, 10 July 1945; Jovančić, “La vita degli ufficiali”, 1.

29 Jovančić, “La vita degli ufficiali”, 1.

30 Radovanović, “Diario”, 126-127.

retained control of and handed over to the Nazis, who then re-deported the prisoners to Germany.³¹

Then, the escapers encountered local civilians. All testimonies show how the population of the Tanaro Valley and its surroundings spontaneously provided the escapees with essential survival resources for weeks, months and, in some cases, the entire duration of the war: shelters in houses, farm-houses and drying sheds; food; clothing; guidance and orientation in places unknown to them; alerts about Nazi-fascist patrols; and other crucial measures to ensure the escapers' safety.³² These actions, which the civilians took at high risk of retaliation by the Nazi-fascists, combined with the prisoners' ability to self-mobilise for survival, proved decisive.³³ Cross-referencing available sources and testimonies reveals that none of the prisoners from Camp No. 43 were captured or deported in the initial weeks following the escape; even in the months that followed, captures and subsequent deportations were relatively limited.³⁴

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- 31 For example, almost 1.000 prisoners were re-deported from the concentration camp for Slovene and Croat civilians in Cairo Montenotte, located a few kilometres from Garesio, to Mauthausen. Milovan Pisarri, "Cairo Montenotte – Campo di concentramento, campifascisti.it. https://campifascisti.it/scheda_campo.php?id_campo=179. Thousands of British POWs were re-deported, either immediately or after their escape and subsequent recapture. Janet Dethick and Andrea Giuseppe, "British Prisoners of War ceded to Germany", <https://lavoroforzato.topografiaperlastoria.org/temi.html?id=23&cap=30&l=en>.
- 32 Among others: Desimir Cvetković et. al., "Al signor sindaco di Garesio"; ASCG, XLVII-P, 46, 1, 15 May 1945; Vasa Dolinka, "All'ill.mo Signor prefetto", 1-5, 10 July 1945; Aleksandar Tamindžić, "Diario di un prigioniero di guerra", *Il presente e la storia*, no. 60 (2001): 102-117; Radovanović, "Diario", 126-129; Jovančić, "La vita degli ufficiali", 1-3; Maksimović, "Intervento".
- 33 The ongoing data collection on the helpers of Camp No. 43 POW's helpers, compiled by the author for the scope of this research, currently includes around seventy names of individuals and families, as identified across various sources. Researchers in the field suggest that each escaper received assistance from at least two or three different families: Claretta Coda, *A strange alliance. L'inattesa alleanza della gente di Castiglione Torinese con 126 prigionieri di guerra inglesi del Campo PG 112/4 di Gassino* (Torino: Città metropolitana di Torino, 2021), 19.
- 34 Tamindžić reports a few captures at the end of October 1943 and another four in January 1944. See "Diario", 112-113. One confirmed case is that of Captain Vasa Dolinka, born in 1882 and the oldest prisoner in Camp No. 43, who was captured in June 1944 and subsequently deported to Germany with three compatriots. Dolinka explained this in a report he wrote in July 1945 in Garesio, where he briefly returned before going back to Yugoslavia. See: Dolinka, "All'ill.mo", 3. Among former Camp 43 POWs, there were two confirmed deaths in Garesio: one due to illness (Adolf Menčak, on 17 January 1944) and one from capture and execution by the Nazis (Miodrag Aleksić, on 20 November 1944). While some sources hint at the death of a third ex-prisoner, Miloš Nikolić, there is no conclusive evidence at this point.



Map 2: Localities nearby Garesio where escapers from Camp No. 43 have been hiding and receiving support in the aftermath of the 1943 armistice. Elaboration from the author's data collection. (Map designed by Iris Buljević for this publication.)

Research on the aid provided by Italian civilians to Allied prisoners typically highlights peasants' significant role.³⁵ Indeed, many people from the countryside offered solidarity and local knowledge, driven by a traditional mistrust towards state actors and state intrusion ranging from requisitions to forced recruitment. The Camp No. 43 area, in which many of the helpers were peasants, was no exception. However, it is important not to overlook the contribution of social sectors of small town centres. In a territory as semi-mountainous but moderately industrialised as Garesio and the entire Tanaro Valley were at the time, industrial workers, shopkeepers and small professionals played a key role in providing material and monetary resources. These helpers did not see the ex-prisoners as strangers, seeing them instead as somehow familiar figures because of their everyday presence in the recent human landscape of the town and valley, which was now ravaged by post-armistice turmoil.

35 Absalom, *A Strange Alliance*; Eugenia Corbino, "Contadini brava gente", in *Prigionieri in Italia militari alleati e campi di prigionia (1940-1945)*, ed. Marco Minardi (Parma: MUP, 2021), 66-98.

Many helpers offered aid that was unrelated to the ensuing Partisan struggle, but others would later become supporters or members of the resistance. A crucial figure in the link between civil solidarity and armed resistance was Roberto Lepetit, the owner of a small pharmaceutical company in Garesio. Lepetit's anti-fascist orientation initially led him to coordinate and participate in aiding the Yugoslav POWs. Later, he offered substantial resources and funding to the first local Partisan groups.³⁶

The roles of two social categories are particularly noteworthy. The first is that of women, who assumed significant responsibilities, often defying authority. On 20 October 1943, a German patrol searching for Yugoslav fugitives raided the Hotel Paradiso, which was owned by Flora Corradi. With a rifle to her back and the patrol about to discover the seven Slovenian officers she was hiding, Corradi distracted the soldiers with a pretext, thus allowing the fugitives to escape.³⁷ This and other behaviours exemplify what historian Anna Bravo has termed "mass mothering" in post-8 September Italy, describing the role of women not as sources of undifferentiated pity, but rather as specifically protective figures for vulnerable males. If taking responsibility for the lives of strangers' endangered by the Nazi-fascist occupation is acknowledged as a practice of civil resistance, then the "mass mothering" represents its distinctly female form.³⁸

The second notable category is local clergy. In the post-armistice turmoil, parishes offered protection and the tools of a social organisation. The first to contribute in the Camp's area was the former military chaplain, Don Giuseppe Divina, a figure the prisoners recognised and deeply appreciated.³⁹ Later, priests from different towns and villages coordinated aid centres through the territory; most of them would eventually cooperate with Partisan formations. This approach highlights the Italian Catholic Church's contradictions in confronting the war. On the one hand, the church sought to maintain social order and diplomatic equidistance between fascists and anti-fascists, mainly (but not exceptionally) expressed by the high clergy; on the other hand, it had the duty of solidarity and the urge to take sides against perceived injustice, mostly manifested by the lower clergy.⁴⁰

36 Susanna Sala Massari, *Roberto Lepetit. Un industriale nella Resistenza* (Milano: Archinto, 2015), 60-74; Dolinka, "All'ill.mo", 3.

37 Dolinka, "All'ill.mo", 2.

38 Anna Bravo and Annamaria Bruzzone, *In guerra senz'armi* (Bari: Laterza 2000).

39 Dolinka, "All'ill.mo", 2.

40 Pavone, *A civil war*, 338-341.

The account of Bogomil Lilija, who hid for five months in the town of Lisio together with three comrades of Slovenian origin, illustrates the construction of a shared aversion to fascism through his sharing of mutual backgrounds, living experiences and worldviews with parish priest Don Antonio Ansaldi:

Every evening we would visit the parish priest to listen and discuss events at home and in the world. He was very interested in what life was like in Slovenia, and what our nation and culture were like. We told him everything: how we [there] had rebelled against the regime at the time, and how the people here [in Italy] had also rebelled against the fascists and other criminal occupiers. We also listened to bulletins from London, from where Slovenian journalists and others described the situation on the frontline.⁴¹

Solidarity was widespread, but not universal. While many testimonies are filled with expressions of support and gratitude, there was also at least one significant episode of the opposite behaviour. In June 1944, following a tip-off from a young man from Garessio, militiamen of the Italian Social Republic arrested several escapees. Among them was Captain Vasa Dolinka, who, along with three fellow PoWs, would later be deported to Germany. They also arrested typographer Luigi Odda, who had been producing identity cards and passes that enabled many escapers to travel to Yugoslavia or Switzerland.⁴² Odda was subsequently deported to Mauthausen, where he died on 28 April 1945.⁴³

“What should we do now?”: Partisans in Italy

Like thousands of escapees across Europe, the ex-prisoners of Camp No. 43 were confronted with decisions that carried uncertain prospects. The prisoners' first priority was pure survival, and material, idealistic and existential choices followed: whether to stay, what to do and with whom, or

41 Bogomil Lilija's letter to the Lisio parish bulletin, 15 September 1977, reported in *L'Unione Monregalese*, no. 1, 5 January 1978, 3. Don Ansaldi actively cooperated with the Partisans.

42 Dolinka, "All'ill.mo", 4; Tamindžić, "Intervento", 13.

43 Renzo Amedeo, *Storia partigiana di Garessio e della prima Valcasotto* (Torino: AVL, 1982), 112.

to set out and where to go. The range of possibilities is vividly illustrated in Aleksandar Tamindžić's diary entry from 26 September 1943, which he wrote while in hiding in the woods above Garesio:

Now that we have regained our freedom, we often ask ourselves: 'What should we do now?' There were many possibilities and [...] the idea of potentially heading south to meet the Allies, but also of a departure for Yugoslavia and a passage to Switzerland, has become topical. Even the possibility of staying where we were now, waiting for the Allies to land on the Côte d'Azur, was not ruled out. But all departures come with a risk. [...] Staying where we are, waiting for the Allies to land near Genoa, seemed less risky and would offer us the opportunity, in the event of them landing, to participate honourably in the struggle against our common enemy. So, if we stayed in place, waiting for the Allies to arrive, we would have to organise ourselves: to collect weapons, make contact with the Italian fighters in the surrounding area and help each other.⁴⁴

Tamindžić's reflections align with his background as a career officer. Despite everything he experienced, he still retained a degree of loyalty to his former institutional affiliation. He also took a leading role in a group of ex-prisoners who were hiding together or nearby, and he maintained contact with other small groups or individual POWs. Their connections with the local Partisans, who were setting up a formation later known as Valcasotto, were facilitated through ex-commander Ardu and other members of the former Camp 43 command who had joined the Partisans by then. Once again, this connection between those who were previously prisoners and guards proved to be essential.

In his diary entry on 4 November 1943, Don Emidio Ferraris, a parish priest close to the Valcasotto Partisans, notes the following: "This group of partisans [Valcasotto] is joined by some Serbian officers, formerly prisoners at the Miramonti Hotel in Garesio, [...] they are gentlemen and, like [all] the partisans, enjoy the sympathy of the population."⁴⁵

44 Tamindžić, "Diario", 103.

45 Don Emidio Ferraris, *Valcasotto nella vita partigiana* (Mondovi: Avagnina, 1947), 12. This excerpt is followed by a list of eleven names.

This small cell likely disbanded soon afterwards, but at least a couple of sub-groups of Yugoslavs re-emerged later on, participating in several combats in the valleys of southern Piedmont. Notably absent among these names is Tamindžić. In his diary, again with the typical mindset of a career officer, he expresses frustration over some misunderstanding with the Partisans, whom he criticises for lack of preparation. These circumstances probably contributed to his decision to head to Switzerland in early 1944, via the Allies' escape lines. Dozens of his fellow Camp No. 43 POWs also took this path, supported in their movements and logistics by local citizens.⁴⁶

After the war, about thirty Yugoslav ex-POWs from Camp No. 43 would be officially recognised by Italy's Ministry of Post-War Assistance of the Italian government as "combatant partisans" in the 4th Alps Division, the Partisan unit that included the Valcasotto group.⁴⁷ The 4th Division, part of the "autonomous" (*Autonomi*) Partisans, was formally apolitical and drew from a diverse social base. However, its leadership generally came from the Royal Italian Army, and it had a classically hierarchical conception, leaning towards liberal-conservative ideals. One can assume an affinity in military approaches and, perhaps, in political ideals, between this formation and the Yugoslav ex-POWs. Nonetheless, few traces remain of this experience. The *Autonomi's* organisation and narrative was imbued with a traditional national patriotism that often persisted in their commanders' memoirs; this approach might contribute to explain why, in the war and post-war documentation about the 4th Division, little attention was devoted to the presence of foreign Partisans in its lines.⁴⁸

While some acted in groups, others followed individual paths. Krešimir Stojanović, one of the few simple soldiers in Camp 43, was detained there with his father Aleksandar. Together, they escaped and took refuge in Garesio for five months. In February 1944, when his father left for Switzerland, Krešimir opted to stay. He initially wandered among different Partisan

46 Tamindžić, "Diario", 112-117.

47 The author's data collection on Yugoslav Partisans in the resistance movement in Piedmont and Liguria is based on the Ricompart Archive (Archive of the Italian Partisans' Service for recognition and rewards) <https://partigianiditalia.cultura.gov.it/>.

48 A similar but distinct case, also from southern Piedmont, is that of ISLAFRAN (an acronym for "Italians, Slavs, French", where "Slavs" covered Yugoslavs, Soviets and Czechoslovaks). This battalion, integrated into the *Garibaldini*, was characterised by a clear and explicitly internationalist ideological stance. The Yugoslav members of ISLAFRAN were former political prisoners who had escaped from the prison in the town of Fossano. Ezio Zubini, *Isklafran. Storia di una formazione partigiana nelle langhe* (Alba: Ilmiolibro, 2015).

groups before joining the Val Tanaro Brigade as “Cresci”, his battle name. In this *Autonomi*’s formation, part of the 4th Division, he rose to the position of vice-commander of the assault squad. Stojanović’s participation later gained major recognition in the collective memory of local resistance.⁴⁹ One account describes his struggle as being motivated by the Nazi-fascist persecutions in Yugoslavia. He talked about these events to civilians and fellow Partisans, who were still largely uninformed about events in occupied Europe and found his stories of “unimaginable cruelties” hard to believe.⁵⁰

Another distinct individual journey is that of Mihailo Palević, whose battle name was “Micio”. He fled from Camp No. 43 to the southern slopes of the Maritime Alps, on the Ligurian side, an area where local Partisan formations were mostly “*Garibaldini*” aligned with the Communist Party.⁵¹ Palević initially served as political commissar and later became commander of the 3rd Garibaldi Brigade. His path, along with the following recollections of a brigade comrade, indicates that he had robust political beliefs, leaving a lasting impression on his fellow Partisans. This suggests that he might have had a prior affiliation with the Yugoslav communists:

The Yugoslav Micio, a man of solid culture and a communist, proved to be an exceptional political commissar. With him, the discussion was always open, ready, and rich in teachings [...] He explained to us the significance of concepts like “democracy”, “popular power”, “freedom”, “social justice”, and so on. “Ideas are as important as weapons”, he used to tell us.⁵²

[...] Our commissar, Micio, had told us many times during the evening meetings: “The reasons why we engage in the partisan struggle are not only to fight against the fascists. Yes, first of all we must confront Nazi-fascism and fight it. But with the same resolve, we

49 Renzo Amedeo, *Storia partigiana della 13° Brigata Val Tanaro* (Cuneo: Istituto Storico della Resistenza di Cuneo, 2009).

50 Bruno Catella, *I suoni dell'incudine* (Garessio: self-published, 2017), 144. Catella’s uncle, Alfredo Bernasconi, hid Krešimir and Lazar Stojanović in his house for five months, as stated in the original statement written and signed by Krešimir and Lazar Stojanović. This statement, in both Serbo-Croatian and Italian, is reproduced in the book.

51 Seven ex-POWs from Camp 43, including Palević, joined the Garibaldi brigades in Liguria (Author’s data collection).

52 Enrico De Vincenzi, *O Bella Ciao. Il distaccamento Torcello* (Milano: La Pietra, 1975), 45. I am grateful to Anna Traverso of ISREC Savona for providing me with this source.

must also oppose the return of those conservative ideas and forces that want to restore the old bourgeois society of exploitation and privilege. Otherwise, what will the Resistance have been for?”⁵³

The post-war legacy: Returnees and emigrants

In a letter dated 15 May 1945, seven former prisoners from Camp No. 43, all of whom had been combatants in Italian Partisan forces, expressed their gratitude to the mayor and the people of Garessio for the various kinds of assistance they had received during their stay. The letter recalled “the long and hard months of struggle against the enemy, the cold, and difficulties of all kinds when, united by a common ideal with the best Italians, we fought relentlessly against the hated oppressor.”⁵⁴ The letter concluded with wishes that “cordial and friendly relations will unite the two nations that border the same sea and are joined together in the Alps.”⁵⁵

However, it was the turbulent course of Italian-Yugoslav relations since the war’s immediate aftermath, influenced by the territorial claims and border disputes over Trieste, as well as the severing of relations between the respective communist parties after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 that initially influenced the reception of the events related to Camp No. 43.

There were also specific consequences regarding the status and the choices of former POWs. Most available evidence suggests that the majority came back to Yugoslavia. However, dozens of former prisoners, including many who had participated in the Italian resistance, chose not to return. In the Arolsen Archives, one can find the applications that many of them submitted to the International Refugee Organization (IRO) for care, maintenance, and resettlement. Some of them found a home in Switzerland (where many had fled in the winter 1943-44), in North and South America, and in Australia.⁵⁶

In these applications, many former POWs cited idealistic motives, sometimes along with safety concerns, arguing that as former soldiers of the Yugoslav Royal Army they would suffer systematic reprisals in Socialist

53 De Vincenzi, *O Bella Ciao*, 136.

54 Cvetković et.al., “Al signor sindaco”, ASCG, XLVII-P, 46,1.

55 Ibid., 1.

56 Online Archive of the Arolsen Archives International Center on Nazi Persecution: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/3-2-1-2>.

Yugoslavia. It might be assumed that, in some cases, emphasising ideological reasons was intended to enhance their resettlement applications, although these concerns were often aligned with socio-economic or self-realisation motives. In any case, many continued to identify as political exiles in later decades. This geographic dispersion did not contribute positively to preserving the memory of the events at the camp.

The re-establishment of contacts between former Yugoslav prisoners and their Italian helpers began spontaneously. Since the mid-1950s, there have been reports of visits by former prisoners to the camp's surroundings and renewed correspondence between them, their helpers, families, groups and Partisan associations.⁵⁷ These connections were maintained for years, in some cases until the early 1990s. A pivotal event took place in 1970, when Garessio's mayor, Renzo Amedeo,⁵⁸ aided by ex-prisoner Spasoje Radovanović who had settled in Liguria, organised an "Italian-Yugoslav meeting" inviting the ex-POWs that they could locate to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Italy. More than 30 of them, mainly from Yugoslavia and Switzerland, attended the event on 6 September 1970, along with local and national authorities, including the Yugoslav consul in Milan.⁵⁹

Letters and messages surrounding the meeting, as well as the speeches of former prisoners – which were carefully distributed to "returnees" and emigrants – describe an overall serene atmosphere filled with mutual gratitude. There was also an opportunity for more openly internationalist expressions. Ex-POW Muharem Paripović connected civil solidarity with armed resistance, highlighting them as inseparable parts of the struggle for a "progressive and democratic Europe" against oppression. For Paripović, the Italian-Yugoslav cooperation that began in 1943 continued into the present, providing a safe basis for exchanges that, he noted, made the border between

57 Some examples: Boris Sančin, "12 let pozneje", *Demokracija*, 27 January, 1956, 3; N.N., "Ritorno in Val Mongia", *L'Unione Monregalese*, 19 September, 1964, 2.

58 Renzo Amedeo played a crucial role in preserving the memories and networks related to the events at Camp No. 43 events. He contributed in various capacities: as an institutional representative, as a partisan veteran (as a former member of the Val Tanaro Brigade) and as a prolific author on resistance in southern Piedmont.

59 ASCG, XLVII-S, "Incontro Italo-jugoslavo – documenti", 6 September 1970; Archives of Yugoslavia/*Arhiv Jugoslavije* – AJ, Fond SUBNOR-a – Savezni odbor, Fasc. 50, Milan Milutinović and Muharem Paripović, "Izveštaj povodom proslave 100. godišnjice proglašenja Garessia za grad i 25. godišnjice pobeđe pokreta otpora u Italiji", 6 October 1970, 1-11.



Fig. 1: Panel displayed at the Italian-Yugoslav meeting, 6 September 1970.
(Source: Archivio Storico della Città di Garesio (ASCG), XLVII-S, 5,
“Album fotografico sull’incontro italo-jugoslavo”)

the two countries “one of the most open in Europe”.⁶⁰ While the conflicts of the “old” war seemed to have been resolved, the tensions of the “new”, Cold War came to the fore on that occasion. One testimony recounts protests by

⁶⁰ ASCG, XLVII-S “Incontro Italo-jugoslavo – documenti”.

right-wing, nationalist-oriented individuals against the Garessio council for inviting “communist Slavs”.⁶¹ Another account recalls moments of discomfort during the 6 September official ceremony, with some Yugoslav emigres complaining about the display of Socialist Yugoslavia’s flag and symbols.⁶²

Despite these episodes, the event’s overall optimism remained unaffected, in line with the state-level Yugoslav-Italian rapprochement that culminated in the Treaty of Osimo in 1975, which finally settled the border issue between the two countries. The period between late 1960s and early 1980s saw the establishment of several monuments, memorials and commemorations on both sides of the Adriatic, held on the initiative of municipalities and local organisations.⁶³ Many of these events, however, were still framed in a national-institutional context and focused more on the armed Partisan struggle. The peculiarity of initiatives related to Camp No. 43 events lies in their local spontaneity, political plurality and explicit reference to the link between civil solidarity and partisan resistance. The significance of these exchanges is also highlighted by their occurrence in the Piedmontese-Ligurian Maritime Alps, a region peripheral to the traditional geographical, cultural and economic links between the two countries.

The last institutional event related to Camp No. 43 events took place in May 1983. During the awarding of the Italian state bronze medal to the municipality of Garessio for its contribution to the resistance (which explicitly mentioned the aid provided to Yugoslav escapers), the town also received a medal from the Yugoslav SUBNOR (Association of Fighters in the Yugoslav War of Liberation).⁶⁴ A few months later, during one of his frequent visits to Liguria, “Micio” Palević was honoured by the City of Savona for his role as a Partisan commander in the liberation of the city.⁶⁵

61 Author’s interview with Sisto Bisio, then town council member in Garessio; Garessio, 26 January 2019.

62 Author’s interview with Adelmo Odello, then town council member in Garessio; Ormea, 26 January 2019.

63 On municipal co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia and its connection with historical memory and bilateral relations, see: Borut Klabjan, “Twinning across the Adriatic: history, memory and municipal co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia during the Cold War”, *Urban History* (2023): 1-14; Eloisa Betti and Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, “Town twinning in the Cold War: Zagreb and Bologna as ‘détente from below’?” (Conference paper, ECPR Conference, Prague, Czechia, 10 September 2016), 1-6.

64 “Decorato il gonfalone comunale di Garessio”, *Rivista Autonomi* 28, no. 3 (1983), 20-22.

65 “Così Savona non s’arrese ai tedeschi”, *La Stampa – Ed. Savona e Provincia*, 8 September 1983, 17; Emira Karabeg, “Podvizi partizana Miće”, *Politika*, 4 August, 1984, 8. Karabeg’s article explains that Palević returned to Yugoslavia in May 1945 and had lived in Belgrade for decades.

Conclusion

The mutual trust that developed between Yugoslav POWs and Italian civilians near Camp No. 43 was formed despite the asymmetrical relationship between the two sides, as the Yugoslavs POWs were dependent on the help of the Italian civilians after their escape. The cooperation was built after the armistice as a response to the breakdown of institutional and social order. The Yugoslav prisoners had encountered this collapse in April 1941, while the Italian civilians faced it in September 1943. This dual capitulation led to a shared construction of meanings and survival tools. Many of the former POWs' testimonies are conciliatory and, implicitly or literally, adopt the stereotype of the "good Italian", or the notion of good "mountain" or "Alpine" people. However, it is important to consider both the structural and the material factors in these events by distinguishing between their ordinary and extraordinary elements. The latter might include the camp command's active cooperation, a network of local people supporting both escapers and partisans, and the positive social acceptance of POWs among the population, possibly influenced by the predominance of officers, some of them with relatively mature age and middle-class backgrounds.

In every case, this story aligns with a broader pattern of solidarity throughout Italy towards POWs of various nationalities. The episodes of civil resistance that have been documented are, most probably, less than those that actually occurred. However, instances of denied aid and denunciations (like the Odda and Dolinka case) might have been underreported as well. It is always essential to consider what the existing testimonies might not have known, or chose not to reveal.

The Miramonti's post-war legacy illustrates a complex and multifaceted interaction between institutional and informal, local and (trans)-national, as well as political and pre-political elements. The connection between civil and armed resistance which vitalised the post-war ties and formed the basis of their common language was central to this interaction. Grassroots relationships motivated events, communications and friendships over several decades. However, these did not outlast the disappearance of the generation of direct protagonists, nor the direct and indirect consequences of the dissolution of the Yugoslav state in the 1990s.⁶⁶

66 The building that hosted Camp No. 43, the Hotel Miramonti, was completely destroyed by fire in 1986 and has been in ruins since then. There are no monuments or plaques in its vicinity. There



Fig. 2: The metal plaque as in January 2019. (Photo: Alfredo Sasso)

The only lasting “monument” to the story of Camp 43 that is still visible today reflects the spirit of initiative and the profound significance of human values it conveyed to those involved, while also highlighting its transient legacy: a simple, small metal plaque with an inscription. It was crafted during a break in the September 1970 Italian-Yugoslav meeting by four ex-prisoners, and placed on the door of the Ghiglia family’s drying shed, located in the woods above the Miramonti. The plaque reads:

After escaping from the Miramonti on 10 September 1943, we found refuge in this drying shed. Thanks to the spontaneous and great help, here we experienced the greatness and generosity of all the people of Garessio, Eternally grateful, Yugoslav officers Alexandro / Lazaro / Giovanni / Vasco. Garessio 6 September 1970.⁶⁷

were no official commemorations regarding Camp No. 43 and following events until 2021. To celebrate 25 April (Liberation Day) that year, the Garessio library and municipality released a short documentary titled “Garessini e jugoslavi, testimonianze di solidarietà”, authored by Pierandrea Camelia, Giuliano Molineri and Alfredo Sasso. Comune di Garessio, Youtube, 27 April 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djuoy4-6Xrc>.

⁶⁷ The original names, presented in their Italianized forms on the plaque, are: Aleksandar Tamindžić, Lazar Cenić, Jovan Pejanović and Vasilije Ivanišević.

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From a Zionist Dream to a Transnational Rescue Network for Jewish Children: Youth Aliyah, 1932/3-1945

Susanne Urban

Jewish resistance against Nazism, antisemitism, persecution and the Shoah had many faces: Among the best-known examples is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. Less known is the participation of Jews in different resistance movements throughout Europe. They fought as national citizens and also in separate ranks, since resistance groups were not free of antisemitism.¹ Besides armed resistance, there were many forms of civic resistance, most notably active attempts to help and rescue fellow Jews.² Among the general public the rescue of Jews is mostly associated with non-Jews, such as Oskar Schindler, many of whom have been honoured as “Righteous among the Nations” by Yad Vashem.³ Much less known is how Jews, whether individually, in groups or through networks and with varying degrees of support of non-Jews, actively organised their own survival and that of other Jews.⁴

One of these networks was Youth Aliyah, an educational left-wing Zionist movement created in 1933 in Germany by Recha Freier to offer Jewish youth from Germany a way of reestablishing their lives in Palestine.⁵ During the second half of the 1930s, the organisation developed into a network of Jewish organisations in other European countries affected by antisemitism, under threat or already annexed by Nazi Germany. From 1939 on, Youth Aliyah became a rescue organisation for Jewish youth in which a number

1 See for Jewish resistance: Arno Lustiger: *Zum Kampf auf Leben und Tod! Das Buch vom Widerstand der Juden 1933–1945* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994).

2 See for example Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen and Gideon Botsch, eds., *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933–1945): Formen und Facetten* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 89–105.

3 See the website of Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, located in Israel. <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed 15 October 2023.

4 Some cases are for example dealt with in Schoeps et al., *Jüdischer Widerstand*.

5 Aliyah is a Hebrew term for immigration to then-Palestine and today to Israel, meaning ascent.

of European countries were involved, among them Great Britain, Denmark and Yugoslavia. With the support of other mainly Jewish organisations on the ground, Youth Aliyah organised the training and flight of young Jews to Palestine or transit countries. Youth Aliyah is an illustrative example of how Jewish resistance cannot be defined only as armed resistance in national or Jewish groups. In Jewish history, rescuing the young generation was always important to start anew after persecutions and massacres – Youth Aliyah is therefore defined in Jewish historiography as resistance.⁶

The Youth Aliyah network can be seen both as a national and transnational movement. It encompassed various political tendencies from socialist to religious and was active in various European countries and in Palestine, developing links that stretched beyond the European continent. The people involved in Youth Aliyah were not a homogenous group, but most of them saw no future in Europe for Jewish people and had one aim: the creation and upholding of a Jewish state in Palestine. At the same time, especially once the war began in 1939, they were divided about where to set the priorities, whether to focus on developing Jewish society in Palestine or the rescue of as many Jewish juveniles as possible.

Recha Freier: Youth Aliyah's creator

Youth Aliyah is closely connected to the personality and biography of Recha Freier. She was born in 1892 in Norden in northern Germany. Her father, Menasse Schweitzer, was a rabbi and her mother Bertha was a teacher. Very early in her life, Freier was confronted with antisemitism. When she was five years old, the family was strolling through Norden when they saw a sign forbidding the entrance of Jews to a public park. Decades later, she wrote a poem on this antisemitic incident that had an enormous impact on her:

Earthquake: The city garden
The golden lattice
closed
A large white cardboard sign
A frame made of black paper

6 Arno Lustiger, *Rettungswiderstand. Über die Judenretter in Europa während der NS-Zeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011).

Entry for dogs
and Jews forbidden!⁷

After the family moved to Glogau, Freier transferred from a public school there to a private one in Breslau, because as the only Jewish pupil she had been repeatedly insulted by her teacher. In 1897, the family moved to Glogau in Silesia and after graduating high school in 1912, Freier studied philology, pedagogy and ethnography in Breslau and Munich. She earned money teaching German, French and English and also gave piano lessons. In 1919, she married Rabbi Moritz Freier (1889-1969), who she had met in Breslau. After living in Eschwege and in Sofia, Bulgaria, the family moved to Berlin in 1925, where Freier's husband was appointed as rabbi. Between 1920 and 1929, Freier gave birth to four children.⁸

Freier became a devoted Zionist through her childhood experiences and her exchange with Jewish communities beyond Germany: "That meant that I understood that the existence of the Jew, both the individual and the existence of the whole people, depends on one thing, that they must free themselves from slavery and from being tolerated ... To do that, they would have to go to Palestine."⁹ Her deep bonds with Judaism and Zionism were reflected in the names of her children. When her first son was born, in 1920, she did not follow the usual custom of giving the child a German first name followed by a Hebrew name. Instead, the newborn was named Shalhevet (flame). The subsequent three children were named Ammud (pillar), Zerem (thunderstorm) and Maayan (source).

Following historian Hagit Lavsky, Freier belonged to the second generation of German Zionists, who experienced antisemitism from an early age and therefore were less convinced of a future in Germany and that

7 Recha Freier, *Auf der Treppe* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1976), 62.

8 For more information on Recha Freier's life: Shalhevet Freier, "Alijath haNo'ar: Recha Freier und Testimonium", <https://www.hagalil.com/israel/deutschland/freier.htm>; Elizabeth Hudson, *Recha Freier and the Youth Aliyah, The Holocaust and European Mass Murder* (HGS 51, 20 October 2020), https://www.academia.edu/46923582/Recha_Freier_and_the_Youth_Aliyah; Gudrun Maierhof, "Recha Freier – Zwischen Zionismus und Widerstand", in *Wege von Pädagoginnen vor und nach 1933*, eds. Inge Hansen-Schaberg and Christian Ritzi (Hohengehren: Schneider Verlag, 2004), 139-150.

9 Monika Ogorek, *Recha Freier – Die Gründung der Jugendaliya und das Portrait einer ungewöhnlichen Frau*, Radio Broadcast: Sender Freies Berlin, 1986, Typoscript, no page numbers.

assimilation was a means of securing that future.¹⁰ The third generation, born after World War I, turned in significant numbers away from their parents' attitudes and joined Zionist organisations which developed significantly after 1933.¹¹

The decisive moment that prompted Recha Freier to launch activities to help Jewish youth came in spring 1932.¹²

When in 1932 some young people came to me and told me that Jewish youth had been expelled from their workplaces only because they were Jews, I felt two things: on the one hand, there was this overwhelming sense of despair in the face of the young people who stood before me so helpless and lost, and on the other hand, there was a joyful inner voice that told me ... the dream began to become reality. I first founded an organisation to settle disadvantaged Jewish youth on the soil of Erez Israel ... I realised that the movement grew out of the experiences of my own past ...¹³

For Recha Freier, the incident was not connected to economic and social problems in the decaying Weimar Republic, but rather an antisemitic act. "With an almost uncanny sense of things to come, Recha Freier concluded – [...] before Hitler came to power – that there was no future for Jews in Germany. Against the wishes of their parents and the Jewish community, one of the most solidly anchored in the entire world, she began to organize what was to become Youth Aliyah" wrote her son decades later.¹⁴

10 Hagit Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe: The Distinctive Path of German Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 27 f.

11 Jehuda Reinharz ed., *Dokumente zur Geschichte des deutschen Zionismus 1882-1933* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981); Stefan Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen: Der deutsche Zionismus im Feld des Nationalismus in Deutschland 1890-1933* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016).

12 See also the testimony of Nathan Höxter: Nathan Höxter, "70 Jahre Jugendalijah: Als Pionier in Palästina", interview by Iris Noah, 2003, <http://www.berlin-judentum.de/kultur/hoexter.htm>. Höxter recalls that for him, Recha seemed "like the prophetess Debora".

13 Recha Freier, "Wurzeln schlagen: Die Gründung der Jugend-Alija und ihre ersten Jahre", in *Aus Kindern werden Briefe: Die Rettung jüdischer Kinder aus Nazi-Deutschland*, eds. Gudrun Maierhof, Chana Schütz and Hermann Simon (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2004), 268.

14 Freier, "Alijath haNo'ar".

The first steps toward Youth Aliyah (1932)

When Freier developed her plans to bring young Jews from Germany to Palestine after spring 1932, she faced various obstacles: the Zionist movement preferred trained professionals to develop the Kibbutzim¹⁵ and villages in Palestine. Representatives of the Jewish community declared that the homeland of German Jews was Germany. Parents hesitated to let their children leave. Moreover, they often insisted that antisemitism and the Nazis would eventually be overcome.¹⁶ Nathan Höxter recalled: “Recha Freier had many difficulties in her struggle to organize Youth Aliyah, since many leaders of Jewish organizations in Germany were against her plans. In addition, Henrietta Szold, an American Jew who already lived in Palestine and was a member of the ‘Va’ad Leumi’,¹⁷ also acted to scupper Freier’s plans. She thought it was inappropriate to send Jewish children from Germany to kibbutzim.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, Recha Freier organised her first Youth Aliya group in late 1932. She travelled back and forth between Berlin and Palestine to find the resources to bring her plans to fruition and started to seek out people who later would become her allies.¹⁹ In Berlin, Freier met educator Siegfried Lehmann (1892-1958), director of the children’s village Ben Shemen. After Kibbutz Ein Harod withdrew its commitment to take in the first Youth Aliyah group, Lehmann approved Freier’s plans. As a next step, financial guarantees and certificates for entry to the British Mandate of Palestine had to be obtained. Ben Shemen also needed assurance that the children’s living expenses would be covered for two years.²⁰ Money came from the Zionist organisation in Königsberg, Wilfrid Israel (1899-1943), owner of a well-known department store in Berlin (Kaufhaus N. Israel) and an

15 A Kibbutz is a collective rural settlement with common ownership and grassroot-democratic structures.

16 Recha Freier, *Let the Children Come* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), 10-21; Freier, “Wurzeln schlagen”, 271-275.

17 Official representation of the Jewish citizens of Palestine.

18 Höxter, “70 Jahre Jugendalijah”.

19 For instance, she met Enzo Sereni: Ruth Bondy, *The Emissary: A Life of Enzo Sereni* (Boston: Little, 1977).

20 Beate Lehmann, “Die Jugend-Alija als Herausforderung für das Kinder- und Jugenddorf Ben Shemen”, in *Hachschara und Jugend-Alija. Wege jüdischer Jugend nach Palästina 1918-1941*, eds. Ulrike Pilarczyk, Ofer Asjenazi and Arne Hofmann (Gifhorn: Gemeinnützige Bildungs- und Kultur GmbH des Landkreises Gifhorn, 2020), 165-194, <https://doi.org/10.24355/dbbs.084-202104201055-0>.

acquaintance of Recha who sold her jewellery. Over the course of successive years, Wilfrid Israel provided the young pioneers with clothing, suitcases, backpacks, boots and other items, as many parents could not afford to buy them.²¹ On 12 October 1932, the first group of seven boys from Berlin and five boys from Königsberg left the German capital.²²

Members of all the various youth movements lined the platforms at Anhalter Bahnhof singing Hebrew songs. Many adults were there as well, and everyone present was excited. Wilfried Israel whispered to me: "This is a historic moment!" The platform seemed to tremble under my feet. Now the work had begun: No one could interfere with it anymore; it would progress and develop ... The children rejoiced as the train departed. The parents cried.²³

On the organisational level, in late 1932, Freier founded first Jewish Youth Aid (*Jüdische Jugendhilfe*) in order to have a legal basis for her initiative and to act as a serious partner for other institutions. On 30 January 1933, when the NSDAP took power, Freier founded the Youth Aliyah Consortium (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendaliyah*) and the legal process was formally completed in May. In September 1933, Freier became a board member of Jewish Youth Aid, which came into being within the newly founded Reich Representation of German Jews (*Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden*).²⁴ In the meantime, the American Jewish Congress, as one of the predecessor organisations of World Jewish Congress (established 1936), had approved the aims of Youth Aliyah. Within one year, Freier had built up an impressive organisational structure. Youth Aliyah was placed under the Department of Migration of the Reichsvertretung which included:

21 Naomi Shepherd, *Wilfrid Israel* (Berlin: Siedler, 1985).

22 The Jewish Community in Königsberg agreed to support the group, dependent that five boys would be sent from their community. Girls were part of the Youth Aliyah scheme without any distinction to boys after it was institutionalised.

23 Freier, *Let the Children Come*, 17

24 Created in reaction to the increasing antisemitic measures by the NSDAP government, the aim of the Berlin-based *Reichsvertretung* was to represent the interests of the Jewish population in Germany, with all movements under one roof. Cf. Otto Dov Kulka, ed., *Deutsches Judentum unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, Volume 1: *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden 1933-1939* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997). On the importance of the year 1933 as turning point for the Jews in Germany see: Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

- Palestine Agency (*Palästina-Amt*),
- Jewish Migration Aid (*Jüdische Wanderfürsorge*),
- Aid Committee for Other Countries (*Hilfsverein für andere Länder*) and
- Youth Aliyah Consortium (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendaliyah*), which consisted of three more subdepartments:
 - Ahawah Children's Home (*Kinderheim Ahawah*),²⁵
 - Jewish Orphans Aid (*Jüdische Waisenhilfe e.V.*) and
 - Jewish Youth Aid (*Jüdische Jugendhilfe*).²⁶

Youth Aliyah was financed by the Reichsvertretung, Hadassah, Jewish communities and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

For the development of Youth Aliyah, it was indispensable to also have someone on the ground in Palestine. That task was taken over by Henrietta Szold (1860-1945). Born in Baltimore, she founded Hadassah in 1912 in the United States. Hadassah was a Zionist women's organisation dedicated to health care in Palestine, where she had lived since 1920.²⁷ Szold had rejected assistance for the first Youth Aliyah group in 1932 and even though she and Freier met in June 1933, she remained sceptical because so many poor Jewish children lived in Palestine. But she was finally won over because official Jewish organisations confirmed the importance of Youth Aliyah and asked her to fulfil the work started by Chaim Arlosoroff (1899-1933).

In the spring of 1933, Arlosoroff, who represented the Jewish Agency, travelled to Berlin to discuss the immigration of German Jews to Palestine with officials of the Zionist Movement there. He visited the Youth Aliyah office and spoke with the staff, as Freier was in Palestine at that time. Arlosoroff was enthusiastic and promised to provide several hundred immigration certificates. The newspapers in Palestine reported about his visit. Revisionist Zionists accused Arlosoroff of collaborating with the Nazis²⁸; he was shot dead on the Tel Aviv beach in June 1933. Henrietta Szold was devastated, as were many Jews. Szold took over where Arlosoroff had left, obtaining the first 500 certificates for Youth Aliyah children and in November 1933 agreed to head the office of Youth Aliyah in Jerusalem.

25 Ayelet Bargur, *Ahawah heißt Liebe: Die Geschichte des jüdischen Kinderheims in der Berliner Auguststraße* (München: dtv, 2006).

26 Lehmann, *Die Jugend-Alija als Herausforderung*, 166.

27 Joan Dash, *Summoned to Jerusalem: The Life of Henrietta Szold* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

28 On Revisionist Zionism, see: "Zionism: Revisionist Zionism", Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/revisionist-zionism>.

Many documents and personal accounts make clear that a conflict was smouldering between Szold and Freier. Szold focused on working according to the regulations within a functioning administration. Tasks were divided: Freier was networking and collecting money, while Szold prepared the papers and lodging.

From Hachshara to emigration

If a Jewish boy or girl decided to join Youth Aliyah, they first had to be registered through their parents or a guardian. The age of acceptance was 15 to 16 – a regulation based on British rules for certificates and for pedagogical reasons. The sum of RM 2.000 Mark (130 Palestinian Pound, in 1933 ca. USD 350) per individual had to be secured and covered Hachshara,²⁹ travel, equipment, housing, food and more, for a period of two years. Additionally, the British mandatory asked for an annual financial guarantee for each candidate. Many parents applied for funding because of impoverishment of Jewish families linked to the antisemitic politics in Germany. Hadassah and other organisations helped.

More than 40 Hachshara centres offered training in Germany until 1939. After 1938, 16 centres opened in Austria. Youth Aliyah and Hechaluz³⁰ ran most Hachsharot together. Youth Aliyah training lasted four to six weeks and consisted of four hours each day of agricultural work such as ploughing, seeding, breeding animals and housework. Four hours a day were dedicated to lessons in Hebrew, Jewish history and Zionism. Hachshara was also a time to redevelop self-esteem. Esther Deutsch wrote on Hachshara in Ahrensdorf: “We felt like we were on an island, far away from all the terrible events that were happening in this country at the time.”³¹

After Hachshara, the children had to pass an exam and a medic had to testify to their physical and psychological fitness. When confirmed and materially equipped, Youth Aliyah members needed certificates for immigration to Palestine. To obtain these from the British authorities, a kibbutz or another Youth Aliyah institution had to request the immigration

29 Hachshara = training.

30 Hechaluz = Pioneer; it was the umbrella organisation of all Zionist Youth Organizations.

31 Herbert Fiedler, *“Träume und Hoffnungen”*; Vol. 1: Ein Kibbutz in Ahrensdorf (Nuthe-Urstromtal: Förderverein Begegnungsstätte Hachschara-Landwerk Ahrensdorf, 2000), 18.

of these youths and confirm the guarantees. The Jewish Agency, the operative branch of the World Zionist Organization established in 1929 was part of these organisational procedures. After Henrietta Szold received the Kibbutz requests, she ordered the certificates. The British also demanded a questionnaire from the parents on income, health and more, with a special paragraph in which they promised to support their child. They had to attest through signature that their child would stay in the settlement in which he or she was placed and that they as parents did not expect to get to Palestine through their child's request or help.³²

The young Jewish pioneers travelled in groups through Italy and across the Mediterranean to Palestine, settling together after their arrival. Nearly all Youth Aliyah groups were welcomed personally and accompanied to their destination by Henrietta Szold, until her death in February 1945. The great majority of the young immigrants were sent to kibbutzim, while others went to moshavim³³ or other vocational training centres.³⁴

On 19 February 1934, the first official group of 43 (mainly boys) from Germany arrived.³⁵ The number of young Jews who desired to register with Youth Aliyah increased steadily until 1937.³⁶ Beginning in 1934, Georg (Giora) Josephthal (1912-1962), was employed by Youth Aliyah and in 1936 served as secretary general of Hechaluz in Germany. In January 1936, he underlined in a letter to Szold that Youth Aliyah seemed to be the only truly successful Zionist emigration organisation.³⁷ Relations between the offices Berlin and in Jerusalem remained tense.

32 Regarding topics such as social structure, age, percentage of girls and boys etc: Susanne Urban, "Die Jugend-Alijah 1932 bis 1940: Exil in der Fremde oder Heimat in Erez Israel?" in *Kindheit und Jugend im Exil: Ein Generationenthema*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 34-61, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112422960-003>.

33 A Moshav is a cooperatively organised form of rural settlement.

34 More detailed: Axel Meier, "Die Jugend-Alija in Deutschland 1932 bis 1942", in *Aus Kindern werden Briefe. Die Rettung jüdischer Kinder aus Nazi-Deutschland*, eds. Gudrun Maierhof, Chana Schütz and Hermann Simon (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2004), 70-95; Brian Amkraut, *Between Home and Homeland: Youth Aliyah from Nazi Germany* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 47-60.

35 After the founding of the State of Israel in May 1948, this day was declared "Children's Day".

36 Central Bureau for the Settlement of German Jews in Palestine, Report to the Twentieth Zionist Congress and to the Council of the Jewish Agency in Zurich (Jerusalem, 1937). The report shows a figure of 1.650 for 1935-37 compared to 612 for 1933-35. The document was shown to the author by Ella Freund (1909-2012) in Tel Aviv in 2004. Freund was a Youth Aliyah Emissary in the 1940s.

37 Giora Josephthal to Henrietta Szold, 23 January 1936, Central Zionist Archive, S75/116.

Networking in Europe (1935-1939)

In 1935, Recha Freier proposed expansion of Youth Aliyah to Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, as she sensed Nazi Germany's aggressive intentions and the burgeoning threat to Jewish life in Europe. Jüdische Jugendhilfe agreed and connections were made with Jewish representatives in the other countries. Szold, however, rejected the idea. According to Freier, she said: "We do not yet know the results of Youth Aliyah from Germany, whether good or bad, and already you want to plan ahead?"³⁸

Nevertheless, in May 1938, Youth Aliyah was extended to Austria, in the fall of 1938 to the Sudeten territories and in March 1939, to Prague, all of which had been seized by Germany. "Now functioning from three organizational centers, Youth Aliyah leaders from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia established a joint council."³⁹

In September 1938, a fundraising office was opened in England. It was headed by Eva Michaelis-Stern (1904-1992)⁴⁰ who had been employed in the Berlin office before her emigration. Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)⁴¹ worked for Youth Aliyah France after having fled Germany in 1933 and secured transit centres in France for Jewish youth from German-occupied Czech lands.

By 1938-1939, Youth Aliyah was active in Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Recha Freier was critical of the idea of establishing transit camps in countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, as only few children were billeted in Jewish homes and *Hachshara* was not provided everywhere. She feared that war was looming and in 1939 negotiated vainly with Zionist and Jewish organisations to establish transit camps closer to Palestine, in Turkey, Cyprus or Greece.⁴²

38 Freier: *Wurzeln schlagen*, 293.

39 Amkraut, *Between Home and Homeland*, 116.

40 Sara Kados, *Eva Michaelis Stern*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/stern-eva-michaelis>.

41 Thomas Meyer, *Hannah Arendt. Die Biografie* (München: Piper-Verlag 2023); Stephen J. Whitfield, *Hannah Arendt*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/arendt-hannah>.

42 Freier, *Wurzeln schlagen*, 300 f.

1939-1940: Turning points

After 1933, the worsening situation of Jews in Germany also affected Recha Freier's family. Between 1937 and 1939, her husband and sons emigrated to England, while Recha decided to remain in Germany with her daughter Maayan. Maayan later described her mother as "a woman either with her head in the clouds or with her head through the wall".⁴³ From autumn 1938 on, Recha Freier made no secret of the fact that she was prepared to support or set up illegal activities for rescuing children. She found allies such as Nathan Schwalb (1908-2004), head of Hechalutz Geneva and Aron Menczer (1917-1943), who took the post of Youth Aliya director in Vienna in September 1939.⁴⁴ After Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, several thousand Youth Aliyah members, youth counsellors (*madrichim*) and office staff were spread all over Europe. From October 1939, the Mandatory authorities no longer issued certificates to German Jews, as Germany and Britain were at war. The British, however, still granted Youth Aliyah certificates for children from Germany and Nazi controlled lands who had been in transit before September 1939.

Because of insecurity regarding the departure of Youth Aliyah groups in war, Recha Freier convinced the Palestine Agency to set up Special *Hachshara*/SH (*Sonder-Hachashara*) for clandestine immigration to Palestine. Between November 1939 and November 1940, seven SH transports were organised,⁴⁵ mainly financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.⁴⁶ For example, trainees from Ahrensdorf arrived in Palestine with SH in March 1939, November 1939 and in May 1940. Around 1.800 Jews arrived with SH in Palestine, travelling to Vienna, on the Danube to Yugoslavia and onward to Palestine; about 20 percent of the passengers were Youth Aliyah members.⁴⁷ Szold argued vehemently against these transports, out of legal reasons.

43 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

44 Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, ed., *Trotz allem! Aron Menczer 1917-1943* (Wien: Böhlau, 1993).

45 Clandestine immigration was named "Aliyah Beth," meaning "B-immigration". Artur Patek, *Jews on Route to Palestine 1934-1944: Sketches from the History of Aliyah Bet - Clandestine Jewish Immigration* (Krakow, Jagiellonian University Press, 2012).

46 Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1939-1945* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry/Hebrew University, 1981).

47 Ferdinand Kroh, *David kämpft. Vom jüdischen Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Reinbek: Rowohlt 1988), 22-33.

In the meantime, Freier was active on behalf of Polish Jews who remained in Berlin after more than 5.000 men had been arrested and taken to concentration camps (Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen) in 1938-1939.⁴⁸ Their wives and children were left behind. Freier's request to help them fell on deaf ears at the central council, now named *Reichsvereinigung*.⁴⁹ The *Reichsvereinigung* did not feel responsible for Jews of Polish nationality and feared attracting the attention of the Nazi authorities. Freier knew that release from concentration camps was possible if a permit issued by the *Reichsvereinigung* indicated that the person would leave Germany within 24 hours. Together with Rudolf Pick from the Palestine Office, she stole 100 permits and Pick signed them. Polish-Jewish men were released and rescued through SH.⁵⁰

The *Reichsvereinigung* rejected Freier's methods. In January 1940, the SH Commission demanded her exclusion. On 9 February 1940, the Palestine Office and the board of the Jewish Youth Aid suspended Freier from all her responsibilities. Edith Wolff (1905-1997), a colleague and supporter of Freier, was also dismissed. Wolff later joined an underground group around Yizchak Schwersenz, a Youth Aliyah teacher.⁵¹ After the war, Schwersenz wrote:

Alfred Selbiger, and Dr. Paul Eppstein, as the person in charge of the *Reichsvereinigung*, accused Recha Freier of endangering our work by "stepping out of line:" ... Today I ask myself: What could have endangered us more at that time than what happened and what affected us all a short time later? What did "legality" mean when thousands were torn apart and deported under the arbitrariness of a political system?⁵²

48 On the expulsion of Polish Jews, see: Alina Bothe and Gertrud Pickhan eds., *Ausgewiesen! Berlin, 28.10.1938: Die Geschichte der "Polenaktion"*, (Berlin: Metropol 2018).

49 On 4 June 1939, all Jewish associations and Jewish communities were forcibly merged into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. This marked the end of the *Reichsvertretung* and an elected Jewish representation in Germany. Nazi authorities used the *Reichsvertretung* to control the Jewish population.

50 Many of them joined *Sonder-Hachshara* No. 6 and boarded the unseaworthy *Pentcho*. "The refugee ship 'Pentcho'", United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/index.php/content/en/photo/the-refugee-ship-pentcho>.

51 Jizchak Schwersenz, *Die versteckte Gruppe. Ein jüdischer Lehrer erinnert sich an Deutschland* (Berlin: Wichern, 2000).

52 Schwersenz, *Gruppe*, 62.



Fig. 1: Recha Freier and her daughter Maayan, around 1939.
(© Private, Courtesy of Freier Family.)

Freier's daughter Maayan recalled:

When the Reichsvereinigung was informed of what my mother had done, she was suspended from all positions. She was summoned to Adolf Eichmann, Head of 'Reichszentrale für jüdische Auswanderung'⁵³ in Berlin. Her passport had already been withheld ... Eichmann took my mother's passport, stamped it invalid and threw it in her face. We assume, she was denounced, and then left right- and defenceless, completely on her own.⁵⁴

After several warnings, Recha Freier fled Berlin in July 1940 with her 11-year-old daughter. She first went to Vienna and from there to Zagreb, arriving in Jerusalem in June 1941.⁵⁵

Parallel to this dramatic development in Freier's life, transportation routes, visas and the travel costs were the main obstacles to keeping Youth Aliyah going. Until June 1940, Youth Aliyah candidates could cross the

53 Reich Headquarters for Jewish Emigration, see: Gabriele Anderl, Dirk Rupnow and Alexandra-Eileen Wenck, *Die Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung als Beraubungsinstitution* (Oldenbourg: München, 2004).

54 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

55 At the same time, Rudolf Pick resigned from all positions in the Palestine Office in Berlin. He was deported to the Riga Ghetto on 27 November 1941 and murdered there.

Mediterranean to Palestine. After Italy's entry into war in May 1940, groups had to travel through the Soviet Union, Turkey, Greece, Syria and Lebanon. It took months to receive Soviet and Turkish transit visas. Youth Aliyah candidates stuck in Denmark, Sweden and Lithuania failed to leave Europe because no route was open after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

After 23 October 1941, the Nazi regime forbade emigration. The remaining *Hachshara* institutions were closed. Youth Aliyah members were sent to the "Jewish labour camp Paderborn" from which they were deported to Auschwitz on 1 March 1942.⁵⁶

Transnational escape routes: The role of Yugoslavia after 1938

Szold underlined in mid-1940 that Youth Aliyah was not a rescue organisation but meant to contribute to the upbuilding of the Jewish Community in Palestine.⁵⁷ This was seen differently by Freier and her supporters, who knew that they were continuing the work and that it had transformed to a rescue mission. Historian Sara Kadosh wrote:

Youth Aliyah administration, like the rest of the Yishuv in Eretz Israel, failed to comprehend the situation in Europe during the early years of war, and did not adapt its policies and procedures to war conditions. In many cases, rescue activity succeeded only because Youth Aliyah leaders in Europe ignored the rules and structures of the Jerusalem office.⁵⁸

Yugoslavia played an important role in organising the escape routes. Youth Aliyah rescue activities in Yugoslavia started in 1938. Recha Freier had done outreach work with the Jewish communities there because she recognized their political awareness. Emissaries from kibbutzim were sent

56 Correspondence and lists (Gestapo files) on the "Jewish retraining and work camp" in Paderborn (1941-1943), Arolsen Archives, Doc-ID: 11199809-16; Correspondence and telexes concerning the deportation of prisoners and the planned dissolution / sale of the camp, 27 February to 15 March, 1943: Arolsen Archives, Doc-ID: 11199827/8.

57 Henrietta Szold to Youth Aliyah London, 28 May 1940, Central Zionist Archive, A125/94.

58 Sara Kadosh, "Youth Aliyah Policies and the Rescue of Jewish Children from Europe", *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1997): 95-103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23535811>, 97.

to support the activities there. Zionist ideas were widespread in the Jewish community in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Zionist organisations had called since the 1920s to oppose the rising antisemitism in Germany and Europe. They also actively helped Jewish refugees from Germany and elsewhere during the 1930s.⁵⁹

In July 1940, Freier, along with her daughter, was smuggled from Vienna to Zagreb and realising that this was a viable escape route, developed plans to rescue more children. They first travelled to Vienna, where Aron Menczer prepared their way to Yugoslavia. Josef Schleich (1902-1949) was a crucial person in this plan. Schleich had a chicken farm that was used at request of the Jewish community after 1938 for agricultural training and issued training certificates. After 1940, he used his network of smugglers to organise thousands of Jews' journeys from the Styrian-Slovenian border to Zagreb. This was tacitly and strategically tolerated by the Gestapo until Jewish emigration was forbidden in October 1941. In 1941, Schleich was arrested for foreign exchange offences, probably on the grounds that he was paid by agencies or individuals for each Jew he accompanied.⁶⁰

Between summer 1940 until February 1941, small groups reached Yugoslavia from Germany and Austria with the help of Freier, Menczer and Schwalb. Maayan Freier recounted her experiences:

We arrived in Zagreb and the same day my mother met representatives of the Zionist Association and the Jewish community. She said, "My daughter and I crossed the border illegally together, then others can do it too. I want to get children out of Germany, and especially children whose fathers have already died in concentration camps." The Jewish community in Zagreb was immediately on fire. There was talk of taking in 100 children. Local families were willing to house them in their homes. My mother sent the list of names to the Reichsvereinigung and asked that the children be sent to her. It went back and forth, but the children were stuck. My mother sent a telegram to

59 Marija Vulesica, "Formen des Widerstandes jugoslawischer Zionistinnen und Zionisten gegen die NS-Judenpolitik und den Antisemitismus", in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten*, eds. Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen and Gideon Botsch, (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 89-105.

60 Hannelore Fröhlich, *Judenretter – Abenteurer – Lebemann: Josef Schleich. Spurensuche einer Tochter* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2007); Walter Brunner, *Josef Schleich. "Judenschlepper" aus Graz, 1938-1941: eine Dokumentation* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2017).

Berlin. It said something like, “I have Palestine certificates by name for 100 children, and if you don’t send the children right away, I’ll make a huge scandal.” The Reichsvereinigung knew my mother and it was impossible in 1940 to let 100 certificates expire. She didn’t have a single certificate, of course. But she didn’t care about that. Anyway, the first group came and then the second. Both groups were boys. The last group consisted of 16 girls. They were caught at the border by Yugoslav border guards and taken to Maribor. After the inspector of Maribor questioned the girls and learned what happened in Nazi Germany and Austria, he was desperate. He informed newspapers about their fate and brought them to a hotel for accommodation. In the end, the mayor of the city decided not to send the children back but informed the Jewish community in Maribor.⁶¹

From Maribor, the girls were brought to Zagreb in early April 1941.⁶² The Jewish community in Zagreb took responsibility for the more than 120 children. Most of them came in organised groups, some on their own, psychologically devastated after having experienced atrocities in Poland. Regarding schooling and other activities, the socialist-Zionist Hashomer Hazair partly took over. Freier taught Hebrew classes. Despite the harsh policies on refugees in Yugoslavia, these children were relatively free and the police even warned the community about raids.

My mother had brought them to Yugoslavia and moved heaven and hell to get certificates. Henrietta Szold didn’t want to do anything illegal and said, “These children of Recha Freier will never see Palestine.” One version is that Hans Beyth, Szold’s associate, sent my mother 90 certificates to Yugoslavia. When my mother met him in Palestine, he told her that Henrietta Szold did not know that. Another version says that Szold did know about the certificates and that they were sent on their way by the Jewish Agency representative in Turkey and not by Beyth. To this day, it is not known for sure.⁶³

61 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

62 Klaus Voigt ed., *Joškos Kinder: Flucht und Alija durch Europa. Josef Indigs Bericht* (Berlin: Arsenal Verlag, 2006), 25 f., 40 f.

63 Zerem and Maayan Freier, interview with the author, Jerusalem, September 2002.

Recha Freier left with Maayan in March 1941, after certificates were secured for 90 children. They left a month later, after the German invasion of Yugoslavia began on 6 April 1941. Kalman Givon recalled: "Of course, we feared falling into German hands again and Recha Freier ... managed to get our whole group from Zagreb to Belgrade by train." In Belgrade, they were hosted for some days by the Jewish community. "At that time, we heard that Germans had invaded Zagreb. Shortly thereafter, we managed to leave Belgrade on the last train bound for Greece and Turkey."⁶⁴ The group arrived by train in Beirut via Aleppo.

However, the number of certificates was insufficient; more than 30 children remained in Zagreb. Given that the newly established Croatian fascist Ustasha regime collaborating with the Germans was a willing helper in the persecution and murder of Jews, another escape route had to be found. Youth Aliyah leader Joseph Itai Indig (1917-1998), born in Osijek, Croatia, organised the group's flight in July 1941 to the Italian-annexed part of Slovenia, where they spent a year in an old derelict hunting lodge near Ljubljana. "From Recha Freier ... I took over in Zagreb the children she had rescued from Germany and Austria. From her I learned unconditional faithfulness in service to them. It was this faithfulness that made me persevere alongside the children."⁶⁵ Freier assisted Indig whenever possible in the following months.⁶⁶ He succeeded in obtaining an entry permit from the Italian authorities for the 43 girls and boys and their adult companions. He was also helped by Nathan Schwab and different Jewish aid organisations while he spent three weeks travelling across Slovenia in an attempt to secure housing.⁶⁷ Everything was financed by the Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants (*Delegazione per l'Assistenza degli Emigranti Ebrei* – DELASEM), the aid organisation of Italian Jews.⁶⁸ As partisan struggle expanded, the group found itself in the middle of the combat zone in 1942. Indig again turned to DELASEM and the group was allowed to move to

64 Kalman Givon, "Die Flucht von Deutschland nach Palästina (Eretz Israel) über Jugoslawien: Ich wurde von Recha Freier gerettet", *HaGalil*, 30 November, 2004, <http://www.schoah.org/zeitzeugen/givon.htm>.

65 Voigt, *Joškos Kinder*, 15.

66 "Letters and documents regarding the 'Villa Emma' children, 1940-1944", Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/3699087>.

67 Voigt, *Joškos Kinder*, 46-170.

68 Laura Bava, "Aiding gli Ebrei' – Delasem under fascism, 1939 to 1945", M.A. thesis (University of Notre Dame Australia, 2016), <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1129&context=theses>.

Nonantola near Bologna in July 1942, where they were accommodated in Villa Emma and later joined by Jewish refugee children from Croatia. After Germany invaded Italy in summer 1943, with the help of the Swiss Zionist Federation, Schwalb arranged the entry of the entire group to Switzerland, where they were assembled in the Youth Aliyah Home in Bex. On 29 May 1945, after the end of the war in Europe, the “Villa Emma group” left for Palestine with official certificates in their pockets.⁶⁹

While these attempts by Youth Aliyah and other organisations to rescue young Jews were successful, others were not. One dramatic example is the fate of the SH 5 transport, which got stranded at the Yugoslav river port of Kladovo.⁷⁰ In November 1939, the SH 5 passengers, a third of whom were Youth Aliyah-trainees, left Berlin and boarded the boat in Vienna. When they reached Bratislava, the emigrants were interned and guarded by the fascist Slovak Hlinka Guard. The local Jewish Community provided the refugees with food. As more refugees streamed in, additional 280 Jews from Germany joined SH 5. The boat was eventually released and reached a village near Budapest, where, with the help of the Association of Jewish Communities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (AJCY) and of Mossad Aliyah Bet, those aboard were transferred to three smaller vessels flying the Yugoslav flag.⁷¹ After two weeks on the Danube, going back and forth between Romania and Yugoslavia, SH 5 was finally denied entry by Romanian authorities. The boats reached Kladovo near the Romanian border at the end of December 1939. All efforts to continue the journey failed. The Danube froze and

69 Cp. Sonja Borus, *Sonjas Tagebuch. Flucht und Alija in den Aufzeichnungen von Sonja Borus aus Berlin, 1941–1946*, ed. Klaus Voigt (Berlin: Metropol Verlag 2014); Voigt, *Villa Emma – Jüdische Kinder auf der Flucht*; Voigt, *Joškos Kinder*. See also Jakob “Jakica” Altaras, “Crossing the Adriatic with the children”, in *We Survived: Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust*, vol.1 (Belgrade: Jewish Historical Museum of Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, 2005), 167–174.

70 See for details: Zeni Lebl, *Tragedy of the Kladovo-Sabac Transport Refugee Relief Board*, 467–531; Chaim Schatzker, *The Kladovo-Sabac-Affair* (two books and a third reflection), in *Kladovo Transport: roundtable transcripts*, Belgrade, October, 2002 (Belgrade: Jewish Historical Museum of Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia/Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije = Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia), CC BY-NC-ND, 559–585; Mordecai Paldiel, “Toward Palestine, the Land of Israel: Boat People on the Danube with the Connivance of the Nazis”, in *Saving One’s Own: Jewish Rescuers during the Holocaust*, ed. Mordecai Paldiel, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017): 316–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1mtz4tx.17>.

71 *Mossad Aliyah Bet* was created to bring Jews from Europe to Palestine; it organised a network of offices throughout Europe, bought ships and brought clandestinely around 20.000 Jews to Palestine, using ca. 50 cruises. See: Dalia Ofer, “The Rescue of European Jewry and Illegal Immigration to Palestine in 1940. Prospects and Reality: Berthold Storfer and the Mossad Le’Aliyah Bet”, *Modern Judaism* 4, no. 2 (1984): 159–81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396459>.



Fig. 2: A group of the youth movement “Akiva” on the immigrant ship “Tzar Dushan” in Kladovo, 1940. (© Yad Vashem, 4531/66.)

the Yugoslav authorities did not let them pass. The boats, anchored in the winter port, were internment camps more than anything else. The people on the ships dealt with poor, crowded shelter and very harsh living conditions.⁷²

As there was no Jewish Community in Kladovo, AJCY emissaries had to travel back and forth under difficult conditions. In spring 1940, the number of refugees had grown to 1.200. In September 1940, they were finally able to leave, but they were unable to continue the journey towards the Black Sea. Instead, they headed 300 kilometres up the Sava River to Šabac. After their arrival, the AJCY, the Women’s Zionist Organization (WIZO) and the small local Jewish Community worked together in an “Action Committee”

⁷² See for example the testimony by Herta Reich, “Zwei Tage Zeit, um zwanzig Jahre meines jungen Lebens zurückzulassen”, in *Zwei Tage Zeit. Herta Reich und die Spuren jüdischen Lebens in Mürz-zuschlag*, ed. Heimo Halbrainer (Graz: CLIO Verein für Geschichts- & Bildungsarbeit, 1999), 41.



Fig. 3: Luggage of the Youth Aliyah group in Šabac, 1940.
(© Yad Vashem, 4531/20.)

that raised money and provided the refugees with clothing, food, books etc.. Living conditions improved, there was more freedom of movement and the Zionist youth movements kindled the flame of hope again. “Even in dire circumstances like these, they had strength for culture, education and music. Some wrote poetry, others wrote music (‘The Refugee Song’, ‘Aliyat Hanoar March’, ‘Thank you, Yugoslavia’).”⁷³

Shortly before the German invasion in April 1941, a small number of the Kladovo refugees were able to escape. About 200 certificates were sent for members of Youth Aliyah and around 50 for accompanying adults, obtained through WIZO or guarantees of relatives. In addition, passports were needed as well as transit visas for Bulgaria, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon.

⁷³ Lebl, *Tragedy*, 510.

Since Bulgaria had joined the Axis in February, transit through Bulgaria was blocked and the refugees had to go through Greece. Many travelled on interim passports issued by Yugoslavia. Among the rescued was Chaim Schatzker (*1928) who had been compelled to leave his mother behind. As a renowned historian, his judgement on Youth Aliyah Jerusalem – not Recha Freier – is adamant: “... deliberating the need and justification to transform Youth Aliyah into a rescue enterprise become not only utterly irrelevant, but also categorically immoral, stupefying and hard-hearted.”⁷⁴

More than 1.100 Jewish refugees stayed behind: adults and those over the age of 17. The men from the Kladovo group were murdered in early October 1941 as retribution for a Partisan attack on Germans. 805 Jews and Roma were taken from Šabac and shot in Zasavica. In January 1942, the women were transferred, as were Serbian Jewish women, to the Sajmiste concentration camp near Belgrade. Many were killed in gas vans, among them Schatzker’s mother.

“Let the children come...”: Commemorating Recha Freier and her work

Between 1933 and 1939, Youth Aliyah had rescued over 5.000 children and young Jews from Europe. Between autumn 1939 to the end of the war, an additional 9.000 children were rescued.⁷⁵ It can be estimated that by May 1945, a few hundred had still not reached Palestine, but remained in transit countries, having survived the Shoah there. During the war, two groups reached Palestine and were absorbed by Youth Aliyah, the Teheran Children⁷⁶ and Children from Transnistria.⁷⁷ After the end of the war, Youth Aliyah cared for thousands of Jewish children who had survived.

74 Schatzker, *Kladovo-Sabac-Affair*, 581.

75 Child and Youth Aliyah Bureau, Jerusalem, *Monthly Statistical Statement*, March 1, 1945, Central Zionist Archive, S75/1364; Jewish Agency for Palestine, Child and Youth Immigration Bureau, *Statistical Statement for the period February 19, 1934 to September 30, 1944*, in *Statistical Bulletin*, Central Zionist Archive, S25/2542.

76 Mikhal Dekel, *Tehran Children: A Holocaust Refugee Odyssey* (New York: Norton 2019); Dvorah Omer, *The Teheran Operation: The Rescue of Jewish Children from the Nazis* (Washington DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1991); Jutta Vogel, *Die Odyssee der Kinder. Auf der Flucht aus dem Dritten Reich ins Gelobte Land* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2008).

77 Dana Mihăilescu, “Early Postwar Accounts on Jewish Orphans from Transnistria”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 36, no. 3, Winter 2022, 353–371, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcac056>.

After she reached Jerusalem in Spring 1941, Recha Freier was ready to continue her work for Youth Aliyah. Shockingly, the office in Jerusalem refused to take her on. Freier never stopped following the Jewish concept of “Tikkun Olam” (“repairing the world”⁷⁸) and that same year founded the “Agricultural Training Center” for neglected Jewish children. In 1958, she created “Testimonium” to inspire compositions on the history of the Jewish people. Recha Freier died in Jerusalem in 1984. During the war, Freier’s role in Youth Aliyah was already being marginalised and a narrative developed that Szold was the founder of Youth Aliyah. It had been Szold who was in Palestine to greet the arriving groups, while Freier operated behind the scenes and had been cast aside both in Germany and in Jerusalem. The debate continues – who is the “mother” of Youth Aliyah⁷⁹ and whose approach was the right one. Albert Einstein, acquainted with Freier, “proposed Youth Aliyah for the Nobel Peace Prize ... before his death in 1955. He wrote: ‘I have the honor to propose for the next Nobel Peace Prize the international organisation known as the Youth Aliyah. Through it, children from 72 countries have been rescued and incorporated into Israel.’ The Nobel Committee decided otherwise.”⁸⁰

From the mid-1970s, Freier started to gain her well-deserved recognition. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Hebrew University in 1975. In 1981 she received the Israel Prize, Israel’s highest cultural honour. After her death in 1984, a square in Jerusalem was named for her. Outside of Israel, Recha Freier’s deeds remained largely unrecognised. One of the rare tributes was a commemorative plaque at the Jewish Community Center in Berlin, which was put up in 1984 for “Recha Freier, the Founder of Youth Aliyah”.

Youth Aliyah remained widely unknown, especially in comparison with the *Kindertransporte*, another transnational rescue initiative. Nearly 10.000 Jewish children from Germany and Austria were brought to Britain and the United States through the *Kindertransporte* in 1938 and 1939.⁸¹ That rescue

78 Levi Cooper, “The Assimilation of Tikkun Olam”, *Jewish Political Studies Review* 25, no. 3/4 (2013): 10–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43150877>.

79 The Hadassah Website recounts the story as such: “At the dawn of the Holocaust in Europe, in the 1930s, Henrietta Szold and a German colleague organised the rescue of thousands of Jewish children to safety in Palestine through Youth Aliyah.”

80 Freier, “Alijath haNo’ar”, <https://www.hagalil.com/israel/deutschland/freier-recha.htm>.

81 Amy Williams and William Niven, *National and Transnational Memories of the Kindertransport. Exhibitions, Memorials, and Commemorations* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2023).

operation better reflects the generally more accepted narrative and image of non-Jews helping Jews (although Jewish organisations were involved in the *Kindertransporte* as well).

Another reason could be the explicit connection of Youth Aliyah to Zionism. For the wider public in Europe, a mainly humanitarian and non-national operation is more palatable than a Zionist one. In modern-day Europe, there is little sympathy for Zionism or the Jewish State that emerged from it.

The Partisan Resistance Goes Global: Yugoslav Veterans and Decolonisation

Jelena Đureinović

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.¹ 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”.² 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

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”³

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.⁴ The Algerian War was the first conflict in which Yugoslavia became directly involved,⁵ 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).⁶ 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.

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.⁷ 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.⁸

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,⁹ 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

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹²

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

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".¹⁴

The NAM as an international organisation can also be understood as a network that facilitated relationships, flows and trajectories across multiple nodal points.¹⁵ 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".¹⁶ 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".¹⁷

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.¹⁸ Yugoslav officials saw important future allies and partners among the leaders of the liberation movements and decolonising countries.¹⁹ In the case of Algeria, Yugoslavia deemed providing assistance and building its influence in the country that would soon become

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.²⁰ 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 1960.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴

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,²⁵ 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

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.²⁶

²⁶ 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,²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.

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.³⁰ 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”,³¹ 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”.³² The brotherhood and unity represented for many Partisans more than the ideological foundations of the new state, it reflected their wartime experience.³³ 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”.³⁴ 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”.³⁵

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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹

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”.⁴⁰ Transnational

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”.⁴¹ 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.⁴² The transnational gaze highlights the entanglements and travelling of memory and its discourses, forms, media and practices through time and space,⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.

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 Counter-public 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.⁴⁸

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”.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² The nature, goals and strategies of the Partisans’ struggle reflected

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.⁵³

The Algerian War was the first postwar event that generated intersecting histories of violence and cross-referencing between decolonisation and Nazi genocide.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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

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”.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

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,⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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.⁶³ When it comes to the combatants, the dichotomy of the medical assistance meant that the

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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”⁶⁶

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.

Part 5.

How to Transmit? Resistance as Object of
Conservation, Documentation, Education,
and Policy-Making

Resistance Told by Resisters: The Digitised Collection of Reports of Former Prisoners of Buchenwald Concentration Camp

Robert Parzer

Resistance in concentration camps is a topic so well-researched that it may seem to be even whimsical to try to add another position to the bibliography. For example, the best catalogue available, that of the Topography of Terror Foundation (*Stiftung Topographie des Terrors*) in Berlin, returns as many as 271 entries on a search for the keywords *Widerstand+Konzentrationslager* (Resistance+Concentration Camp).¹ However, in recent years, memorial institutions have started to digitise their holdings, giving researchers exciting new possibilities for research.

This article will use a small part of one of the digitised collections of the Buchenwald memorial, applying a qualitative method to find out how the term resistance was used by former inmates of the camp. It will then discuss its findings, which were made possible through digitisation in the context of the research about resistance in Buchenwald concentration camp.

The Buchenwald Memorial has taken a leading role in responding to the challenges of the digital revolution, going as far as discussing digitisation in its mission statement: “[...] digitalization has radically altered the way in which knowledge is acquired and opinions are formed. This also requires new educational approaches and formats.”² For comparison, many other memorial institutions in Germany either do not publish mission statements or do not mention digitisation.³ This is no coincidence, as the digital

1 See: <https://vzlbs2.gbv.de/DB=48.1/SET=1/TTL=4/CMD?ACT=SRCHA&IKT=1016&SRT=YOP&TRM=widerstand+konzentrationslager>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed on 14 April 2024.

2 Jens-Christian Wagner, “Foundation Mission Statement”, *Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation*, <https://www.stiftung-gedenkstaetten.de/en/ueber-uns/leitbild>.

3 See e.g. “Stiftungszweck, Gesetz & Satzung”, *Stiftung Bayerische Gedenkstätten*, <https://www.stiftung-bayerische-gedenkstaetten.de/die-stiftung/gesetz-satzung>. The author of this text was part of a subproject of the digitisation project at the Buchenwald Memorial in the years 2022-2023.

transformation at the Buchenwald Memorial started very early. Already in 1994, a database project was initiated to create a memorial book and an inventory of archeological findings. The program used to build the database was developed in-house.⁴

The latest digitisation project at the Buchenwald Memorial started in autumn 2021. The project's blog states that the project's aim is to provide access to sources of the history of the concentration camp and its aftermath and to make them more usable.⁵ The further development of databases, the usage of archival standards and linkage with other sources available online are named as further goals of the undertaking.

The collection of reports of survivors

The first body of source material processed by the Buchenwald Memorial's digitisation team was the collection of reports of survivors. This collection consists of 1.146 reports, which add up to 19.456 pages with an average of 14,44 pages per report. Most reports, however, have a lower quantity of pages. 139 reports have only one page, while 30 reports comprise over 100 pages. The maximum number of pages per report is 521.⁶ Some authors wrote several reports so the number of reports is larger than the number of authors. The reports are usually typewritten statements of survivors about their time in Buchenwald concentration camp and the story of their persecution before that, but they also contain other material such as original letters that were written during imprisonment, lists of prisoners, certificates, photos and maps. The reports were not necessarily memories written down especially for the purpose of archiving. Some had already been published elsewhere, mostly in newspapers or magazines, as can be seen for example by the archived report of Domenico Ciufoli,⁷ which is a translation of a piece published in the Italian magazine *Verita*. Also, female survivor Anna Walzewa's report had been published in Moscow's *Literaturnaja Gazeta* in

4 Harry Stein and Jens Vehlhaber, "Datenbankprojekt in der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald zur Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald 1937-1945", *Gedenkstättenrundbrief* 87 (1999): 29-36.

5 See Markus Wegewitz, "Start des Digitalisierungsprojekts", SGBMDigital, 12 October 2021, <https://sgbmdigital.hypotheses.org/page/2>.

6 Report of Nathan Garfinkel, Buchenwald Archives K 31/1086.

7 Buchenwald Archives K 31/58.

1960, before it was sent to Buchenwald Memorial's Archive.⁸ After scanning, the reports were transformed into searchable PDFs and indexed, thus creating a large database with thousands of entries, which allow for inter-textual searches.

The base materials for this database are the reports, which have been collected since the 1950s. This means that the first stage of this process took place in a period when there was not yet an archive as a separate entity within the National Memorial Site Buchenwald (*Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald*). An archive was established only in 1971, 12 years after the memorial was founded.⁹ The prisoners' reports collection is a quite peculiar subset of the Buchenwald Archives' holdings, as the reports were collected for a publication project.

The publication was meant to be a collective work of members of the resistance movement in Buchenwald. The goal was to publish documentation about the camp that would highlight the "lives and fight of the antifascist resistance fighters".¹⁰ A publishing committee was established, composed of former prisoners from Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Czechoslovakia, France and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). That the members (and the countries they represented) were not coincidentally chosen can be derived from the fact that the inaugural conference of the publishing project was opened with a speech by Ludwig Einicke (1904-1975), who was also a former Buchenwald prisoner. More importantly, in this context, Einicke was the director of the Institute for Marxism-Leninism at the Central Committee of the GDR's ruling party, the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*), from 1953 to 1962.¹¹ All the attendees were more or less orthodox communists. In his speech, Einicke stressed that the publication should "significantly contribute to the fight against the re-awakening of fascism and against the renewed use of former SS-leaders in West Germany".¹²

8 Buchenwald Archives K 31/12.

9 Sabine Stein, "Das Buchenwaldarchiv: Eine archivische Sammlung in der neu geschaffenen selbständigen Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora", *AsKI Kulturberichte*, no. 1 (2003), <https://www.aski.org/das-buchenwaldarchiv-eine-archivische-sammlung-in-der-neu-geschaffenen-selbstaendigen-stiftung-gedenkstaetten-buchenwald-und-mittelbau-dora.html>.

10 Philipp Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin und Eigenwilligkeit: Das Internationale Komitee Buchenwald-Dora und Kommandos* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014), 226.

11 See the respective entry in the *Wer war wer in der DDR?* online dictionary: "Einicke, Ludwig" *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*, <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/ludwig-einicke>.

12 Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin*, 227.

This was completely in line with the purpose of sites like Buchenwald in GDR memory culture.

The GDR created memorial sites “of the heroic communist resistance against the ‘Third Reich’, a red Olympus”.¹³ At the inauguration of the Buchenwald National Memorial in 1958, then Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl spoke of the heroism of the European resistance fighters. “A militant identification”¹⁴ with the German and European resistance movements took place.

When the publication project started, not much material on which to base it was available. Even though the first reports about concentration camps had already been published in the 1930s by escapees or people released from internment, they had not reached many readers. This is astonishing when one looks at the prominence of Buchenwald in worldwide memorial culture today.¹⁵

The publication project took many turns. Initially planned for the opening of the National Memorial in 1958, it became a focal point for political struggles between the committee of former prisoners and the GDR’s leadership.¹⁶ It was published in January 1960 under the title *Buchenwald – Mahnung und Verpflichtung. Berichte und Dokumente* (Buchenwald – Reminder and Obligation. Reports and Documents), gathering around dozens of reports collected so far or extracts of them, which were mixed with documents produced by the SS and from trials and investigations. There was also a separate part with photos of the former camp and its prisoners.¹⁷ Reports continued to be sent to the Buchenwald Memorial long after this project was finished.

13 Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Waffe. Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd ed., 2007), 110.

14 Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 177.

15 For reference, see e.g. Michael Löffelsender, *Das KZ Buchenwald 1937-1945* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale f. polit. Bild. Thüringen, 2020).

16 Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin*, 251.

17 Fédération Internationale des Résistants, des Victimes et des Prisonniers du Fascisme, Internationales Buchenwald-Komitee and Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der DDR, eds., *Buchenwald – Mahnung und Verpflichtung. Dokumente und Berichte* (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1960). Another edition was printed in 1961 which included supplements and corrections by former prisoners.

A very short history of Buchenwald

Buchenwald was a concentration camp built on a hill near Weimar in 1937. It was the second large concentration camp to be erected in Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s, after Sachsenhausen in 1936, and after the first wave of imprisonment in concentration camps, which had already started in 1933 and included Dachau. Altogether, until its liberation on 11 April 1945, the SS brought up to 278.000 prisoners into the camp, killing around 56.000. Around 21.000 prisoners were left in the camp and its substructures when the U.S. Army liberated the camp in April 1945.

Today, the camp is also known because of its many prominent prisoners. To name just a few, the former inmates Imre Kertész and Jorge Semprun would later become Nobel Prize winners for literature. Stéphane Hessel, a member of the French Resistance was brought to Buchenwald in 1944. He survived, made a career as a diplomat and was adopted by the anti-globalist left, when his essay *Indignez vous!* became a world-wide bestseller in 2010.¹⁸ Elie Wiesel, another survivor of Buchenwald, was a very important figure in establishing Holocaust memory worldwide. Most prisoners, however, are unknown and forgotten, but their names can be researched, using the Buchenwald memorial site's website¹⁹ and Arolsen Archives' extensive collections, which can be searched online.²⁰ A few prisoners rose to prominence only very late in their lives and in horrific circumstances. One example is Buchenwald survivor Boris Romantschenko, who became known only in 2022. He had survived many concentration camps, among them Buchenwald, just to be killed in March 2022 when his home in Kharkiv, Ukraine, was hit during a Russian rocket attack.²¹

Buchenwald was a place of internment for people from all over Europe. It served different functions within the concentration camp system.

18 Stéphane Hessel, *Indignez-vous!* (Montpellier: Indigène, 2010). The booklet was published in English as *Time for Outrage!* (London: Charles Glass Books, 2011).

19 See: "Die Toten: 1937-1945", *Konzentrationslager Buchenwald*, <https://totenbuch.buchenwald.de/names/list>.

20 The Arolsen Archives, formerly known as the International Tracing Service, keep records about camps and their inmates and make them searchable online. See: <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/de/search?s=Buchenwald>.

21 "Ukrainian Holocaust survivor Boris Romantschenko (96) killed in Russian shelling of Kharkiv", *International Auschwitz Committee*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.auschwitz.info/en/press/press-informations/press-information-single/lesen/ukrainian-holocaust-survivor-boris-romantschenko-96-killed-in-russian-shelling-of-kharkiv-2589.html>.

Starting with mostly political enemies of the Nazis in 1938, it became a place where so-called evacuation transports from camps in occupied Eastern Europe arrived starting in 1944, bringing tens of thousands of Jewish prisoners to Buchenwald. By then, many of the prisoners were kept in one of Buchenwald's many sub-camps, such as Ohrdruf.

Although unrelated to the topic of this article, it is important to state that the prisoners of the Soviet Special Camp in Buchenwald were not that prominent, and their stories could be told only after the end of the GDR in 1989. For five years, from 1945 to 1950, Soviet occupation forces locked away around 28.000 Germans in an internment camp established on the premises of the former concentration camp. Many of the prisoners of the Soviets had been low-level members of the Nazi Party and many were completely innocent victims of Stalinist policies.²²

The reports about resistance in Buchenwald

The first book about Buchenwald as a concentration camp was published in Amsterdam in 1944, before liberation, when Dutch historian Peter Geyl (1887-1966) published a poetry collection titled *Het wachtwoord: Sonnetten* (The password: Sonnets). Geyl was brought to Buchenwald as a hostage in 1940 and released in 1943. The term resistance is mentioned only once in his poems and refers to the crackdown on resistance in Amsterdam within the framework of a fictitious dialogue between the lyrical self and a “tyrant”.²³ Another early publication about Buchenwald from 1945 was written by five former communist prisoners from Czechoslovakia.²⁴ An analysis of the content reveals that resistance is not a very prominent motif. It is mentioned only once properly and appears more as a possibility than a fact. The collective author writes: “The situation in the camp was so critical that we expected to be shot at any moment. As police,²⁵ we were divided into several groups and given the task of constantly monitoring the activities of the

22 Julia Landau and Enrico Heitzer, eds., *Zwischen Entnazifizierung und Besatzungspolitik: Die sowjetischen Speziallager 1945-1950 im Kontext* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021).

23 Pieter Geyl, *Het wachtwoord: Sonnetten* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1944), no page numbers.

24 Vladimír Baudyš et al., *Vzpomínky z koncentráků* (Úpice: Svaz osvobozených politických vězňů, 1945).

25 It is not clear what the authors meant by this expression. They probably coined a term to describe the task they had been given.

SS so that we could prepare for resistance in good time.”²⁶ Such examples, which depict the fact that resistance in the camp was not a topic in these early testimonies, can be quoted from nearly all the early publications.

However, when the Buchenwald collective prepared itself for the publication of reports, it was most certainly unaware of most of the hitherto published Holocaust and camp literature,²⁷ as there was so little of it and because it was published mostly in small or obscure publishing houses. As the authors of a research project about this phenomenon postulate, “these early texts have been forgotten and pushed out of the collective and cultural memory.”²⁸ So, the publishing committee soon realised that there was an important problem: a lack of sources. As a remedy, they reached out to former prisoners, asking them to submit reports about different aspects of Buchenwald’s history and that of its sub-camps, based on their own experiences. The committee collected the reports that their comrades submitted.

One of the methods of making the facts about the concentration camp better-known was organising the former prisoners. This effort is described in more recent research as organised remembrance (*organisierte Erinnerung*).²⁹ It stands in contrast to Aleida Assmann’s concept of cultural memory (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*),³⁰ which has been heavily criticised in recent years because it is based on rather stable identities (of persons and nations alike), which are less important in a world characterised by migration and hybrid identities.

Indeed, organised memory it was. The key player in the process of getting the memories written and organised was the Buchenwald Committee (*Buchenwald-Komitee*), which had assembled former prisoners of Buchenwald since its foundation in 1956. It was the successor to organisations of kapos or prisoners’ functionaries who had been assigned by the SS with

26 Baudyš et al., *Vzpomínky z koncentrákú*, 86-87.

27 For a discussion of this term, see “Begriffsdefinition Holocaust- und Lagerliteratur”, *Arbeitsstelle Holocaustliteratur*, https://www.fruehe-texte-holocaustliteratur.de/wiki/Begriffsdefinition_Holocaust-_und_Lagerliteratur.

28 See: “Frühe Texte der Holocaust- und Lagerliteratur 1933 bis 1949”, *Arbeitsstelle Holocaustliteratur*, https://www.fruehe-texte-holocaustliteratur.de/wiki/Fr%C3%BChe_Texte_der_Holocaust-_und_Lagerliteratur_1933_bis_1949. A critical discussion whether they had ever been part of the “collective and cultural memory” would be necessary.

29 Philipp Neumann-Thein et al., *Organisiertes Gedächtnis: Kollektive Aktivitäten von Überlebenden der nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022).

30 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999).

different supervision and administration tasks within the camp, and not just in name. As Neumann-Thein states, communists were the leading force among the kapos in the Buchenwald camp. By 1943, they had assumed almost all the powerful positions in the hierarchy that the SS had established among the prisoners. All three “camp elders” (*Lagerälteste*), most “block elders” (*Blockälteste*) and the decisive kapo posts in the infirmary, work statistics department and other key bureaucratic posts that allowed for acts of resistance were held by communists. Around a quarter of the prisoners who were active members of the former Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – KPD) had held higher positions in the party’s rank before they were deported to the camp.³¹ This paper cannot give a detailed insight into the many issues that came with the power-sharing system established by the SS. It became a topic of a heated debate among historians and former prisoners of the camp after the end of the GDR, which also meant an end of the former communist prisoners’ monopoly on interpretation of Buchenwald’s history.³² The debate was initiated by a book about the “red kapos”, which held the communist functionary prisoners accountable for many wrongdoings.³³ The allegation that hit hardest was that the communist elite sometimes sacrificed non-communist prisoners to protect themselves and their network from the SS’s wrath. Also, party purges were the order of the day even amid the camp realities. This created a “political survivor’s guilt” (*politische Überlebensschuld*), a term coined by Lutz Niethammer and Harry Stein, authors of the aforementioned book about the kapos. As they convincingly argue, this guilt was compensated by the creation of the narration of self-liberation, a narration based on the outright lie that the camp would have been liberated by armed prisoners rather than the U.S. Army in April 1945. In reality, an armed uprising, which was suggested by several prisoners, was prevented by German communist prisoners because they knew a lot about asymmetric power metrics between SS and prisoners.

Given the above-mentioned circumstances of how the sources were collected, it may come as no surprise that the topic of resistance and (self-)liberation is very much present in the reports. It mainly referred to activities of

31 Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin*, 35.

32 For a critical review of the debate see e.g. Mark Homann, *Jenseits des Mythos: die Geschichte(n) des Buchenwald-Außenkommandos Wernigerode und seiner “roten Kapos”* (Berlin: Metropol, 2020).

33 Lutz Niethammer et al., eds., *Der “gesäuberte” Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994).

the International Camp Committee (*Internationales Lagerkomitee*), which was created in 1943 by German communists along with political detainees from other countries. In his report, Walter Eberhardt, a former prisoner, explained the phenomenon of resistance as one that was organised from the top down “because the camp committee created national groups in illegal committees and the KPD had the leadership so we had a strong resistance movement on the agenda.”³⁴ Teofil Witek, a Polish former prisoner, stated what the goal of the resistance movement in the camp was about. He claimed that it would be wrong to limit the resistance movement in Buchenwald to a self-help action, for its goal was “a life-and-death fight to the death against the hated fascist system.”³⁵ For many who filed reports, the alleged act of self-liberation was “the crowning of the longstanding work of the resistance movement”³⁶ In an interesting semantic twist, Witek acknowledged the presence of U.S. troops, something that other former prisoners’ reports tended to avoid. According to him, just after the “revolt”, through which he described “self-liberation” happening, American troops came close. He then stated that “Buchenwald is an example for the relentless and consequent [...] fight against fascism” and closed his report by claiming that Buchenwald “is an example and an incentive for all comrades who continue to fight against the resurgence of American-style fascism in the capitalist countries.”³⁷ The myth of self-liberation is repeated in nearly every report examined. Some authors ascribe additional meanings to it, as does for example Walter Eberhardt. He states that 21.000 “Kameraden”, meaning comrades, “raised the call ‘Free’, as soon as the ‘self-liberation’ had begun.”³⁸ Other survivors tried to stick to the ideological paradigm by demeaning

34 Walter Eberhardt, “Tag der Befreiung 1945 der Widerstandskämpfer von Buchenwald”, Buchenwald Archive, K 31/70. Eberhardt, born 24 November 1905, died 10 May 1973. He was in Buchenwald from 10 November 1938, and was a kapo from October 1943. This data was collected from Arolsen Archives, DocID: 5806683 (WALTER EBERHARDT), retrieved from <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/de/document/5806683>.

35 Teofil Witek, “Die Widerstandsbewegung in Buchenwald”, Buchenwald Archives K 31/415, Page 10. Witek, born 25 July 1913, died 13 March 1965. He was imprisoned in Auschwitz from 1 October 1941, and in Buchenwald from 12 March 1943. This data was collected from Arolsen Archives, DocID: 7428600 (TEOFIL WITEK), retrieved from <https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/de/document/7428600>.

36 *Ibid.*, 12.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Walter Eberhardt, “Tag der Befreiung 1945 der Widerstandskämpfer von Buchenwald”, Buchenwald Archive, K 31/70.

the liberators, as did Richard Thiede.³⁹ He recalls a successful escape after which he was greeted “damn little cordially” by Americans who even put him into a camp for Germans, from which he escaped again.⁴⁰ Some former prisoners seem to have even been aware of the fact that they were repeating the same narrative: Franz Eichhorn wrote in 1974 that “these records prove once again that every political prisoner used his position for the good of the camp, even if he sometimes risked his head and neck”.⁴¹

Concluding remarks

Only a small fraction of the potential that digitisation has to offer for the researcher could be used in this article. For example, due to the article’s scope, methods of machine reading large quantities of scanned material and semantically analysing it were not applied here. However, just the mere fact that survivors’ reports have been transformed into searchable PDFs already made the research for this text significantly easier. A rather vast body of material could be studied in a small part of the time that would have been necessary if one would have had to sift through the paper originals or the scans usually provided by archives. There remains space for improvement, though. The reports are not available online, and neither is the database consisting of the key words extracted from them. Being able to use the material freely online clearly has such great advantages that it outweighs any data or privacy protection regulations that might be applicable. Since the Arolsen Archives have made their materials available (see above), nearly all possible information about the former prisoners is out there anyway. It remains to be seen if the thus far rather strict imposition of privacy laws in German memorial sites can hold out much longer against the digital storm.

39 Richard Thiede was born in Leipzig on 6 February 1906 to a family of railway workers. He was brought to Buchenwald in November 1943 and transferred to the subcamp in Kassel.

40 Richard Thiede, “Betrifft: Schreiben vom 19.11.74”, Buchenwald Archive, K 31/328, 7.

41 Franz Eichhorn, “Bericht zum Thema: Antifaschistischer Widerstandskampf im ehemaligen KZ Buchenwald”, Buchenwald Archives K 31/332, 9. Eichhorn, born 3 April 1906, died 11 August 1993. He was imprisoned at Buchenwald from 18 January 1938, and was kapo of the camp’s barber shop. See: “Franz Eichhorn (Widerstandskämpfer)”, Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 28 September 2023, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Eichhorn_\(Widerstandsk%C3%A4mpfer\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Eichhorn_(Widerstandsk%C3%A4mpfer)).

Footprints of Resistance: Material Culture and Memory of the People's Liberation Struggle in Socialist Yugoslavia

Sanja Horvatinčić

Introduction

In 1983, the art historian Katica Brusić defended her master's thesis, which was titled "The Material Culture of the People's Liberation Struggle in Gorski Kotar". Through her decades-long, dedicated field research of the "authentic monuments of the socialist revolution" in Croatian Littoral, Gorski Kotar and Istria, conducted as a conservationist at the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (*Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture*) in Rijeka, she surveyed and documented about 250 locations dated to 1941 and 1942. In the introduction, she noted: "My colleagues [historians] investigate and write about *how* the revolution happened, while I am interested in *where* it took place. This thesis is only an attempt at one such approach to the material culture of the socialist revolution."¹ An archival encounter with Brusić's impressive scientific methodology, which she developed through her conservationist practice,² strongly resonated with my own research interests and practice, as well as with the broader issues related to the contemporary studies of monuments of socialist Yugoslavia.

"Until now, more attention has been paid to erecting monuments in honour of the revolution. Should future generations experience our revolution exclusively through these monuments, they will get the wrong idea about it. Meanwhile, listing and recording the material culture of the revolution has

1 Katica Brusić, *Materijalna kultura Gorskog kotara u toku Narodnooslobodilačke borbe* (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Odjel za povijest umjetnosti, 1983), 1-2.

2 The archive is held in Rijeka State Archives/*Državni arhiv u Rijeci*. HR-DARI-1300, Katica Brusić. I would like to thank the archival advisor Zorica Manojlović for guiding and supporting my research in the archives.

been neglected”, wrote Brusić.³ While these words primarily referred to her professional concern about documenting and preserving original sites and artefacts related to the People’s Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka Borba* - NOB), at the beginning of the 1980s, it also reflected the growing difficulties and limitations in transferring and mediating the memory of the Partisan resistance through artistic monuments. Her fieldwork resulted in impressive documentation and professional guidelines for proper memorialisation of such sites, aimed at conservation methods and non-invasive presentation of World War II locations and narratives. One such example is her proposal for listing the secret forest routes of the Partisan courier Romano Pličić-Celić as a protected cultural monument and its activation as an educational-memorial hiking trail (*Fig. 1*).⁴ This minimal, sensorial, and environmentally conscious model of memory transfer stood in contrast to the often costly artistic projects or invasive infrastructural developments that characterised Yugoslav high-modernist monument-making practices. These often failed to envision feasible maintenance and coped with growing challenges in keeping their relevance in the changing social and economic circumstances of the late socialist period. On the other hand, Brusić’s focus on documenting, protecting and presenting original sites of Partisan warfare can be interpreted as the need to uncover the numerous political and cultural layers piled up upon the legacy of the revolution and resistance and re-evidence the history from the simple facts on the ground.

The recent rediscovery of Yugoslav monuments and memorial complexes dedicated to the People’s Liberation Struggle and the Revolution, usually bound to the appealing effect of their monumentality, high-modernist features and ruined state, brings such urgency to the fore once again. As the enthusiastic reception of high-modernist monuments by Western art institutions has grown more prominent in the recent decade, the relevance of the historical sites and narratives they mark vanished. The monuments became more prone to various forms of appropriation, neglect and destruction. Despite the intentions, it seems that the international recognition of the artistic and architectural value of Yugoslav memorials and monuments achieved little in reaffirming the relevance of the sites of memory and drawing attention to the symbolic meaning of antifascism for contemporary society.

3 Brusić, *Materijalna kultura*, 1.

4 HR-DARI-832(DS-92) – *Konzervatorski zavod u Rijeci, opći spisi 1981–1993*.



Fig. 1: The map of the Partisan trail marked by the Partisan courier Romano Pilčić-Celić. (Rijeka National Archives, Fund Katica Brusić, HR-DARI-1300)

Brusić’s work on the material culture of the People’s Liberation Struggle introduces two topics I want to focus on in this chapter. The first is the central role of the materiality of war-time sites and artefacts in the production of cultural memory of resistance in World War II in socialist Yugoslavia, including the agency of a variety of heritage practitioners and institutions in creating special NOB or resistance-related heritage categories. The second is its role in conceiving and designing new types of memorial spaces and models of memory transfer.

NOB as the framework of Yugoslav resistance heritage

Compared to some other European countries such as Italy or France, the term “resistance” was rarely used in the official political discourse of socialist Yugoslavia. Soon after the war ended, the “People’s Liberation Struggle”, “People’s Liberation War”, and “People’s Liberation Movement” (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba / rat / pokret*) became the official terms, each with slightly different meanings: by the movement, for example, more diverse

types of activities, such as civic, cultural or even religious acts of resistance were acknowledged, as long as they targeted the common goal of liberation from the occupation of the Axis powers and local (pro)fascist regime(s).⁵ In socialist Yugoslavia, the term NOB was often understood as inseparable from the socialist revolution, which defined its goal not only as a struggle against the harmful forces of fascism but also as a struggle for an alternative future political project, that is, for a fundamental social and economic transformation of the society. In the last categorisation of cultural heritage from the mid-1980s, the Republican Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (*Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture*) and the special committee of the parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia listed original sites, artefacts and monuments associated with various stages, forms and aspects of that struggle by the special category: Monuments to the Revolutionary Workers Movement, People's Liberation Movement and Socialist Revolution.⁶ Two additional explanations are needed regarding this category's name: the revolutionary workers' movement indicates the broader historical scope, which placed the period of World War II in the longer line of the history of class struggles, such as workers unions actions, national uprisings or even peasant revolts. Secondly, the meaning of the term monument is closer to that of "heritage", meaning that it primarily valued original historical sites, structures and artefacts. We will discuss this further later in the text.

While the term NOB lost its legitimacy and prominence in new official political and historiographic discourses in the post-socialist Yugoslav context, the variety of topics and aspects of World War II encompassed by that term are of interest for comparative study of antifascist resistance and its legacies in Europe today. It is important to remember the political function of this term as a state-sponsored narrative in socialist Yugoslavia and its specific use in historiography, museology and heritage system. The interpretative bias and epistemic limitations in socialism were bound to the essential political functions of the narratives of the NOB and revolution, and hegemonic ideas about the past, both of which were transferred to the

5 For the official definition of these terms, see: *Leksikon Narodnooslobodilački rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945*. (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, izdavačko-publicistička delatnost; Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1980), 681.

6 *Spomenici revolucionarnog radničkog pokreta, Narodnooslobodilačkog rata i socijalističke revolucije. Kategorizacija* (Zagreb: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture Zagreb; Odbor za spomen-obilježavanje povijesnih događaja i ličnosti Sabora SRH, 1986).

cultural heritage domain. This meant, for example, that sites of atrocities or monuments dedicated to civilians would feature Partisan or communist symbols, even when they were devoted explicitly to civilian victims. From a contemporary perspective, this can easily be interpreted as a form of political instrumentalisation of victims.⁷ However, it is also vital to emphasise that under the term NOB, topics as diverse as women's role in the resistance, transnationalism, the importance of arts and culture, the agency of the civilian population and diverse actors participating or supporting resistance found their way to museums and history books, becoming part of the commemorative culture still relevant today. In other words, with the politically motivated suspension of the use of the term NOB, the specificity and complexity of the Yugoslav historical context of World War II resistance that is embodied in that term has also been lost.

On the other hand, the historical and political-semantic scope of the apparently neutral term “resistance” – serving as a broad signifier for various European movements and individual forms of struggles that opposed Nazi and fascist regimes in World War II – should also be addressed. It reproduced the normative terminology of many western European historiographies, for instance French, in which use of the term has a historical continuity despite new interpretations and historical debates. In former Yugoslav space, the term “resistance” has come to include the “grey zones”, which used to be sidelined, ignored or rejected in socialist historiography and memory culture, as was the case with the Chetnik movement. In the former socialist Europe, which has been dominated by the anti-totalitarian interpretative matrix since the 1990s, the vagueness of “resistance” is commonly stretched to connote actions opposing “all ideologies”, in order to relativise, disavow or even criminalise the communist-led resistance, historically referred to by terms such as NOB. Even the notion of “struggle” became ostracised as the word still carries the connotation of an (unwanted)

7 The monuments dedicated to crimes and atrocities testified to the injustices and sacrifices as a necessary part of the historical struggle for a better society. The enemy was conceptualised through the political concept of fascism, thus avoiding reference to particular identities. This politically highly sensitive practice in the multiethnic context of Yugoslavia was aimed at strengthening interethnic unity and class solidarity as guarantees of future social justice, peace and prosperity. Such conceptualisation of memory is at odds with dominant (neo)liberal memory politics, focused on the notion of victimhood, and establishing revisionist equal distance from the ideas of all armed struggles, martyrs and heroes. For the critique of such dominant discourse in the field of memory studies, see: Daniel Palacios González, “Towards an economy of memory: Defining material conditions of remembrance”, *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023), 1452-1465.

political agenda for the future. If we are interested in comparative analyses of various forms and traditions of interpreting resistance in Europe, the scope of topics commonly understood by the term NOB in former Yugoslav countries correspond to or are comparable with those understood by the term “resistance” in some other countries. The term NOB should, therefore, not be simply substituted with the vague notion of “resistance”, but used precisely for the sake of clarity in reference to the specific historical context it denotes. This is particularly relevant when studying the changing heritage policies and standards.

The systematic archival and field research of NOB monuments offers an insight into the variety of approaches that surpass the stereotypical ideas about crude and ideologised socialist memoryscapes. Research has shown that this was also the case in other socialist countries, for example, in various forms of remembering antifascist struggle and communist resistance in the GDR. Rudy Koshar notes that GDR commemorative practices were quite variable despite the prevailing imagery of giant socialist-realist statues: “Hardly a town or a village in the former GDR was without a small memorial site or cemetery that symbolised communist antifascist resistance to Hitler.”⁸ He underlines the importance of differentiation between “legitimate” and “legitimising” antifascism, whereby the first refers to the “positive memories and ethical principles rooted in the idea of antifascism” and the latter defines a “self-serving strategy of the regime which used popular memory of resistance for its own political interests”.⁹

Not only did diverse social agents participate in shaping, negotiating and influencing the complex and multilayered process of constructing war memory in socialist Yugoslavia,¹⁰ but the very term “NOB monument” was also understood differently by different social groups in different periods and within particular discursive registers. This brings us back to the ambiguity over the term “monument” and the title of Brusić’s master’s thesis. By the notion of “material culture”, she referred to what had, until then, been generally referred to as “authentic NOB/Revolution monuments”. With her interdisciplinary method, combining extensive fieldwork, a form of proto-archaeological documentation of sites, oral history and ethnographic

8 Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 196.

9 *Ibid.*, 196-197.

10 Heike Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu – okamenjeno sećanje?* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2014), 245-254.

methods, Brusić shifted conservationist work on the World War II sites in the direction of developing a wholesome, interdisciplinary scientific approach. Working with the notion of material culture enabled a more comprehensive view of the complexity of historical sites and contexts. More importantly, in the context of her professional work, it allowed focusing on material that did not illustrate the existing narratives but rather provoked new research questions and methods and opened critical reflections on the junction of conservationist and commemorative forms and practices.

Focusing on the comprehensive notion of material culture enables heritage specialists to consider practices of mobilisation of a variety of material remains from the wartime period for the purposes of memory transfer. The array of such objects is commonly divided into categories of respective fields of academic interest and expertise: written documents relevant to historians, three-dimensional objects relevant to museum professionals, wartime drawings for art historians, buildings or ruins for conservationists, and so on. The logic of extracting and separating traces of the past into various niches of expertise leads to the defragmentation of complex social and cultural phenomena such as monuments and memorials.¹¹ In the socialist period, when the specific category of NOB heritage was invented, those niches were brought into closer dialogue and applied in memorialisation. In some cases, this dialogue paved a path for community-based methods of documenting the heritage of resistance as a way of learning from and through materiality. In the following two sections, I will discuss the role of material culture in museology and heritage related to NOB.

Strategies of display

Material culture has always been the crucial medium for transmitting memories of military conflicts. Used in ritual practices to heal the wartime traumas or symbolically confirm the defeat of the enemy or displaying material remains of the war – artefacts or preserved structures and landscapes – in modern heritage institutions such as military museums have been powerful tools for constructing desired narratives and images of the past. War monuments and museum collections related to (selected) historical conflicts

11 Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies", *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no.2 (2011), 232-248.

have remained vital assets in building national heritage and memory culture in Western societies.¹² Since their birth in the 19th century, military museums and battlefield memorials have merged with commemorative rituals and propagandist aims, employing various representational strategies, professional standards, and display aesthetics. Peculiar ethnographic collections emerged as a way to display the superiority of European military powers over non-European enemies. Historical exhibitions organised to mark centennial anniversaries of the Battle of Vienna in 1683, for centuries, displayed so-called exotic Ottoman military culture which became part of the city's museum collections; many colonial museums originate from the need to collect and present the supposedly inferior weapons of the defeated peoples in the colonised territories. In socialist Yugoslavia, on the other hand, a collection of non-European weapons held by the Military Museum in Belgrade – composed of private donations since the 19th century – was displayed in the 1960s with a decolonial agenda: traditional weapons were used to affirm the long tradition of warfare and resistance of the peoples and nations of Africa and Asia, many of which were at the time waging anti-colonial wars, supported by Yugoslavia as part of the Non-Aligned Movement.¹³ This example is particularly interesting if we consider museums' role in documenting and commemorating the People's Liberation War in Yugoslavia, which often featured self-made, "primitive" Partisan weapons or tools used in the first phases of World War II.

While the Military Museum in Belgrade specialised in documenting all historical military conflicts on the territory of Yugoslavia, dozens of specialised NOB and revolution museums or museum collections were founded in the decades following World War II. Some originated from bottom-up initiatives by "individuals and groups attempting to meet authorities' expectations in a way that was not officially required", thus serving as "political and cultural expressions of self-staging of social need".¹⁴ The "museum boom"¹⁵

12 See, for example, the overview in: Ola Svein Stugu, "Exhibiting The War. Approaches To World War II in Museums and Exhibitions" in *Historicizing the Uses of the Past: Scandinavian Perspectives on History Culture, Historical Consciousness and Didactics of History Related to World War II*, eds. Helle Bjerg, Claudia Lenz and Erik Thorstensen (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011), 189-206.

13 Mirko Barjaktarović, "Staro oružje Afrike, Azije i Okeanije: Izložba u vojnom muzeju JNA", *Muzeji* no. 16-17 (1962): 137-139; *Oružje Afrike: katalog. 2* (Beograd: Vojni muzej JNA, 1962); *Oružje Okeanije* (Beograd: Vojni muzej JNA, 1962).

14 Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums: Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 20.

15 Ibid, 22.



Fig. 2: Locations of the NOB museums or collections in Croatia. The size of the circle indicates the number of artefacts in each museum. The visualisation is based on data taken from “Katalog muzejskih zbirki, muzejskih izložbi i stalnih izložbi sadržajno vezanih uz radnički pokret, NOB i poslijeratnu socijalističku izgradnju na teritoriju SR Hrvatske.” *Muzeologija*, no. 26 (1988), 61–133. Visualisation: Sanja Horvatinić. (Tableau Public).

in socialist Yugoslavia was caused by a similar mode of semi-official heritage production to the “monuments boom” in the 1950s, and it resulted in comparable difficulties in recording, monitoring, and overseeing them by heritage authorities. In Croatia, however, we know that by the end of the 1980s, there were as many as 150 displays, collections and permanent exhibitions related to the NOB and the revolution, of which 70 operated within independent working organisations (museums), and 80 within other organisations and socio-political communities (e.g. cultural centres, local committees of SUBNOR, local communities, archives, etc.).¹⁶ (Fig. 2)

The Croatian Museum Documentation Centre’s comprehensive survey of those museums and exhibitions indicated many problems related to the lack of professional staff and supervision, inadequate premises, and more. The survey showed that these museums and collections had over 140.000

16 Ljerka Kanižaj. “Analiza stanja muzejskih zbirki, muzejskih i stalnih izložbi, sadržajno vezanih uz radnički pokret, NOB i poslijeratnu socijalističku izgradnju na teritoriju SR Hrvatske”, *Muzeologija*, no. 26 (1988), 8-9.



Fig. 3: The museum display of fragments of the gallows in the NOB museum in Kamnik, Slovenia. (Photo archives Nenad Gattin, Institute of Art History, Zagreb).

recorded artefacts and at least twice as many unregistered ones. Most content was presented through panels with reproductions of documents and photographs, often lacking original artefacts. The reason for this, as Nataša Jagdhuhn argues, lay in the dominant museological approach, which focused on communicating historical processes and aimed to “break with perceptions of museum objects as curiosities, objects of antiquity, objects of special value for a particular scientific discipline (for instance art history, archaeology, etc.)”.¹⁷ On the other hand, Yugoslav NOB museums displayed numerous personal artefacts donated by community members or those testifying to specific ideas about resistance, such as the original fragments of the wooden gallows used by the occupation forces for public hanging of Partisan hostages displayed in the Kamnik NOB museum (Fig. 3). The artefact supplemented the museum’s narrative of resistance, while the original location of the gallows in the town square was marked by a memorial fountain dedicated to the hanged hostages. The practice of turning original artefacts related to violence and punishment into a sort of reliquiae of antifascist resilience, brings us back to the need to study such

¹⁷ Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums*, 53

specific museological context as part of the broader, interdisciplinary field of material culture studies. The topic of public hangings was a common motif in Yugoslav monuments, which served to demonstrate the heroism and martyrdom of Partisans and other resistance fighters.¹⁸ This example poses some further questions relevant to this study: the specific interest in authenticity as a way of evidence with a higher political agenda, and the difference between the presentation in museums and the use of the materiality of the historical sites, especially as a way of transmitting the memory *in situ*.

How to remember resistance

The memory of resistance and struggle against fascism in socialist Yugoslavia was not only mobilised by the aesthetic or visual narrative potential of memorial sculptural or architectural projects but also by the materiality that served, at the same time, as objective and documentary, as highly affective or emotionally engaging means of transmitting memory. Remembering is entangled with things, which enables the creation of specific human bonds between the present, past and future.¹⁹ The power of materiality, understood as relations between people and things, was often employed to enhance the quality of those bonds in museological practices and the mediative strategies of monument-making, closely related to the notion of authenticity. Furthermore, “the desire to represent the memory through the making of ‘place’ is a feature of all modern societies and is prevalent after every conflict or tragic event”.²⁰ These places often represent the heritage of a particular group, individual or community, as they can connect to them physically or emotionally. Those places-turned-heritage can be rather unusual locations, depending on what sort of narrative and symbolic meaning is constituted through them.

18 Cf. Sanja Horvatinčić, “Ballade of the Hanged: The Representation of Second World War Atrocities in Yugoslav Memorial Sculpture”, in *Art and Its Responses to Changes in Society*, eds. Ines Unetič et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 186-208.

19 Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, “Introduction to Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture”, in *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016), 1-24.

20 Sara McDowell, “Heritage, memory and identity”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. Brian Graham and Peter Howard, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 38.

In post-war Yugoslavia, such places were related to the NOB and were selected to best represent the character of Yugoslav Partisan warfare. We already mentioned the importance of NOB heritage sites and institutions, but why was it so crucial in a war-struck country to not only nourish the processes of making “places”, turning them into heritage,²¹ but also to document, study and preserve them?

In a lengthy essay written in 1949, Koča Popović, a highly ranked Yugoslav People’s Army general and former volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, listed a set of practical and theoretical arguments defending Yugoslav warfare in the NOB, as a response to one of the many attacks in the aggressive Soviet campaign against Yugoslavia following the Cominform Resolution in 1948.²² The resolution was a Soviet attempt to question, relativise or minimise the accomplishments of the Yugoslav anti-fascist struggle and revolutionary victory. Popović’s 1949 essay is telling for two reasons: it reminds us how crucial the 1948 Cominform crisis was for the constitution of the Yugo-centric narrative of resistance, and it underlines the vital importance of representing plausible evidence for legitimising Yugoslav claims to sovereignty and independence within the socialist bloc.

Among various other means and strategies, this was done in the following decades by presenting and commemorating as many and as convincing original Yugoslav wartime artefacts and sites as possible. This is not to say that collecting evidence and “exhibiting war” was an uncommon practice before the split with the USSR, during World War II and early postwar years. The guidelines on how to properly collect materials from the NOB for the Museum of the People’s Liberation were issued as early as 1944 in the liberated territory of Croatia and supplemented in 1945 with three more chapters.²³ The diversity of the topics relevant to the collection at the time is rather impressive: from the uprising, military actions, through the Women’s Antifascist Front, the relation between the minorities, to the economy, refugees, health system and cultural production. “Not a single detail is so irrelevant, to be forgotten”, wrote Danica Švalba, the museum’s

21 Heritage is a widely studied and complex phenomenon with many definitions. The basic definition that has been widely accepted is heritage as the selective use of the past for contemporary purposes. G.J. Ashworth and Brian Graham, eds., *Senses of Place: Senses of Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 7.

22 Koča Popović, “Za pravilnu ocenu oslobodilačkog rata naroda Jugoslavije”, *Vojno delo: Organ Ministarstva narodne odbrane FNRJ* 1, no.2 (1949), 17.

23 Danica Švalba, “Rad Muzeja narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske na skupljanju grade za povijest NOB-e”, *Historijski zbornik*, 1, no. 1-4 (1948), 228.

first director, arguing for collections based on crowdsourcing wartime material, which could reveal some unexpected sides of recent history.²⁴

In 1946, the “Sanitation in the People's Liberation Struggle” exhibition was organised in Zagreb. It was one of the first exhibitions that showed original artefacts (medical instruments, hand-made prostheses, etc.) and maquettes of Partisan hospitals, an effort to present sanitation as the crucial element of the successful liberation. In the following decades, Partisan hospitals became one of the central topos of resistance in Yugoslavia, musealised, reconstructed and commemorated by some of the most monumental memorial complexes. Bringing the NOB closer to those in big cities who never experienced nor could imagine the hardships of war was a common practice. To reach as broad an audience as possible, exhibiting spaces expanded to shop windows or public spaces. The exhibition project for one of the central parks in Zagreb was planned for two months and was supposed to show various events, phases and aspects of NOB. Among other activities, visitors would be allowed to try out the weapons from the Museum of the People's Liberation collection and watch open-air Partisan theatre and cinema, while city children could engage in the activities organised by the pioneers' section.²⁵

Resistance in the heritage system

Exhibiting the wartime artefacts belonged to the broader system of heritage management, which also took care of the original structures, buildings and material remains found *in situ* – the so-called authentic monuments – and commemorative markers (memorial plaques, sculptures, architectural elements) built after the war to remember and honour historical events, persons or ideas. Authentic monuments were defined as “areas or built structures in which the memory of certain past events is fixed in space and

24 Ibid., 229.

25 The authors of this two-month, open-air festival, designed for Park Ribnjak, were the museum director Danica Švalba and the architect Đuka Kauzlarić. It is worth mentioning that a number of other exhibitions were planned for the 10th anniversary in Zagreb, including the exhibition module “The resistance of our people through centuries”, held in all museums. “Zapisnik sjednice biroa CK KPH održane 21.VI. ov. g. [1951.] u Zagrebu. Početak u 17 sati: Pripreme za proslavu 10-godišnjice ustanka u NR Hrvatskoj”, in *Zapisi Politbiroa Centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske 1945–1952*, vol. 2, ed. Branislava Vojnović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2006), 770.

thus preserved; physical traces which serve as material evidence of time and events in a certain location, whose authenticity adds to it an extra value, making it significant for future generations who will have the chance to learn about NOB history in the original setting.”²⁶ This heritage category was further distinguished into three sub-categories: movable, immovable, and living monuments, the latter referring to the intangible heritage transferred via living witnesses.²⁷ Movable heritage (photographs, newspapers, arms, drawings, poems, etc.) was collected, analysed, archived and musealised, while immovable heritage referred to original locations of historical events, facilities or more extensive spatial units/territories. Most common were buildings used by Partisans to host meetings, congresses and other significant historical events or temporary structures built during the war for specific Partisan warfare purposes such as military and refugee camps and hospitals. Usually located within former liberated Partisan territories, the latter served as cornerstones for the protection and planned development of more expansive memorial areas (*spomenička područja*), characterised by a high density of historical sites in natural settings, thus featuring both historical and natural value.

Located in remote locations, usually in rural regions, those areas were invested in and promoted as potential memorial touristic zones from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.²⁸ Most memorial area development plans in Croatia were integrated with the national urban planning system, envisioning infrastructural and economic development through self-managed and self-sustainable eco-industries, traditional crafts, and agriculture.²⁹ Legal protection and professional supervision over memorial heritage were to be incorporated in a specific model of “social heritage protection” (*društvena zaštita*), by which all citizens and local organisations could actively partici-

26 Ivo Maroević, “Muzejski upotrebljavani spomenici culture [1976./1979.]”, in *Sadašnjost baštine* (Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti SR Hrvatske, Društvo konzervatora Hrvatske, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 1986), 179.

27 Katica Brusić, “Metoda rada na evidenciji, valorizaciji i prezentaciji spomenika socijalističke revolucije”, *Dometi: Časopis za kulturu i društvena pitanja* 13, no. 3-5, (1980), 166.

28 See: Sanja Horvatinčić, “Monument, Territory, and the Mediation of War Memory in Socialist Yugoslavia”, *Život umjetnosti: časopis za suvremena likovna zbivanja*, no. 96 (2015), 34-61; Milan Rakita, *Prostorno-političke i memorijalne infrastrukture socijalističke Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, 2019), 92-108.

29 Fedor Wenzler, “Spomen područja kao specifična kategorija obilježavanja lokaliteta i memoriranja značajnih događaja iz Narodnooslobodilačke borbe”, *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, XIX(155) (1975), 19-23.

pate to preserve not only NOB monuments and historic sites but also keep alive symbolic, social and ideological aspects of the antifascist legacy. The construction of NOB memory and heritage was a dynamic social practice in which various agents were actively engaged on different levels, thus influencing, negotiating, or modifying the dominant narratives related to World War II. While walking in the Partisans' footsteps on the "paths of the revolution" (*putevima revolucije*) was part of the official memory culture with less of a commemorative and more of an educational purpose, it also served to encourage the mobility of the youth across the country and their encounters with the rural areas where the "revolution took place". Visiting Partisan sites in the vast network of memorial sites could open various aspects and provoke new questions about the history and legacy of resistance as one of the rare examples of shared Yugoslav cultural heritage. The presentation of the natural context and materiality of NOB no longer primarily served to present evidence but to effectively construct narratives through the immersive experience in the original historical setting. It was, therefore, essential to arrange such sites in an accessible, modern and visually captivating way.

We can approach the memory transfer through the materiality of resistance on at least two levels: (1) How the "authenticity" of the Yugoslav resistance sites was treated by conservationists and by artists/architects, and how the traditional monument was rethought to serve as a bridge between the visitors and materiality *in situ*, and (2) how the material remains of the war were extracted from their original context, and reused in artistic works included in the museums of NOB or memorial houses.

Partisan hospitals as the central topos of NOB heritage

Along with the liberated territories, the effective Yugoslav Partisan health service, with its wide network of hospitals, was unique in the context of antifascist resistance warfare in Europe.³⁰ Due to the civilian population's massive involvement in the activities around Partisan hospitals – construction, food supply, care work, cleaning, and more – and the medical services

30 Among the extensive literature on the topic, see: Đorđe Dragić, *Partisan hospitals in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1966); *Sanitetska služba u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu Jugoslavije 1941–1945, Vol. 1–4*, ed. Stanislav Pišćević (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1989).

that the Partisan health system provided to the war-struck communities, the hospitals became symbols of civilian-military collaboration and civilian support of the People's Liberation Movement. As such, Partisan hospitals were particularly apt for memorialisation and heritagisation and will serve as a case study in the present analysis.

Partisan hospital complexes were usually treated as a combination of “authentic” and commemorative heritage: authentic sites were typically supplemented by memorial markers to emphasise or describe their historical significance.³¹ An essential aspect of the conception of such memorial complexes was the assumed presence of visitors or tourists. Authentic sites and memorial markers aimed to influence the visitors in such a way as to shape their (positive) attitude towards the events these monuments signified.³² To achieve that, collecting as much information as possible was crucial. This meant researching and documenting all aspects of the site (historical sources, oral testimonies, etc.). New methods focused on the material culture of NOB, such as those developed by Katica Brusić, sought to reveal possible material evidence which could contribute to a fuller understanding of everyday life at these heritage sites.

Following the formation of specialised offices of NOB heritage within the existing cultural heritage institutions, the early 1960s marked the beginning of a new wave of specialised interest in the “authentic NOB sites”. General recommendations for conserving and presenting such historic sites were to reduce contemporary interventions and to adapt both the material and form to the natural surroundings.³³ Conservation or reconstruction of the sites relied on combined sources, including field research, personal memos and testimonies, military documents and photographs. Since Slovenian hospitals were the first in Yugoslavia to receive professional conservation immediately after the war ended, sites such as Franja Partisan Hospital or the Partisan complex of military bases and hospitals in Kočevski Rog still present exceptional examples of conservation methods.³⁴ However, the majority of the Partisan hospital sites were destroyed or deconstructed during and after the war and required complete reconstruction or a memorial

31 Maroević, “Muzejski upotrebljavani”, 180.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, 183.

34 In 2014, Franja Partisan Hospital was listed under the European Heritage Label. See: “Europe starts in the Franja Partisan Hospital”, *Mestni Muzej Idrija*, 2024. <https://www.pb-franja.si/en/visit-us/european-heritage-label/>.

substitute. Such initiatives usually happened decades after the war, when the sites had already materially deteriorated and when their protection was gaining new momentum as part of more extensive memorial area protection plans and programs.

The first hospital to be reconstructed in Croatia was Gudnoga Hospital, at Mount Papuk in Slavonia. The Partisan hospital was formed under the military code name VI-2-A at the location of the Gudnoga stream in deep forests, several kilometres from the village of Sekulinci.³⁵ Among other reasons, the area was chosen because the site had a basic prewar infrastructure: a forestry station with a couple of wooden barracks. In late 1941, this became the base of a group of Partisans from Papuk, and in spring 1942, the Partisan hospital for the Slatina Partisan territory was formed and constructed by the end of that year.³⁶ The preserved barracks were removed and possibly reused by the Belišće Forest Company in 1946. In the 1950s, a study for the reconstruction was done based on the memory of one of the hospital's builders and a political commissar. This pioneering, bottom-up effort was undertaken by the Voćin Commission for the Memorialisation of the NOB in Virovitica county.³⁷

A more well-known endeavour of facsimile reconstruction and musealisation is the Central Partisan Hospital in Petrova Gora in central Croatia. The hospital facilities were preserved throughout the war. However, due to enormous war damage and significant post-war shortages in the region, the local population moved the prefabricated wooden barracks of the hospital facilities to nearby villages, where they were repurposed for housing. Unlike in Gudnoga, the task of reconstructing the original appearance of the hospital was entrusted to experts from the Conservation Institute in Zagreb, where a special department for documentation and registration of NOB and revolution monuments was established at the end of the 1950s. One of the department's first tasks was recording and documenting Partisan hospitals scattered throughout Croatia's mountainous regions. With the help of local guides, conservationists determined the original positions of

35 DAOS, Koordinacioni odbor SUBNOR-a Našice. Podaci za spomen-obilježja NOR-a po Slavoniji i Baranji 1957.-1970.", "Plan za rekonstrukciju partizanske bolnice i groblja u Gudnogi na Papuku". See also: E. M., "Partizanska bolnica na Gudnogi", *Crvena zvezda*, 21 February 1961, 4.

36 Regarding the history of the hospital, see: Milorad Stanivuković and Pero Stanivuković, *Vojno-partizanska bolnica Gudnoga* (Podravska Slatina: Skupština općine Podravska Slatina, 1987).

37 Since the early 1990s, the whole hospital complex with the memorial cemetery was heavily damaged and is no longer listed as national heritage.

the hospital facilities on Petrova Gora, and some of the original prefabricated wooden barracks were identified in the nearby villages and returned to the hospital's original location. The reconstruction of the hospital complex entailed the adaptation of hospital and auxiliary buildings, dugouts and cemeteries and equipping them with original and facsimile artefacts, and panels for an adequate presentation to future visitors (*Fig. 4*). With its non-invasive approach to the historical site, respect for the original construction technique and preservation of the natural environment, this conservation approach was in line with contemporary principles of conservation and restoration, such as the 1965 ICOMOS Athens Charter.³⁸

The third example concerning the conservation and memorialisation of Partisan hospitals in Croatia that I want to discuss has a somewhat different presentation model. None of the structures of the wooden barracks of the Partisan Hospital no. 7, which moved across the mountain Javornica near Drežnica in central Croatia from 1942 to 1944, were preserved after the war. After a long period of successful hiding, the Partisan hospital was burned down during the German military offensive in early 1944.³⁹ However, the original locations were revisited in the late 1960s, carefully examined, documented, and mapped by a committee composed of historians, heritage experts, war veterans, witnesses, and local foresters. Jela Jančić-Starc, the former political commissar and the hospital manager, was at the head of the team. "At those places, bits of coal, bottles, ampules, and crockery can be found in the ground. The plant life of those burnt-down places is different from the surrounding plant life at the altitude of 1.000 metres", noted Jančić-Starc, a professional agronomist by training, in her 1971 book on the hospital.⁴⁰ The movement of the wounded and hospital staff across the area, in search of shelter from the enemy attacks, left a good amount of material traces in the whole area, turning some of them into monuments in their own right, for example the mysterious fruitless cherry trees at an altitude of 1.000 metres, planted by the remains of the vitamin dose brought by the village children who walked for hours to remote and isolated locations to which the patients were evacuated before an enemy attack.

38 The Partisan Hospital in Petrova Gora is still listed as Croatian national heritage. However, it has been deteriorating due to the lack of maintenance and no sustainable heritage management program.

39 For the history of the hospital, see: Jela Jančić-Starc, *Vojno-partizanska bolnica u Drežnici 1942-1944* (Zagreb: Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture u Zagrebu, 1971).

40 The objects found on the sites were deposited in the local museum as another form of displaying historical evidence. Jančić-Starc, *Vojno-partizanska bolnica u Drežnici 1942-1944*, 69.



Fig. 4: Reconstructed wooden barracks at the original location of the Central Partisan Hospital on Petrova Gora, Croatia. (Photo archives Branko Balić, Institute of Art History, Zagreb)

Based on this meticulous research process, which resulted in a collection of found objects and maps of hospital sites in the whole area, further steps were taken to memorialise the last location of the main hospital complex. The planned facsimile reconstruction of the hospital barracks was eventually dropped and replaced with an architectural solution that required less maintenance. Based on the rich documentation about the site – photographs, testimonies, archival documents, and topographic maps – the architect Zdenko Kolacio designed a system of modular concrete elements, reminiscent of roofed structures, which indicated the exact locations of each hospital facility, thus defining the spatial outline of the former complex. The concrete “barracks” with signs indicating their function (Guardhouse, Surgery, Typhus Ward, etc.) emerge from the site’s unchanged forest



Fig. 5: Memorial complex at the original site of the Partisan Hospital no. 7 on Mount Javornica near Drežnica, Croatia. Architect: Zdenko Kolacio, 1980. (Photo archives of the Ogulin Heritage Museum.)

setting, enabling visitors to gain an unguided sensory experience of the site and its past function. While the concrete structures suggest endurance and defiance, the emptiness these structures embrace reveals the monument's dependency on visitors' imaginations and invites them to physically engage with the site (Fig. 5). The spatial plan for Partizanska Drežnica Memorial Area predicted a more encompassing protection of the network of authentic sites and natural reserves, including memorial facilities for future visitors. The spatial plan was accompanied by a study of its economic development and environmental protection.⁴¹

Such synergy of materiality and symbolic monumentality was, in fact, one of the crucial strategies for creating meaningful resistance heritage and memorial sites in socialist Yugoslavia. Other memorialization projects, such as the complex of the Partisan hospital in Bijeli Potoci-Kamensko on Mount Plješevica in Croatia and the Partisan hospital at Mount Grmeč in Bosnia and Herzegovina, show a similar approach of combining the authenticity of the site and artistic interventions.⁴²

41 *Prostorni plan područja posebne namjene Spomen područje Partizanska Drežnica i Brinjski gornji kraj* (Rijeka: Urbanistički institut u Rijeci, 1980).

42 Dino Dupanović, *Partizanske bolnice u Drugom svjetskom ratu u Bihačkoj krajini* (Bihać: JU Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona, 2023).



Fig. 6: Nandor Glid's sculpture in the display of the Museum of Revolution in Sarajevo. (History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Photo collection)

Materiality as an artistic strategy

Yugoslav artists were very much encouraged to take part in the monument-making processes. In this analysis, we are specifically interested in how materiality of war was employed in artistic work and what creative strategies this type of engagement with materiality assumed. One of them was the transformation of weapons and military remains into artworks, or – more specifically – monuments and memorials, through assemblage techniques, used both by local artisans and amateurs and established artists. Nandor Glid sculptures made from armaments and other metal elements were installed mostly in museum interiors (*Fig. 6*). The Slovene writer and amateur sculptor Tone Svetina made over 15 memorials composed of old armaments, in the form of both sculptures and reliefs. As a Partisan fighter in the famous Prešeren Brigade in Slovenia's mountainous Gorenjska region, Svetina was drawn to art and developed his method at the front, where he was surrounded by the remnants of grenades from World War I. The symbolic act of reusing leftover weapons for war monuments was not an exception or a novelty per se, yet the specific manner of welding of the metal parts into an aesthetic whole, symbolically silencing the military past by transposing rifles into artistic material, echoes procedures we find in modern painting and sculpture at the time.



Fig. 7: Wartime bulletshell inserted in Krsto Hegedušić's fresco in the Memorial House of the Battle of Sutjeska, Tjentište, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Photo: Sanja Horvatinčić)

In his last monumental work – the fresco cycle for the memorial house of the Battle of Sutjeska – the painter Krsto Hegedušić inserted cobbles taken from the Sutjeska river, as well as original bullet shells and other wartime material found at the site of the famous Partisan battle in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The painter Ratko Janjić, who assisted Hegedušić with the fresco, noted that those objects were easily found all around the former battlefield and that Hegedušić encouraged young artists to experiment with the classical medium of fresco (Fig. 7).

Artists and architects used various strategies to respond to often demanding memorialization tasks at the original wartime locations and achieve the desired effect aimed at the visitors. Activating their imagination *in situ* required physical engagement and sensorial experience. Located at war-time historical sites, these monuments and memorial parks were often aimed at mobilising material traces and landscapes of the past to envision new models of collective remembrance.

The shifting value of material culture of resistance

Today, it has been almost entirely forgotten that in socialist Yugoslavia, the highest value was assigned to what were called “authentic monuments”. Within that heritage system, the term “monument” primarily referred to the period and context of their origin, that is, to the period of World War II. The priority of conservation over interpretation of war heritage had been regularly emphasised: “The potency of an immediate encounter with the authentic (ambience, structures) cannot be supplemented by a new work, however (aesthetically) valuable it may be”.⁴³ The evaluation of the memorialisation projects thus seems to have been divided between the aesthetic criteria and social interests of artists, architects, and local communities on the one hand, and the heritage protection service, which urged for the importance of preserving the authenticity of memorial sites, on the other.

This significantly differs from our current understanding of what the term monument should stand for and reflects our interest – or lack thereof – in the cultural and artistic production of socialism on which contemporary heritage policies are based, with little attention paid to the original wartime structures and contexts. The new heritage evaluation systems in most former Yugoslav countries – where original artefacts and sites receive little to no attention – reflect the degradation of the symbolic value of anti-facist resistance, and unwillingness to recognise the potential of transmitting the past through materiality.

The special value assigned to the material culture of NOB, which was institutionalised in the Yugoslav heritage system, has been redefined or entirely erased in successor Yugoslav states. The notion of shared Yugoslav memory of resistance, embedded in the term “NOB”, was replaced by strengthening national discourses or revisionist concepts about the past.⁴⁴ Yet despite the various “memory games” of the post-socialist contexts, memorials and traces of World War II resistance remain a form of unofficial heritage with, in some cases, even stronger mobilising potential than when

43 Razumenka Petrović, “Stanje i problemi zaštite i uređivanja spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata”, in *Zaštita, uređivanje i podizanje spomenika Narodnooslobodilačkog rata u SR Srbiji* (Beograd: Republički sekretarijat za obrazovanje, nauku i kulturu: Komisija za uređivanje i zaštitu spomenika Narodno-oslobodilačke borbe i ratova za oslobođenje naših naroda, 1970), 7.

44 Marija Jauković, “To Share or to Keep: The Afterlife of Yugoslavia's Heritage and the Contemporary Heritage Management Practices”, *Politička misao* 51, no. 5 (2014).

they were part of the official heritage.⁴⁵ Even as ruins, or as “traces of traces”, the material culture of resistance is still present in people’s everyday lives. The growing number of grassroots projects of restoring and mapping monuments, online inventories, private military collections, and more, attests to the idea that heritage “can be found, interpreted, given meanings, classified, presented, conserved and lost again, and again, and again within any age”⁴⁶

The value of the monument-object primarily depends on the dominant value of the memory of the historical narrative it refers to. Having in mind the political importance of the historical narrative of NOB and the revolution in socialism, the value of “authenticity” and age – a documentary value – was primary. As presented earlier, even such mundane sites and objects as wooden barracks were scientifically documented, classified and conserved through heritage institutions. Simple material remains of the Partisan resistance were assigned higher value than the artworks created to mark them. This changed, however, with the loss of the material culture’s purpose to testify for a particular picture of the past, or to support the claims for “heritage” as the basis for economic development through memorial tourism.

Contrary to expectations, it seems that the institutionalisation of NOB heritage and the integration of “NOB memory” into economic development plans gradually weakened the transmitting potential of NOB material culture and original wartime sites. With the devaluation of the political significance of revolutionary memory, more and more emphasis was given – already in the socialist period – to monuments as artworks that often featured hermetic formal language. Despite the fragile bonds to the NOB narratives, monuments remain targets of politically motivated destruction, and despite their appropriation and trivialisation in global internet culture, NOB memorial sites are not entirely devoid of their mobilising social and political potential. However, the dramatic effect of the violence invested in destroying monuments – perceived primarily as a loss of cultural artefacts of socialist modernism – in many cases completely shadowed the symbolic value of the places and narratives they were supposed to mark. The new heritage system no longer guarantees the historical value of those sites, thus

45 For a broader discussion on this see my article: Sanja Horvatinčić, “Between Memory Politics and New Models of Heritage Management: Rebuilding Yugoslav Memorial Sites ‘From Below’”, *Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees*, LXXIII (2020), 108-115.

46 David C. Harvey, “The History of Heritage”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. Brian Graham, and Peter Howard (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 22.

fully disclosing heritage's instrumental purpose as an integral part of different political projects.

While the original World War II sites often became stages of new armed conflicts during the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, revealing the fragility of grand narratives and monumental gestures, some memorial sites and traces of past emancipatory struggles continue to inspire and mobilise ideas of resilience, solidarity and social justice in the present moment. This palimpsest and the rich, layered material of such sites offer a way to engage with multiple and diverse narratives and agents of the past, who compose the complex histories of resistance. What was left behind are the material traces that pertain to no value system, and that can be mobilised to mediate the (his)stories of resistance in a manner that invites questioning and learning from the complexities those material traces reveal and which present a picture of the past that is ever more difficult to reduce to a singular narrative.⁴⁷

47 This work was made as a part of the research project of the Institute of Art History in Zagreb Digital network, spatial and (con)textual analysis of artistic phenomena and heritage of the 20th century (DIGitART, 2023–2027) funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU.

The Making of Resistance Heroes: Examples from France

Matthias Waechter

“France needs a myth; and in this very moment, France is too humiliated to find this myth in an idea or a formula; it needs to be embodied by a man”, wrote Pierre Brossolette, one of the most important figures of the French Resistance, in spring 1942.¹ For him, there was only one man who could personify the Resistance and thus serve as the desired myth: Charles de Gaulle, the man who had been the first to call the French to resist against German occupation with his radio speech delivered from London on 18 June 1940. It appears that France is not the only country where resistance against Nazism and Fascism has produced hero myths. In Germany, protagonists of the attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 like Claus von Stauffenberg, or key figures of the White Rose (*Weißer Rose*) student movement like Hans and Sophie Scholl have been magnified to heroes of anti-Nazi resistance.² In Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito became the object of a pervasive personality cult around his role as the leader of the revolutionary uprising between 1941 and 1945.³ Hero myths, this seems obvious, are not born, but made; they are the product of conscious myth-making through political, societal and cultural actors. Some hero myths only generate after the period of resistance is over, as in the case of the German figures Stauffenberg and the Scholl siblings. Others, like de Gaulle, are made into heroes during the resistance period.

Before we look more closely into French examples of myth-making, we should address general questions about the functions of hero myths:

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- 1 Pierre Brossolette, “Rapport politique”, in *Pierre Brossolette, Résistance (1927-1943)*, textes rassemblés et présentés par Guillaume Piketty (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998), 111-139.
 - 2 Cf. Katie Rickard, “Memorializing the White Rose Resistance Group in post-war Germany”, in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945: Difficult pasts*, eds. Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 157-167.
 - 3 Marc Halder, *Der Titokult. Charismatische Herrschaft im sozialistischen Jugoslawien* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2023).

Why are resistance movements likely to produce hero myths? Which political and societal needs are addressed by such myths? Firstly, one can say that heroes serve as models. Their actions and individual decisions should guide other citizens to make the right political and moral choices in troubled times of defeat and occupation. Secondly, the making of hero myths always implies a reduction of the complexity of personalities. Myth-making blurs the inner contradictions, the emotional tensions, doubts and errors inherent in all human lives and creates figures of unambiguity, of political purity and moral flawlessness. Heroes, thus, are not ordinary, commonplace human beings, as the cult around them turns them into immortal figures endowed with exceptional virtues. Thirdly, heroes are supposed to provide identity to a group, in our case nations or political movements. Situations like military defeat, occupation, radical political change always produce crises of collective identities. The citizens tend to doubt their nations, feel humiliated, and disunited. A hero myth is supposed to rally the citizens around one venerated individual and thus restore their belief in the future of the collective.⁴

When we now look more closely at the case of France during World War II, two observations should be made: Firstly, the extremely rapid and devastating defeat in the summer of 1940 had a destabilising and depressing effect on the mood of the French population. For many citizens, it was unbelievable that a nation that had won World War I, called one of the strongest armies of the world its own and governed the world's second largest colonial empire, could be subdued within only a few weeks. The humiliating conditions of the armistice, which left roughly two thirds of continental France in the hands of the Germans, added to this frustration. Not only did the country experience defeat, but it also underwent a pervasive domestic change, as a new political authority engaged in collaboration with the German occupants and abolished the 70-year-old Republic by replacing it by an authoritarian "French State". The second observation is closely related to these circumstances: In order to comfort the French population in this deeply unsettling situation, the new political authorities developed a ubiquitous personality cult around the new leader of the country. That

4 Closer development of this concept of myth: Matthias Waechter, "Mythos", *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 11 February 2010, http://docupedia.de/zg/waechter_mythos_v1_de_2010; See also: Jane L. Bownas, *The Myth of the Modern Hero: Changing Perceptions of Heroism* (Liverpool: University Press, 2017).

figure was Marshal Philippe Pétain, an aged protagonist of World War I and hero of the Battle of Verdun, who now stood atop the “French State” with dictatorial powers. He was presented as the saviour of the fatherland, who had selflessly taken up the task of resurrecting France in the moment of its deepest humiliation. In his speech announcing the armistice, he promised “to give his life to France to alleviate its misfortune”.⁵ Posters of a stern-looking Pétain were displayed all over the country, replacing the traditional symbol of the Republic, the “Marianne”, in town halls throughout France. French citizens were summoned to follow him as a father-like leader (*Chef*), who had taken painful but inevitable decisions for the survival of the nation. The new authoritarian regime, which had its capital in Vichy, presented a radically one-sided narrative of French history, discarding the heritage of the revolution and the Republic as decadent and destructive, driven by hostile forces such as Jews, Freemasons, and foreigners. Vichy France celebrated the monarchical tradition, the army, the family, and order as the only elements that could provide identity for the French.⁶

De Gaulle: Symbol, prophet, liberator

Thus, any person or movement opposing Pétain and his collaboration policy had to confront the pervasive hero cult that the new authorities had displayed and which found broad support among the French population.⁷ This challenge was particularly acute for Charles de Gaulle, who wanted to build up an alternative political authority from his exile in London, but was completely unknown to the citizens in the home country. The history of Gaullism began on 18 June 1940. With his call for resistance from exile in London, de Gaulle not only entered the history of World War II, but also in French national memory. By calling for resistance, he saw himself as part of a great patriotic tradition, reincarnating the great figures of French history who had acted heroically in comparable situations of extreme danger to the fatherland. As a leading figure of the resistance, he updated the memory of

5 Philippe Pétain, “Appel du 17 juin 1940”, in *Discours aux Français. 17 juin 1940-20 août 1944*, textes établis, présentés et commentés par Jean-Claude Barbas (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), 56-57.

6 Cf. Didier Fischer, *Le mythe Pétain* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

7 Cf. Pierre Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1990).

such figures and sought to appropriate them. He *was* – in his own opinion – Joan of Arc, he *was* Clemenceau, he *was* Carnot.⁸

He also embodied – according to his own perception – the synthesis of different, even contrary traditions of French history. Since the revolution of 1789, two political and ideological currents had opposed each other; the revolutionary-republican, secular France rivalled its monarchist, anti-revolutionary and clerical counterpart.⁹ De Gaulle did not align with either side, but pretended to reconcile the *deux France*, or two Frances. At the same time, he positioned himself as a symbol of this synthesis, a symbol of all the positive traditions of national history. In the first half of 1941, an illustration was produced that quickly became widespread. It showed the general in front of two warlike female figures: on his right, Joan of Arc on horseback with her sword drawn, and on his left, a revolutionary female figure with her breast bared, modelled on Eugène Delacroix's famous painting "Liberty Leading the People".¹⁰ The illustration thus referred to de Gaulle's cherished synthesis between the myth of Joan of Arc and the cult of the Revolution, showing the general as the one who united and embodied these two traditions.¹¹

This self-portrayal by de Gaulle and his London circle became increasingly popular from the winter of 1941/1942; it was more and more adopted by the underground resistance press in France. In January 1942, the clandestine newspaper *Libération* called him the "symbol of the reconstruction of our country"; a few weeks later, *Combat* praised him as "the one who symbolises resistance against oppression. The French liberation movement

8 At the Casablanca conference in 1943, de Gaulle, according to Cordell Hull, told President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "I am Joan of Arc. I am Clemenceau." See: Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 2 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948), 1206-1207. Lazare Carnot was a protagonist of the French Revolution and organised the massive recruitment of soldiers in 1793.

9 The problem of the *deux France* has been systematically examined in the collective work *Les lieux de mémoire*. See for instance the contributions by Jean-Louis Ormières, "Les rouges et les blancs", and Marcel Gauchet, "La droite et la gauche", both in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), 2395-2432 and 2533-2601.

10 Le Général de Gaulle (not dated), photograph, National Archives/*Archives Nationales* (Paris), F la 5220. The illustration appeared on the 4 August 1941 cover of the US magazine *Time*; it is thus probable that it was created in the first half of the year 1941. Cf. Ernest Hamlin Baker, "De Gaulle. Already he rules two-fifths of the French Empire – by mileage", *Time*, 4 August 1941, <https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19410804,00.html>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed 3 April 2024.

11 As to de Gaulle's attempt to link the myth of Jeanne d'Arc with the revolutionary tradition: Charles de Gaulle, "Discours prononcé à Londres au déjeuner de la chambre de commerce française, 6.1.1942", in *Discours et messages*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1970), 167.

is deeply attached to this symbol.”¹² During the same period, considerable parts of the population seem to have accepted de Gaulle’s value as a symbol. This can be seen, for example, in the letters that French people from all walks of life sent to BBC radio, which was the most important Resistance media outlet. Here, de Gaulle – whose radio speeches were followed devoutly – was a symbol of hope, regained courage, and patriotism.¹³ The fact that De Gaulle was unknown and remote made it possible for him to become a projection screen for various needs and desires of the citizens. The, “prayers” to the General, which were already circulating in France around Christmas 1940, are a good example of this:

Our Father de Gaulle who art in England
Glorified be Thy name.
May your victory come on land, on the seas and in the air
Give them today their daily bombardments
And give them back a hundredfold the suffering they have inflicted
on the French.
Do not leave us under their rule, deliver us from the Germans [boches].¹⁴

At the same time, de Gaulle presented himself as the prophet who had foreseen France’s defeat in his critical military writings since the 1930s and then had prophesied victory against Nazi Germany since 18 June 1940. The first biography of the General, written in 1941 by Philippe Barrès, the son of the famous writer Maurice Barrès, was also based on this leitmotif.¹⁵ The course of the war could thus be described as a gradual fulfilment of de Gaulle’s prophecies. In this sense, the Gaullist resistance movement annually celebrated his return on 18 June as a day on which it was possible to see how the Resistance leader’s predictions were coming true. Towards the end of the war, the mythological roles of symbol and prophet increasingly

12 “Le Général de Gaulle, l’Étranger et Nous”, *Combat*, March 1942; “Vers la libération”, *Libération (Sud)*, No. 5, 20 January 1942.

13 Cf. “Les Français écrivent au Général de Gaulle”, *Service Presse et Information*, February 1940, Institute for Contemporary History/*Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent*, ARC 074-5.

14 “Tracts clandestins publiés en France”, National Library Paris/*Bibliothèque Nationale Paris*, Rés.G. 1476 I-VII. Other variations of the “prayer” to de Gaulle are in this collection.

15 Philippe Barrès, *Charles de Gaulle* (London: The Continental Publishers and Distributors LTD., 1941).

gave way to that of the saviour and liberator of the fatherland, the roles he inhabited when he entered Paris in August 1944. In the months of the “libération”, the cult surrounding de Gaulle reached a culmination point; he was worshipped, sung about, and painted as a hero of world-historical stature, as if he was sent by God. As a man without clearly defined political, social and cultural affiliations, he increasingly became the embodiment of the entire nation in the myth-making of the liberation period.¹⁶

Colonel Fabien: The archetypal communist partisan

Charles de Gaulle was obviously not uncontested in his aim of leading and embodying the resistance against German occupation and collaboration. His most powerful rival was French communism, which by the end of the war provided the biggest number of armed fighters and played a strong role in the Resistance’s political organisation. The French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français* – PCF), however, had to struggle with the handicap that it belatedly entered resistance. Bound by instructions from Moscow and the Non-Aggression-Treaty between Stalin and Hitler, the overwhelming majority of party members avoided any action against the occupation, as long as the Soviet Union had not yet been attacked by Germany. Only after 22 June 1941 and the beginning of the Soviet-German war, did the PCF fully join the resistance, at which point de Gaulle and his followers had already established a solid underground organisation.

Communism’s entry into resistance was symbolised by a violent act: On 21 August 1941, the partisan Pierre Georges, later known by his *nom de guerre* Colonel Fabien, assassinated a German officer at the Barbès-Rochecouart metro station in Paris. It was the first time that a member of the occupation troops was shot on open streets by a French citizen. The shooting at Barbès-Rochecouart marked a turning point in the relationship between the occupation troops and French citizens, which had been relatively peaceful to that time. The German military command ordered a severe retaliation for the killed officer; all French political prisoners were declared “hostages” of the occupation forces and close to 100 of them were executed in the following weeks. A fatal cycle began, as communist

16 Cf. Matthias Waechter, *Der Mythos des Gaullismus. Heldenkult, Geschichtspolitik und Ideologie 1940-1958* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006).

partisans would continue attacking occupation troops, and the Germans would execute many times more French “hostages” for each killed soldier. This confrontation altered the perception and presentation of the PCF and meant the beginning of an armed, popular uprising, markedly different from the Gaullist resistance, which was essentially verbal (in the form of de Gaulle’s radio speeches) and military.¹⁷

The gunshot of 21 August 1941 ideally fit into the biography of the perpetrator, Pierre Georges (or later Colonel Fabien). He had been continuously precocious in his political engagements. Born on 21 January 1919 in a Parisian workers’ neighbourhood, he grew up in a communist family, joined communist youth organisations, and encountered several problems as an adolescent when rebelling against exploitative and abusive employers. In October 1936, he lied about his age in order to join the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War. A report about his service reads: “In many circumstances, he showed courage, self-sacrifice and immense initiative, and proved to be an excellent marksman. He was eager to go to the front, but was held back because of his age.”¹⁸ After his return to France in 1938, he became a party official in charge of the Parisian youth organisation, and was arrested in 1939 because of underground activities for the now prohibited PCF. While the bulk of the party remained neutral in the first months after the armistice of June 1940, Georges again proved his precocity by organising opposition against Vichy and the occupation. After the gunshot at Barbès Rochechouart, he continued on with assassinations, acts of sabotage, and the formation of armed groups. His life resembled more and more that of an ideal partisan fighter. He was wounded, but resumed the fight immediately afterwards, he took up various identities to escape from persecution; when arrested by the police, interrogated and tortured, he avoided delivering any sensitive information. After escaping from prison, he arrived in Paris in June 1944, when the Allied invasion of Normandy had just begun. Under his *nom de guerre* Colonel Fabien, he was now a living legend, and became one of the chief commanders of the *Franc-tireurs et partisans* (FTP), the communist-led militia leading the popular uprising in the capital.¹⁹ With the

17 Cf. Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français* (Paris: PUF, 2000). See also: Franck Liaigre, *Les FTP. Nouvelle histoire d'une résistance* (Paris: Perrin, 2015).

18 Quoted in: Jean Maitron and Claude Penner, “Pierre Georges, dit Fredo, dit Colonel Fabien”, *Le Maitron. Dictionnaire biographique, mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social*, 31 May 2009 (last modified 30 January 2022), <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article50415>.

19 Cf. Alber Ouzoulias, *La vie héroïque du Colonel Fabien* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1945).

liberation of Paris in August 1944, the competition between de Gaulle and the communists was exacerbated. Colonel Fabien became part of this conflict. Whereas de Gaulle insisted on his exclusive leadership over the armed combat against the Germans and wanted to entrust it into his professional exile army, the communists, and Fabien among them, strove for their independent, self-organised contribution to liberation. Fabien founded his own brigade mainly from Parisian workers, including women, foreigners, Jews, which went on to participate in pushing the Germans beyond the Rhine. It was in this context that Colonel Fabien was killed when a mine exploded close to his headquarters on 25 December 1944. The obsequies for the dead partisan were reminiscent of a state funeral. His coffin was laid out in front of Paris' city hall, where a huge crowd marched past him.²⁰

Memory battles after World War II

The conflict between Gaullism and communism, already nascent during resistance and in the days of the liberation, intensified after 1945. Both forces strove for a maximum of influence on postwar France's political development, buttressing their ambitions with the roles they played during the resistance. Whereas de Gaulle continuously claimed that he embodied the legitimacy of France since his call for resistance on 18 June 1940, the Communist Party invented a new narrative. It presented itself as the "party of the 75.000 shot dead (*fusillés*)", alleging that it had paid the highest death toll for the liberation of France. The number of 75.000 was highly exaggerated, as overall, roughly 25.000 resistance fighters of all political orientations were shot during the war. Under the auspices of the beginnings of the Cold War in 1947, the PCF, obedient to directives from Moscow, isolated itself from its partners of the resistance period, left the government and went into a principled opposition to the Fourth Republic. In the meantime, Charles de Gaulle, after having stepped down as leader of the provisional postwar government in January 1946, founded his own political movement, the Rally of the French People (*Rassemblement du Peuple Français* – RPF), which presented itself as the last resort of the French nation against rising

20 Cf. INA Histoire, "Les obsèques de Romain Rolland et du Colonel Fabien", YouTube video, 2:45, 20 March 2022 (from Journal Les Actualités Françaises, 1 January 1945), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t14cgiB11M>.

communism. De Gaulle fiercely condemned the parliamentary Fourth Republic as a frail political system, fostering futile bickering between political parties and thus weakening France's position in the international system. The problem for the Fourth Republic and the parties supporting it was that together, the PCF and RPF represented roughly half of the electorate. Conversely, the problem for Gaullists and communists was that they opposed an incontestably legitimate political system, whose constitution had been ratified in 1946 by a referendum.²¹

To strengthen their legitimacy, communists and Gaullists focused again on memory and the role they had played in the resistance period. Both movements claimed that they had the sole right to embody the spirit of resistance, that they had contributed most to the liberation of France, and that this heritage legitimated their position in the postwar political arena. In this context, the role of resistance heroes and the commemoration of their acts played a key role. Those heroes were meant to embody the message that the movements wanted to convey in the deeply divided historical-political culture of postwar French society. Colonel Fabien's gunshot of 21 August 1941 was essential to the Communist narrative. The commemoration of this single heroic act aimed to erase the Communist Party's weak point, which was its late entry into the Resistance. Fabien was presented as the man who had started the real Resistance, the one who fought not just with words, but with a weapon in his hand. "He must be for all patriotic Frenchmen the living symbol of the first fighter of the armed Resistance on French soil, the image of the first Frenchman who dared to rise up, weapon in hand, in broad daylight and in the heart of Paris, against a Nazi officer", claimed the initiators of monument for Colonel Fabien.²² To mark the anniversary of his attack in August 1946, the scene of the crime (the Barbès Metro station) was adorned with a banner with the following inscription: "Fabien's revolver shot did more for the liberation of the fatherland than 100 speeches."²³

21 Cf. Pierre Nora, "Gaullistes et communistes", in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 2489-2532. See also: Olivier Wieviorka, *The French resistance*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Harvard University Press, 2016), final chapter "A divided memory", 454-466; Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the shadow. A new history of the French resistance* (Harvard University Press, 2015), final chapter "Conclusion: Battle for the soul of the resistance", 445-481.

22 Letter of the "Comité parisien d'érection du monument Fabien" to the Prefect of the département Seine-et-Oise, 27 November 1946, National Archives/*Archives nationales* – Paris, Reg. F 1cI 231.

23 Henri Amouroux, *La France du baby-boom 1945-1950, Les photos retrouvés de l'AFP* (Paris: Agence France-Presse 1991), 50.

The Gaullist RPF, on the other hand, presented a highly personalised interpretation of the Resistance that foregrounded de Gaulle's role as the "Man of 18 June 1940". The exceptional achievements of the historically significant individual were put forward against the communist view, which focused on the masses. The Resistance's military aspects were emphasised, whereas the role of the internal resistance, most of whose protagonists had meanwhile turned their backs on de Gaulle, was deliberately diminished. This phase therefore saw a fundamental change in the De Gaulle myth's function; until then, it had always been associated with the claim of uniting the French and reconciling divergent traditions. With the founding of the RPF, Gaullism took on the form of a political party, and the General, who until then had always wanted to be above all parties, had to descend into the depths of day-to-day politics. The Cross of Lorraine, once the unifying symbol of a resisting France across all dividing lines, was chosen by the Gaullists as its party insignia and thus became the emblem of a specific political movement that fought the communists, who were branded as "separatists", and the party system. De Gaulle, whose mission to date had been the unity of France, was increasingly perceived as a divider of the country's political culture.

Jean Moulin: Belated hero of unity

With the regime change of 1958 and the establishment of the Fifth Republic, de Gaulle's role in France's political culture evolved again. He was no longer a dissenter, using his legitimacy from the resistance period as an argument against the existing constitution, but now, as head of state, he was in the very centre of the political system, guaranteeing the independence and unity of the nation. Still, the first four years of de Gaulle's presidency were marked again by deep divisions, caused by the Algerian war of independence. The Arab Muslim population of Algeria's fight for self-determination not only pitted French citizens of different political persuasions against each other, but also led to deep rifts between former resistance fighters. Thus, some former key figures of the resistance movement such as Georges Bidault and Jacques Soustelle fiercely opposed de Gaulle's policy, which led to Algerian self-determination, siding instead with the most intransigent defenders of French Algeria.

In this context, state authorities decided to organise a great commemoration of the resistance. The moment was chosen for 1964, which was labelled the “year of two anniversaries”: The 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, and the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Paris. The idea of commemorating the two world wars together reinforced the idea that both wars were intertwined and represented two episodes of a “30-year war” in which France had fought to assert itself. By the same token, the motif of national unity was emphasised, as no event stood for France’s “sacred unity” as much as August 1914, when all political forces unanimously sustained the mobilisation of the country. The central event of the festivities was the transfer of Jean Moulin’s ashes to the Pantheon, a temple-like place in the centre of Paris where the nation commemorates its great men and women. In this commemoration, Jean Moulin, a personality who had previously not been prominently featured in commemorations of the Resistance, became the focus of attention. De Gaulle appointed Moulin, a former prefect exiled in London, as his representative in France with the task of unifying the dispersed resistance movements and bringing them under de Gaulle’s authority. In 1943, he succeeded in his mission, when the National Council of the Resistance (*Conseil national de la Résistance* – CNR), which assembled all different parts of the resistance movement, met for the first time and unanimously acclaimed de Gaulle as its leader. Shortly afterwards, though, the Gestapo arrested Moulin, after a member of the Resistance betrayed him. Moulin, however, remained steadfast even under severe torture and did not reveal anyone before he died from the injuries that his torturers had inflicted on him.

The protagonist of the ceremony transferring Moulin’s ashes to the Pantheon on 19 December 1964 was de Gaulle’s Minister of Culture André Malraux, a famous novelist and member of the Resistance. In his speech, Malraux praised Moulin as a symbol of national unity, a man with only one ambition: turning the resisting French (“*des Français résistants*”) into the French Resistance (“*la Résistance française*”).²⁴ Malraux celebrated the tortured Resistance leader not only as a representative of Gaullism, but also for the whole country. His speech concluded with the following words: “Youth of France, may you today be able to think of this man as

24 André Malraux, “Transfert des cendres de Jean Moulin au Panthéon. Discours prononcé à Paris le 19 décembre 1964”, in *La politique, la culture. Discours, articles, entretiens (1925-1975)*, présentés par Janine Mossuz-Lavau (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 297.

you would have touched with your hands his poor disfigured face of the last day, his lips over which no word had passed; on that day it was the face of France.”²⁵ Malraux’s formulation clearly demonstrated Gaullist historical mythology’s essence: the true “face of France” was not embodied by the majority of the population, who had adopted a wait-and-see attitude by silently rejecting (or tolerating) the German occupiers, but by the lone Resistance leader Moulin, who chose martyrdom rather than betrayal of his comrades. If Moulin was the “face of France”, then France was synonymous with the Resistance, and the Resistance was synonymous with de Gaulle, who had created it and given Moulin his authority. Malraux thus reduced the complexity of an entire epoch and, more specifically, the complexity of the resistance movement, to one figure symbolising France’s fate. Also, by making Moulin into a saint-like, selfless martyr of the resistance, the novelist Malraux drastically reduced the complexity of his personality, who was little known to most of the French population. Only after the transfer of his ashes to the Pantheon and Malraux’s speech did the man behind the myth become more and more known, notably thanks to his former assistant Daniel Cordier, who tellingly published his three-volume biography of Moulin under the title “The Unknown of the Pantheon”.²⁶

The attempt to establish Jean Moulin as the emblematic hero of the Resistance proved to be successful and durable. When socialist François Mitterrand started his presidency on 12 May 1981, he paid homage to Moulin by laying a rose on his tomb in the Pantheon, demonstrating that Moulin was not only the hero of Gaullism, but also a model for the Left, which was just gaining power. Today, Moulin is, alongside de Gaulle, the best-known member of the French resistance. 433 public schools have been named Jean Moulin, which makes him the third most popular school name in France (behind Jules Ferry, the founder of the French public school system, and the poet Jacques Prévert).²⁷ Jean Moulin is fifth-most present personality on street signs in France, with 2.215 streets or squares named after him (on the

25 Ibid., 305.

26 Daniel Cordier, *Jean Moulin. L’Inconnu du Panthéon*, 3 vol. (Paris: J C Lattès, 1993). Cf. Michel Fraissier, *Jean Moulin ou la Fabrique d’un héros* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011) and Alan Clinton, *Jean Moulin, 1899–1943: The French Resistance and the Republic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

27 Luc Bronner and Maúrice Vaudano, “De Jules Ferry à Pierre Perret, l’étonnant palmarès des noms d’écoles, de collèges et de lycées en France”, *Le Monde*, 18 April 2015, https://www.le-monde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2015/04/18/de-jules-ferry-a-pierre-perret-l-etonnant-palmares-des-noms-d-ecoles-de-colleges-et-de-lycees-en-france_4613091_4355770.html.

first place is de Gaulle, with 3.903 streets or squares, followed by Louis Pasteur, Victor Hugo and Jean Jaurès).²⁸ As far as de Gaulle himself is concerned, his place in collective memory is predominantly associated with the role he played in the Resistance. His merits as the “man of 18 June 1940”, as leader of the Resistance and liberator of the country, largely overshadow his later role in French politics, in which he was the founder of the Fifth Republic, President of the Republic for over ten years and peacemaker in Algeria.²⁹ Colonel Fabien, on the other hand, is a hero myth in decline, declining with the misfortunes of the PCF in recent years. The PCF has fallen from being the strongest political party after the liberation to receiving just 2,28 percent of the vote in the 2022 presidential elections. The PCF candidate was Fabien Roussel, whose parents gave him his first name “Fabien” in honour of Colonel Fabien. The impressive party headquarters building at Place du Colonel Fabien in Paris, designed in 1965 by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, recalls the glorious period of the party, when it drew on its fame from the resistance period.

The ritual of transferring the ashes of Resistance heroes to the Pantheon has recently been taken up again, after a pause of several decades. When looking at the selected individuals, we can observe that the perception of resistance has changed. Thus, among the four figures of the Resistance that President François Hollande selected for a transferal to the Pantheon in 2015, two were women: Germaine Tillion and Geneviève De Gaulle-Anthonioz (the niece of the general), who had both joined Resistance groups in occupied France early on and were deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp because of their clandestine activities.³⁰ Under President Emmanuel Macron, the remains of three Resistance activists were transferred to the Pantheon, and all three were born foreigners: Josephine Baker, the American-born dancer, had supported the Resistance by supplying information to secret services, hiding resisters and Jews in her French

28 Cf. “Le top 10 des noms les plus donnés à vos rues”, *Le Dauphiné libéré*, 17 April 2016, <https://www.ledauphine.com/france-monde/2016/04/17/le-top-10-des-noms-les-plus-donnees-a-vos-rues#:~:text=5,6>.

29 Opinion polls in recent years show that the majority of French citizens see de Gaulle more as a Resistance leader than as the founder of the Fifth Republic. Cf. Jérôme Saint-Marie, “Le Général de Gaulle et l’opinion publique”, *La Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, No. 1094-1095, 6 July 2020, <https://www.revuepolitique.fr/charles-de-gaulle-et-lopinion-publique/>.

30 Cf. “France president François Hollande adds resistance heroines to Panthéon”, *The Guardian*, 27 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/27/french-president-hollande-honours-female-resistance-heroes-in-pantheon>.

castle, and performing for the Free French troops in North Africa.³¹ The Resistance fighters most recently honoured in this way are Armenian-born Missak Manouchian and his wife Mélinée. Missak Manouchian was one of the leaders of the *Franc-Tireurs et Partisans – Main d’œuvre immigrée* (FTP-MOI), a group composed predominantly of foreigners connected to the communist-led resistance organisation FTP. Together with 23 comrades, Missak was arrested and killed by the German occupying forces in February 1944. In order to discredit the Resistance as a foreign conspiracy, Vichy France propaganda printed the infamous Red Poster (*Affiche rouge*), displaying Manouchian and nine of his – mainly Jewish – comrades as criminals having assassinated innocent French civilians. The tribute to Missak and Mélinée Manouchian in the form of their “pantheonisation” under President Macron in February 2024 can also be seen as a kind of reparation, intended to emphasise that the Resistance in France was not only a national, but a universal undertaking.³²

31 Cf. “Josephine Baker to be first black woman immortalised in France’s Pantheon”, *France 24*, 27 November 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211127-josephine-baker-to-be-first-black-woman-immortalised-in-france-s-pantheon>.

32 Cf. “Manouchian’s induction to Panthéon celebrates French Resistance’s universalist spirit”, *Le Monde*, 29 June 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/06/19/manouchian-s-induction-to-pantheon-celebrates-french-resistance-s-universalist-spirit_6034044_7.html.

Approaches to Reading the Competing Narratives of World War II Resistance in Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mirna Jančić Doyle

Introduction

Primary education about local resistance to Nazism during World War II (WWII) represents a contested epistemic space in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), with schools teaching competing historical interpretations of who were the forces of resistance, the local collaborators, and the biggest victims.¹ This phenomenon is a consequence of the Bosnian War of 1992 to 1995, from which BiH emerged as an independent country, but politically and culturally divided between three dominant national groups: Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. This included a split in what used to be their shared official history, which has continued to impact politics² and public discourse,³ and has especially affected compulsory education in BiH.

Before the 1990s war, as a constitutive republic within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina promoted a strictly controlled narrative of WWII.⁴ This narrative was presented through

- 1 See Pilvi Torsti, *Divergent Stories, Convergent Attitudes* (Helsinki: Kustannus Oy Taifuuni, 2003); and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc and Tamara Pavasović Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists? Divergent Interpretations of WWII in Contemporary Post-Yugoslav History Textbooks", in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 173-192, DOI:10.4324/9781351296564-9.
- 2 For an introduction to the key challenges to BiH's democracy, see Tihomir Cipek, "Crisis of Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Is Direct Democracy the Answer?" *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska, sectio M – Balceniensis* 1(1-2) (February 2017), 87-101, <https://journals.umcs.pl/bc/article/view/4696>.
- 3 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Memory politics in the Former Yugoslavia", *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 18, no. 2 (December 2020), 9-32, <https://doi.org/10.36874/RIESW.2020.2.1>.
- 4 See Wolfgang Hoepken, "War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: the Case of Yugoslavia", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 13, no. 1 (December 1999), 190-227,

a single history textbook authorised for use in the final grade of primary school. During the breakup of Yugoslavia, as a contested “memoryscape” emerged among the country’s national groups,⁵ the strictly controlled, single historical narrative diverged into multiple, antagonistic official interpretations. These became separately inscribed in new, revised school textbooks. With the start of the war in BiH in 1992, students began studying from revised, imported textbooks from Serbia if they went to school in Serb-army controlled areas of BiH, or from Croatia if they lived in majority Croat areas; students in schools under Bosnian Army control continued using the socialist-era textbook for another two years. After 2003, when all textbooks were again being published in BiH, history remained a so-called national subject, whereby each national group continued the wartime practice of learning exclusively according to their own textbook(s).⁶ This system was enabled by the fragmentation of the educational administration⁷ and the consolidation of three curricula in BiH, independently serving the Bosniak, Croat or Serb majority areas of the country. This paper therefore refers to the authorised history textbooks in BiH as the Bosnian-language, Croatian-language, and Serbian-language narratives (the latter two include the textbooks imported from neighbouring Croatia and Serbia that were used in BiH from 1992).

The history textbook holds a prominent role in the education systems in BiH, where it is used by the majority of teachers as the primary teaching tool in the classroom.⁸ The international community organisations in BiH

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325499013001>; Torsti, *Divergent Stories*; Tamara Pavasović Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, “History textbooks in war-time: The use of Second World War narratives in 1990s war propaganda in the former Yugoslavia”, *War & Society* 39, no. 4 (October 2020), 290-309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2020.1811472>.

5 Pavlaković, “Memory politics”, 9.

6 For an overview of the development of the post-war textbook policy in BiH, see Melisa Forić Plasto, “Historiografija o Bosni i Hercegovini u bosanskohercegovačkim udžbenicima historije (2000–2017)”, in *Prilozi o historiografiji Bosne i Hercegovine (2001-2017) II*, ed. Dževad Juzbašić and Zijad Šehić (Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2020), 277-300, <https://doi.org/10.5644/pi2020.186.26>.

7 Following the 1992-1995 war, BiH was administratively divided into two entities: Republika Srpska (with its own education ministry) and the Federation BiH (whose ministry of education had limited powers). The Federation BiH entity was further divided into ten cantons, each with its own education ministry. The area around the northern town of Brčko became a special district shared by both entities but with its own self-government and education department.

8 Heike Karge and Katarina Batarilo, *Reform in the Field of History in Education Bosnia and Herzegovina* (July 2008), https://repository.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11428/264/Karge_Batarilo_Reform.pdf

spearheaded numerous efforts to address antagonistic schoolbook content.⁹ Despite marked progress, the content of all authorised textbooks continues to “contribute to the politicisation and instrumentalisation of the past”,¹⁰ and two of the curricula explicitly link their objectives with the students’ national identity.¹¹ The opening of the textbook markets in other countries of former Yugoslavia in 2013 was heralded as a sign of the democratisation of history teaching in schools,¹² while two of the three curricula in BiH currently authorise the use of only a single history textbook for the final grade of primary school.¹³

There exist extensive studies of the revisions of school history textbooks in BiH and the former Yugoslavia since the 1980s.¹⁴ The next section

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- 9 Falk Pingel, “From Ownership to Intervention – or Vice Versa? Textbook Revision in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), 251-306.
- 10 Heike Karge, *History Teaching Materials on 1992-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Building Trust or Deepening Divides?* (Sarajevo: OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022), iv, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/1/541980.pdf>; also see Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.
- 11 See BiH, Federacija BiH, Županija Zapadnohercegovačka, Ministarstvo prosvjete, znanosti, kulture i športa, *Nastavni plan i program za devetogodišnje osnovne škole na hrvatskome jeziku u Bosni i Hercegovini* (July 2008), <https://mozks-ksb.ba/dokumenti/nastavni-plan-i-program/>; Republika Srpska, Ministarstvo prosvjete i kulture, Republički pedagoški zavod, *Nastavni plan i program za osnovno obrazovanje i vaspitanje* (Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva: Istočno Sarajevo, 2014), <https://www.rpz-rs.org/7/NPP>.
- 12 Tamara Pavasović Trošt, “War crimes as political tools: Bleiburg and Jasenovac in history textbooks”, in *History and politics in the Western Balkans: changes at the turn of the millennium*, ed. Srđan Jovanović (Center for Good Governance Studies, 2013), 13-41, https://www.academia.edu/4097311/War_Crimes_as_Political_Tools_Bleiburg_and_Jasenovac_in_History_Textbooks_1973_2012.
- 13 For the 2022/23 school year, the RS Ministry of Education and Culture authorised a single history textbook, published by the RS entity Institute for Textbooks. Since 2011, the Federation entity Ministry of Education and Science has selected and approved a single history textbook for use in the Bosnian language, following an open call; the ministries of education of cantons with large populations of children belonging to the Croatian national group, authorised three history textbooks for use by children following the Croatian-language programme (two of which were available to the author on the open market).
- 14 Some examples include Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education”; Pingel, “From Ownership to Intervention”; Torsti, *Divergent Stories*; Emir Filipović et al., *Zloupotreba istorije u procesima koji su doveli do posljednjeg rata u Bosni i Hercegovini: Okvir za promjenu paradigme u izučavanju istorije u školama BiH*, ed. Edin Radušić (Sarajevo: EUROCLIO HIP BiH, 2015), <http://cliohipbih.ba/materijali-3/>; Karge and Batarilo, *Reform in the Field*; Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”; Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”; Fond otvoreno društvo BiH and proMENTE socijalna istraživanja, *Obrazovanje u BiH: Čemu (ne)učimo djecu? Analiza sadržaja udžbenika nacionalne grupe predmeta u osnovnim školama* (Sarajevo: Mas Media Sarajevo and Fond otvoreno društvo BiH, 2017), <https://www.promente.org/downloads/cemuucimodjecu.pdf>; Heike Karge, *History Teaching*; Plasto, “Historiografija”; Vera Katz, “Analiza udžbenika historije u Bosni i Hercegovini (8. i 9. razred osnovne škole, 4. razred gimnazije i 1. i 2. razred stručnih škola)”, *Forum za tranzicionu pravdu* 5

underlines the main points on which the narratives of local WWII resistance diverged in the textbooks for the final year of primary school in the country, building on the existing research, and presenting this author's primary observations of the socialist-era and most recent textbooks used in BiH. In the third section, the paper reviews the discussion about BiH's competing schoolbook narratives and explores alternative entry points for approaching the history textbook itself as part of a historical and cultural archive.

The diverging narratives of WWII resistance in BiH textbooks

Summary of the socialist-era textbook narrative in BiH

The main patterns of the narrative of WWII resistance within socialist-era textbooks in BiH can be found in two editions published by the same authors in 1990 and 1991.¹⁵ Their focus was on presenting the Partisans' multi-ethnic, "people's liberation struggle" against fascism,¹⁶ in pursuit of national equality and a socialist Yugoslavia. The books also emphasised the Partisans' contribution to ordinary people's agency in determining their political future without the interference of foreign powers. The narrative presented that the Partisans (and the Communist Party as their political organiser) represented the true will of the people and led an independent, grassroots resistance against the bourgeoisie, the Axis occupying forces, and the political influence of the Allies. It posited how this newfound sense

(December 2015), 52-63, https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Forum_5.pdf. For more scholarship on the diverging history textbook narratives published in Serbia and Croatia, see for example Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Damir Agičić, "The Use and Misuse of History Teaching in 1990s Croatia", in *Democratic Transition in Croatia. Value Transformation, Education & Media*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matic (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 193-223; Dubravka Stojanović, "Slow Burning: History Textbooks in Serbia, 1993 – 2008", in *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), 141-158, <https://www.gei.de/en/research/publications>; Snježana Koren and Branislava Baranović, "What Kind of History Education Do We Have After Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia? Transition, Intervention, and History Education Politics (1990 – 2008)", in *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Augusta Dimou (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009), 91-140, <https://www.gei.de/en/research/publications>.

15 Stanko Perazić and Husein Serdarević, *Istorija-Povijest udžbenik za VIII razred osnovne škole*, 1st ed. (Sarajevo: IP Svjetlost, d.d. Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1991); Stanko Perazić and Husein Serdarević, *Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, Zavod za udžbenike, 1990).

16 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija za 8.razred*, 139.

of grassroots agency both attracted and served the majority of people in BiH. This was illustrated through descriptions of Partisans educating local people as they struggled with widespread illiteracy in the 1940s and through the lack of agency people felt when they found themselves in the WWII crossfire between the Ustasha and Chetniks fight for control over territory.

The narrative explicitly condemned the Ustasha and Chetniks as local military formations that directly collaborated with the Axis powers and committed “mass crimes against the people, especially over Muslims, Croats and Serb patriots”¹⁷ in pursuit of “a pure nation”.¹⁸ The Chetniks were presented as a nationalist and a monarchist movement. Meanwhile, the Ustasha were shown as fascists who in 1941 established the Axis puppet state called the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) across most of modern Croatia, BiH and Srem (part of modern Serbia). The narrative stated that the Partisans, having reached eastern Bosnia in the early period of the war, had to “explain to the people the Chetnik betrayal”¹⁹ in order to win them over to their side. It presented the Allies as ignorant of the Chetniks’ collaboration with the Axis, supporting them as the armed units of the exiled Yugoslav King Peter II, and hoping through 1944 that the Chetniks would enable the “return of the bourgeoisie to power in Yugoslavia”.²⁰

The socialist-era narrative maintained that the Partisans had united the people of different nationalities in BiH as an antidote to the “fratricidal war” instigated by the Ustasha and Chetniks: it was through the “huge sacrifice as part of the people’s liberation struggle, that [Serbs, Croats and Muslims] broke down all those forces that had separated them and which had planted hatred among them”.²¹ The narrative prominently presented the establishment of the civilian government of BiH as part of the Partisan political conventions known as ZAVNOBIH (State Antifascist Council for the People’s Liberation of BiH), and of the new Yugoslav state foundations laid at AVNOJ (Antifascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia) conventions. It also presented a detailed account of the key Partisan military battles and successes. In a tone of rightful vengeance, the textbook described the Yugoslav Army at the close of the war “destroying tens of

17 Ibid., 105.

18 Ibid., 104.

19 Ibid., 105.

20 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija-Povijest*, 112.

21 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija za 8.razred*, 104, 139.

thousands of Ustasha, Chetniks, White Guardists and others” for their war-time collaboration and crimes.²²

Bosnian-language textbooks: Key changes from the socialist-era narrative

From the first revised textbook published in 1994 to the present, research has shown that Bosnian-language textbooks have continued the socialist-era narrative’s positive treatment of the Partisans, retaining the overall focus on their multiethnic resistance and military victories during the war, without any negative connotations of the movement.²³ Textbooks from 2007²⁴ and the contemporary textbook published in 2012²⁵ do not mention the Partisan executions of prisoners of war who had been captured at Bleiburg, near the Slovenian-Austrian border in 1945. Intrinsic to the resistance narrative of the contemporary textbook is the unity of the Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks as they “renewed the statehood of BiH” as part of the Partisan political conventions of ZAVNOBIH,²⁶ and the importance of the AVNOJ conventions. This narrative mentions that the initial composition of the Partisans was largely Serbs, where the Serb population in east Herzegovina was the first to engage in resistance in response to the “mass terror” by Ustasha in NDH.²⁷

Researchers noted the first key changes in the Bosnian-language narrative on resistance in the first revised textbook published in 1994.²⁸ For example, it ascribed Serbs’ support for the Chetniks during WWII as a consequence of their embedded hostility towards non-Serbs,²⁹ and argued that the Muslims³⁰ were the biggest victims of and fighters against WWII “genocide” as a percentage of their total population.³¹ Researchers noted how this

22 Perazić and Serdarević, *Istorija-Povijest*, 122.

23 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascist?”

24 Ibid.

25 Izet Šabotić and Mirza Čehajić, *Historija: udžbenik za deveti razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole* (NAM Tuzla, Vrijeme Zenica, 2012).

26 Ibid., 162.

27 Ibid., 157.

28 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”.

29 Ibid., 300.

30 The terms “Muslims”, “Bosnian Muslims” and “Bosniaks” are used in different Bosnian language textbooks to denote the same national group.

31 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”, 303; Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 205.

textbook argued that the NDH appropriated Muslim identity³² and avoided labelling WWII Muslim military groups and citizens who had collaborated with the fascists as collaborators.³³ Only the last of these revisions remains in the textbook authorised for use since 2012. That textbook argues that “one smaller part of Bosniak citizens” supported the NDH Ustasha regime, while the rest sought “autonomy under German protection” and formed self-organised units, most of which joined the Partisans from the end of 1942.³⁴ The narrative mentions the existence of an SS division composed of Bosnian Muslims, but remains silent about its crimes, presenting it only in a positive light – that its members staged “the only example of a mutiny in the German army during the Second World War”.³⁵

Echoing the socialist-era narrative, the textbooks published in the late 2000s presented the Chetniks’ character as nationalistic and collaborationist, with the key aim of creating a Greater Serbia.³⁶ In the 2012 textbook, Chetniks are presented as having wanted to “renew Yugoslavia and within it create a ‘homogenous Serbia’, which would be ethnically pure Serbian”. Because of this, they conducted “mass slaughter” of Bosniaks.³⁷ The Ustasha are presented in the context of their co-opting of BiH territory and their persecution of Serbs, Jews, Roma, communists, including anti-regime Croats and Bosniaks. The textbook states that “a large number of innocent people” died at the NDH concentration camp of Jasenovac and other camps.³⁸

Serbian-language textbooks: Key changes from the socialist-era narrative

The revised Serbian-language textbooks present a critical case against the Partisans. Researchers noted how the 2009 textbook criticised the Partisans for their ideological and Soviet-linked aspects and for wanting to split Serb territory.³⁹ The 2022 edition does not mention the latter, but still presents the Partisan resistance as a direct result of a “call from Moscow”, where their

32 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 205.

33 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”, 298.

34 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*, 155.

35 *Ibid.*, 155. On the different interpretations of the mutiny in Villefranche-de-Rouergue in 1943, see Xavier Bougarel’s contribution in the present publication. [Editor’s note]

36 Trbovc and Trošt, “Were the Anti-Fascists”.

37 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*, 155-156.

38 *Ibid.*, 155.

39 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 177.

“freedom fighting” went hand in hand with their anti-monarchist and anti-capitalist “socialist revolution” along the Soviet model.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, it presents the dominance of Serbs within Partisan resistance until 1943, noting that Serbs experienced the highest wartime losses. It portrays Serbs as the first antifascists, who self-organised into local, unaffiliated uprisings in villages, ignorant of politics, and who were “torn” between the Partisans and the Chetniks.⁴¹ The 2009 edition did not explain what happened after the Partisans’ capture of several hundred thousand “German and quisling soldiers...[and] parts of the Chetnik army” in 1945,⁴² while the textbook published in 2022 explicitly states that the Partisans “executed...thousands, mostly Ustasha” prisoners of war, which included “the remains of the German, quisling, and Chetnik forces”⁴³

Researchers noted how the revised textbooks published in 1993 and 1994 began describing the Chetniks as antifascists,⁴⁴ in direct contrast to the socialist-era narrative. In later textbook editions, researchers found that the Chetniks were presented as complete equals to the Partisans in the context of antifascist resistance. These editions portrayed the two movements initially fighting together against the Axis occupiers before splitting over different war strategies.⁴⁵ The researchers noted that the 2009 edition remained silent about Chetnik war crimes, and that it mentioned the Chetniks’ collaboration with the occupying forces only in the context that the Partisans blamed them for it.⁴⁶ The textbook published in 2022⁴⁷ explicitly states that the Chetnik units collaborated with the Axis occupiers, but does not further contextualise this information within claims that Chetniks were an *antifascist* movement, nor beyond the time-specificity of the year 1942. Collaboration is ascribed to the low “fighting spirit” of Chetnik soldiers, brought on by their leader’s strategy of refraining from battle while “waiting out the outcomes of the war on the main fronts.”⁴⁸ This textbook also

40 Dragiša Vasić, *Istorija za 9. razred osnovne škole* (Istočno Novo Sarajevo: JP Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva a.d., 2022), 129.

41 *Ibid.*, 129.

42 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 183.

43 Vasić, *Istorija*, 135.

44 See Stojanović, “Slow Burning”, 151, and Trošt and Trbovc, “History Textbooks”, 301.

45 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.

46 *Ibid.*, 178.

47 Vasić, *Istorija*.

48 *Ibid.*, 130.

briefly notes the Chetniks' "crimes" against Muslims and Croats, motivated by "revenge because of the crimes against Serbs within NDH"⁴⁹

The contemporary textbook presents the character of the Chetnik movement also as "national and civic", aiming at the "liberation of Yugoslavia, a renewal of the monarchy [...] and of the prewar capitalist order".⁵⁰ It underlines the Western powers' initial support for the Chetniks as an antifascist resistance force, as the army of the exiled Yugoslav King, and contextualises the fighting between Chetniks and Partisans as a "fratricidal war".⁵¹ Alongside the Partisan military successes and the 1943 AVNOJ convention, the narrative introduces the equal significance of the 1944 Chetnik political congress for the future political organisation of Yugoslavia. It presents a visually marginal (in smaller font, at the edge of a page) brief mention of the first ZAVNOBIH convention.⁵² The textbook argues that from 1943 onwards, with the anticipated advance of the Soviet Red Army into Eastern Europe, the British pressured the exiled King to reject the Chetniks in favour of the Partisans, calculating that such a move would provide the Allies with some degree of future influence in the region.

An analysis of the first revised Serbian-language textbooks noted their intensified portrayal of Serbs' suffering at the NDH's Jasenovac concentration camp, which was endorsed by the Catholic Church.⁵³ The 2022 edition continues this approach: it refers to Ustasha crimes as "genocidal politics" against Jews, Roma, and Serbs, with mass killing of up to 600,000 people in the NDH concentration camp of Jasenovac, and notes the persecution of the Serbian Orthodox clergy.⁵⁴ It presents the Catholic Church and its archbishop as among the chief supporters of Ustasha crimes and the citizens of Zagreb as having welcomed their German occupiers "with delight".⁵⁵ It further states that the Bosniaks in some parts of the country joined the Ustasha units "en masse...and committed crimes" but that otherwise the majority of Muslims remained "passive" during the war.⁵⁶

49 Ibid., 131.

50 Ibid., 128.

51 Ibid., 128.

52 Ibid., 134.

53 Tamara Pavasović Trošt, "Ruptures and Continuities in Nationhood Narratives: Reconstructing the Nation through History Textbooks in Serbia and Croatia", *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no.3 (June 2018), 716-740, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12433>.

54 Vasić, *Istorija*, 124-126.

55 Ibid., 121.

56 Ibid., 125.

Croatian-language textbooks: Key changes from the socialist-era narrative

The two contemporary textbooks⁵⁷ portray the Partisans in a conflicted manner. They critically focus on their quest for power (also noted in research about textbooks published in the late 2000s⁵⁸), their Soviet-inspired socialist victory, and their war crimes. However, they also positively present the Croatians' role in the origins of Partisan resistance, emphasising the Croatian Partisans' contribution to the European antifascist struggle. Although both textbooks reference the Croatian Partisans as having been part of the pan-Yugoslav resistance movement, one of them stresses the significance of the Partisan resistance and related events primarily within the geographic parameters of modern Croatia⁵⁹; the same observation had been made of the textbook used in 1999.⁶⁰ The contemporary textbooks positively treat the confirmation of civilian governments of BiH and Croatia at the ZAVNOBIH and ZAVNOH (State Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia) conventions and of a new Yugoslavia at the AVNOJ conventions.

Researchers noted that the first Croatian-language textbooks published in the 1990s already built a critical case against the Partisans through a heavy emphasis on their reprisals against Croat civilians and prisoners of war at Bleiburg in 1945.⁶¹ The 1995 edition described the Partisans at Bleiburg as having been predominantly Serbs⁶²; one of the currently used textbooks calls them "Yugoslav soldiers".⁶³ The two contemporary textbooks have continued a narrative from an earlier generation of books (analysed in 2013⁶⁴). This narrative holds that at Bleiburg, the Partisans killed a part of the "fugitives from the area of NDH (including some Chetniks and Slovenians)"⁶⁵ or "Croat soldiers and civilians",⁶⁶ and forced the rest of them on a

57 Stjepan Bekavac, Mario Jareb and Miroslav Rozić, *Povijest 9: udžbenik za 9. razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole*, 4th ed. (Mostar: Alfa Mostar, 2022); Krešimir Erdelja, Igor Stojaković, Ivan Madžar, Nikola Lovrinović, *Povijest 9: udžbenik povijesti za deveti razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole* (Mostar: Školska naklada, 2018).

58 Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

59 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest 9*.

60 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*.

61 Trošt and Trbovc, "History textbooks", 300.

62 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 222.

63 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest 9*, 107.

64 Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

65 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest 9*, 106.

66 *Ibid.*, 106.

march across the country, during which they were either killed, or died of thirst and starvation. The cited number of total victims is from “several tens of thousands of people”⁶⁷ in one textbook to “70,000 Croats” in another.⁶⁸ Partisans are presented to have also killed Catholic clergy and prominent people across the country.⁶⁹

Both contemporary textbooks echo the socialist-era narrative of the Ustasha’s pursuit of a pure Croat nation. Their crimes are described as “terror”⁷⁰ and “repressive politics”⁷¹ against Jews, Roma, Serbs and anti-regime Croats. Continuing from observations in the earlier generation of textbooks,⁷² the 2018 edition ascribes the majority of Croats’ initial support for the establishment of the Ustasha-led NDH, to the people’s “bad memories” from the time of the former Yugoslav kingdom. It explains how this support then waned under Ustasha terror and the regime’s gifting of Croatian territory to Italy.⁷³ The Catholic Church and its archbishop are presented as important opponents of Ustasha crimes, which included the killing of 83,000,⁷⁴ or up to 100,000 people⁷⁵ at the Jasenovac concentration camp.

Contemporary textbooks echo the socialist-era narrative also when presenting the Chetniks’ aims of renewing the monarchy and establishing Serb domination and their collaboration with the occupying forces from the early days of the war. They argue that Chetniks committed grave crimes against non-Serb civilians and turned against the Partisans, perceiving them as a “greater enemy than the occupying forces due to plans for bringing down the monarchy and creating a communist Yugoslavia”.⁷⁶ They claim that the Allies mistakenly supported the Chetniks as the “only” antifascists until 1943,⁷⁷ ignorant of their collaboration with the occupying forces, until realising that only the Partisans were fighting against the Axis.⁷⁸

67 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 155.

68 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 106.

69 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9.

70 *Ibid.*, 128.

71 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 85.

72 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.

73 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 127.

74 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 85.

75 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 130.

76 *Ibid.*, 131.

77 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 100.

78 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 146.

Approaches to reading the diverging WWII narratives

Review of discussion on the revision of textbook narratives

Since the 1990s war, research on history textbooks and education systems in the region brought important insights into the strategies and implications of the revised narratives of local WWII resistance and the broader twentieth century history. This section looks at some of the main findings of a number of studies that have analysed the key drivers of differences between the competing narratives in BiH history textbooks, as well as their pedagogical and broader social implications.

To the extent that it was neglected in the socialist-era textbooks,⁷⁹ the ethnic or national dimension has driven the revision of WWII narratives in post-socialist history textbooks. Researchers Tamara Pavasović Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc noted how, already in the 1980s, the textbooks in neighbouring Serbia and Croatia started adding ethnic (Serb or Croat) labelling to the historical mentions of the Chetniks and the Ustasha.⁸⁰ They described how the textbook narratives in the 1990s were strategically reinforcing the in-group victim mentality among the national groups, with highly emotional references to their WWII suffering.⁸¹ Research into the history textbooks of the late 1990s⁸² and 2000s⁸³ concluded that by this point the nation and nation-statehood⁸⁴ had become established as the key new protagonists within the competing interpretations of twentieth century history, as either the Serbs, the Croats or the Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims.⁸⁵ Other national groups such as Jews and Roma were mentioned briefly, only in the context of their persecution.⁸⁶ The exception is the 2012

79 Hoepken, "War, Memory, and Education"; Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

80 Trošt and Trbovc, "History textbooks".

81 Ibid. See also Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

82 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*; Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

83 Karge and Batarilo, *Reform in the Field*; Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

84 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse".

85 Further complexities emerged in the Bosnian-language textbooks of the late 1990s, where the *nation* was portrayed as the Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims, but also as the "territorial Bosnian nation" – see Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 198.

86 For a study of how the History textbooks treat marginalised groups, see Melisa Forić Plašto, "Marginalne grupe na stranicama savremenih bosanskohercegovačkih udžbenika historije", in *Na margini povijesti: zbornik radova*, ed. Amir Duranović (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2018), 135-169.

Bosnian-language textbook⁸⁷ in which the multiethnic Partisans lead the WWII narrative even as Serbs are mentioned as the first Partisans and the Bosnian Muslims are singled out for broader treatment. Historian Pilvi Torsti showed how the nation had become the driver of auto and hetero-stereotypes in the three narratives, of “us” and “them”, precisely defining how each national group was perceived by the other and by themselves.⁸⁸

As the nation became central to the narrative, any period of locally shared history, such as the period of WWII, reportedly became “difficult to teach throughout BiH”.⁸⁹ Contemporary textbooks share the positive presentation of the concept of resistance to Nazism. However, they have continued to follow the “imagined [contemporary] national interest” when interpreting who were the true local antifascists and which local groups were the collaborators,⁹⁰ and when determining the geographic focus of the resistance narrative, such as the territory of modern Croatia,⁹¹ or modern BiH,⁹² or the territory of former Yugoslavia.⁹³ In the context of the national interest, researchers noted the continuing similarities between the interpretations in the locally published Croatian- and Serbian-language history textbooks and those used in Croatia and Serbia, respectively.⁹⁴

The changing interpretations across generations of post-socialist textbooks point at the somewhat temporary position of each textbook as part of the decades-long process of revision, reflecting the changing political agendas.⁹⁵ Trošt and Trbovc noted the manipulation of WWII memories in the 1990s textbooks to fit the needs of the new war, and the “haphazard”, frequent revisions in Croatian and Serbian textbooks during this time, suggestive of “a lack of a...coherent idea of the preferred historical narrative”.⁹⁶ Researchers Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Damir Agičić ascribed this to the proliferation of an unscientific approach to the writing of history

87 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*.

88 Torsti, *Divergent Stories*, 248.

89 Karge and Batarilo, *Reform in the Field*, 6; see also Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, “The Use and Misuse”.

90 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 188.

91 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9.

92 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*, 157.

93 Vasić, *Istorija*.

94 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”.

95 See Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education”; Stojanović, “Slow Burning”; Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”; Trošt, “Ruptures and Continuities”.

96 Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”, 291-295.

textbooks during this period.⁹⁷ In a separate study, Trošt and Trbovc have pointed to the continuing “unsettled historical revisions” in the region,⁹⁸

In her research on the pedagogical and social implications of the most recent history textbooks for the final grade of primary school in BiH, historian Heike Karge found that the national “ethnocentric” perspectives were still present in these latest editions.⁹⁹ Karge established that the textbooks were continuing to forge a “problematic connection” between WWII and the 1990s war, towards “reinforc[ing] victim identity” of their readers’ national group.¹⁰⁰ As a critical reflection on the textbooks’ negative social role, Karge established that none of them met “the standard of contributing to mutual understanding and reconciliation” in the context of post-war BiH.¹⁰¹ She presented these textbooks as “monumental histories”,¹⁰² drawing on the concept that assumed a fixed and biased understanding of “us” as victims and “them” as the “essential enemy” and that was missing a critical approach to the crimes committed by “us”.¹⁰³ Although noting improvements across the textbooks compared to previous generations, Karge emphasised the need for a “fundamental change” in how twentieth century history was taught to students in BiH,¹⁰⁴ and especially the need for multiperspectivity. An earlier report found that the multi-perspectival approach was found in only five percent of the overall primary school history textbook content across BiH.¹⁰⁵

An earlier call for a “change in paradigm” in how twentieth century history was taught in BiH schools¹⁰⁶ had led to the production of the Alternative History Curriculum¹⁰⁷ by the Association of History Teachers in BiH

97 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, “The Use and Misuse”.

98 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 189.

99 Karge, *History Teaching*, 13. Karge’s research examined how the textbooks were applying the Council of Europe’s guidelines on history education from 2018 and 2006, the latter having been adopted by all education ministries in BiH. Karge’s analysis focused on the textbook narratives of the 1990s war, but it is crucially addressed in this section for its broader lens in reading the school textbooks for the final grade of primary school, on twentieth century conflicts.

100 *Ibid.*, 27.

101 *Ibid.*, 13.

102 *Ibid.*, iv.

103 Karina V. Korostelina, “History Education in the Midst of Post-conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned”, in *History Can Bite*, eds. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 295-296, <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737006088.289>.

104 Karge, *History Teaching*, 54.

105 Fond otvoreno društvo BiH, *Obrazovanje u BiH*.

106 Filipović et al, *Zloupotreba istorije*.

107 Slavojka Beštić Bronza et al, *Alternativni kurikulum za Historiju/Istoriju/Povijest u Bosni i Hercegovini*, ed. Edin Veladžić (Sarajevo: EUROCLIO HIP BIH, 2019), <http://cliohipbih.ba/materijali-3/>.

– EuroclioHIP. Disregarded by the BiH authorities, this curriculum did not specifically name fascism or the main local historical actors in relation to WWII, but focused on developing the students’ understanding and skills about how to “avoid [a war] in the future”.¹⁰⁸ It called for students to develop critical thinking skills through a multi-perspectival approach to examining “propaganda” and how it “alludes to or negates universal human values”.¹⁰⁹ The importance for students to develop critical thinking skills had also been underlined by researchers Najbar-Agičić and Agičić,¹¹⁰ and by Vjeran Pavlaković, who called it a key towards regional peace.¹¹¹ Other historians noted a challenge, however, to the pursuit of multi-perspectival history teaching in the region. As part of the Joint History Project of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, and their Alternative Educational Materials: World War II,¹¹² historians observed that multi-perspectival teaching through the presentation of contradictory sources was a novelty in some countries in the region, which may lead to “disorientation, even rejection” among teachers and students.¹¹³ Nonetheless, as the authors pointed out, the multi-perspective approach was the only gateway to achieving “real, high quality study, comprehension and knowledge of history”.¹¹⁴

Alternative entry points for reading the textbooks

This section picks up on alternative ways of reading the history textbooks’ narratives of local resistance to Nazism during WWII as part of a contemporary archive. Comparative research into generations of textbooks in BiH and the region points at the particular and temporary position of each textbook within the bigger scope of changing narratives and changing political agendas.¹¹⁵ The entire body of textbooks can therefore arguably be viewed

108 Ibid., 83-84.

109 Ibid., 83.

110 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, “The Use and Misuse”.

111 Pavlaković, “Memory politics”.

112 *Teaching Modern Southeast European History: Alternative Educational Materials. Workbook 4: The Second World War*, ed. Krešimir Erdelja, Series ed. Christina Koulouri. 2nd ed. (Thessaloniki: Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe CDRSEE, 2009), https://www.jointhis-tory.net/download/eng/workbook4_eng.pdf.

113 Ibid., 16.

114 Ibid., 16.

115 See Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education”; Stojanović, “Slow Burning”; Trošt and Trbovc, “History textbooks”; Karge, *History Teaching*.

as a primary cultural archival record of the diverging perceptions of BiH history (and relative to the region) during a particular time period. Looking at textbooks as part of a cultural archive opens them to evaluation through new entry points. Within the field of artistic research, for example, the competing textbooks have been addressed as a historically significant cultural phenomenon, as cultural artefacts, in the context of knowledge production.¹¹⁶

As a cultural archive, the history textbooks in BiH could also be approached through an anthropological or critical theory lens. Ann Laura Stoler's writing in decolonial critical theory provides one such alternative set of concepts.¹¹⁷ Stoler examined archives from the period of Dutch colonial rule, asking that we read not "against" the archive,¹¹⁸ looking for deliberate bias, but rather that we read "along the archival grain", seeking evidence of "epistemic uncertainty".¹¹⁹ Stoler posited that colonial archivists faced such "uncertainty" when challenged to reformulate their prior, established understanding of the "essence" of specific archival categories.¹²⁰ She argued that the production process of these archives was governed by a colonial "common sense", representative of an "emotional economy" where sentiments such as "attachment" or "contempt" would be applied to ascertain the archivist's racial position in relation to the archival categories.¹²¹

In the contemporary context of BiH, Stoler's colonial "common sense" can arguably be replaced with nationalist "common sense". Researchers could apply Stoler's concept of "epistemic uncertainty" to explore to what extent the authors of the contemporary editions of textbooks continue to be uncertain about their interpretations of the "essence" of WWII historical

116 The art installation titled "Into Which Narrative Was I Born?" was exhibited by the author of this paper at the History Museum of BiH, during July and August 2023. Building on a childhood experience under a socialist-era narrative and wartime education from a revised history textbook, the author questioned the competing textbooks through visually interweaving and juxtaposing their WWII resistance narratives. As another example, in the 2000s, artist Vahida Ramujkić started building a library of all the textbooks from the former Yugoslav region, titled "Disputed Histories", and running community workshops to produce alternative history booklets, including through collage cutouts of the competing textbooks.

117 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), Kindle.

118 *Ibid.*, 46.

119 *Ibid.*, 43.

120 *Ibid.*, 4.

121 *Ibid.*, 35, 3, 41, 40.

actors. Stoler recommended that such unclear “epistemic spaces”¹²² within archives provided an “ethnographic entry”¹²³ for researchers from which to begin studying the process of archival production. Relative to the scope of this paper, a few brief examples are presented of what such unclear “epistemic spaces” look like within the contemporary textbooks, in the context of the monumental narrative of the nation.

For example, in the latest Serbian-language textbook, the “essence” of the Chetniks’ character is presented as having been “antifascist”.¹²⁴ This narrative is critically interrupted by two brief sentences (that were reportedly absent from the textbook a generation prior¹²⁵) – that the Chetniks collaborated with the occupying Axis forces, and committed crimes against Muslim and Croat civilians.¹²⁶ This suggests an uncertain “epistemic space”, as the rest of the narrative then proceeds unaffected by these two critical interruptions, continuing to present the Chetniks’ “essence” as antifascist.

Within the Croatian-language narrative, a confusing “epistemic space” has persisted in many textbooks since 1992 concerning the “essence” of the Partisan movement through the lens of the nation.¹²⁷ Both contemporary textbooks seek to distance Croats’ membership in the Partisans as an antifascist movement from the Partisans’ communist ideology, leadership and war crimes. One textbook presents Partisans as “Croatian partisans”¹²⁸ in the context of antifascism, but then as “Yugoslav soldiers”¹²⁹ during executions of Croats at Bleiburg. Another invites student-readers to look up local monuments to the “antifascist struggle” and separately monuments to the “communist crimes”.¹³⁰

The contemporary Bosnian-language textbook¹³¹ presents its narrative of resistance with a complete “attachment” to the Partisans who fought the occupying forces. The confusing “epistemic space” emerges in how the authors then introduce “attachment” to the Bosnian Muslims within the concept of resistance. The textbook accentuates their protests against the NDH,

122 Ibid., 43.

123 Ibid., 185.

124 Vasić, *Istorija*, 128.

125 Trbovc and Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists”, 178.

126 Vasić, *Istorija*, 131.

127 See Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education”.

128 Bekavac, Jareb and Rozić, *Povijest* 9, 89.

129 Ibid., 106.

130 Erdelja et al., *Povijest* 9, 159.

131 Šabotić and Čehajić, *Historija*.

but maintains complete silence about crimes committed by an SS division composed of Bosnian Muslims. It further celebrates it as the only German Army unit that mutinied during the war.

Conclusion

Scholars have read the BiH history textbooks for the final grade of primary school for various aspects of their competing narratives, and have pointed at their politicisation, revisionism, and their contribution to social divisions. They established that the competing interpretations have been driven by the emergence of the nation as the leading historical actor in the narratives. For this reason, while all the contemporary History textbooks in BiH positively present the concept of resistance to Nazism, they disagree about which historical actors embodied such resistance, based on contemporary national interests.¹³² Depending on the narrative, the main resistance appears either in the form of the multiethnic, Serb, or Croat Partisans, or as intrinsic to the Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks/Muslims as a nation, or through actions of the Catholic clergy, or as the Chetniks. The collaborators appear either as the Chetniks, and as Ustasha, or as the Catholic clergy, or Muslim military units, or as the Serbian quisling war government. Applying alternative conceptual approaches such as Stoler's to reading the textbooks highlights the confusing, uncertain "epistemic spaces" on WWII resistance, within narratives that are governed by the "emotional economy" of a nationalist "common sense" and recommends these spaces as the starting point for ethnographic research into the production of history textbooks. As another alternative example, artists have approached the textbooks as cultural objects that embody contemporary thinking. Borrowing from Stoler's words, therefore, history textbooks in BiH should be approached less as educational sites of knowledge about resistance, but rather as "sites of contested cultural knowledge".¹³³

The findings identified in this paper raise questions about the purpose of history textbooks as sites of knowledge within the educational system. Should they serve the transmission of limited, authorised historical interpretations? More broadly, should the public education system, through the

¹³² Trbovc and Trošt, "Who Were the Anti-Fascists".

¹³³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 35.

history curriculum and textbooks, participate in defining the students' national identity and in "rationaliz[ing their] historical consciousness"?¹³⁴ Alternatively, scholars have argued that history teaching should focus on the development of skills needed for students to become critical thinkers who are able to consider competing sources as well as absent voices when interpreting the past. The development of a multi-perspectival approach (especially when considering the actions of "us") has been underlined as crucial in achieving this. What critical skills would the primary school students gain, for example, by reading in parallel all the competing textbooks' chapters on WWII resistance? If the educational objective remains the teaching of exclusive interpretations, history textbooks in BiH may necessarily remain outputs of contemporary nationalist "common sense", primary cultural archival material reflecting the contemporary contest for ownership over the narrative of local resistance to fascism.

134 Najbar-Agičić and Agičić, "The Use and Misuse", 215.

The Participation of Roma in the Yugoslav Partisan Movement as an Argument for their Recognition as a National Minority in Socialist Yugoslavia

Danijel Vojak

Short notes on the position of the Roma in Yugoslavia during World War II and their participation in the anti-fascist resistance

In April 1941, the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated and collapsed after a brief military conflict with the Axis Powers, which were led by the German army with the support of the Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian armies. The territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was mostly occupied, while the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) was founded on Croatian and Bosnian territory. One part of the population on those territories started to resist the new authorities as part of the anti-fascist Partisan movement. The Partisans were communist-led, with Josip Broz Tito at their helm.¹

In the NDH and Serbia, the persecution of the Roma population began very early, which included legal discrimination based on racial laws and deportation to camps, where Roma were used as forced labour, or were tortured and killed. More extensive and organised persecution of the Roma was carried out in NDH, where most Roma were deported to the Jasenovac camp in the middle of 1942 and subsequently killed.² The German authorities ruled the occupied Serbian territories with the help of Milan Aćimović, and later Milan Nedić, who formed a special government.³ The German

1 Dragutin Pavličević, *Povijest Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2007), 399-461; Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918-2008* (Zagreb: Novi Liber-Europapress holding, 2008), 205-349.

2 Danijel Vojak, "Forgotten Victims of World War II: The Suffering of Roma in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945", in *Jasenovac Concentration Camp: An Unfinished Past*, eds. Andriana Kužnar, Stipe Odak and Danijela Lucić (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 188-223.

3 Rajko Đurić, *Povijest Roma: prije i poslije Auschwitzta* (Zagreb: Prosvjeta, 2007), 75-81.

occupying authorities in Serbia persecuted the Roma, and Roma were often shot dead along with Jews in retaliation for German soldiers killed in attacks by Partisan units.⁴ Roma were also victims of numerous mass crimes by the Serb nationalist Chetniks, who collaborated with the occupying forces.⁵ In Slovenia, which was annexed by Germany and Italy, Roma were deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp (on 2 December 1943, about 77 Roma) and also to other camps such as Dachau.⁶ In other areas of the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia like Montenegro and Macedonia, Roma were victims of the occupation regimes, especially the Bulgarians and Italians.⁷ Following the example of the Nazi authorities, the Bulgarian authorities in Macedonia sought to eradicate the Roma, isolate them socio-geographically, and prevent their nomadic lifestyle by forcing them to stay in one place.⁸

Roma resisted the Nazi authorities and their allies in ways such as escaping from deportations and from the camps themselves. Roma were also part of the Partisan movement and participated in armed resistance in different areas of occupied Yugoslavia. According to the available sources, some Roma joined the Partisan movement as a reaction to Ustasha violence against them, especially in mid-1942, when the mass deportations of Roma to Jasenovac took place.⁹ In the territory of occupied Macedonia, some Roma joined Partisan units at the end of the war and participated in battles in Kosovo, Serbia and Croatia.¹⁰

4 Milovan Pisarri, *Stradanje Roma u Srbiji za vreme Holokausta* (Beograd: Forum za primenjenu istoriju, 2014), 50-64; Đurić, *Povijest Roma*, 81.

5 Pisarri, *Stradanje Roma*, 71-72.

6 Vanek Šiftar, "Romi u Sloveniji 1940-1945", *Naše teme* 28, no. 7-8 (1984), 1334; Andrej Studen, *Neprilagojeni in nevarni: podoba in status Ciganov v preteklosti* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2015), 174-175; Miran Komac, "Pobijanje Ciganov med drugo svetovno vojno v Sloveniji", *Zgodovinski časopis* 75 (2021), 216-239.

7 Momčilo Lutovac, *Romi u Crnoj Gori: od pojave do danas* (Ivangrad: Društvo prijatelja knjige, 1987), 91, 197-201; Elena Marušiakova and Vesselin Popov, "Bugarski Romi u Drugom svjetskom ratu", in *Romi u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, vol. 2 (*U sjeni svastike*), ed. Donald Kenrick (Zagreb: Ibis-grafika, 2009), 100; Mirdita Salju, "Genocidot na Romite na Balkanskom poluostrvu u drugoj svjetskoj vojni", in *Prva konferencija za sećanje, odgovornost i prepoznatljivost na romite žrtve na holokaustot žrtvite na holokaustot vo Republika Severna Makedonija*, eds. Monika Markovska and Fatma Bajram Azemovska (Bitola: Nacionalna ustanova – Univerzitetska biblioteka "Sv. Kliment Ohridski"), (Cyrillic), 39-40.

8 Marushiakova and Popov, "Bugarski Romi", 100-102.

9 Luka Šteković, *Romi u virovitičkom kraju* (Beograd: Radnička Štampa, 1998), 49; Vladimir Dedijer, *Dnevnik: 1941-1944: Od 28. novembra 1942. do 10. novembra 1943*, vol. 2 (Rijeka: Liburnija, 1981), 469.

10 Daniel Petrovski, *Romski partizani: Izložba na romski partizani od Makedonija vo tekot na Vtorata svetska vojna: Katalog od izložba na fotografii* (Skopje: NVO Romano Ilo, 2023).

Also, according to some sources, Ustasha authorities started deporting Roma because of fear of their cooperation with the Partisan movement, as shown by the example of the deportation of Roma from the Zemun area in mid-1942 and in Derventa from May 1943.¹¹ In some areas of occupied Yugoslavia, special Roma Partisan units were formed, as shown by the example of the Gypsy Partisan unit, which was formed in July 1942 from about 40 Roma who were hiding in the forest between Kreštelovac and Goveđe Polje (district Daruvar in northeastern Croatia), and which had fled there due to fear of Ustasha deportations.¹²

Some Roma distinguished themselves particularly with heroism in the Partisan units, and many died fighting against occupying military forces.¹³ Among others, the Roma Partisan Stevan Đorđević Novak must be mentioned. Novak was one of the military commanders of a Partisan unit in eastern Serbia, where he was killed in 1943. In 1953, he was proclaimed a People's Hero in Yugoslavia, the only Roma to receive the title. Milica Katić from Grabovac, Serbia, also stands out as a particularly brave Partisan soldier. In 1942, she was arrested by the Chetniks due to her involvement with the Partisans; she was executed in the Banjica camp in Belgrade soon thereafter.¹⁴

11 Milan Bulajić, *Ustaški zločini genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, vol. 2 (Beograd: Rad, 1988), 88, 168.

12 Šteković, *Romi u virovitičkom kraju*, 49-50.

13 Danijel Vojak, "Roma Resistance in Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia during World War II", in *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery*, eds. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva (Budapest: European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, 2020), 45-67; Danijel Vojak, "Otpor Roma za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata na području okupirane Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1941.-1945", in *Zbornik radova Osma naučna konferencija sa međunarodnim učešćem: Stradanje Srba, Jevreja, Roma i ostalih na teritoriji bivše Jugoslavije*, eds. Života Radosavljević, et.al. (Beograd: Fakultet za poslovne studije i pravo, Beograd – Fakultet za informacione tehnologije i inženjerstvo, 2021), 343-366; Danijel Vojak, "Roma also Fought: The History of Romani Participation in the Anti-Fascist Movement in Croatia during World War II", *Roma Rights Journal of the European Roma Rights Centre*, 1 (2017), 9-16.

14 Milosav Bojić, "Posavski partizanski odred", in *Ustanak naroda Jugoslavije 1941*, book III, ed. Milinko Đurović (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod JNA 'Vojno Delo', 1964), 17, 331; Sima Begović, *Logor Banjica 1941-1944.*, vol. 1 (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1989), 192; Đurić, *Povijest Roma*, 85.

Culture of remembrance of Roma victims in the Republics of socialist Yugoslavia

After World War II, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was formed, mostly encompassing the territories of pre-war monarchist Yugoslavia. The Roma communities were almost destroyed during the war in Croatia, and partly in Serbia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but they managed to survive. Other Roma communities in Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo did not suffer to the same extent during the war. According to the official data, the number of Roma in Yugoslavia ranged from 72.651 in 1948 to 168.098 in 1981. Roma made up a relatively small part of the population. Most lived in Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo, while few lived in Montenegro and Slovenia.¹⁵ Numerous socioeconomic problems still prevailed among the Roma community, especially those related to insufficient education, unemployment and poor living conditions. This led some Roma to emigrate to Western Europe in the 1960s.¹⁶ At the same time, the legal position of Roma was not regulated and thus differed at the state and republic levels. For example, Roma were recognized as national minority or “nationality” (*narodnost*) only in the republics of Macedonia (1971) and Montenegro (in the early 1980s), while in the other republics they were considered an ethnic group.¹⁷

The suffering of Roma in World War II was consigned to oblivion in Yugoslavia, as in most other countries in Europe. The principal ideological concept of the new Yugoslav government was the “brotherhood and unity of all peoples and ethnicities”.¹⁸ Due to this collective unitary political

15 Milutin Prokić, “Socijalno-Ekonomske Karakteristike Roma u Jugoslaviji”, in *Razvitak Roma u Jugoslaviji: problemi i tendencije*, ed. Miroš Macura (Beograd: SANU, 1992), (Cyrillic), 97-114.

16 Judith Lathman, “Roma of the former Yugoslavia”, *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1999), 206, 217.

17 Dragoljub Acković, “Konstucionalni problem Roma”, in *Razvitak Roma u Jugoslaviji: problemi i tendencije*, ed. Miroš Macura (Beograd: SANU, 1992), (Cyrillic), 17-23; Lathman, “Roma of the former Yugoslavia”, 206; Yaron Matras, *The Romani Gypsies* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), 236. In the multinational state of Yugoslavia's complex constitutional order, there was distinction between “nations” (*narod*), which were considered the constituent Slavic peoples (Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, and since 1961 also (Bosnian) Muslims), and “nationalities” (*narodnosti*), which included other Slavic and non-Slavic groups.

18 Ivo Komšić, “Komunizam i nacionalna svijest na kraju Drugog svjetskog rata u Jugoslaviji”, in *Kultura sjećanja: 1945. Povijesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti*, eds. Sulejman Bosto and Tihomir Cipek (Zagreb: Disput, 2009), 29-36; Marinko Gruić, “Romi – narodnost: Socijalna emancipacija i nacionalni afirmacija bivših nomada”, *Večernji list*, 28-29 August 1982, 37.

discourse in the Yugoslav – and thus Croatian – post-war socialist society, avoided highlighting individual ethnic groups as victims. Instead, the memorials and official commemorations used the collective term “victims of fascist terror (and/or) the occupiers”. The names of Roma victims were thus “drowned” in a mass of other victims, and could be discerned only to some extent by comparing their surnames to their place of residence.¹⁹ In 1968, the former Ustasha concentration camp Jasenovac was opened as a memorial complex, in which the Roma suffering was marginalised or ignored in several of the complex’s permanent exhibitions.²⁰ The first known monument dedicated to memory of Roma victims in Serbia was the “Crystal Flower” in the Šumarice Memorial Park (Memorial Park October) in Kragujevac, which was also opened in 1968. The monument was designed by Nebojša Delja and was dedicated to a 15-year-old Roma boy who was shot with a group of other adults who were all buried in a mass grave at this location.²¹ In 1970, Roma victims and survivors of the Ustasha mass crime of September 1944 in the village of Žerjavica near Bosanska Gradiška in Bosnia and Herzegovina erected the first known monument for Roma victims of World War II in the area of the former NDH. One of the initiators of this monument was Nadir Dedić, who was captured and deported by Ustasha to the Jasenovac camp.²² One year later, the only known memorial to the Roma victims of World War II in Croatia was erected in the village of Uštica (in the immediate vicinity of Jasenovac) and as a part of the Jasenovac memorial complex. This memorial’s development was initiated by the local branch of the Association of Veterans of the People’s Liberation War

19 Luka Šteković, *Romi u virovitičkom kraju* (Beograd: Radnička Štampa, 1998), 10-11, 28-33, 36, 47-49.

20 Dragoljub Acković, “Uštica – najveći romski grad mrtvih”, in *Odgovornost države Hrvatske za izvršeni genocid nad srpskim narodom i drugim narodima u periodu 1941.-1945. i 1991.-1995. (Okrugli sto – Beograd, 9. marta 2007.)*, ed. Smilja Tišma (Beograd: Udruženje zatočenika i potomaka zatočenika logora genocida u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj 1941-1945, Pešić i sinovi, 2007), 45-62; Ljiljana Radonić, “Univerzalizacija holokausta na primjeru hrvatske politike prošlosti i spomen-područja Jasenovac”, *Suvremene teme* 3, no. 1 (2010), 53-62. For more on commemorations of Roma victims in socialist Croatia, see: Danijel Vojak, “Komemoracija romskih žrtava Drugog svjetskog rata u socijalističkoj Hrvatskoj, 1945.-1991”, *Zgodovinski časopis*, vol. 72, no. 3-4, 2018, 440-461; Danijel Vojak, Filip Tomić and Neven Kovačev, “Remembering the ‘Victims of Fascist Terror’ in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, 1970-1990”, *History and Memory* 31, no. 1 (2019), 118-150; Danijel Vojak, “Between oblivion and recognition: the commemorating Roma suffering in Croatia during the Second World War”, in *Preserving the Roma Memories*, eds. Hristo Kyuchukov, Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov (München: LINCOM GmbH, 2020), 118-141.

21 “Kragujevac”, *Spomenik Database*, <https://www.spomenikdatabase.org/kragujevac>.

22 Drago Lončar, “Romi ipak ne zaboravljaju”, *Arena*, 7 August 1985, 22-23.

of Yugoslavia. On that occasion, 21 mass graves of victims of the Jasenovac camp were marked in an area covering 4.700 square metres.²³ Serbian architect Bogdan Bogdanović had designed the monument for victims killed by Germans in December 1941 at Arapova Dolina, Serbia, in a retaliatory execution following the killing of three German officers near Leskovac. The vast majority – 293 of the 310 victims – were Roma, according to recent research. The monument was opened in December 1973, carrying the following inscription: “Here German fascists executed 500 patriots, including 320 Roma, on 11 December 1941”.²⁴

The issue of Roma participation in the Partisan movement as part of the political activity of Roma activists in socialist Croatia/Yugoslavia

From the previous chapter, it is evident that the Yugoslav authorities marginalised the culture of memory of the Roma victims, and that they did not hold commemorations, nor did they erect, with a few exceptions, monuments in memory of specific groups of victims. Roma victims were “drowned” in the ideological discourse of “victims of fascist terror”. This ideological model of Yugoslav unitary politics was also reflected in the neglectful attitude toward acknowledging Roma participation in the Partisan movement.

The general marginalisation of the persecution and fate of Roma during World War II, and more specifically the marginalisation of the role of Roma in the Partisan movement in the liberation of Yugoslavia, were two of the important programmatic points around which Roma intellectuals and community leaders gathered. In the late 1960s, some Roma intellectuals started the sociopolitical organisation of the Roma in the “Roma under the sun” (*Romi pod suncem*) movement, after which the cultural society “Roma” (*Rom*) was founded in Belgrade in 1969. Roma intellectuals such as

23 “Uredene grobnice u Uštici”, *Poruke*, 21 June 1971, 6.

24 Andrew Lawler, “Whose Memorial? The Arapova Dolina Monument in Leskovac, Serbia”, *Roma Rights Journal*, 1 (2017), 17-22. Lawler states that based on own research, he estimates that “several dozen memorials were created [during Socialist Yugoslavia] specifically related to the persecution of the country’s Roma community, at some times incorporated into larger memorial complexes, and at others as stand-alone memorials” (21). But unfortunately, a precise inventory of this kind of monument has not yet been done.

Slobodan Berberski, Sait Balić, Rajko Đurić and others gathered in this organisation. The society members' political and public activity was aimed at recognising the position of Roma as a national minority, which would enable the protection of their culture, customs, and language.²⁵ These Roma intellectuals were also very active on an international level. This applies especially to Berberski, a distinguished poet and member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, who in 1971, was elected as the first president of the World Roma Congress, held in London. Berberski's political and broader significance in the Roma movement in Yugoslavia and beyond was partially highlighted through his military activity during the war, as he was a participant in the Partisan movement.²⁶ It is also important to highlight the similar activity of Đurić and Balić in the 1970s within the International Romani Union, which advocated for commemorating Roma victims of the genocide in Yugoslavia and also in Europe more generally.²⁷ According to some researchers, it was the Yugoslav Roma who were the bearers of the international political organisation of the Roma, because their social position in Yugoslavia was significantly better than that of Roma in other European countries.²⁸

The Roma movement, which was centred in Belgrade, successfully spread to other areas in Yugoslavia. It founded various branches, which then organised cultural events, publishing books in the Roma language, broadcasting radio and television shows in the Roma language, and more. In the 1980s, the social organisation of Roma in Croatia began. The first Roma association in Croatia was founded in Zagreb in 1986 under the name Roma Association Zagreb – Croatia (*Udruga Roma Zagreb – Hrvatska*). Then in 1988, the Roma heart (*Romsko srce*) Roma cultural and artistic society was founded, also in Zagreb.²⁹ This Roma organisation was part

25 See more in: Dragoljub Acković, *Nacija smo a ne Cigani: pregled aktivnosti romskih i neromskih društvenih i političkih organizacija i pojedinaca o romskoj problematici u nekadašnjoj i sadašnjoj Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Rrominterpress, 2001).

26 Ian Hancock, *We are the Romani People – Ame sam e Rromane džene* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2012), 120-121; Becky Taylor, *Another Darkness, Another Dawn* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 212.

27 Matras, *The Romani Gypsies*, 252-253.

28 Taylor, *Another Darkness*, 213.

29 David M. Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 222-231; Latham, "Roma of the former Yugoslavia", 206-207, 217-218; Filip Škiljan, "Kratok pregled povijesti nacionalnih manjina grada Zagreba", in *Nacionalne manjine u Zagrebu: Položaj i perspective*, eds. Dragutin Babić, Filip Škiljan and Drago Župarić-Ilić (Zagreb: Plejada, 2011), 106-107, 118-119.

of the Union of Roma Associations of Yugoslavia (*Savez udruženja Roma Jugoslavije*). The first Roma were also elected as political representatives in the local government in cities such as Niš in the 1980s.³⁰

In order to gain recognition as a national minority in the eyes of the public and the authorities, Roma in the Union of Roma Associations of Yugoslavia emphasised the Roma contribution to liberating Yugoslavia from the “occupier and his allies”.³¹ This political strategy aimed to socially and historically legitimise the Roma community in Yugoslavia as a group that participated in its liberation and the creation of a new state union. In such a public strategy, some Roma representatives not only emphasised the great extent of the suffering of their community in the war itself, but stated that the Roma joined the Partisan movement and thereby contributed to the liberation of the country. In 1989, one of the prominent Roma leaders of this movement, Rajko Đurić, spoke about this for a Yugoslav political magazine. Đurić noted that it was at the end of the 1960s that a “valid” discussion of the “Roma problem” began in Yugoslavia, focusing on the discussion on the regulation of their “national question” (referring to the recognition of their position as a nationality/national minority). Đurić pointed to Roma participation in the Partisan movement and the “trouble and misery of previous centuries, persecutions, discrimination, genocide” as key arguments in achieving these rights.³²

One of the events that stimulated stronger Roma activism occurred in 1974, when the new Yugoslav Constitution was adopted, in which Roma were recognized as a nationality/national minority at the state level, though not at the level of the republics. Because of this, Roma from Serbia, including the then-autonomous province of Kosovo gathered in societies in Obrenovac, Niš, Kragujevac, Vrnjačka Banja, Priština, Uroševac and Belgrade, and sent in, that same year, a request to the Constitutional Court of Yugoslavia to “equalise and standardise the constitutional provisions”, or, in other words, level the Roma community’s constitutional position at the state and republic levels. Slobodan Berberski played a significant role in formulating this request as the then-president of the World Roma Congress.³³

30 Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov, *Državne politike pod komunizmom*, European Council/Projekat Obrazovanja Romske Dece u Evropi, <https://rm.coe.int/drzavne-politike-pod-komunizmom-informativna-brosura-o-istoriji-roma/16808b1c5e>.

31 Milan Bečević, “Izgubljeni u Ustavu”, *Danas*, 21 March 1989, 24.

32 Ibid.

33 M. Vesnić, “Narodnost po ustavu”, *Večernje novosti*, 18 June 1974, 5.

Strong political support for Roma efforts to acquire the status of a nationality came from some of the most prominent representatives of the government. This could be seen in 1978, when Aleš Bebler, a prominent Yugoslav politician, diplomat and constitutional judge, openly advocated with the Yugoslav authorities for the recognition of the Roma as a nationality.³⁴

The representatives of the Roma from Serbia were joined in the same efforts by the Roma from Croatia a few years later, and at the beginning of 1980, political institutions in Croatia began to discuss the regulation of the social and legal position of the Roma.

In April 1980, the Parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations of the Republican Conference of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Croatia (*Odbor Sabora za međunacionalne odnose Republičke konferencije Socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Hrvatske*) initiated a project to create a scientific study on the position of the Roma in Croatia, titled "Social position of the Roma ethnic group in SR Croatia".³⁵ This was the first systematic scientific research on the position of Roma in Croatia and was carried out by the Zagreb Institute for Social Research (*Institut za društvena istraživanja*) and the Republic Institute for Social Work of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (*Republički zavod za socijalni rad Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske*). The research was published in 1985; one of the authors was Rajko Đurić, who wrote a section on the history of the Roma, in which he highlighted their specific suffering during World War II.³⁶

The debate on the position of the Roma took place at both the national and local levels. Here too, Serbian representatives of the Association of Societies "Roma" played a key role. The representatives were led by Saito Balić, who at the beginning of November 1980, met directly in Zagreb with representatives of the Croatian republic such as Marin Grujić, on which occasion it was agreed to start and establish a special "initiative groups" within Croatian political institutions. These institutions included the previously mentioned Parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations, which would aim to "start the processes" between Roma and local authorities in

34 Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies*, 227.

35 Croatian State Archives Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia/*Hrvatski državni arhiv Sabor Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske* – HR-HDA-1081, Saziv 1978. – 1982., box 125A, "Zapisnik 10. sjednice Odbora za međunacionalne odnose 10. travnja 1980. u 10 sati", 5-6.

36 Rajko Đurić, "Romi u našim krajevima", in *Društveni položaj Roma u SR Hrvatskoj. Analitička informacija* (Zagreb: Institut za društvena istraživanja Sveučilišta u Zagrebu; Republički zavod za Socijalni rad SR Hrvatske), 137-152.

Croatia.³⁷ Soon after that, the City Conference of the Socialist Union of Working People Zagreb discussed the social position of the Roma in Zagreb and the question of obtaining the status of nationality for the Roma.³⁸

The central place where representatives of the state and local authorities gathered with minority representatives was Lipovljani in the Croatian region of Slavonia. The event was called the Lipovljani meetings (*Lipovljanski susreti*). At the Lipovljani meetings in 1981, the issue of studying the history of minority participation in Yugoslav lexicography, specifically the *Enciklopedija Narodnooslobodilačke borbe* (Encyclopedia of the National Liberation Struggle), was discussed. On that occasion, Jefto Šašić, a prominent general and “People’s hero of Yugoslavia”, pointed out that nationalities were not “given enough attention” in that lexicographic project, stating that

... when it comes to the Roma, they are not sedentary, and, regardless of whether they are an ethnic group or a nationality, they are scattered everywhere and have their own way of life. I know that one group in Niš is working on the question of Roma participation in the People’s Liberation Struggle. 10 to 15 survivors are living in Novska, but who will say anything more about those Roma who perished with the Partisans. It is necessary to carry out more research about that group together with them...³⁹

In early July 1982, a Roma organisation in Croatia’s first participation in commemorative activity was recorded. Around 200 members of the Rom cultural-educational association from Zagreb visited Uštica, a part of Jasenovac Memorial Site. On that occasion, Rasim Bajrić, president of the Roma Council of Zagreb, stressed that numerous crimes were committed against the Roma population during the war and that they must not be forgotten.⁴⁰

During the gathering of representatives of the authorities and representatives of minority communities at the *Lipovljani meetings* in late August 1982, a roundtable was held on the position of the Roma in Croatia. Presentations were given on the history of the Roma and their discrimination, the Roma language and customs, as well as social and legal problems.

37 “O Romima s Romima”, *Vjesnik*, 8 November 1980, 4.

38 B.K., “Romi još bez statusa”, *Borba*, 27 November 1980, 6.

39 “Stenografski zapisnik”, in *Lipovljanski susreti '81*, ed. Jovan Mirković (Lipovljani: Organizacijski odbor “Lipovljanski susreti”, 1981), 63.

40 “Romi u posjeti spomen-području Jasenovac”, *Poruke*, 4 July 1982, 6.

Nikola Nikolić presented on the subject of Roma suffering in the Jasenovac camp. Marinko Grujić gave an introductory presentation titled: “Roma: Some current issues of social emancipation and national affirmation”. At that time, Grujić was serving as a member of the Presidency of the Socialist Union of the Working People of Croatia, which was the largest sociopolitical organisation in socialist Croatia. His very presence at this conference and his introductory presentation on the position of the Roma indicate that the Croatian republican authorities had a significant interest in regulating the social position of the Roma. Grujić pointed out in his presentation that Roma had been “cruelly persecuted and mistreated” throughout history, especially during World War II, but they nevertheless managed to survive.⁴¹ And in this context, he described Roma participation in the Partisan movement:

Witnesses and testimonies undoubtedly say the Roma had boldly resisted and fought. Many went to the Partisans, and there are fighters of the first hour (*prvorborci*) and heroes among them. Many have laid down their lives for freedom in the national liberation struggle. Even in the infamous Jasenovac camp, most of them showed stunning dignity and courage, which little is known about. There are testimonies [records of Dr. Mladen Iveković, Dr. Nikola Nikolić and others] on the conduct and resistance of Roma, on the attempts of the escapes, which most often ended with death, on Roma women who tried to save their children with all their strengths and means, on a Roma hero (whose name is not known to this day) who threw himself into the Sava and cursed the villain Pavelić, to whom the guards were shooting using rifles and machine guns, even bombs were used, and he dived into the water and went out to the surface and again he cursed the villain Pavelić and so until the moment the machine gun simply cut him down. Roma, along with our other peoples and nationalities, fought for freedom. They were an active factor – the subject of freedom. Unfortunately, very few of them lived to see the end of the war. The occupier and the Ustashes killed the vast majority of them. Part of them died in the national liberation struggle. Victims and suffering

41 Marinko Grujić, “Romi: Neka aktualna pitanja socijalne emancipacije i nacionalne afirmacije”, in *Lipovljanski susreti* '82, ed. Blaženka Špoljarić (Lipovljani: Organizacijski odbor “Lipovljanski susreti”, 1982), 21.

of Roma obliges us all. And something else – a patriotic feeling, deep attachment and love for our common socialist Yugoslavia.⁴²

In a further presentation, Grujić criticised the state government for not legally regulating the position of Roma as a nationality in the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. Therefore, he emphasised four “important reasons” why the Roma must be granted such a status. The first of his reasons was that the Roma, together with other nations and nationalities, fought for Yugoslavia.⁴³

Along with Grujić, Sait Balić gave a presentation at the same gathering, and emphasised the contribution of Roma in the National liberation struggle:

In our liberation revolution, Roma immediately responded to the invitation of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and, together with all nations and nationalities, made a great contribution to the liberation of our country from the occupiers. A large number of Roma also gave their lives for freedom, brotherhood and unity. A considerable number of Roma were among the first at the invitation of the Communist Party with a weapon in their hand as the bearers of the fight against the occupiers, and among them the honorary place is taken by the national hero Novak, who at one time was also in the entourage of Marshal Tito. During World War II, the Roma in our country were faced with the threat of being exterminated, they were ordered to wear visible yellow strips with the inscription “Cigonja”, their freedom of movement was limited and they were not allowed to access public places. A large number of Roma were shot in our country in World War II, and at the execution sites in Kragujevac, Niš, Leskovac, Kraljevo, Jajinci, Jasenovac and many other places across our country there remained indelible mounds as living witnesses of how many Roma were persecuted, destroyed, but not annihilated, with other patriots. It should be emphasised with certainty that the Roma were not in enemy ranks and that they had always been on the side of the proletariat, because they have been proletarians alone since ancient times.⁴⁴

42 Ibid., 26.

43 Ibid., 28.

44 Sait Balić, “U SFRJ svi narodi i narodnosti su ravnopravni”, in *Lipovljanski susreti '82*, ed. Blaženka Špoljarić (Lipovljani: Organizacijski odbor “Lipovljanski susreti”, 1982), 39-40.

In the rest of the presentation, Balić emphasised the need to recognise the Roma community with the status of nationality so that Roma would thus acquire equality with other nationalities and participate in cultural, public and political life, thus “correcting a perennial omission” towards them as a people who “has suffered a lot in their history so far”.

The media reported from this meeting discussing the Roma position. A part of the media coverage particularly emphasised the issue of the persecution of Roma and the brave resistance against the Ustasha authorities during World War II in the context of the current need of obtaining the status of the nationality for the Roma.⁴⁵

One of the issues on which a common agreement was reached was initiating the process of recognizing the status of the nationality of Roma in Croatia. At the end of 1982, the Parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations submitted a proposal to recognize the status of nationality to Roma to the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. The same proposal was sent to other federal and republican institutions in order to “agree a common solution with them”. Marinko Grujić explained the proposal at a session of this parliamentary committee, stating that “numerous elements justify the establishment of the status of nationality” to Roma, such as their more than six centuries of presence in Croatian areas, participation “in the construction” of the new state, and the fact that “their language, grammar, culture, customs and ethnic identity that have been preserved despite the centuries of persecution”.⁴⁶ Interestingly, preservation despite persecution is used here as an argument for the achievement of the political rights to nationality, and preservation can also be seen as a kind of resistance. At the same time, Grujić pointed out that a similar process for recognising the rights of Roma in other republics had not been “solidified”, which is why he would address them directly and ask for concrete “solutions”.⁴⁷

At the same session in early December 1982, the Parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations adopted an action plan for implementing measures to improve the position of Roma in Croatia. It envisaged measures related to the improvement of education, cultural development (the initiation of Romology Studies at the Department of Indology at the Faculty

45 Josip Vuković, “Društveni položaj Roma (2): Put do afirmacije”, *Komunist*, 10 September 1982, 14; Josip Vuković, “Društveni položaj Roma (1)”, *Komunist*, 3 September 1982, 13.

46 “Romima status narodnosti”, *Vjesnik*, 4 December 1982, 5.

47 Ibid.

of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb was mentioned), living conditions and employment.⁴⁸ The action plan was discussed in the Parliament and in the Constitutional Commission, but in this case their opinion is unknown. What is known is that at that time it was not decided that the Roma would become a nationality in Croatia.⁴⁹ Two years later, at the Lipovljani meetings, Marinko Grujić, in his report on the position of nationalities (national minorities), spoke about the Roma in a special agenda item, stating that there is a justified need to establish their status as a nationality in Croatia and Yugoslavia and that this will be changed as part of the “regular procedure” in voting on amendments to the constitution. He pointed out that they are a “suffering people” who, despite the attempt to exterminate them, managed to preserve their own identity, language and culture, and he considered their gaining the status of nationality as a “civilisational event of great importance” for the Roma in Yugoslavia and beyond.⁵⁰ It should be noted that at that time, Grujić was the president of the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik* and was a member of the Central Committee of the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia, which again indicates a certain continuity of interest of the central republican authorities in bettering the situation of the Roma.

The issue of regulating the position of the Roma as a nationality was brought up again at the end of the same decade. This time, Roma representatives, such as Rajko Đurić, in their capacity as members of the World Roma Organization, demanded in 1989 that the Roma be recognized as nationality/national minority, which would enable them to “finally” exercise their right to better education and cultural affirmation, so that they no longer be “second-class citizens”.⁵¹ In 1989, the Parliamentary Committee for Interethnic Relations discussed the constitutional position of the Roma in Croatia, emphasising that they all have civil rights and additional rights in the development of their culture and education.⁵² However, even then, the decision was not made to recognise Roma as a nationality, and further activities in this regard were stopped by the outbreak of wars that led to the end of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Roma issue then

48 Ibid.

49 Bečejić, “Izgubljeni u Ustavu”, 25; “Romima status narodnosti”, 5.

50 Marinko Grujić, “Moramo biti dosljedniji u oživotvorenju i svakodnevnom ostvarivanju ustavnih prava narodnosti”, in *Lipovljanski susreti '84*, ed. Ante Mihaljević (Lipovljani: Organizacijski odbor “Lipovljanski susreti”, 1985), 53-54.

51 “Narodnost Rom”, *Danas*, 1 May 1990, 34; Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies*, 231.

52 “Informacija o društvenom položaju Roma u Hrvatskoj”, *Delegatski vjesnik*, 9 September 1989, 17.

moved to the governments of the Yugoslav successor states, such as the Republic of Croatia.

Conclusion

After World War II, the fate of Roma victims was relegated to the margins of most European countries. One of these countries was Yugoslavia, whose authorities shaped the culture of remembrance without mentioning the victims' ethnic identity, classifying them all as "victims of fascist terror". As a result of this policy, Roma victims were "drowned" in such an ideological discourse. This was most visible in the non-mentioning of their identity in commemorations and monuments. In parallel, the total scale of the Roma population's suffering was insufficiently known and widely ignored by scientific research in Yugoslav historiography. The consequence was that until the 1970s, the wider Yugoslav public was almost unaware that the Roma were victims of the genocidal policies of the authorities in Croatia and Serbia during World War II and that Roma had also actively participated in the Partisan resistance movement. Such marginality in the public memory and the scientific research was a reflection of the Roma population's permanently socioeconomically marginal position in Yugoslavia.

A special problem for the Roma community in Yugoslavia was the non-recognition of their position as a nationality in all Yugoslav republics, which made their social integration and systematic protection of their culture, customs and language difficult. The initiative to change the public discourse and alter the culture of remembrance came precisely from the Roma community itself, whose prominent intellectuals organised themselves in Belgrade at the end of the 1960s and were instrumental in spreading the Roma movement to other areas of Yugoslavia. They also played an important role in establishing the international gathering of Roma at the World Roma Congresses. In the mid-1970s, Slobodan Berberski initiated the constitutional process of recognising the position of the Roma as a nationality. One of his key arguments for this recognition rested on highlighting the Roma community's suffering during the war and, in particular, Roma participation in the anti-fascist (Partisan) resistance movement. At that time, Roma intellectuals increasingly emphasised the bravery of the Roma Partisans and their contribution to the liberation of the Yugoslav state. Such

a policy, especially at the end of the 1970s, was increasingly accepted by Croatian political institutions and Marinko Grujić, as a prominent official at the level of the Croatian republican government, openly spoke in public that the Roma must be granted the status of a nationality because of their prominent participation in the partisan movement, which liberated and created the new Yugoslav state.

Despite such mostly declarative support from high-ranking Croatian officials, the actual recognition of the Roma as a nationality did not occur and was furthermore postponed with the outbreak of numerous wars on the territory of Yugoslavia and the state's overall collapse. Despite this, the active advocacy of Roma equality in Yugoslav society, initiated and carried out by the Roma themselves, was a significant indicator of the increasingly active political and wider social activity of the Roma community in Yugoslavia. Precisely on the basis of such action, the Roma increasingly successfully fought for their rights in the new states created after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Thus, the Roma community's status as a national minority in the Republic of Croatia, with all the rights to protect its cultural and ethnic identity, was finally achieved in 2002 by a special constitutional law. This was possible due to the prominent activity of Roma intellectuals thirty years earlier, who themselves demanded equality based on their merits in participating in the Partisan resistance movement.

In parallel, the suffering and resistance of Roma during World War II has slowly attracted more attention in the public sphere and also in research, first in Europe in general, then also more specifically in the Yugoslav successor states. One of the first political initiatives for establishing international commemoration for Roma victims of genocide came in late June 2009, when the Roma National Congress and International Roma Union proposed the commemoration of the International Remembrance Day of Roma Victims of the Pharrimos (Holocaust) to the Council of Europe. The commemoration was proposed for 2 August, in memory of 2 August 1944, when around 4,200 Roma were killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Commemorations were then held in many European countries. In Croatia, they started on 2 August 2012 at the Roma cemetery in Uštica village near Jasenovac. The commemoration was organised by Roma organisations.⁵³ The second important step came in April 2015, when after a

53 Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "Holocaust, Porrajmos, Samudaripen...Tworzenie nowej mitologii narodowej", *Studia Romologica*, Vol. 3 (2010), 75-94; Danijel Vojak, "Roma Holocaust in Croatia: from marginalization to formal recognition and commemoration", in *Beyond the Roma*

long mobilisation by Roma associations, the European Parliament finally approved a resolution recognising the genocide of Roma during World War II.⁵⁴ Additionally, for the past several years, Roma associations and especially youth activists, commemorate each 16 May as “Romani Resistance Day”, referring to the revolt of Roma prisoners against their extermination in the Gypsy Family Camp (*Zigeunerfamilienlager*) in Auschwitz II-Birkenau concentration camp on 16 May 1944.⁵⁵ However, this event is historically controversial, and for many Roma associations it is important to have a larger understanding of resistance and not only to focus on one specific event.

In the post-Yugoslav space, there recently have been some scientific studies that show the variety of attitudes present in Roma resistance. These include avoiding deportation and escaping from camps, participating in musical formations or as armed fighters in Partisan units, or helping and hiding Partisans.⁵⁶ In 2020, a more general European research project, including the post-Yugoslav space, led to the publication of a book providing a panorama of Roma resistance in different European countries during World War II.⁵⁷ However, the topic of Roma resistance still remains insufficiently researched, as is the case with many other issues related to Roma history in most European historiographies. Despite such marginalised historiographical interest, the issue of Roma resistance is an important area of research, as it points to Roma as active individuals in the fight against Nazi authorities and their allies during World War II. In this way, it also underlines that they have to be seen as an integral part of the wider history of resistance against Nazism in Europe.⁵⁸

Holocaust: From Resistance to Mobilisation, eds. Thomas M. Buchsbaum and Sławomir Kaprański (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2017), 131-149.

54 “Resolution on the occasion of International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II”, *European Parliament*, 15 April 2015, <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1385420&t=e&l=en>.

55 See for example “16 May 1944 – a day to remember”, *Council of Europe*, 15 May 2020, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/-/16-may-1944-a-day-to-remember>.

56 See the literature mentioned above in footnote 13.

57 Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Jekatyerina Dunajeva, eds., *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery* (Budapest: European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, 2020). The book is available online as a pdf: <https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance-book-roma-resistance/>. For more about this project, which was led by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN) and its different outputs, see: <https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance/>.

58 The research for this paper was carried out as part of the project “Forgotten places of suffering of the Unsuitables: Genocide of Roma in the Independent State of Croatia: research, memorialization, education – FORGOT-GENROMISC”, funded by European Union programme NextGeneration EU (01/08-73/23-2519-8).

Part 6.

How to Represent Resistance in Museums?

Filling a Gap: The “Women in the Resistance Against National Socialism” Exhibition of the German Resistance Memorial

Dagmar Lieske

Introduction

“Even though I did not hold any official positions within the party, I was still a very active member, participating in all meetings and actively engaging in home and street propaganda. This led to disagreements between my husband and me, who, while accepting my membership in the KPD [Communist Party of Germany], nevertheless viewed my activity with reluctance.”¹

38-year-old Judith Auer explained her political career during an interrogation by the Gestapo in July 1944 with apparent confidence. Born Judith Vallentin in Zurich in 1905, she joined the Young Communist League of Germany (*Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands* – KJVD) in Thuringia as a young adult and participated in gatherings and protests. It is there that she met Erich Auer in 1924, a functionary of the KJVD and the Communist Revolutionary Union Opposition (*Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts-Opposition* – RGO).² The couple married in 1926 and two years later, moved to Moscow to work for the Communist International. Shortly after their return to Germany, their daughter Ruth was born in Berlin on 27 November 1929. Following the Nazi seizure of power, the Auers were initially active together for the now illegal Communist Party in Berlin and Thuringia. As a result, Erich Auer was arrested in March 1934 and sentenced to

1 Quotation from an interrogation of Judith Auer by the Gestapo on 22 July 1944, 3, Federal Archives/*Bundesarchiv*: BArch, R 3018-1558 T.1.

2 Cf. “Auer, Erich”, Bundesstiftung Datenbanken, <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/erich-auer>. All internet sources were last accessed on 20 October 2023.

one and a half years in prison for “preparing high treason.” In 1937, he was imprisoned again for three months.

Judith Auer continued her involvement in the resistance against the new regime after her husband’s arrest. Starting in 1937, she was employed as a purchasing agent at the Oberspree Cable Works in Berlin and made repeated use of business trips in the following years to carry out courier activities. For example, in the spring of 1944, she collected a bicycle tyre bearing an antifascist slogan from Magnus Poser³ in Jena. The idea was to unroll the slogan on the street and make it visible using a special colour printing technique.⁴ From October/November 1942 to January 1943, Judith Auer hid the fugitive communist Franz Jakob⁵ in her home in Berlin-Bohnsdorf. She also repeatedly offered her home for illegal meetings and networking sessions for the Berlin resistance groups associated with Franz Jakob and Anton Saefkow,⁶ the husband of her long-time friend Aenne Saefkow.⁷ After she was denounced, Judith Auer was finally arrested at her workplace on 7 July 1944. During her interrogation by the Gestapo, she made the statements regarding the failure of her marriage cited above. According to Auer, the couple had divorced “by mutual consent” in 1939.⁸ Their daughter Ruth subsequently lived with her mother. Judith Auer’s account suggests that her political involvement was a significant factor in the breakdown of her marriage; although he was an active communist himself, her husband Erich disapproved of her overly conspicuous activities. This interpretation of the cause of marital discord between the Auers is reiterated in the indictment brought in August of the same year by the People’s Court (*Volksgerichtshof*) against Judith Auer on charges of “preparing high treason.”⁹ Two months later, Auer was sentenced to death. She was executed on 27 October 1944,

3 Cf. “Magnus Poser”, Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, https://www.gdw-berlin.de/vertiefung/biografien/personenverzeichnis/biografie/view-bio/magnus-poser/?no_cache=1.

4 The indictment of the *Volksgerichtshof* (VGH) against Judith Auer and others, 7 August 1944, 14, BArch, R 3018-1558 T. 1.

5 Cf. “Franz Jakob”, Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, https://www.gdw-berlin.de/vertiefung/biografien/personenverzeichnis/biografie/view-bio/franz-jacob/?no_cache=1.

6 Cf. “Anton Saefkow”, Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, https://www.gdw-berlin.de/vertiefung/biografien/personenverzeichnis/biografie/view-bio/anton-saefkow/?no_cache=1.

7 Cf. “Aenne Saefkow”, Internationales Ravensbrück Committee, <https://www.irk-cir.org/de/members/151>.

8 Quotation from an interrogation of Judith Auer by the Gestapo on 22 July 1944, 3, BArch R 3018-1558 T.1.

9 Indictment of the VGH against Judith Auer and others, 7 August 1944, 5, BArch R 3018-1558 T. 1.



Fig. 1: Judith Auer with her daughter Ruth, around 1938.
(Source: Bundesarchiv Bild Y 10-198-523-66)

at the execution site in Berlin-Plötzensee.¹⁰ After the war, Judith Auer was honoured in various ways in the German Democratic Republic (GDR); a street, a kindergarten and a retirement home in East Berlin were named after her.

¹⁰ Judgement of the VGH against Judith Auer and others, 6 September 1944, BArch R 3018/1558 T. 1.

Her story is one of the case studies featured in the “Women in the Resistance against National Socialism” exhibition. This exhibition, currently being developed by a team at the German Resistance Memorial in Berlin, will open in July 2024.¹¹ Judith Auer has been presented as an example here because both of the above-mentioned sources – the interrogation and the indictment against Auer – reference gender-specific themes that have been fundamental to the concept of the exhibition. Implicitly, these sources indicate how Nazi judges and Gestapo officers viewed women active in the resistance such as Judith Auer. This raises the question why marital conflicts found their way into the interrogation records and the indictment of the “People’s Court” in the first place. The judicial record does not provide an explicit justification, but it is likely that Judith Auer’s persecutors wanted to express their disapproval of her prominent role in the communist movement. According to this interpretation, even her husband disapproved of her behaviour. As other studies on proceedings against women before the “People’s Court” also demonstrate, the judges were particularly disconcerted when a woman/wife played a central role in a resistance group.¹²

Auer’s statements also shed light on the dynamics of couples engaged in the resistance. Even in the left-wing labour movement, it was not always taken for granted that women could assume leadership positions, as Klaus-Michael Mallmann has pointed out.¹³ Nevertheless, some women already held important political roles during the Weimar Republic and occasionally attempted to maintain these after the Nazi seizure of power.

Research and work process

It may sometimes appear as if the history of National Socialism, which by now can fill entire bookshelves, has been thoroughly explored. However,

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- 11 The project team, in addition to the author of this article, includes: Lydia Dollmann, Carolin Raabe, Silke Struck, and Elisa Zenck. I finished this article in February 2024. At this moment we had finished the texts for the biographies, the acts of resistance and chosen the illustrations.
 - 12 Cf. Isabel Richter’s work on treason trials against women: Isabel Richter, *Hochverratsprozesse als Herrschaftspraxis im Nationalsozialismus: Männer und Frauen vor dem Volksgerichtshof 1934-1939* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot Verlag, 2001); Karen Holtmann, *Die Saefkow-Jacob-Bästlein-Gruppe vor dem Volksgerichtshof. Die Hochverratsverfahren gegen die Frauen und Männer der Berliner Widerstandsorganisation 1944-1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010).
 - 13 Klaus-Michael Mallmann, “Zwischen Denunziation und Roter Hilfe. Geschlechterbeziehungen und kommunistischer Widerstand 1933-1945”, in *Frauen gegen die Diktatur – Widerstand und Verfolgung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. Christl Wickert (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1995), 82-97.

there are still remarkable gaps. One of these is the role of women in the resistance, which has not yet been systematically examined. Furthermore, the vast majority of women who resisted National Socialism have not been recognized for their diverse and distinct actions. Resistance was long considered a male theme, even though individual stories, such as that of Judith Auer or the Munich student Sophie Scholl,¹⁴ were present in both German states.

With the emergence of the New Women's Movement in the 1970s and 1980s, resistance by women during the National Socialist era received greater attention. However, it was often equated with a general struggle against patriarchy. This led to simultaneous heroization and victimisation of women, which at times not only reinforced gender stereotypes, but also obscured the view of male and female perpetrators and grey areas. In contrast, it must be emphasised that women who chose to engage in acts of resistance were an absolute minority, as Gisela Bock highlighted already in the late 1990s: "By 1937, the overwhelming majority of non-Jewish Germans were more or less staunch supporters of the regime, not least because of its domestic and foreign policy successes."¹⁵ This applied to both men and women, although during the course of World War II, critical attitudes increased, particularly among women. This conclusion is suggested, at least, by the numerous proceedings conducted against women during the war for making critical, oppositional remarks.

For years, several historians including Johannes Tuchel, the director of the German Resistance Memorial Center, drew attention to the need for research on women in the resistance, until in June 2019, the German Bundestag finally passed a resolution to provide financial support for research on this aspect of National Socialist history.¹⁶ The research project conceived within

14 Sophie Scholl (1921-1943), a Munich student, took on a leadership role in the Nazi *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM) when she was a young girl. She increasingly distanced herself from the new regime and participated in the production and distribution of a critical leaflet by the White Rose (*Weißer Rose*) resistance group in 1943. Scholl was arrested while distributing leaflets in Munich University and a few days later, on 22 February 1943, she was sentenced to death by the VGH and executed on the same day.

15 Gisela Bock, "Ganz normale Frauen. Täter, Opfer, Mitläufer und Zuschauer im Nationalsozialismus", in *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, eds. Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel and Ulrike Weckel (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 245-277, here: 248.

16 "Bundestag würdigt Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus", Deutscher Bundestag, 28 June 2019, <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw26-de-frauen-widerstand-646432>.

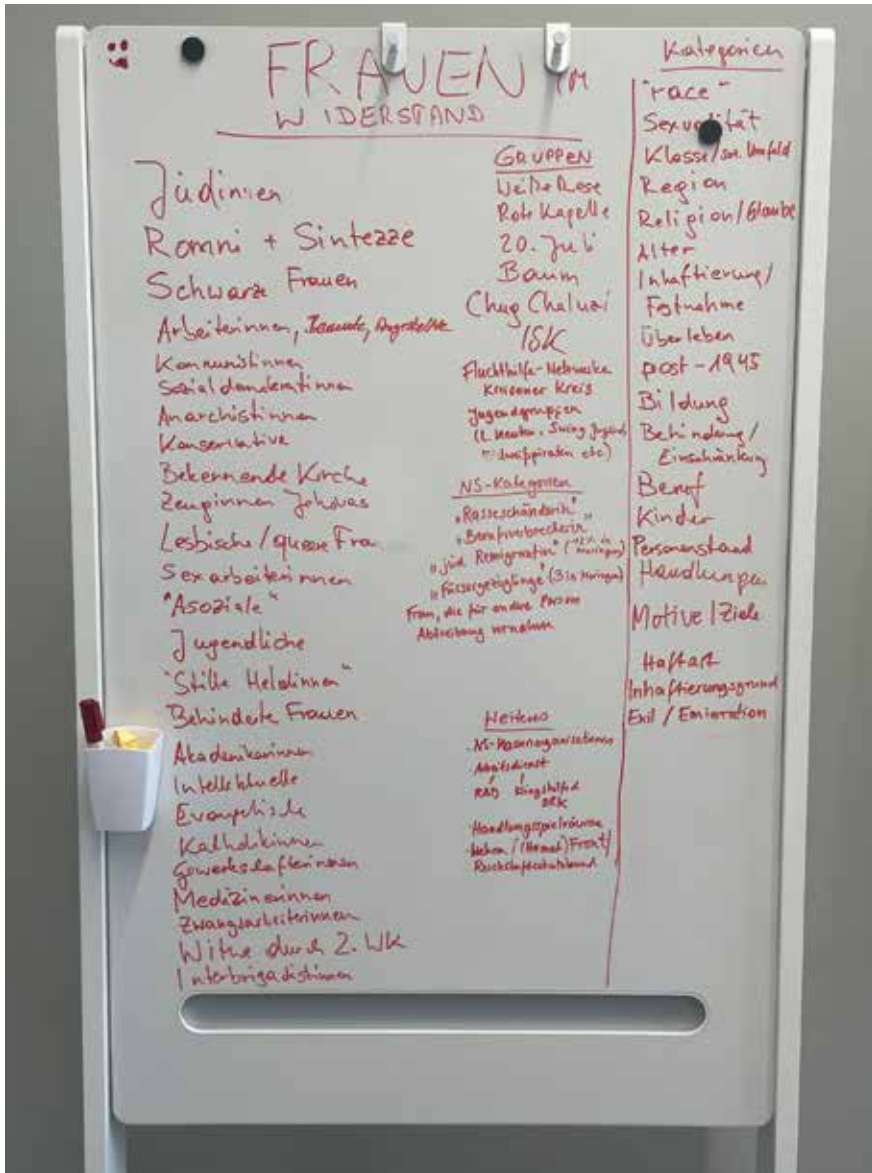


Fig. 2: Brainstorming of the project team “Women in Resistance against National Socialism”, Berlin 2020. (Photo: Dagmar Lieske)

this framework, which has led to the exhibition described here, explicitly does not view women as a collective. Instead, we want to enable visitors to gain insight into individual biographies and the scope of action available to women. At what point in her life did a woman decide to engage in acts of resistance, under what conditions did she act, and what risks did she incur?

These questions have guided our project, which is based at the German Resistance Memorial Center. Despite significant constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁷ we have, since summer 2020, researched over 5.000 women by name, who can be shown to have engaged in acts of resistance against the National Socialist regime. These women are documented in an internal database, accompanied by brief biographies and keywords, which allow them to be sorted by political orientation or other topics such as “queer references.” The sample can be expanded after the opening of the exhibition, as there are plans for a website with further biographies and a book series to accompany the project.¹⁸ How can one approach the resistance of women? Where can one find information about lesser-known examples? The German Resistance Memorial Center works with an integrative concept of resistance, whereby resistance encompasses all actions that contributed to harming the National Socialist regime.¹⁹ This includes, for example, the writing and dissemination of illegal leaflets and participation in prohibited parties or groups, as well as individual assistance to Jewish and other persecuted individuals or repeated public criticism of the war and the Nazi leadership.

This integrative concept of resistance is the result of decades-long discussions in Germany. For a long time, actions against the regime that did not explicitly occur within the framework of illegal political groups were not well acknowledged – neither within historical research nor in cultural memory. In our research on women in the resistance, our project team, in close consultation with the leadership of the German Resistance Memorial Center, initially conducted investigations along the various hierarchical levels of the Nazi courts. Our analysis began with an evaluation of treason trials held before the *Volksgerichtshof* against women (and men),²⁰ followed

17 During the peak phase of the pandemic from spring to autumn 2021, archives for example remained closed for months, so that sources could not be accessed on-site. The project team also had to rely on digital meetings for a long time, which sometimes complicated the work and team-building process. Further networking, such as conferences, was also not possible.

18 Volume 1 of the “Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus” (Women in the Resistance against National Socialism) project series was published in 2022: Johannes Tuchel, ... *wenn man bedenkt, wie jung wir sind, so kann man nicht an den Tod glauben: Liane Berkowitz, Friedrich Rehmer und die Widerstandsaktionen der Berliner Roten Kapelle* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2022).

19 Peter Steinbach, *Widerstand im Widerstreit. Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Erinnerung der Deutschen* 2nd ed. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000).

20 Fortunately, the digitised records of proceedings before the VGH could be accessed during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://db.saur.de/DGO/login.jsf?jsessionid=a78e7ef2704d471dde8e70205cd7>. In total, the proceedings against 580 accused women were reviewed and later supplemented with additional individual files from the Federal Archives Berlin (BArch).

by a review of selected treason proceedings of the Higher Regional Courts.²¹ Finally, holdings of the District Courts and Special Courts were selectively examined.²² The latter primarily cover the realm of individual and everyday acts of resistance, such as cases related to aiding persecuted Jews, as well as cases involving critical remarks or listening to so-called foreign “enemy radio stations” (*Feindsender*). In total, over a thousand case-specific court records against women were reviewed in this manner. These records form a crucial foundation for our research.²³

To systematise the information obtained, our project team developed a template in the form of a sample excerpt. Alongside personal details and fields where the woman’s political biography and specific acts of resistance can be entered, there is also space to note gender-specific aspects that stand out in the court records. As Thomas Roth aptly put it, jurisprudence was “a central arena for the reproduction of images of femininity and masculinity”.²⁴ It always reflects a contemporary discourse – how are the accused perceived, what role does their gender play, and how is the act of resistance judged by the judiciary? Using examples from the sources, the following section sheds light on specific selected themes that stand out in proceedings against women: marriage, divorce, and sexuality, as well as pregnancy and motherhood. All the women mentioned in the following section are currently included in the exhibition sample.²⁵

21 Research was conducted with the help of several service contract workers in the holdings of the Higher Regional Courts (OLG) in Hamm, Hamburg, Jena, Kassel, Munich, Saxony, and Stuttgart, as well as the Regional Court of Berlin.

22 Systematic research was conducted in the holdings of the Special Courts in Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich. In addition, individual files from other Special Courts were also evaluated.

23 Additional perpetrator sources include personnel files from prisons, police records, and others, as well as egodocuments from the victims, including writings from the time of persecution, as well as legacies and interviews conducted with survivors. Compensation claims submitted in the GDR and the Federal Republic were also taken into account.

24 Thomas Roth, “‘Gestrauchelte Frauen’ und ‘unverbesserliche Weibspersonen’: zum Stellenwert der Kategorie Geschlecht in der nationalsozialistischen Strafrechtspflege”, in *Nationalsozialismus und Geschlecht. Zur Politisierung und Ästhetisierung von Körper, “Rasse” und Sexualität im “Dritten Reich” und nach 1945*, eds. Elke Frietsch and Christina Herkommer (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), 109-140, here: 110.

25 It is an ongoing project, so changes may still occur.

Gender-specific aspects in the sources

Marriage and citizenship

First, let us return to Judith Auer. Like many other women who were active in the resistance, she evidently did not fulfil the role assigned to her from the perspective of the Nazis. The political sphere was reserved for men; hence the failure of her marriage due to her long-standing political involvement presumably appeared both logical and yet reprehensible to her persecutors. According to Nazi propaganda, women should above all support their husbands. Assuming a political role was at best reserved for them in the Nazi girls' and women's organisations.²⁶ However, from the viewpoint of the Nazi state, their primary task, at least until the start of the war, was to take care of the household and children.²⁷ Marriage, which was already presented to young girls as the only desirable form of coexistence between the genders, held special significance in Nazi ideology as the nucleus of the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft*.²⁸ As a result, divorce was extremely problematic for many women, especially if they were deemed the guilty party in the proceedings. Although the divorce in Auer's case was pronounced by mutual consent, she became an unmarried or divorced woman in a society where single women were not envisaged. Often, divorce was not only associated with a loss of status but could also have direct economic consequences for the woman – for instance, if the man was the sole breadwinner and had financially supported the woman and/or the family.

In Nazi Germany, citizenship, which was accompanied by certain rights, also played a crucial role in this context. For women who had acquired their husband's citizenship through marriage, divorce could mean the loss

26 See, for example, Dagmar Reese ed., *Die BDM-Generation. Weibliche Jugend in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus*, Potsdamer Studien 19 (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2007).

27 With the start of World War II, gender roles shifted in some areas. Women were now increasingly employed as workers in war-related industries or at the front. This gave them access to fields of activity that were largely new for women. The conditions for resistance against the regime also changed accordingly.

28 This primarily refers to the desired marriages among *Volksgenossen*, people considered to be of the same race and nationality in National Socialist ideology. Regarding divorces and consequences, see: Annemone Christians, *Das Private vor Gericht: Verhandlungen des Eigenen in der nationalsozialistischen Rechtspraxis*, Das Private im Nationalsozialismus, Volume 2 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020).

of citizenship and, consequently, the loss of civil and residency rights.²⁹ Conversely, marriage could sometimes serve as a protective instrument: The actresses Therese Giehse and Erika Mann, who were a couple for a time, co-founded the The Pepper Mill (*Die Pfeffermühle*) cabaret in January 1933 with Erika's brother, the writer Klaus Mann, and their friend Magnus Henning. While in exile from 1933 to 1936, they toured Europe with the cabaret, which Therese Giehse and Erika Mann used as a medium to express their opposition to the Nazi regime. Due to their political opposition and their escape into exile, both lost their German citizenship in 1935. It was only after their marriage with two friends, who were homosexual British writers, that they were no longer considered stateless and could enter the USA in 1936.³⁰

Sexuality/ies in court

The marital status or the relationship of the accused women to their spouses/partners was always a central theme in the indictments and judgments of the Nazi courts. This illustrates the significance the courts attributed to the topic. The (sexual) relationships of the accused women received much more attention from the judges than those of the accused men. One recurring figure of discourse was the assumed fundamental (sexual) dependency of women on men as a motive or cause for their acts of resistance. The sexuality of women who entered into "forbidden relationships" with non-German forced or civilian labourers was treated particularly intensively and pejoratively.³¹ Often, their husbands were serving as soldiers at the front or had already fallen.

29 Cf. Maren Röger, "Die Grenzen der 'Volksgemeinschaft': Deutsch-Ausländische Eheschließungen 1933-1945", in *Geschlechterbeziehungen und "Volksgemeinschaft"*, eds. Klaus Latzel, Elissa Mailänder and Franka Maubach (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018), 87-108.

30 Cf. Therese Giehse and Erika Mann, see: Gunna Wendt, *Erika und Therese: Erika Mann und Therese Giehse – Eine Liebe zwischen Kunst und Krieg* (Munich: Piper Taschenbuch, 2018); Jana Mikota, "Abgesehen von ihrer großen Begabung ist sie eine sehr warmherzige und natürliche Frau: Therese Giehse's Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der 'Pfeffermühle'", *Informationen* 63 (May 2006), ed. Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand, 18-22.

31 Cf. Birthe Kundrus, "'Die Unmoral deutscher Soldatenfrauen' Diskurs, Alltagsverhalten und Ahndungspraxis 1939-1945", in *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, eds. Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel and Ulrike Weckel (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 96-110; Silke Schneider, *Verbotener Umgang. Ausländer und Deutsche im Nationalsozialismus. Diskurse um Sexualität, Moral, Wissen und Strafe* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2010).

This was the case for Marianne Kürschner, for instance. Her husband died in May 1940 – just one month after their marriage – as a soldier in France. In the death sentence pronounced by the *Volksgeschichtshof* against the young woman in June 1943, her status as a “war widow” was repeatedly emphasised and used as an argument against her.³² Kürschner, a technical draftswoman from Saxony, was only 22 years old at this point. She worked in an arms factory in Berlin, where she befriended Czech workers. Left to fend for herself after her husband’s death, she engaged in various relationships with male Czech colleagues and became pregnant. All of this is included in the justification for her sentence, even though she was arrested and convicted primarily for making critical remarks and jokes about the regime during working hours.³³ The judges clearly reached the limits of their understanding of gender roles when assessing Kürschner’s sexuality. “It may well be that Mrs. Kürschner was dominated by the influence of the Czech men [...] But whilst the People’s Court acknowledges that in sexual relationships and their consequences the man is responsible – in this case, Mrs. Kürschner cannot avail herself of this argument.”³⁴ In other words, although self-determined female sexuality essentially does not exist for the judges, Kürschner alone is held accountable for her actions. The fact that she entered into a relationship with a Czech man is deemed particularly reprehensible by the Court, which equates it to a “betrayal” of her husband who died a “heroic death”: “[...] by engaging in relationships with several Czech men, she has defiled the honour of her fallen husband.”³⁵ It is all too evident that the court condemned Marianne Kürschner not only legally but also morally.

32 Judgement against Marianne Kürschner, 26 June 1943, 1-2, BArch R 3018/3670.

33 The judgement includes the following joke she is said to have told: “The Führer once had the Reich Marshal show him Berlin, the airport, the east-west axis, and then both climbed the radio tower. There, the Führer said Berlin was so beautiful, and he would like to give the Berliners a treat; Hermann then said, ‘well, then jump from the tower’”; cf. Judgement against Marianne Kürschner, 26 June 1943, 1-2, BArch R 3018/3670.

34 *Ibid.*, 4.

35 *Ibid.*



Fig. 3: Marianne Kürschner, around 1953. (Source: Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 30413 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Karl-Marx-Stadt, 57196.)

Pregnancy and motherhood

Pregnancy as a physical event and motherhood as a social occurrence are two additional central themes that some women in the resistance had to confront and that are present in the sources. In addition to documents such as interrogations, charges, and judgements, which primarily reflect the perspective of the prosecuting authorities, the court records also contain personal testimonies such as letters written in detention or pleas for clemency. They highlight the dilemmas many women faced when choosing to resist. Concerns for their partners, as

well as for their already-born or unborn children, are a recurring theme.³⁶ And this concern was not unfounded, as the consequences of an act of resistance for (expectant) mothers could indeed be severe. In the event of their imprisonment, pregnant women faced significant health risks for themselves and their unborn children.³⁷ Marianne Kürschner also submitted a plea for clemency citing her pregnancy, concluding with the following words: “I beg for mercy, for the sake of my already beloved child, my dear parents, and my youth.”³⁸ However, her plea was rejected, and she gave birth to her son Josef in prison in September 1943. Josef died just a few weeks later.³⁹

36 Cf. also the secret message from Liane Berkowitz to her mother, smuggled out through a prison guard. Berkowitz was sentenced to death in January 1943 as part of the trials against the “Red Orchestra,” even though she was still a minor and pregnant at the time. In the letters to her mother, she describes, among other things, her concern for family members and the unborn child, as well as the health difficulties she faced as a pregnant woman in custody, Tuchel (2022), 237-243 and 369-419. Some letters are transcribed in the volume.

37 Cf. also Helga Amesberger, “Schwangerschaft und Mutterschaft während der Verfolgung,” in *Zwischen Mutterkreuz und Gaskammer. Täterinnen und Mitläuferinnen oder Widerstand und Verfolgung?* eds. Andreas Baumgartner and Jean-Marie Winkler (Vienna: Edition Mauthausen, 2008), 21-26.

38 Clemency plea from Marianna Kürschner, 22 July 1943, BArch R 3018-8934.

39 Notification of the death of Marianne Kürschner’s child, 24 December 1943, BArch 3018/1919.

Only after her child’s death did further appeals for clemency from her and her parents succeed. In early 1944, Reich Minister of Justice Otto Thierack commuted her death sentence to an eight-year prison term. Kürschner survived the lengthy imprisonment and was liberated from Jauer Prison by American troops in April 1945. She returned to her hometown, Elsterberg, in Saxony, and remarried in 1948. Kürschner initially made a living as a taxi driver; she later worked for the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – VVN*) in the GDR.⁴⁰

In addition to documents outlining the perspectives of both the persecutors and the mothers, testimonies of the children themselves have in some cases also been preserved. These include both petitions for clemency they wrote for their incarcerated mothers during the Nazi era and memoirs published after the end of the war. In 2004, Ruth Hortzschansky, Judith Auer’s daughter, published a book about her mother’s story with her husband Günter. It is titled “May everything that was painful not have been in vain” and includes transcripts of the letters Judith Auer sent to her daughter from prison. The volume impressively illustrates how profoundly the persecution of women in the resistance affected subsequent generations. Ruth Hortzschansky concludes that the “life and struggle” of her mother always shaped her own life. She describes how she is always reminded of the last encounter with her mother whenever she passes the location of the former women’s prison on Barnimstrasse in southeast Berlin⁴¹: “And behind this ruin was the prison where she was incarcerated. In this women’s prison on Barnimstrasse – like the factory ruin, it has been demolished for many years – I saw my mother for the last time.”⁴² After her mother’s arrest, Ruth was initially hidden by Judith Auer’s sister Gabriele. She only learned about her mother’s execution on her 15th birthday, several weeks later. Judith Auer had concealed her conviction from her daughter during their last meeting in prison to protect her. When asked by the Gestapo in an interrogation in 1944 if she felt remorse, Judith Auer replied: “[...] I believed that I had to contribute to the elimination of the current regime in Germany and only feel remorse insofar as I should have given some consideration to

40 Compensation file of Marianne Kürschner, Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 30413 Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Karl-Marx-Stadt, 57196.

41 Claudia von Gélieu, *Barnimstrasse 10: Das Berliner Frauengefängnis 1868-1974* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2014).

42 Ruth Hortzschansky and Günter Hortzschansky, “*Möge alles Schmerzliche nicht umsonst gewesen sein*”: *Von Leben und Tod der Antifaschistin Judith Auer (1905-1944)*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: trafo, 2017), 9.

my daughter.”⁴³ Aenne Saefkow, her friend and comrade, later wrote in her memoirs that Judith Auer died with a photo of her daughter in her hand.⁴⁴ While the space here does not allow for a closer examination of the reception history of women in the resistance, it can be posited that the social role of mothers in particular is often emphasised as is shown, for example, by an article about Judith Auer published in 1947 in the GDR daily newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. It is titled: “Always let yourself be guided by love. A mother’s letter before her execution.”⁴⁵

However, such a focus on the topic of motherhood carries the risk of reducing the lives and acts of resistance of women to presumed female-specific areas, with a moralising effect that should not be underestimated. Not all women who resisted were mothers or lived in heterosexual partnerships. And, of course, men were also affected by the loss of their partners and children. At the same time, children and pregnancy were factors that were significantly more relevant for women and could influence their decision to resist to a much greater extent. In this regard, women’s circumstances were markedly different from those of men. It can be assumed that in the 1930s and 1940s, women were still predominantly responsible for caring for and raising their children. They faced the risk that, in case of imprisonment, their children would be placed in foster families or forcibly adopted. Children were also used as a deliberate means to put pressure on women, as in the case of female Jehovah’s Witnesses, who, according to Detlev Garbe, were blackmailed by persecutors with the threatened forcible adoption of their children.⁴⁶

The exhibition

A fundamental research finding from the examination of the sources carried out by our project team for more than four years is that the resistance

43 Quote from the interrogation of Judith Auer by the Gestapo on 22 July 1944, 10, BArch R 3018-1558 T.1.

44 Memories of Aenne Saefkow about Judith Auer, undated, BArch (VVN estate), DY 55.

45 Cf. *Neues Deutschland*, 12 September 1947, “Lass dich stets von der Liebe leiten”. Brief einer Mutter vor ihrer Hinrichtung, BArch, (VVN-Nachlass), DY 55.

46 Detlev Garbe, “Kompromißlose Bekennerinnen. Selbstbehauptung und Verweigerung von Bibelforscherinnen”, in *Frauen gegen die Diktatur – Widerstand und Verfolgung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. Christl Wickert (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1995), 52-73, here 58-59.

of women is not limited to a specific political ideology, a specific role, or individual actions. Women were present in almost all groups and areas in which men also resisted, albeit to a greater or lesser extent. Examples can be found even in militant and armed resistance, which has long been attributed solely to men. For instance, women such as Erika von Tresckow⁴⁷ participated in the coup attempt of 20 July 1944, or supported the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, as did Irma Götze.⁴⁸ They engaged in rebuilding illegal political structures, as did Judith Auer, resisted the regime for religious reasons, and assisted Jewish and other persecuted individuals. The goal of the exhibition is accordingly to depict a broad range of acts of resistance and ideological orientations.

At the same time, the exhibition does not claim to be representative. This would be beyond the scope of the project. Although we had more than enough women we could have shown, we had to reduce our sample. The current plan is to show 32 women with their short biographies and acts of resistance. Such an exhibition should be easy to understand and accessible, too much information would be a barrier for some visitors. Our team focuses on women who acted in Germany, including some who went into exile in 1933. Showing the resistance of women in annexed or occupied territories would also be very interesting, but was not possible in the time and space we had available.

The women whose biographies and actions are included in the exhibition provide a good insight into the diversity of personal backgrounds, life situations, and political orientations of women who resisted. The exhibition thus follows the premise of not making statements about "the women" in the resistance; instead, the focus is on individuals and their specific circumstances.

Visitors to the exhibition will probably first notice the large portraits of individual women, each of which is vertically mounted on a table and accompanied by a brief biography. On the side of the table, a vertical caption aims to arouse curiosity. On the surface of the table, a horizontal introductory text describes the particular act of resistance. Beside it, a maximum of two images illustrate the resistance of the woman who is featured.

47 Cf. "Den Umsturz planen", Was konnten sie tun?, <https://www.was-konnten-sie-tun.de/themen/th/den-umsturz-planen/>.

48 Cf. "Irma Götze", Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, https://www.gdw-berlin.de/vertiefung/biografien/personenverzeichnis/biografie/view-bio/irma-goetze/?no_cache=1.

Some of the gender-specific aspects mentioned above are also taken into account here. In this manner, the exhibition avoids attributing specific areas to women based on their gender. Instead, the focus is on the individual circumstances, risks, and dilemmas in each biography. After all, as Gisela Bock aptly put it, women do not share the same history solely because of their gender: among women “in National Socialism, the differences were as extreme as those between life and death”.⁴⁹ Additional texts in the exhibition, which are not explicitly assigned to individual women, explain the broader framework conditions. These include, for example, the National Socialist view of women, the roles designated for women, as well as individual risks and consequences of resistance, to make visitors aware of the historical context in which the featured women acted.

49 Bock, “Ganz normale Frauen”, 245.

Narrating the Glorious Resistance: The Permanent Exhibition of the Museum of the Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Nedim Pustahija

Germany's capitulation in May 1945 marked the end of World War II in Europe. With it began the gruelling task of rebuilding war-torn countries, Yugoslavia among them. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ) arose from the war as the dominant power in the country, both politically and militarily. Apart from the obvious task of rebuilding the country, the KPJ also aimed to pursue its goal of creating a new socialist society founded upon the principles of “brotherhood and unity” between Yugoslavia's different nations. The achievements and legacy of the People's Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* – NOB), fought between 1941 and 1945, were fundamental to achieving that goal. On that account, the newly formed Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia dedicated much of its attention to creating institutional and organisational mediums to convey and promote the values and the legacy of the NOB. One of them were newly created museums, envisioned to narrate and celebrate the antifascist resistance and revolution led during the war. These were established in each of the republics of the new Yugoslavia.¹

As a direct result of this state policy, on 28 November 1945, the Museum of People's Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established in Sarajevo, the capital of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The legal act defined the primary task of the museum as follows: “to collect, preserve, and present all the items and documents about the NOB and its legacy; to collect, research, and publish all materials referring to the history of the

1 On the importance of remembering the joint antifascist resistance on all levels of the new state and of the NOB as a foundational myth of Yugoslavia, see: Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums – Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia* (Cham: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1-2.

NOB; to nourish and protect the memory of national heroes and victims of fascism, of heroism, and of the sacrifice of our people during the NOB.”²

After its creation in 1945, the museum used the premises of other institutions across Sarajevo such as the National Museum (1945-1950) and the City Hall building (1950-1963). In 1967, it was renamed the Museum of the Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina indicating that its thematic approach had broadened beyond just World War II. However, the latter continued to be a centrepiece of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its revolutionary journey through the centuries. The first work on a new building began in 1957, when Moni Finci was appointed as the director.³ Work was completed in 1963, and three years later, on 25 November 1966, the Museum of the Revolution presented its permanent exhibition to the public.⁴ The exhibition was divided into four main “sectors,” as the museum documentation refers to it, representing different periods in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s history.⁵ To create the exhibition, the Museum used around 1.500 different artefacts, such as three dimensional objects, photos, documents, leaflets, and specially commissioned artwork by the most famous artists in the country, among them Vojo Dimitrijević and Ismet Mujezinović. The exhibition started with a summary of the history before 1878, and the first sector covered the Austro-Hungarian occupation period

2 Dušan Otašević and Dušan Kojović, *Muzeji novije istorije* (Sarajevo: Muzej Revolucije BiH, 1987), 153.

3 Salomon Moni Finci was the director of the Museum of the Revolution from 1957 until 1972. He had been part of the Partisan movement from 1941 to the end of the war. “Biography”, *Moni Finci – Remembrance & Legacy*, <https://monifinci.com/biografija/>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed 15 October 2023. On the construction of the new building, see Boro Pištalo, “Trideset godina Muzeja Revolucije Bosne i Hercegovine”, in *Zbornik radova – Proceedings 1*, ed. Tonči Grbelja (Sarajevo: Muzej Revolucije BiH, 1975), 237-238.

4 25 November was chosen because on that day in 1943, the first session of the State Anti-fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine – ZAVNOBiH*) took place. ZAVNOBiH laid the foundations of the future Republic of BiH within socialist Yugoslavia. This was celebrated as Republic Day. In the opening speech, Moni Finci stated: “Today, on 25 November 1966, as part of the celebration of the jubilee 25th anniversary of the uprising and revolution and in honour of the Republic Day, the collective of the Museum of Revolution hands over to the public, our socialist community, present and future generations, and especially the youth, this Museum as a new institution.” History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina/*Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine* (HMBiH) – Documentation Center, *Speech of Moni Finci during the opening ceremony*, 1966.

5 Dušan Kojović, who was part of the museum’s staff from 1958 to 1987, stated that the Museum of the Revolution should create exhibitions so that the revolution would be more emphasised and presented in conjunction with social and historical processes leading up to it. Otašević and Kojović, *Muzeji*, 211-212.

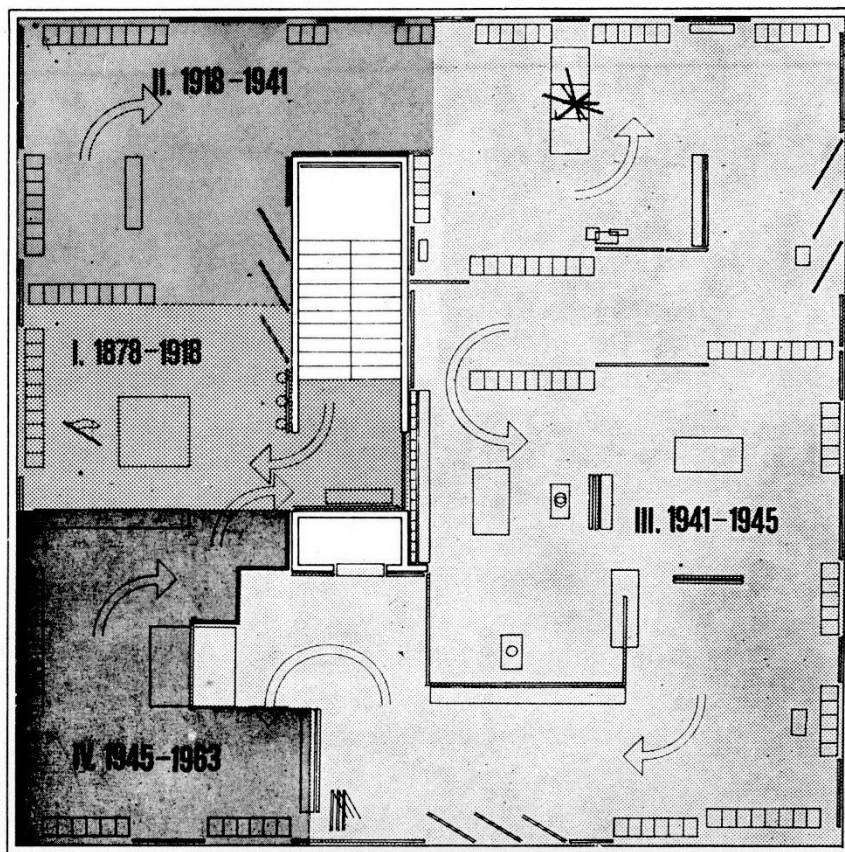


Fig. 1: The layout of the “Cube” by sectors.
 (Source: *The Museum of the Revolution – A Guidebook*, 3-4).

from 1878 to 1918. The next sector exhibited the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941). The largest and most elaborate sector covered the timeframe from 1941 to 1945, displaying the events of World War II and the NOB in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the exhibition guidebook, almost 900 items were used in the third sector alone. The exhibition’s final section showed the period from 1945 until 1963, displaying the rebuilding of the country after the war.⁶

The exhibition was situated in the so-called “Cube”, which was the museum’s largest exhibition space and centrepiece.⁷ Its opening was a big step

6 Tonči Grbelja, Dušan Kojović and Dušan Otašević, *The Museum of the Revolution – A Guidebook* (Sarajevo: The Museum of the Revolution, 1986), 3-4.

7 *Ibid.*, 3-4.

toward establishing the museum as the central institution for collecting, researching, and presenting heritage of World War II and creating a collective memory and identity. Over almost 30 years, the exhibition welcomed many important guests such as Josip Broz Tito and his wife in 1969, different foreign delegations, ambassadors, and hundreds of school classes from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the changing political landscape and the dissolution of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, including the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the war that followed, the exhibition was taken down in 1992, without ever having been changed since its opening. One year later, the museum changed its name to the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This article will focus on the main part of the permanent exhibition, covering the timeframe of 1941-1945. What was the narrative about World War II and how was it presented in the exhibition? When analysing the narrative, I will mainly deal with three aspects: the representation of the Ustasha, the Chetniks and the Communist Party/Partisans. What was emphasised, and what was not? And for which reasons? I proceed in this way because, by analysing and questioning the warring parties mentioned above, there is room for cross-sectional analysis and comparison. This not only leads to identifying the pillars on which the exhibition and its narrative created a clear separation between fascist and anti-fascist forces, but also whether there was a distinction between fascist forces themselves within the exhibition. The museum was one of the mediums for promoting the NOB's legacy, and when analysing its exhibition narrative, it is important to point out that the historiography in the 1950s was heavily influenced by the ruling KPJ's views on the topic of World War II and the NOB. Throughout Yugoslavia, works of KPJ officials and Tito were the primary benchmarks for shaping the image of said events.⁸

Key sources of information for conducting the research presented in this article were the documents "Thematic plan of the main exhibition", dated from 1964, and "Legends and texts – final redaction", dated from 1965-1966, which come from the museum's archives. Because their origins are two years apart, the two documents offered an insight into the exhibition's structure but also offered a chance to cross-examine the two. Through

8 Snježana Koren, "Drugi svjetski rat u člancima i govorima Josipa Broza Tita (1940.-1948.)", in *Intelektualci i rat – 1939.-1947.*, eds. Drago Roksanđić and Ivana Cvijović Javorina (Zagreb: Plejada, 2012), 197-198.

that comparison, I could conclude that the plan from 1964 was indeed the one upon which the exhibition was built. On the other hand, both documents proved challenging to work with since the authors are not known by name and the reasons behind certain choices and changes are not explicitly mentioned in them.⁹ It is also important to point out that due to not having all the documents about the exhibition and its creation available, the answers to the question why certain strategies were employed by the exhibition team will mostly be my interpretations and opinions.

The Ustasha: “A tool” in the hands of the fascists

The first topic in the exhibition was named “The Occupation” and was divided into three subtopics: “Bosnia and Herzegovina under German-Italian Occupation”, “Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the Independent State of Croatia”, and “Surrender of the Economy to the Occupiers – The Robbery of Natural Resources”.¹⁰ The introductory text for the topic stated: “The quisling Independent State of Croatia, with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of it, represented the German-Italian occupation zone.” Elaborating further on the creation of such a state, it was emphasised that the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) gathered support from “conservative catholic clergy”, the former leading figures of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka* – HSS), and Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (*Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija* – JMO).¹¹ Besides them, much support came from “the most backward parts of the Muslim and Croatian population”. This description sent a strong message on the nature of such a state, merely by listing the people who supported it.

After presenting some general information about the NDH, the exhibition shifted its focus to the establishment of the NDH through a combination of three-dimensional objects, photographs and archive material.

9 HMBiH – Documentation Center, Thematic plan of the main exhibition – second part (*Tematsko-ekspozicioni plan glavne izložbe – Dio drugi*), 1964; HMBiH – Documentation Center, Exhibition texts – Final Redaction (*Legende i tekstovi – Definitivna redakcija*), 1965-66. I discovered some changes and alterations occurring from 1964 to 1966 by comparing both documents. I will present these in the following parts of the article.

10 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 15. The numbering of the topics in the thematic plan for the section 1941-1945 begins with 15; topics 1 to 14 refer to the two previous sections about 1878-1918 and 1918-1941.

11 *Ibid.*

Newspaper articles, legal acts about the NDH's internal organisation, Ustaša emblems, military equipment and official currency were used to depict that process and adherently the incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the new state. It also presented the legal acts and legislation of the new authorities against the Jewish and Serb populations. This served as an introductory part for the next topic, which dealt with the consequences of said processes.

The following topic, "The Terror of the Occupation and the Ustasha", emphasised the core processes leading to the exclusion and extermination of all those who seemingly threatened the Ustaša society. The introductory text stated: "The crime of genocide as well as the methods of racial and national discrimination, which were in practice by Nazi Germany already, were implemented by the Germans and the Italians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a somewhat different shape, using the Ustaša primarily as a tool for their policy of 'divide and conquer'."¹² Another text highlighted the tragedy that "befell our people bringing them national slavery, hunger, and havoc", before explicitly explaining that: "Axis occupying authorities rage in their wild and predatory pursuit of the people of Yugoslavia [...] people are being killed wherever you go."¹³

These exhibition texts specifically emphasised the severity of the ongoing events and processes following the capitulation and the establishment of "occupying authorities". This aligns with the general idea of what these texts had to achieve. Indeed, a document labelled "The List of Examined and Cross-checked Exhibition Texts", concerning the topic of concentration camps and the persecution of Jews, Serbs and Roma population, had a footnote pointing out that "this topic needs to be more emphasised so that the visitors could 'get a feel' and 'experience' it, especially the younger generations".¹⁴

When depicting the Ustaša regime's crimes and its persecution of Jews, Serbs and the Roma population, the victims were sometimes given national or religious affiliations and sometimes not. Even though some texts in this

12 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 16.

13 Ibid.

14 HMBiH – Documentation Center, *The list of examined and double-checked exhibition texts*, no author, no date, Topic 16. This document proved important for my research because it offered the possibility of comparing it with the document mentioned in the introductory part of the article, containing the final version of the exhibition texts. Through that comparison, I could identify some of the changes made to the exhibition, which will be discussed later in the text.

part refer to the Ustasha regime's actions against the "Serb population" and "Jews" on its territory, most of the exhibition texts refer to the victims as "people", "women, children and elderly" or as "camp inmates".¹⁵ However, a couple of exhibition texts mention detained "communists" and the "captured participants of NOB", which is not a national affiliation, but still a clear distinction compared to other victims portrayed in the exhibition.¹⁶ The differences in dealing with national/political affiliations were part of a strategy to strengthen certain narratives, mainly the gravity of the consequences of Ustasha collaboration with the occupation. On one side, national affiliation was not emphasised in trying to achieve social cohesion and put internal national conflicts from wartime aside.¹⁷ On the other side, emphasising the political affiliation of said victims was probably done to portray the KPJ as being always with the people undergoing the same hardships as all others.

Ultimately, the exhibition narrative underlines a couple of core perspectives about the Ustasha and the NDH. First of all, they were "quislings" and "servants of the occupiers". Their role as collaborators was the exhibition's focal point, and the exhibition showcased that through numerous exhibits. This led to the other perspective, which was labelling the Ustasha as "a tool" in the hands of Germans and Italians, who used them to pursue their genocidal policies. Such a perspective was based on a vivid depiction of the crimes they committed throughout the war.

The Chetniks: A stab in the back

Beyond the Germans and the Ustasha, the Chetniks are another warring side to be examined in this chapter, focusing on how the exhibition presented them and their actions during World War II. After Yugoslavia's capitulation and the dissolution of the Yugoslav army, a group of officers and soldiers refused to follow the order to surrender to the Germans. This group, led by Draža Mihajlović, eventually moved to Ravna Gora in Serbia, where more officers and soldiers joined. They organised themselves as a

15 Even when depicting the outline of the persecution of Jews across Europe, it was stated that "The Auschwitz concentration camp was the place where around four million people from all over Europe were killed in the most brutal of ways." – HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 16.

16 Ibid.

17 Cf. Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 3.

resistance movement against the occupation, but eventually started collaborating.¹⁸ Under the official name of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, their role during the war became one of the most contested issues regarding memorialising “difficult heritage” after the war, due to their movement going from resistance movement to collaboration.¹⁹

The standalone portion of the exhibition titled “The Chetnik Betrayal” set the tone for the narrative in which the Chetniks were portrayed. The exhibition’s introductory text stated: “The collaboration between the Chetniks, the occupiers and the Ustasha was made official in the spring of 1942, by a series of treaties for joint fight against the partisans.” Furthermore, “the Chetniks managed to reconstruct the former government institutions in Herzegovina with the help of Italians and in Eastern Bosnia with the help of Germans”. Introducing the topic in this way set a firm narrative focused on the Chetniks’ collaboration and betrayal of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another text underlined this by stating that “when the German fascist occupation, together with the hordes of Pavelić, started an offensive against the liberated territory in eastern Bosnia, all Chetnik ‘leaders’ (*vođe*) and ‘dukes’ (*vojvode*) ran away from the enemy, but not before ordering their units to let the enemy go by without any fighting”.²⁰

As with the Ustasha, after emphasising the Chetniks’ collaboration with the occupiers, the narrative focused on the mass crimes they committed in 1942, which were vividly depicted. Despite that similarity, the presentation of the victims was differentiated by giving them national/religious affiliations, with quotes such as: “A knife that the Chetniks used in committing mass murder against the Muslim population of Foča and Goražde.” The texts specifically mention the “Muslim population”, but constructs like “women, children and elderly” were present as well. Similarly to Ustasha, the persecution and murders of Partisans and their officers were presented as a separate subtopic in the context of Chetnik crimes.

It was a recurring approach to give the victims national, religious or political affiliation only to strengthen the narrative about the Ustasha and Chetniks as collaborators and traitors, as well as the severity of their actions. The portrayal of Partisan commanders killed by the Chetniks provides another

18 For more information, see: Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War*, trans. Aida Vidan (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 215-216.

19 Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 3.

20 HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 23.

example: “Most treacherously and brutally, the Chetniks killed Dr. Mladen Stojanović, the chief of staff for the People’s Liberation Army. The latest traitors of Serb people – the Chetniks, killed Mladen who was among the first to lead the Serb people to fight back when it was faced with the danger of being exterminated by the Ustashes.”²¹ Even though national affiliations were usually not given to the Partisans, this exhibition text did quite the opposite. With the KPJ being portrayed as a force that rallied all the patriotic forces, different nationalities and religions under the idea of “brotherhood and unity”, a Partisan officer was portrayed as leading “Serb people in the face of imminent danger” and finally being heinously killed by the traitors – the Chetniks. In portraying the Chetniks’ crimes, national affiliation, along with numerous artefacts such as weapons, uniforms and emblems,²² was used to strengthen the narrative about the heinous nature of their betrayal and being on the fascist side from the beginning. This corresponds with the presentation of Chetniks in Yugoslavia in general. They were seen by the state solely as “collaborators” which ultimately led to a clear-cut distinction between “the people” and “others”/“them” (traitors/collaborators).²³

The Chetniks being presented in the exhibition for the first time in the context of 1942 and their official collaboration raises questions about their presence and actions in the previous period, in 1941. The exhibition dedicated almost no attention to this, only mentioning Chetniks a couple of times in the context of the attack on the “Republic of Užice”.²⁴ More importantly, KPJ leadership’s several attempts to establish a joint front with the Chetniks were not mentioned at all. Those attempts are a well-established fact in contemporary historiography, and were sometimes mentioned in the literature of the late 1950s and 1960s. A book titled *Overview of the History of the People’s Liberation Struggle*, published in 1963, stated: “It is known that the Communist Party led by comrade Tito undertook all possible actions in an attempt to dissuade Mihajlović from committing treason and prevent fratricidal war.”²⁵

21 Ibid.

22 Those enemy objects were of utmost importance, as they were not just proof of the crimes perpetrated, but also evidence for the narrative about the Chetniks’ treacherous nature. Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 18-19.

23 Ibid., 3.

24 The Republic of Užice (*Užička republika*) was a territory in western Serbia liberated and controlled by the Partisan movement in autumn 1941. It was the first liberated territory in World War II in Europe until it was conquered again by German troops in November 1941.

25 Tomo Čubelić and Milovan Milostić, *Pregled historije NOB* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1963), 82-83.

When considering the narratives about the Ustasha and the Chetniks, one might ask why there was no real differentiation in how these collaborators were presented, given that one of them had a state and that the other acted on behalf of the exiled Yugoslav government. Interestingly, the mere fact that, with the NDH, there was a state and a system that facilitated the persecution of Jews, Serbs and Roma was never emphasised as such. The fact that the NDH's genocidal policies against Serbs were not demanded by Nazi Germany, but rather were initiated and realised by the Ustasha was not mentioned. As they were considered a tool, the Ustasha were denied their own agency. The exhibition narrative was completely based on presenting the one thing that Ustasha and Chetniks had in common: collaboration. Unlike the NDH, whose existence was shown but never emphasised, the question of Chetnik activities and their orientation at the beginning of the uprising was not shown at all. The explanation for this is certainly that the Chetnik activities, in the beginning, could be tied to the KPJ to a certain degree, but the narrative about the KPJ in the exhibition allowed for no such thing, as will be presented in the following parts of the article.

The Communist Party: The red star of resistance

With the presentation of the occupying forces and their collaborators at the beginning, the most important part of the exhibition revolved around the People's Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret* – NOP), led by the KPJ. Out of the 29 topics covering the World War II period, only three were dedicated to presenting forces opposed to the KPJ. The remaining topics focused entirely on the NOP from the beginning of the uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 27 July 1941, led by the KPJ's watchful eye. To analyse them, I have regrouped these topics around three general themes, which can be seen as complementary and as central elements for constructing the underlying narrative: the first is the uprising of 1941, the military operations during the war the second, and the revolutionary process with the political creation of socialist Yugoslavia being the final one.

The opening topic introduces the KPJ and is titled: "The Uprising of the People of Bosnia and Herzegovina." The narrative presented focuses on the party's role as the main, and more importantly, the only driving force behind the July 1941 uprising. This again reflects the general historiography of that



Fig. 2: The building of the Museum of the Revolution. The permanent exhibition was opened in the “Cube” in 1966. (HMBiH, Photo Archive)²⁶

time.²⁷ The KPJ’s role was emphasised in the introductory text: “The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, even though persecuted over the last 20 years, was always on the forefront of fighting for the rights of the oppressed and nationally enslaved... In spite of terror, arrests, and murders, the Party will organise the fight against the occupier and its collaborators even more decisively and persistently.”²⁸ The invasion of the Soviet Union was presented as another motivation for the uprising, although not prominently. It was mentioned within one exhibition text in the following way: “Into battle because the time has come to throw off the occupying fascist yoke! Into battle, because it is our debt to the Soviet people who are fighting for our freedom! Into battle, the last one to destroy the fascist infection!”²⁹

The KPJ’s leading role continued to be emphasised in the following topics, one of which was titled “The Creation of a People’s Government”. It illustrated the process of creating governing bodies, People’s Liberation

26 Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, taken by Džemal Hadžimuratović, were obtained from Esad Hadžihasanović, who has been the museum’s photographer since the 1970s.

27 See, for example: “That historical task could have been achieved by the working class and its political organisation – KPJ” because it was the only one that had the trust of the people. Konstantin Bastaić et al., *Narodi Jugoslavije u borbi za slobodu* (Zagreb: Znanje, 1959), 323; Čubelić and Milošević, *Pregled historije NOB*, 61.

28 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 17.

29 HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 17.

Councils (*Narodnooslobodilački odbori* – NOO), which were tasked with organising and facilitating the new political system on territory liberated by the Partisans. Those governing bodies were portrayed as mediums through which the people were able to demonstrate their political will. Following the same matrix as in the previous topic, it was pointed out that those governing bodies were ultimately led and controlled by the KPJ, which was not only leading the uprising but also creating the foundation of the new people's political system and state.³⁰ Another example of this narrative appears in the topic “The Military Units of the People's Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” where one text stated: “That's why the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to mobilise the people into battle against the occupiers and domestic traitors, had to constantly and unwaveringly promote and emphasise the idea of brotherhood and unity.”³¹

Portraying the KPJ as the only organisation capable of mobilising the people to resist begs the question of whether there was any other body capable of organising the resistance. The exhibition offers two interesting examples regarding that. Before the July 1941 uprising in the topic “Terror of the Occupiers and Ustasha”, there was a subtopic titled “Resistance of the People of Eastern Herzegovina Against Ustasha Crimes”, in which the events of June 1941 were mentioned several times. One such event was an attack on an Ustasha patrol near Nevesinje conducted by “the people of eastern Herzegovina”. This subtopic's title is one of the rare places where the term “resistance” (*otpor*) was used, while the dominant terms in the exhibition text were “uprising” (*ustanak*) or “struggle” (*borba*), raising question of why those actions were not also labelled as such. The argument could be that the KPJ was the one that started the uprising, while the events mentioned in this subtopic were much more spontaneous and, more importantly, not led by the KPJ. The narrative saw only the KPJ as capable of an organised and massive uprising with clear political goals, in contrast to unorganised “resistance”, which was more seen as a reactive rather than proactive response. Related to organised resistance, it was also important to ignore the Chetniks and their initial stance in the first period of the war.

Interestingly, there was also a proposal to present the Chetniks as part of the uprising as well. The proposed exhibition text stated: “In order to

30 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 18.

31 *Ibid.*, Topic 19.

preserve the unity of insurgent ranks (*ustaničkih redova*) and to mobilise all patriotic forces (*patriotske snage*) in a fight against the occupiers, at the initiative of chief headquarters of NOP units of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a treaty of cooperation was signed on 1 October 1941, in Drinjača with the Chetnik high command for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Chetniks violated the agreement very soon.”³² This text was ultimately not chosen. We can assume that this happened for two reasons. First, the Chetniks were categorised here as part of the “patriotic forces” willing to fight against the occupation, which was a contradiction to the narrative of Chetniks being collaborators from the beginning.³³ Second, this exhibition text presented the meetings between KPJ leadership and the Chetnik high command to form some sort of cooperation against the occupiers. This would have bridged the gap in the uprising from 1941 until 1942, in terms of explaining the positions of the Partisans and KPJ on one side and the Chetniks on the other. Consequently, this exhibition text proposal was discarded, as noted in the document “Final redaction”.³⁴

Through the woods and hills

The uprising was the first important theme in the exhibition narrative about the KPJ and the Partisans. The second was military operations, or so-called “offensives”,³⁵ undertaken by the Germans and their collaborators against the NOP. Since the first offensive against the “Republic of Užice” in 1941 occurred outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the exhibition text about the offensives started with the second offensive, better known as the “Igman March” (also the title of the topic). The Igman March was a daring undertaking by the Partisans in January of 1942 in which they managed to escape encirclement over Igman mountain near Sarajevo. The introductory text stated: “To end the uprising and to protect their military and economic

32 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 19.

33 See also Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 19. Jagdhuhn writes more generally about Yugoslavia: “Any proof of resistance on the part of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland in the early years of the war was not placed on the priority list for historical documentation.”

34 Underneath the mentioned exhibition text is a handwritten note reading “To be discarded” (*Otpada*) – HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 19.

35 “The seven offensives” is a term in Yugoslav historiography, referring to the seven military operations that the Germans undertook to destroy the NOP between 1941 and 1944. Most of them took place on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

interests, the Germans, with the help of Italians and the Ustasha, undertook an offensive against the Partisans in eastern Bosnia in January 1942. Strong enemy forces, thanks to the betrayal of Chetnik forces, managed to break through into the Partisan-controlled territory. The Partisans were forced to retreat and head towards Foča, performing one of the most glorious marches, known as the Igman March.”³⁶

After the Igman March, the exhibition underlined the significance of the time that the KPJ and the Partisans spent in the town of Foča in eastern Bosnia in 1942. This period became known as the “Foča period”. This topic centred on the KPJ’s efforts to mobilise and establish new brigades, particularly in furthering the development of the “people’s government”. The third offensive against the Partisans in eastern Bosnia in spring 1942 was presented as a direct consequence of the successes achieved by the KPJ and the NOB during their time in Foča. Partisans undertook another march from eastern Bosnia to northwestern parts of Bosnia. Along the way, “Partisans destroyed numerous enemy units and managed to create a newly liberated territory in Bosnian Krajina.”³⁷

This newly liberated territory with a Partisan state was presented as a crucial step in the efforts made both on the battlefield and in establishing a new political system facilitating the NOP’s growth. Within this territory and theme, special attention was given to the events in the mountainous area of Kozara. These were presented as a standalone topic entitled “Kozara”: “The successes of the partisan units and versatile work of the party organisations and governing bodies made Kozara into a real partisan fortress – the forge of brotherhood and unity.” Once more, their successes forced the Germans to react, only this time, their aim was not only to end the uprising but to also “punish the people of Kozara for its unwavering support and participation in the NOB”. The consequences of the attack for the civilian population were summarised as follows: “Only 15-20 thousand people managed to break through the encirclement on Kozara, while around 60 thousand people were taken into numerous concentration camps.”³⁸

The presentation of the following two “enemy offensives” put them in clear continuity with the previous ones, showing them to be a direct consequence of the NOP’s successes in 1942. The topic titled “From River Una

36 HMBiH, *Thematic Plan*, Topic 22.

37 *Ibid.*, Topic 25.

38 HMBiH, *Thematic Plan*, Topic 27.



Fig. 3: A segment of the NOB section within the permanent exhibition.
(HMBiH, Photo Archive)

to River Drina”, which showcased the fourth offensive, pointed out that the People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia “threatened the existence” of the Ustasha regime.³⁹ The offensive was presented as an important victory for the Partisans in that they managed to save the wounded, destroy the majority of the Chetnik forces, who “never managed to recover”, and go to Herzegovina.⁴⁰ Throughout the topic, a huge emphasis was put on presenting the severity of the situation for the Partisan hospital and the wounded, following the narrative of the Yugoslav historiography about the “Battle at the Neretva River” or “The Battle for the Wounded”.⁴¹

39 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 31.

40 Ibid.

41 See, for example: Ljubo Mihić, *Bitka za ranjenike na Neretvi* (Jablanica: Skupština opštine Prozor i Skupština opštine Jablanica, 1978), 7.

“After a short break, which was much needed for the enemy to regroup their forces, the Germans continued to pursue their intentions of destroying the People’s Liberation Army and the KPJ.” This sentence introduced the topic “Battle of Sutjeska”, which took place in 1943. It focused on depicting the disparity in numbers and the severity of the battle: “During this offensive, the main partisan force lost more than 8.000 fighters.” To put even more emphasis on the brutality of the battle, there was a dedicated subtopic titled “Mass Heroism During the Most Difficult Times”.⁴² It had a graphic presentation of the geography of the terrain on which the battle happened, the life conditions of the fighters and the wounded, and a photo of wounded Tito on Sutjeska.

The exhibition’s narrative about these two offensives centred on presenting their importance for the NOB and the future of Yugoslavia. Both were portrayed as make-or-break events for the Partisan movement, with them either erupting into an unprecedented force of resistance or ending up destroyed by the Germans. With victories achieved in both of the offensives (in the sense that the Germans did not achieve their goal), the Partisans grew to an unprecedented strength, as presented in the topic “The Flaring up of People’s Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The Partisans’ successes and its consequences were presented in the following way: “In the second half of 1943, the People’s Liberation Movement grew into the leading military and political power in the country. The idea of brotherhood and unity was manifested on a large scale.”⁴³

After the glorious victories at the Neretva River and on Sutjeska, the final two offensives against the NOP in 1944 were portrayed as a last-ditch German effort to quell the uprising.⁴⁴ The introductory text for the topic “Airborne Assault on Drvar” showcased this: “On Tito’s birthday, the first airborne assault against the Partisans was undertaken. Around 800 fascist criminals were supposed to be rehabilitated by assassinating Marshall Tito. The assault failed and remained only as an act of desperation.” The crimes perpetrated against the civilian population during those offensives were particularly emphasised; the Germans were said to have “executed every living person they managed to capture including women, children, and war prisoners.”⁴⁵

42 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 32.

43 Ibid.

44 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 36 – 37.

45 Ibid.

After the “enemy offensives”, the crescendo of the military operations was the liberation of the country. These were represented in a standalone topic titled “Liberation of Capital Cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The liberation of Mostar was mentioned in this topic (“after four years of heroic fighting, the people of Mostar welcomed the day of freedom on 14 February 1945”⁴⁶), as was the liberation of Sarajevo on 6 April 1945. It was only in the example of Sarajevo that the resistance activities in occupied cities were mentioned and presented to a certain degree. Interestingly, the 1964 plan of the exhibition barely mentioned the resistance in occupied cities. However, the number of exhibits eventually increased. In the 1964 plan, only two photos and a schematic display of KPJ activities in Sarajevo were used for the resistance movement in Sarajevo. However, based on exhibition texts from 1965, a lot more space was allocated to it with the addition of items belonging to Vladimir “Valter” Perić.⁴⁷

Forging of the New Yugoslavia

The exhibition’s dominant theme was the NOB’s military aspect, shown through standalone topics related to the offensives. The third important general theme within the exhibition narrative about the KPJ and the Partisans was the process of creating the foundations of future Yugoslavia. That revolutionary process revolved around creating governing bodies that were primarily in charge of governing the liberated territories and facilitating the NOP’s further growth as well as decisive Partisan meetings for creating the future Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among the latter, the first mentioned event was “The first session of AVNOJ” in Bihać in 1942, focusing on the creation of the Anti-Fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije* – AVNOJ). This newly-formed political body had a set number of tasks revolving around “the political mobilisation of people and governing the work of NOO”.⁴⁸ “The second session of AVNOJ” held in Jajce in 1943 was granted much more space and emphasis, given

46 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 41.

47 Vladimir “Valter” Perić came to Sarajevo in 1943 with the task of rebuilding the underground KPJ and its resistance activities in the city. He was killed on the day Sarajevo was liberated, 6 April 1945, and was proclaimed People’s Hero in socialist Yugoslavia in 1953.

48 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 30.

its significance for the NOB. It depicted AVNOJ's evolution into "the supreme legislative and executive governing body". This session marked the beginning of the rebirth of Yugoslavia as a democratic and federative state, with Bosnia and Herzegovina being a part of it as a federal unit. Another key aspect of the narrative was the international dimension of these events and their reception among the Allied powers. That was clearly stated in the introductory text for the second session: "The decisions made during the second session of AVNOJ had a strong echo, both domestically and internationally. They were met with approval and delight among Allied Powers and had resulted in a change of attitude of said powers towards the Yugoslav Government in exile."⁴⁹

Besides the AVNOJ sessions' importance for the entire Yugoslavia, the exhibition emphasised the Partisan movement's importance for Bosnia and Herzegovina through topics about the creation and evolution of ZAVNOBIH as the "high representative and legislative body" for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the first topic, titled "The first session of ZAVNOBIH", held in Mrkonjić Grad in 1943, one of the texts stated: "The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through their struggle which impressed the whole world, had built their truly democratic government."⁵⁰ Following the second session of AVNOJ's decision, the second ZAVNOBIH session was held in 1944 in Sanski Most. During this session, ZAVNOBIH became the "supreme legislative and representative state governing body" and the NOOs became "the governing bodies" as the top-down instance of ZAVNOBIH.⁵¹ "The third session of ZAVNOBIH" was held in Sarajevo and presented the final stage of the process, which was the creation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's government in 1945. The revolutionary governing bodies' focus shifted from functioning in wartime conditions to preparing for the "rebuilding of the country". Along that process, "the working methods of the Party were to be adjusted to the new context; the leading role of the Party in that process had to be ensured" because that was the guarantee for "not just preserving the heritage of the People's Liberation War, but also for the socialist transformation of Bosnia and Herzegovina."⁵²

49 Ibid. Topic 35.

50 HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 34.

51 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 38.

52 Ibid. Topic 42.

What did others say about the exhibition plans?

As mentioned in the introduction, work on the exhibition started nearly a decade before it was finally presented to the public. An important step in that process was getting external feedback from renowned names in the fields of history, museology and political sciences. In the Documentation Centre of the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, besides the plans and the exhibition texts, there is a folder with reviews and comments about the thematic plan for the permanent exhibition.⁵³ It contains six reviews made by external associates between 1959 and 1964, among them Idriz Čejvan⁵⁴ and Hamdija Čemerlić.⁵⁵ Beyond the two review documents which have the names of Čejvan and Čemerlić, the others only have the handwritten signatures by the authors, which we could not identify at this stage. I will present some important points of these reviews, also addressing the question of to what extent those suggestions have been implemented in the exhibition itself, which can often not be clearly determined.

From Čemerlić's viewpoint in 1964, the way the exhibition team dealt with the task's complexity, making such an elaborate plan without leaving out some important moment or event, should receive "every praise". He pointed out that the exhibition needed even more emphasis on the terror of the Ustasha and the persecution of Jews, Serbs and the Roma population so that "the visitors and especially younger generations" understood the gravity of such events. Furthermore, Čemerlić put a lot of emphasis on different ways of resistance in 1941, suggesting that "The Muslim Resolutions"⁵⁶ should find their place in the exhibition. He stated that they showcased the Muslim population's opposition or resistance against the terror

53 HMBiH – Documentation Center, *Reviews and comments about the thematic plan for the permanent exhibition, 1959 – 1964*.

54 Idriz Čejvan, a Partisan and political commissar during the war, was a ranking general in the Yugoslav People's Army and the head of the Yugoslav People's Army Military Museum.

55 The academician Hamdija Čemerlić (1905-1990) was a law professor, and rector of the University of Sarajevo and had been a participant of ZAVNOBiH and AVNOJ.

56 The Muslim Resolutions refer to a series of declarations by Bosnian Muslim elites in Sarajevo and other towns, addressed to Ustasha authorities, condemning the violence of the Ustasha and aiming to provide legal protection for all citizens of NDH. The first declaration was issued by El-Hidaje, an association of ulama from Bosnia and Herzegovina on 14 August 1941, followed by several more resolutions, most notably the Resolution of Sarajevo in October 1941. For more information see Hikmet Karčić, Ferid Dautović and Ermin Sinanović eds., *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo: Center for Islam in the Contemporary World, 2021).

and persecution done by the Ustasha, playing a big role in guiding those who were unaware of what was going on among the Muslim population. Regarding that, he also suggested that the exhibition should portray different political parties that were among the ruling ones before the war and “how they did nothing when the fateful moment came”.⁵⁷ The final version of the exhibition showed that Čemerlić’s suggestions were not accepted or incorporated into the exhibition since neither “The Muslim Resolutions” nor the political parties were mentioned in it.

One common critique among the reviews was that the exhibition plan focused too much on military aspects and, as a consequence, did not adequately represent the revolution’s social and political aspects. The process of establishing life after the liberation of a certain territory did not receive proper space in the exhibition. In other words, by strictly following the chronology of the events, certain processes were presented with big gaps in between rather than having one dedicated topic for them. Moreover, some of the reviews stated that the current representation did not portray the revolution as a “comprehensive process”.⁵⁸ One example of that could be the process of creating a people’s government. This process started with the topic “The Creation of a People’s Government”, but due to the chronology of events, the NOOs popped up again only after five other topics. The final version of the exhibition, based on my analysis, did not incorporate these suggestions.

One of the suggestions that seems to have been accepted was emphasising the KPJ’s “leading role”, although this was probably the exhibition designers’ intention from the beginning. This suggestion was part of one of the reviews that has only a handwritten signature and where it was not possible to identify the author: “It is a historical fact that the KPJ organised the uprising against the occupiers in our country. Considering that the literature has already established the leading role of the Party as the main organiser and the leader of the uprising, it needs to be emphasised even more.” This review is dated 1959, so the author referenced some other version of the plan (which we could not find in the archives of the Museum) because the plan from 1964 greatly emphasised the KPJ’s role and was one of the main keynotes in the exhibition narrative.

57 HMBiH – Documentation Center, *Reviews and comments*, Hamdija Čemerlić.

58 HMBiH, *Reviews and comments*, 1959; 1964.

Conclusion

The permanent exhibition of the Museum of the Revolution provided its visitors with a broad overview of the NOB in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though the museum aimed to portray the revolution in conjunction with social and historical processes, its heavy focus on the military aspect underlined the party-centric view of World War II and the revolution in general. Taking into consideration the museum's role and aim of being a medium for promoting the values and legacy of the NOB, the exhibition embodied official KPJ views about the NOB and warring sides and participated in its articulation and dissemination. The example of the Museum of the Revolution and its permanent exhibition can be perceived in the context of the efforts made by the state to legitimise its right to be at the helm of the new Yugoslavia after the war, as well as in their efforts to create collective memory and identity.

Presenting a clear division between “the people” and “them” – in this case, the people led by the KPJ on the one side and the Germans and their collaborators on the other – and the KPJ's untouchable role in mobilising the uprising are clear examples of that.⁵⁹ The KPJ's role and contribution were mentioned in every exhibition topic, strengthening the narrative about the KPJ being the only force fighting against the occupation. Importantly, the exhibition never really focused on distinguishing between the collaborating sides, most notably the Ustasha and the Chetniks, even though some examples presented in the article and the historiography of the time noted those differences. Anything that could have blurred that division was ultimately discarded by the exhibition team. One of the reasons for this may lie in the state's postwar efforts to establish and affirm Yugoslav identity, whose people would be tied not just by the same blood but also through “spilt” blood.⁶⁰ The last exhibition topic, titled “The Contribution of People of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, is a good example of that, stating: “The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were among the first to join the fight against fascism, not to desperately defend their bare lives, but to persistently and wholeheartedly fight against the occupation for a better and brighter future.”⁶¹

59 This reflects the general presentation of World War II in socialist Yugoslavia, which focused on the clear-cut division between those who “resisted” and those who “collaborated”. Gordana Đerić, “Označeno i neoznačeno u narativima društvenog pamćenja: jugoslovenski slučaji”, in *The Culture of Memory: 1945*, eds. Sulejman Bosto and Tihomir Cipek (Zagreb: Disput, 2009), 87.

60 Đerić, “Označeno i neoznačeno”, 88; Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 2.

61 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 44.

Dealing with Yugoslav Resistance During World War II, Then and Now: The Case of the Museum of Yugoslavia

Veselinka Kastratović Ristić and Ana Panić

The Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade is the result of the merger of two previous institutions: The Memorial Centre “Josip Broz Tito” and the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities (*Muzej revolucije naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije* – MRNNJ). The merger occurred in 1996, and the new institution was then called the Museum of Yugoslav History (*Muzej istorije Jugoslavije* – MIJ), until it was renamed as the Museum of Yugoslavia (*Muzej Jugoslavije*) in 2016. The merger and name change in the 1990s resulted from the sociopolitical changes that occurred with the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia officially became an object of history when the MIJ was founded, pushing the Yugoslav experience into the past without the possibility of embedding it in the policies of the future and the process of reshaping post-Yugoslav societies. “Yugoslavia” persisted until 2003 as the official name of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia composed only of Serbia and Montenegro, in an attempt at continuity with the previous state of Yugoslavia. Placing an existing state’s name into a museum (not explicitly specified, but obviously referring to socialist Yugoslavia) was an act of open abandonment of the Yugoslav idea itself, which was deemed to now belong in a museum. In the words of museum curator Momo Cvijović, when the federal government created the new institution, “it seemed that the bosses at that point had in mind a showdown with the past, rather than great expectations for the future [...] One of the stories goes that the formation of the MIJ was only a mask, and that the real intention was to preserve the funds of the two abolished museums, whose names, at the time, were undesirable and irritated most of the public.”¹

1 Momo Cvijović, “DicothoMY(H)”, in *MUSEUM of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia, 2016), 48.

The new Museum of Yugoslav History was established on the site of the abolished Memorial Centre “Josip Broz Tito”, with some solutions that were, let us say, paradoxical and untenable. The old museum’s entire art and cultural-historic contents were ceded to the new institution. All the collections of the also-closed MRNNJ were thrown in, while at the same time, the new institution was stripped of over two-thirds of the surrounding parklands and four of the most important museum buildings: Tito’s Residence, the Commemorative Collection in the Oval Building, the Hunting Lodge and the Pool House. In an even more absurd move, the federal government handed over the requisitioned real estate and all its contents to the newly-elected president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević, who, in 1997, moved with his family into Tito’s residence. At the time, it was physically separated from the area under the control of the Museum of Yugoslav History with a wall more than two metres tall. From the former Memorial Centre, three buildings constitute today’s Museum of Yugoslavia: The 25 May Museum (opened on 25 May 1962 for Tito’s 70th birthday), the Old Museum, and The House of Flowers, which is the resting place of Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980), and his wife, Jovanka Broz (1924-2013).

In order to understand the importance of dealing with resistance during World War II and its presentation in the Museum of Yugoslavia in the last decades, it is necessary to consider how the sociopolitical context has drastically changed since the time of socialist Yugoslavia. Socialist Yugoslavia was based on the myth of Partisan struggle, resistance and antifascism; World War II was considered constitutive for the creation of a new state and a new society. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, there has been a revision of history: Two resistance movements have been introduced into the public discourse – Partisan and Chetnik – and the socialist period has been labelled as “totalitarian”. This formal legitimacy was given in 1996 by the Council of Europe Resolution 1096, which covered measures to dismantle the legacy of former communist totalitarian systems. Therefore, in the first part of the text, we will examine the Museum of the Revolution’s practices, and then observe the changes that have occurred in the way of displaying and interpreting the same items in the newly founded institution – the Museum of (History of) Yugoslavia. We will also consider the struggle of curators seeking objective presentation of facts regardless of political context and demands, lack of interest from the founders and the absence of state and social consensus. Given that this text’s authors, as curators of the

museum, have themselves participated in the processes they write about, and at the same time have been involved in the exhibition practices mentioned in the text, they have frequently been in a position to critically analyse all the mentioned periods and methodologies. Written from that ambivalent position, the paper is the result of practical experience and efforts at introspection, description and analyses of the problems encountered, as well as analyses of results of evaluation processes conducted during, and immediately after, the completion of the projects. The paper intends to open questions about the critical museum,² organisational structure and the institution's openness and functioning.

Museum of the Revolution as a promoter of antifascist values

From the end of World War II to the mid-1960s, there was a pronounced tendency in Yugoslavia to establish museums of the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* – NOB), memorial museums and museums of the revolution. In the first decade after the war, all republics' got a museum of the revolution. In Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia, within the Military Museum there was a segment dealing with the NOB, but there was no museum that dealt with the development of the workers' movement, i.e. the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which was the initiator of the antifascist movement.

Several discussions took place prior to the establishment of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations (*Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije* – MRNJ) with the aim of determining whether such a museum was needed at all, whether there was public interest in it, and whether the available material was sufficient to show “the life of the broadest toiling masses and their movement towards progress”.³ Discussions about the museum began in late 1955, and three years later, the procedure for its establishment was initiated.⁴ On 19 April 1959, the Central Committee of the League of

2 Pjotr Pjetrovski, *Kritički muzej* (Beograd: Evropa Nostra Srbija and Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, 2013)

3 Milorad Panić-Surep, “Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije”, *Bilten Muzeja revolucije naroda Jugoslavije*, no. 1, (Beograd: Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije, 1963), 10.

4 Archives of Yugoslavia/*Arhiv Jugoslavije* – SR AJ, fond 297, Savez udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata – savezni odbor, fascikla 304, Sekcija bivših ratnih zarobljenika, Pripreme za izložbu. (8-8-4-2; 25.II 1956).

Communists of Yugoslavia (*Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Jugoslavije* – CK SKJ) decided to establish the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations in Belgrade as the only federal museum in socialist Yugoslavia for promoting antifascist values and the revolutionary legacy of the Yugoslav peoples. A committee composed of representatives of political bodies, museum professionals and historians worked on the concept of the museum, formed commissions in the republics that would work on the history of the workers' movement of individual regions and made a plan for the development of the museum as an institution. According to Slavko Šakota, a historian and museum adviser of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations:

The central Museum of the Revolution, from its very beginning, has been assigned the role of creating an integral picture of the historical events on the Yugoslav soil of the last eighty years, dealing primarily with the key moments that are important for the whole... The museum will also represent the revolutionary struggle of ethnic minorities as well as the participation of neighbouring nations in the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. Two essential moments will be clearly outlined in the museum exhibition – the contribution of the Yugoslav Revolution to the international fight against fascism and the Yugoslav contribution to the world development of socialist theory and practice.⁵

On the basis of this project, on 9 December 1960, the President of the Republic, Josip Broz Tito, passed the Decree on the establishment of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations, and Milorad Panić Surep was appointed as the museum's director. According to the chronological division of future exposition and research, four museological departments were formed, within which the third department researched World War II in the territory of Yugoslavia. In anticipation of adequate accommodation and a new museum building, continuous work was done until 1969 to prepare the future permanent exhibition and thematic exhibitions. The Program Tasks of the MRNJ show that the curators of the third department

5 Slavko Šakota, "Priprema se Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije", *Muzeji, časopis za muzeološka pitanja*, no. 13 (Beograd: Savez muzejskih društava Srbije, 1960).

planned research in related museums throughout Yugoslavia, but also in the archives of the GDR and the Imperial War Museum in London.⁶

In 1963, it was planned to research the complete holdings of photographs of the *Borba* newspaper and, if necessary, copy over 2.000 photographs. It was also planned to collect and research materials for a future exhibition under the working titles of “Messages from the Executed” (*Poruke streljanih*) or “Messages from the Execution Sites” (*Poruke sa stratišta*). This exhibition was planned but not realised in 1966.⁷ In that period and the following years, the museum’s holdings were enriched with dozens of items related to mass executions and suffering in the concentration camps. The collected, researched and processed material was displayed at the exhibition titled “Testimonies” (*Svedočanstva*), which opened on 13 December 1973 in the foyer of the Contemporary Theatre (today the Belgrade Drama Theatre) as a side program to the play “Day 13” by director and screenwriter Živorad Mihajlović.

In 1968, the museum council proposed that an exhibition be built in the building on Marx and Engels Square (Nikola Pašić Square) as part of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia’s 50th anniversary celebration. Bearing in mind that work on the MRNJ building had not progressed at the expected pace, this was a temporary solution that would enable the museum building to be constructed in stages in line with the financial inflow. A long-term exhibition titled “Half a Century of Revolutionary Struggle of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia” (*Pola veka revolucionarne borbe Saveza komunista Jugoslavije*) was opened in 1970. Events were presented chronologically and divided into four historical periods: 1871-1918; 1918-1941; 1941-1945 and 1945-1969, with 26 thematic units. The units dealt with events marking the development of the workers’ movement and Marxist thought, the political life of the newly-created state of Yugoslavia in the interwar period⁸ with an emphasis on the Communist Party of Yugoslavia’s establishment and illegal activities, the occupation and antifascist struggle during World War II, the formation of socialist Yugoslavia and the period of one-party political life. The two central individuals in the exhibition were King Aleksandar Karađorđević and Josip Broz Tito, the president of socialist Yugoslavia.

6 SR AJ, fond 477, MRNNJ, fascikla 11, Programski zadaci MRNJ.

7 SR AJ, fond 477, MRNNJ, fascikla 12, Izveštaj o radu MRNNJ za 1966.

8 Yugoslavia was formed on 1 December 1918, as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. From 3 October 1929, it was called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.



Fig. 1: Long-term exhibition titled “Half a Century of Revolutionary Struggle of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia”. (Photo: Museum of Yugoslavia)

The antifascist struggle and the national liberation movement in Yugoslavia were covered chronologically from the occupation in April 1941 to the last days of May 1945, when the battles for the liberation of the country were fought. War operations, the formation of concentration camps, life under occupation and life in Partisan units were displayed. The events marking World War II on the territory of Yugoslavia covered only one-fifth of the space. In the 1990s, this conception of the exhibition was criticised by factions in society that wanted to recast and revitalise the Serb nationalist Chetnik movement as antifascist. Among the critics, the loudest were those who had never even seen the MRNNJ exhibition, but persistently claimed that the museum was a place of communist propaganda and Partisan movement.

This exhibition eventually became a permanent exhibition in the museum, which in 1974 was renamed the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities in accordance with the new constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For the next two decades, the museum’s curators followed the adopted concept, supplemented and expanded the exhibition in segments. The research was carried out in the archives and museums in all the republics, and the collection of items

continued by purchase and acquisition from numerous institutions or private collections from all over Yugoslavia. The war years were represented by uniforms, weapons, Partisan newspapers, section maps, photographs and personal items.⁹ A special thematic unit covered civilians' suffering. Personal documents of those executed at Kragujevac and Kraljevo¹⁰ in Serbia were displayed, along with messages and objects left behind by executed inmates of concentration camps in Germany, Banjica in Belgrade, Jasenovac in Croatia and Niš in Serbia. Photographs depicting scenes of violence and disturbing scenes of the victims were rarely used for these segments of the exhibition. Such photographs were exhibited only when the goal was highlighting resistance, or the courage or defiance of individuals as models and motivation for new generations. The most famous photos that were exhibited captured the hanging of Lepa Radić and the execution of Ljuba Čupić.¹¹ In the exhibition notes, the curators often showed the extent of the war with numbers: the number of Partisan units relative to the occupying forces, the number of victims and the number of people who were executed, the number of people who were taken to the concentration camps and more. In addition to the documentary and archival materials, the exhibition included a large number of works of art, paintings and sculptures by renowned Yugoslav artists, while drawings and graphics were implemented on panels as artistic additions to photographs and documents. The museum also prepared thematic exhibitions dedicated to women's participation in the National Liberation Struggle.

The sociologist Todor Kuljić writes that: "In the Communist culture of remembering fascism, the war period between 1941 and 1945 was skilfully summarised in the narrative of seven offensives".¹² In the MRNNJ, in addition to significant battles on the Yugoslav battlefield, the following

9 Thematic segments were: the April war and the 1941 uprising, the formation of Partisan units in the republics, battles of Neretva and Sutjeska, the Supreme Headquarters, the AVNOJ sessions, liberation, and the international recognition of Yugoslavia.

10 In October 1941, the German army killed more than 4.000 civilians in the cities of Kraljevo and Kragujevac.

11 Lepa Radić was a fighter in the Krajina Partisan detachment starting in 1941. She was 17 years old when she was executed on 11 February 1943, in Bosanska Krupa, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Čedomir Ljuba Čupić was the commissar of the Nikšić Partisan detachment; he was shot on 9 May 1942, in Nikšić, Montenegro.

12 Todor Kuljić, "Anti-antifašizam", *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, year 12, no. 1-3, (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet – Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2005), 173. (Cyrillic) "The seven enemy offensives" was a term used in Yugoslav historiography for military operations of the Axis Powers against the Partisans between 1941 and 1944.

segments could also be seen: “Culture and Education in the NOB” (*Kultura i prosveta u NOB-u*),¹³ “Organization and Development of the People’s Government 1941-1943” (*Organizacija i razvitak narodne vlasti 1941-1943*),¹⁴ “Medical Corps in the NOB 1941-1945” (*Sanitet u NOB-u 1941-1945*),¹⁵ and “The Tragic Results of the War and the Post-War Trials of ‘occupying forces members and their helpers’” (*Tragični bilans rata i posleratna suđenja ‘okupatorima i njihovim saradnicima’*).¹⁶

Working on the future permanent exhibition, the museum adviser, Slavko Šakota, who was an éminence grise of the museum with his professionalism, followed modern achievements in the field of museological presentation of recent history with the aim of implementing it in the exhibition with the help of architects and designers.¹⁷ Thus, the exhibition contained the most modern technological devices of the time, such as built-in automatic carousel projections with about 80 slides for those who wanted to learn more about the topic. The maps of Yugoslavia were graphically stylized, depicting the occupation zones and the beginning of the uprising in 1941. A diorama of bombed Belgrade was made during the reconstruction of the thematic block “The Tragic Balance of the War” (*Tragični bilans rata*).

The restrictive number of events that found a place in the exhibition indicated a positivist approach to history with the aim of not disturbing the fragile national relations in a multinational state. The balanced representation of the history of all the Yugoslav nations, as well as the emphasis on the joint antifascist struggle and post-war reconstruction, should present brotherhood and unity as a natural continuation of the common desires of all nations, not just a politically placed supranational idea. Cultivating selective memory was an ideological tool and support for sociopolitical changes that occurred after 1945, as noted by Todor Kuljić:

13 This section exhibited photos of the Partisan theatre created in 1942, photos of artists and writers participating in the NOB, school supplies for children’s literacy classes in the liberated territory, the children’s magazine *Pionir*, Milan Stanković’s violin, etc.

14 National Liberation Committees hand stamps, photos, documents, bonds, etc. were exhibited.

15 Photographs of Partisan hospitals, evacuation and accommodation of the wounded, medical instruments, *Medical Gazette* and *Medical Corps Gazette* brochures and a painting *Transfer of the Wounded* by Ismet Mujezinović were on display.

16 In addition to the German officers, the Chetniks, the Ustashas, the Croatian Home Guard members, the Serbian State Guard members (*Nedićevci*) and other collaborators were tried.

17 SR AJ, fond 477, MRNNJ, fascikla 13, Izveštaj o radu MRNNJ za 1978.



Fig. 2: Long-term exhibition titled “Half a Century of Revolutionary Struggle of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia”. (Photo: Museum of Yugoslavia)

In socialist historiography, textbooks and memorial culture, antifascism and Partisan resistance have long been the central content of memory. The culture of memory was liberating, and antifascism was the crown of all liberation wars. The popularisation of the Partisan war was not only in the service of stipulated memory, but antifascism was also a mediator of other desirable non-ideological values (heroism, resistance, sacrifice). The central framework of historical memory was the NOB, and antifascism, with clearly separated positive heroes and negative villains, set the tone for the desired identity. The class polarisation of the war led to its ethnic neutralisation. The structure of the civil war was understood in a supranational sense: the occupying forces, the Quislings, the bourgeoisie and the monarchy on the one hand and the antifascist front headed by the KPJ on the other.¹⁸

18 Todor Kuljić, *Prevladavanje prošlosti, uzroci i pravci promene slike istorije krajem XX veka* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2002), 475-476.

In addition to the main activities, research and presentation, the museum organised events, lectures, literary evenings, recitals, film screenings, student quiz competitions and meetings with veterans. In 1972, these activities gave birth to the Red Theatre (*Crveni teatar*), which, in cooperation with the Association of Dramatic Artists of Serbia, dramatised revolutionary poetry, veterans' stories, and stage collages. Curator Dušica Mikičić stated that: "The main goal was to revive the exposition of the museum, the possibility of a different way of presenting the material and bringing it closer to the visitor, creating new experiences and representations by changing the relationship between media and content, transforming static two-dimensional exhibits on the move, playing audiovisual performances."¹⁹ The dramatisation of the messages of communists sentenced to death in 12 European countries, titled "Defend Love" (*Branite ljubav*), was performed by the theatres in several towns in Serbia, Macedonia and Croatia. The MRN-NJ announced a public competition for authentic stories of veterans that had not been published before, for which a dramatisation was made under the title "I Will Never Forget" (*Nikada neću zaboravit*).²⁰

New museum – new challenges: What to do with Yugoslavia and World War II?

It may sound like a paradox, but by following the linear narrative of the Museum of Yugoslav History, a superposition becomes apparent in the historiographic narrative of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. A museum's history is always the history of worldviews and of control and power. Negative interpretations of socialist ideology, of Yugoslavness and of brotherhood and unity surfaced at the beginning of the 1980s. New nationalist symbols started taking over Serbian public space in order to perfidiously create the foundations of war in ex-Yugoslavia.²¹

In 1992, Dobrica Ćosić, as the first president of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, raised the issue of the purpose and use of the buildings that belonged to the Memorial Centre "Josip Broz Tito" and the MRN-NJ.

19 Dušica Mikičić, "Reč kao muzeološki izraz u istorijskim muzejima" (Habil. diss., National Museum, Belgrade, 1974), 27.

20 SR AJ fund 477, MRNJ, folder 13, Report on the Work of the MRNJ for 1981.

21 Dubravka Stojanović, "U ogledalu Drugih", in *Novosti iz prošlosti*, ed. Vojin Dimitrijević (Beograd: Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, 2010), 13-31.

The idea of founding the Museum of Yugoslav History was also mentioned that year for the first time. In 1996, it was formed by governmental decree. The founding of a museum dedicated to a non-existent country – only five years after its breakup during the bloodiest war in Europe in the second half of the 20th century – was a purely political act:

Due to the sociohistorical circumstances that resulted in violent breakup and war between the nations that once formed Yugoslavia during the 1990s, these museums became a burden as witnesses of the unwanted past, traces of which were thoroughly erased from the present. It was a political decision that placed the collections of the two institutions under the same roof. Even though this musealization of Yugoslavia was supposed to “put it on the shelf” in accordance with the understanding of a museum as a storage place for “old and unnecessary things”, it turned out that the collections, histories, documentation and employees of these two institutions became the basis of a twenty years long search for ways of acknowledging Yugoslavia as a heritage.²²

By no means was it the result of a thought-out cultural policy, or the desire for musealisation of Yugoslavia and socialist legacy. On the contrary, the legacy needed to be dealt with as something undesirable. Just like the legacy of antifascism and resistance preserved in the MRNNJ, which covered the National Liberation War out of which socialist Yugoslavia was created, evidence of the development of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the workers’ movement was undesirable. The memories had to be erased, eradicated or at least altered with regard to World War II, making room for a revised version of history. Slobodan Milošević’s regime had an ambivalent approach to the historical legacy of Tito’s Yugoslavia, which was described as both the dungeon of the Serbian people and the country in which all Serbs in the region had lived. This ambivalence made the de-Titoisation of Serbia sudden and chaotic. As of the beginning of the 1990s, photographs of Tito in schools were replaced with those of Vuk Karadžić, the Serbian language reformer, Saint Sava, the first Serbian archbishop and Milošević

22 “The Origins: The Background for Understanding the Museum of Yugoslavia”, Museum of Yugoslavia, <https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/predistorija-osnova-za-razumevanje-muzeja-jugoslavije/>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed on 30 January 2024.

– symbols of the specifically Serbian national identity being constructed. Tito's name was removed from the names of cities and towns, and his busts were removed from public spaces. In spite of that, many towns in ex-Yugoslav countries kept the name of Tito for streets and squares, although they often moved it from main streets to the suburbs. There are 12 streets and a square named after Tito in the suburbs of Belgrade. After Milošević's regime was toppled in 2000, the new authorities took things even further, trying to establish themselves as the liberators who cast off communism's shackles and everything the Socialist Party of Serbia had stood for in the 1990s.²³ This was apparent in their legal equation of the Chetnik movement with the Partisans,²⁴ the public affirmation of the Chetnik movement as antifascist in essence and changes of the names of streets, holidays, laws, schoolbooks and monuments. Milošević was presented to the public as the last European communist in order to divert attention from his nationalism. That nationalism did not disappear when Milošević left the political scene, since his national agenda was shared by numerous parties that participated in the new system.²⁵ The Serbian state still promotes a narrative about "national reconciliation" between supporters of the Chetniks and the Partisans, which is most visible at the Victory Day celebrations every 9 May.

The equalisation of the two movements and the depiction of the Chetniks as a resistance force is reflected in the museums in the display of items belonging to Chetniks together with items belonging to Partisans. Maybe the most characteristic example is presenting two warrants side by side: the warrant for "gang leader Draža Mihailović" and the warrant for "Communist leader Tito". Both warrants were made by the same printing company in July 1943, and presenting them like this contributed to the construction of the narrative that the Chetniks were an antifascist movement.²⁶ The Museum of Yugoslavia also has the aforementioned warrants on display,

23 After the opposition had won the local elections, Zoran Đinđić, the first democratically elected mayor of Belgrade, personally took down the five-pointed star from the City Hall dome on 21 February 1997 and took it to the Museum of Yugoslav History. It was replaced with the two-headed eagle, the traditional heraldic symbol of Serbia.

24 "Izmene Zakona o pravima boraca, vojnih invalida i članova njihovih porodica kojima se pripadnici Ravnogorskog pokreta u pravima izjednačavaju sa partizanima", *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije*, no. 137/04 (2004).

25 Dubravka Stojanović, "U ogledalu 'drugih'" in *Novosti iz prošlosti*, ed. Vojin Dimitrijević (Beograd: Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, 2010), 17.

26 For more about the historical revisionism in museums in Serbia, see: *Politički ekstremizmi u muzejima Srbije*, ed. Nebojša Milikić, Vahida Ramujkić, Dragomir Olujić Oluja (Beograd: Rex, 2018).



Fig. 3: Warrants for “gang leader Draža Mihailović” and “Communist leader Tito”, 1943. (Photo: Gavrilko Masniković, Museum of Yugoslavia, 2020)

but seeks to problematise them and open a dialogue about the narrative of “two antifascist movements”. Interestingly, the warrant for “Communist leader Tito” was acquired in 1961 by the curators of Museum of Revolution of Yugoslav Nations, which handled it within the main collection. In 1974, the warrant for “gang leader Draža Mihailović” was acquired from the Institute of Military History, finding its museological place in the auxiliary collection of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations. Back when the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations was established, there was no dilemma regarding the roles of either Josip Broz Tito, or Draža Mihailović during World War II.

Societies undergoing transition look for new identities by revising previous ones. The confusion in Serbian society was mirrored by the confusion in which the museum operated, within the federal framework, but outside the competences of the Ministry of Culture or any other ministry. It was an independent federal organisation until April 2003, when the Serbian parliament accepted a provision determining that the MIJ would become an organisation of the Serbian state within the competences of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government. In November 2007, the Serbian government decided to re-found the MIJ as an institution devoted to culture. Along with this, the museum worked on developing

a future permanent exhibition on Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1991, initiated by the new museum management under the project title “New Old Museum” (*Novi Stari Muzej*). The idea was not to show a timeline of crucial events, but to cover some important phenomena and features that left their mark on the countries and the societies in the country that was known, for more than 70 years, as Yugoslavia. The conceptual choice to focus on specific phenomena and themes allowed the exhibition team, charged with developing a pilot version of the permanent exhibition, to simply skip or neutralise World War II, treating it as one of discontinuities of Yugoslavia, along with the 1990s. In the first part of the exhibition “Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End” (*Jugoslavija: od početka do kraja*), which was titled “Yugoslavia – ID” and opened in 2012, there was a map of Yugoslavia during World War II that showed and explained all the military formations that fought in Yugoslavia at that time. The only caption concerning World War II was quite general and neutral:

During World War II, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was ripped apart and a number of provisional state structures formed in its occupied territory. The four-year chaos that followed was not only a war against the occupying forces, but it also had the features of a remarkably cruel inter-ethnic and ideological war where everybody fought everybody else and more than a million people perished. The end of World War II brought big changes. In addition to territorial changes, the capitalist social system was replaced by the socialist one, while the monarchy was replaced by a federation consisting of six republics.²⁷

The exhibition elicited different reactions and emotions. Visitors contacted us day in, day out, wishing to tell us their memories and views on the history of Yugoslavia, a country that lived on in them. A good example of that would be the Association for the Truth about National Liberation War and Yugoslavia (*Društvo za istinu o NOB i Jugoslaviji*), which organised a roundtable discussion in May 2012 in honour of the 120th anniversary of Tito’s birth. It was dedicated to criticising the international scientific conference held in May 2010 by the Institute for Recent History of Serbia

²⁷ Ana Panić ed., *Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End* (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslav History, 2013), 7.

(*Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije*), Archives of Yugoslavia (*Arhiv Jugoslavije*) and the Institute for East and Southeast European Research (*Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung*) in Regensburg, Germany, because they disagreed with their historical narrative. Branko Kosić wrote:

The international conference with the motto the time has come to scientifically elucidate Tito's Age, was followed by the opening of the controversial exhibition "Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End" in the May 25 Museum, and the projection of movies *Kino Komunisto*, *Goli Otok* and others, which clearly shows that this was all part of a greater and long-term denunciation of the NOR, socialism, SFRY and Tito, with the support of foreign sponsors and the government.²⁸

Opinions that differ from their own even slightly are discarded and perceived as an attack on Yugoslavia, and themselves as well. They see themselves as Yugoslavia's makers, who know the truth about it the best (as implied by the organisation's name).

We understood that the number of histories of Yugoslavia equaled the number of people who lived in the country, and that the personal memories of these millions of witnesses would and could never be identical, neither to one another, nor to what would be shown in the museum. Whatever is displayed, there will always be something missing, there will be too much of something else, or that which is exhibited will not correspond to someone's personal memories, because history and memories are not synonymous.²⁹

28 Branko Kosić, "O viđenju i tumačenju Tita u Zborniku Instituta za noviju istoriju Srbije", in *Zbornik radova sa Okruglog stola o Josipu Brozu Titu*, ed. Mladenko Colić (Beograd: Društvo za istinu o NOB i Jugoslaviji, 2013), 385-393.

29 For more on the New Old museum project and the exhibition "Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End", see Ana Panić, "Holistički pristup u evaluaciji projekta Novi Stari Muzej ili kako učiti na sopstvenim uspesima i greškama", in *Zbornik radova Historijskog Muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine 12*, eds. Elma Hašimbegović and Elma Hodžić (Sarajevo: Historijski Muzej Bosne i Hercegovine, 2017), 20-45; Tijana Vuković, "Museum of Yugoslavia. New Old Museum: Change of Perspective from Yugonostalgia to Performativity and Popularisation", in *Regaining the Past. Yugoslav Legacy in the Period of Transition*, ed. Tijana Vuković (Warsaw: Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, 2022), 139-179.

New chapter: Approaching Yugoslavia and antifascist resistance through personal perspectives

Changing the name of the museum to Museum of Yugoslavia perhaps paradoxically removed the burden of presenting the whole history of Yugoslavia. Museum management decided to support the initiative of changing the name during the collective work on the strategic project to celebrate a century since the beginning of the southern Slavic peoples' first state: "The initiative to change the name to Museum of Yugoslavia is an effort to redirect the scope of research and musealisation to a range of phenomena that mark Yugoslav heritage and Yugoslav experience, which have, for some time, been recognized in the current museum practice."³⁰

Aware of the fact that memories are subjective and are constructs of the past from the current perspective, our idea was to incorporate memories into the already established historical framework, which is based on relevant scientific research, jointly painting a balanced picture of Yugoslavia. In that way, we relinquish our position of power and share it with other experts, different communities, members of social groups, artists and the audience. By decolonising the museum in this way, we transfer control over its legacy to those who are featured in it and to whom that legacy belongs. The museum has changed its methodology and curators started their research from artefacts as the main resources. As of 2020, we have started using the topics that we periodically introduce as keys to figuring out not only the meaning and significance of certain subjects important for understanding the experience of life in Yugoslavia, but also their relevance in modern times. Each new topic is organised in the form of a route that visitors can take through what we call the "Museum Laboratory" and through which the museum curators create a plurality of voices and narratives.³¹ The work process enables different forms of participation, allowing people to share and use the knowledge that is produced. "The End of World War II" (*Kraj Drugog svetskog rata*) was the first topic chosen, in connection to the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the victory over fascism in World War II. Marked items invite visitors to ponder about this turning point in world and Yugoslav history.

30 "Towards the new conception", in MUSEUM of Yugoslavia (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia, 2016), 52.

31 "Museum Laboratory", Museum of Yugoslavia, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/exhibition/laboratorija-muzeja-jugoslavije>.



Fig. 4: “Museum Laboratory”. (Photo: Relja Ivanić, Museum of Yugoslavia, 2021)

We espoused a personal approach to the topic and each curator was invited to contribute, because we were aware of the difficulty or even impossibility of agreeing on a common approach to World War II.³² When we started talking about the artistic items we considered important to exhibit on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, we immediately had a picture of two sculptures of victory from the “Collection of Gifts to Josip Broz Tito – Fine Arts” in mind. Although they were exhibited at similar events in 2005 and 2015 – exhibitions organised by the museum on the occasions of the 60th and 70th anniversaries of the victory over fascism in World War II, we did not really have much information about them. In the museum documentation, both are listed as works of unknown authors and are exhibited as such. Both were located in Tito’s Belgrade residence, in places that were not particularly prominent: one in the billiard room, the other in the gallery on the first floor.

Looking at these two sculptures next to each other, both made of bronze and placed on pedestals of red marble, we were particularly interested in

32 On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, we asked our collaborators: “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when we talk about the end of the Second World War in Yugoslavia?” and recorded their short statements for YouTube. Muzej Jugoslavije, “#75godinaodkrajara”, Youtube playlist, 18 April 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuJ0Xl-3pON4Q-JoffwD1caCDEWhRhwo9>.



Fig. 5: Left: Unknown author, "Victory", before 1950. Gift from the Party Organization at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to Josip Broz Tito, 24 May 1950. Right: Jozef Kostka, "A Study for the Monument to the Liberators in Bratislava", 1946. Gift from free Bratislava to Josip Broz Tito. (Photos: Museum of Yugoslavia).

something that first caught our eyes. Both sculptures are dominated by a female figure. Namely, they are about accepting and exploiting old norms such as "Liberty Leading the People", which seek to adapt to new narratives. The sculpture, along with featuring seven figures on the pedestal, bears a dedication plaque reading: "To our teacher and dearest friend Tito. Party organisation at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, May 25, 1950", engraved in Cyrillic letters. It also has a signature telling us that it was cast in one of the oldest art foundries in Serbia, the renowned "Plastika", where the most prominent Serbian and Yugoslav sculptors made their works. Although we have not yet been able to find out who the author of this quality sculpture is, we can assume that it is a study for a monument that was not constructed. The female figure, unlike Liberty in the famous painting by Eugene Delacroix, does not communicate with the representatives of the people who she leads to a victorious assault. She does not look back, with the flag raised in front of her; she looks ahead, to the future, and is accompanied by figures of fighters with weapons, workers with hammers, axes and pickaxes, and female peasants with ears of corn. These figures

speak to the inseparability of class struggle and armed resistance to fascism. The sculpture also celebrates the values of gender equality developed in World War II through a female figure with a pencil symbolising women's enlightenment through literacy and adult literacy courses as prerequisites for achieving equality.

The second sculpture is a study, from 1946, of the "Liberty" monument to the Red Army in Bratislava, Slovakia, by the sculptor Jozef Kostka. This sculpture is typical of post-war works influenced by Soviet socialist sculpture, from years when Yugoslavia was ideologically close to the USSR. Examples of these sculptures include Antun Augustinčić's "Monument of Gratitude to the Red Army" near Batina, Croatia, on the Danube, erected in 1947. In the early 1950s, monuments celebrating victory through the symbol of a female figure were still made. One example is the "Liberty" monument on Iriški Venac, the summit of Fruška Gora Mountain, Serbia, the work of renowned sculptor Sreten Stojanović. However, such monuments were soon superseded by monuments to fallen soldiers and innocent victims that arose from the need to preserve the memories of all those killed amid the horrors of war, fighting and suffering, to homogenise the multinational, multiethnic and multireligious Yugoslav population, and to glorify the National Liberation War as an integrative factor that gave legitimacy to the new Yugoslavia.

Today, almost 80 years since the victory over fascism in World War II, and after the experience of the wars of the 1990s, we can only wonder which victory and whose resistance we are celebrating, given the new problems we have in our society: ethnicisation of antifascism and de-ideologisation tactics that focus on national reconciliation as advocated by Serbia's official state politics.³³

Conclusion

Museums preserve memories and with modern interpretations of the past, encourage visitors to actively comprehend the present. They are established in accordance with the current state policies of memory and their goal is

33 For more information on renationalisation and ethnonationalisation of the museums' narratives, see: Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums. Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), especially 147-153.

to create a collective memory. We have shown how the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities was founded with the idea of musealising the ongoing revolution, starting with the working class's struggle before World War I, through the struggle for liberation in World War II, and ending with the post-war reconstruction of the country and economic development, which was accompanied by general modernisation, emancipation and urbanisation. The goal of the MRNNJ's exhibitions was the homogenisation of the population and the development of a sense of community and solidarity despite ideological, national, religious and regional differences. This contrasts with the 1990s, when past events were used as a means of mobilisation for war and as proof that conflicts between nations in this region are eternal, inevitable and necessary.³⁴ Spirals of fear and violence were deliberately set in motion by recalling the massacres and commemorating the victims of World War II, cultivating a climate in which differences in nationality prevail over the closeness of neighbours, old fears and suspicions are awakened, and neighbours turn into criminals.³⁵ Museums of the revolution, which existed throughout Yugoslavia, have been transformed into museums of recent history or absorbed into already existing museums of national history, whereby collections acquired new meanings and items were interpreted anew in accordance with the newly created nation-states' national interests.³⁶

The Museum of Yugoslavia is in a different situation because it holds Yugoslavia itself, a supranational state. This is precisely its uniqueness. It is a unique institution keeping the collections of the two institutions that took on the burden of being witnesses to the unwanted past under the same roof. It is a "one-of-a-kind institution that officially inherits Yugoslav ideas and history, because of which it has both one-of-a-kind potential and a one-of-a-kind burden of responsibility".³⁷ Our vision for the future, and an opportunity for the Museum of Yugoslavia, which inherits an unwanted and dissonant legacy, has been to open the museum's collections dealing with the fight against fascism and share them with artists, scientists, cu-

34 Hrvoje Klasić, *Bijelo na crno. Lekcije iz prošlosti za budućnost* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2019), 79.

35 Ksavije Bugarel, *Bosna. Anatomija rata* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2004), 118-142.

36 For more on (re)musealization of World War II in Yugoslavia's successor states, see Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums*, 175-244.

37 Višnja Kisić, *Governing Heritage Dissonance: Promises and Realities of Selected Cultural Policies* (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2016), 149. For more on musealising Yugoslavia, see: *Ibid.*, 189-237.

rators and various communities who will read and interpret it in different ways. We aim to universalise the Yugoslav experience, which is more relevant than ever in today's world. People oppressed by increasing poverty, crises, and fear of new wars and conflicts need to recall the fight against fascism, examples of resistance, heroism and courage, and be shown historical examples of resistance as motivation for a new form of resistance to the injustices we witness in the world today.

Representing Resistance in Museums: The Case of the Buchenwald Memorial

Maëlle Lepitre

Introduction

The complex history of the Buchenwald Memorial offers an example of the way the museal representation of resistance has been shaped and transformed by the political context since the end of World War II. After 1945, the international resistance organisation in the Buchenwald concentration camp became an important component of East German cultural memory; the German Democratic Republic (GDR) instrumentalised it so it could depict itself as the heir of those it celebrated as anti-fascist fighters. The camp history exhibition (which opened in 1955) became a tool in the political misuse of the past, as was evidenced in its strong emphasis on resistance. Indeed, the Buchenwald Museum (and more generally, the Memorial as a whole) was sharply criticised after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, after which it was redesigned and a new exhibition inaugurated in 1995. By comparing the previous GDR museum with the redesigned one, this article examines the evolution of the representation of resistance in Buchenwald in the political context. Methodologically, the article refers to research that understands exhibitions as narratives, where specific messages are conveyed through the subjects they broach, the objects that are shown and the manner in which documents or artefacts are displayed.¹ An analysis of the museal depiction of resistance in Buchenwald required an examination of the archival material, providing insights into the contents

1 See for instance Ljiljana Radonic and Heidemarie Uhl, "Das zeithistorische Museum und seine theoretische Verortung. Zur Einleitung", in *Das umkämpfte Museum. Zeitgeschichte ausstellen zwischen Dekonstruktion und Sinnstiftung*, eds. Ljiljana Radonic and Heidemarie Uhl (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020), 7–25.

of both exhibitions: the design book (*Gestaltungsbuch*)² for the last GDR exhibition, the concept paper (*Konzeption*),³ the story script (*Drehbuch*)⁴ and the catalogue (*Begleitband*)⁵ for the 1995 exhibition.⁶

Resistance in Buchenwald

Since understanding how resistance was represented in the post-1945 period requires historical knowledge, the first part of the article provides essential background information. The uniqueness of the Buchenwald concentration camp was that the resistance was not just carried out by isolated individuals. It was also collectively organised with a high level of efficacy, within and thanks to a system of self-administration,⁷ in which the SS entrusted some inmates – called prisoner functionaries (*Funktionshäftlinge*) or kapos – with minor responsibilities in overseeing the camp's daily running. For instance, kapos were charged with supervising the work commandos and the block elders were charged with serving food or enforcing SS order in the barracks.⁸ The prisoner functionaries, 20 percent of all inmates, were a minority granted certain privileges by the SS (including more food or exemption from hard labour).⁹ Access to such privileges, which were usually enjoyed by non-Jewish, German-speaking inmates and which allowed for a better chance of survival, caused tension among prisoner

2 Buchenwald Archive/*Archiv Buchenwald, Gestaltungsbuch Museum des antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfes Buchenwald*, Teil 1-4, 1983, (hereafter cited as *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 1, Teil 2, Teil 3 and Teil 4).

3 Harry Stein, *Das Konzentrationslager Buchenwald. Eine Geschichte des Verbrechens. Konzeption für ein historisches Museum zur Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald* (Weimar-Buchenwald: 1994) (hereafter cited as Stein, *Konzeption*).

4 Buchenwald Archive, *Drehbuch*, 1994/1995, (hereafter cited as *Drehbuch*).

5 Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, ed., *Konzentrationslager Buchenwald 1937-1945. Begleitband zur ständigen historischen Ausstellung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1999), (hereafter cited as *Begleitband*).

6 The 1995 exhibition was replaced by a new one in the 2010s. I will return to the latter in the conclusion.

7 Even if there were attempts to create international resistance movements in other camps, they were not as effective and well-structured as at Buchenwald. The one in Sachsenhausen, for instance, was discovered and dismantled by the SS in 1944. See Philipp Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin und Eigenwilligkeit. Das Internationale Komitee Buchenwald-Dora und Kommandos* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), 51.

8 Michael Löffelsender, *Das KZ Buchenwald 1937 bis 1945* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2020), 63.

9 Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin und Eigenwilligkeit*, 31–32.

groups. This was notably the case of the so-called professional criminals and political prisoners, who fought against each other for years to obtain leading positions within the system. This conflict ended in 1942/43 after political inmates, especially the German communists, managed to assume the most significant functions in the main camp.¹⁰

The privileges given to the prisoner functionaries gave them greater agency and this offered the possibility of resistance. The German communists, who began forming a committee in 1938/39, used the opportunity to establish contact with political inmates from other countries, leading to the foundation of an international camp committee in the summer of 1943. By the end of the war, German, Belgian, Austrian, Yugoslav, Soviet, French, Czech, Italian, Dutch and Polish resistance fighters had joined the network, although their exact numbers cannot be reconstructed due to a lack of sources. It is known, however, that the aims of this committee were to promote international solidarity and continue the fight against Nazism within the camp.¹¹

A first example of international solidarity took the form of efforts to rescue the youngest prisoners, who, because they were not as strong as adults and could not therefore work as hard, had a smaller chance of survival. The German communists and the international committee created two special blocks (block 8 in 1943 and block 66 in 1945) with SS authorisation. These blocks provided some of the children and teenagers with spaces where they were, as far as possible, spared from violence and hard labour. As a result, 907 young people were saved.¹² Further actions of solidarity were carried out under the auspices of the labour administration, the political inmates from which had to take care of transports to Buchenwald's sub-camps or other camps (under the orders of the SS). While they could not change the number of fellow prisoners who were placed on the list, they could influence its composition. Following discussions held within the resistance organisation, the political inmates from the labour administration put certain groups of inmates on the list (such as the so-called professional criminals) or, conversely, spare certain groups or individuals from the transports

10 Ibid., 34.

11 Ibid., 51.

12 See the catalogue of an exhibition designed by the Buchenwald Memorial: Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, ed., *Buchenwald-Kinder. Eine Hörinstallation an drei Orten. Eine Ausstellung der Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald und Mittelbau-Dora. 11. April 2010* (Weimar-Buchenwald, 2010).

(such as the cadres of the resistance organisation).¹³ In some cases, inmates belonging to the labour administration subsequently deleted the names of certain people and replaced them with other prisoners. The most famous example of this practice, controversially known as victim swapping today, was the September 1944 rescue of the three-year-old Polish-Jewish child Stefan Jerzy Zweig; Stefan's name was replaced with that of a young Sinti boy named Willy Blum on an Auschwitz transport list.¹⁴ Another strategy was termed name swapping: Since the inmates were reduced to numbers upon their arrival in the camp, the resistance fighters from the labour administration were able to exchange the numbers of some of those who died in the infirmary with the numbers of prisoners who were particularly under threat (e.g. inmates who were at risk of being murdered by the SS). Name swapping saved, amongst others, the lives of three British secret service agents who were to be executed in Buchenwald in 1944.¹⁵

As has been pointed out, continuing the struggle against Nazism was the second aim of the resistance. To achieve this goal, an international military organisation consisting of eleven national groups was founded in 1943. After the bombing of the Gustloff factories (where the prisoners had to produce weapons) by Allied aircraft on 24 August 1944, resistance fighters were able to smuggle several dozen rifles into the camp.¹⁶ As the US forces drew closer to Buchenwald in April 1945 and as the danger of a general evacuation or liquidation grew, the Soviet members of the international committee called for an armed uprising before the main camp was dissolved. The other resistance fighters rejected this strategy to prevent a bloodbath; they decided to slow down the evacuation process as much as possible and to send an SOS message to the Allies through secretly constructed radios.¹⁷ On 11 April, after the SS had fled, the military organisation used the smuggled rifles to take possession of the camp's main gate and search for SS men hiding in the forest – thus taking part in the liberation of the camp which was achieved by the arrival of the US troops in the afternoon.¹⁸

13 Sonia Combe, *Une vie contre une autre. Échange de victime et modalités de survie dans le camp de Buchenwald* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 49–64.

14 See the first chapter of Bill Niven's book on the so-called Buchenwald child: Bill Niven, *The Buchenwald Child. Truth, Fiction and Propaganda* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 10–47.

15 Löffelsender, *Das KZ Buchenwald*, 96–97.

16 *Ibid.*, 96.

17 *Ibid.*, 111.

18 *Ibid.*, 115.

This brief account sheds light on the ambiguities of inmates' attitudes within the camp system, accurately described by Primo Levi as the "grey zone".¹⁹ The members of the resistance network, who represented a minority within the camp's society, were not able to help everyone. In a world determined by SS rule, they had to make the difficult decision of who to try to save. Moreover, the (communist) prisoner functionaries were forced to carry out the orders of the SS to keep their positions. They therefore ran the risk of becoming – in the eyes of most of the inmates – Nazi collaborators.

Before 1989: Over-emphasis on collective resistance

Resistance gradually became the core of the state-controlled East German public memory of Nazism after 1945. The focus on so-called anti-fascism²⁰ enabled GDR politicians to justify the existence of a socialist German state during the Cold War, portraying the GDR as the "good" Germany that had broken away from Nazi ideology. Buchenwald played a prominent role in the process, given its history. It was not just the existence of the international committee but also the fact that Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – KPD) during the Weimar Republic, was murdered there in August 1944 and the survivors under the communists' leadership swore an oath to fight for "the eradication of Nazism at its root" on 19 April 1945.²¹ In 1958, it became a so-called national site of admonition and remembrance (*Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte*). Through the promulgation of a memorial statute in 1961, it was officially assigned the task of representing the history of European resistance to Nazism.²² The major tools employed to fulfil this

19 On the topic of "grey zones", see also part 3 of the present publication.

20 Although this article focuses on its instrumentalisation, anti-fascism in the GDR was much more complex than a political misuse of the past, as it had a personal dimension for at least a part of the East German population, who knew, through family or friends, communist resistance fighters. See Hasko Zimmer, *Der Buchenwald-Konflikt. Zum Streit um Geschichte und Erinnerung im Kontext der deutschen Vereinigung* (Münster: Agenda, 1999), 47–49.

21 The text of the oath can be found on the website of the Buchenwald Memorial: "Der Schwur von Buchenwald"; Buchenwald Memorial, accessed 23 October 2023, <https://www.buchenwald.de/geschichte/themen/dossiers/schwur-von-buchenwald>.

22 See Zimmer, *Der Buchenwald-Konflikt*, 76–77; Neumann-Thein, *Parteidisziplin und Eigenwilligkeit*, 66–174; Volkhard Knigge, "Buchenwald", in *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge. KZ-Relikte und KZ-Denk-mäler 1945-1995*, ed. Detlef Hoffmann (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998), 92–173.

function were the three versions of the camp museum: the first one from 1955 onwards in the prisoner's kitchen; the second one from 1964 onwards in the disinfection building; and the last one from 1985 onwards in the storage depot. Since it is beyond the scope of this article to compare the three GDR exhibitions (as Richard Korinth has done in his master's thesis),²³ it will suffice to say that they reflected the evolution of the political situation in the GDR. In particular, they reflected the conflicts for the control of the party: between the communists who had fled to Moscow between 1933 and 1945 and those who had stayed in Germany and were imprisoned in concentration camps. Given that Walter Ulbricht, the leading figure of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED)²⁴ between 1950 and 1971 fled to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the first exhibition highlighted the efforts undertaken by Ulbricht and other communists in exile to continue the fight against Nazism. Therefore, this exhibition offered very little information on the history of the resistance in Buchenwald. Following former political prisoners' protests – that the museum should deal with the history of the camp – the East German Ministry of Culture agreed to redesign the exhibition so that it gave greater attention to the organisation of the resistance. After Erich Honecker (who had first-hand experience of the Nazi repressive system) came to power in 1971, Ulbricht's name disappeared from the museum and the history of the Buchenwald communist resistance fighters was allocated a larger space within the exhibition.²⁵

According to its curators, the 1985 *Museum des antifaschistischen Widerstandskampfes*²⁶ had three principal goals. Besides presenting German imperialism as the cause of the war and depicting the GDR as the heir of the resistance, the exhibition aimed to show “how the anti-fascist resistance fight was carried on most consistently by the communists, also in Buchenwald, as a unified fight against fascism and war and, under the leadership of the illegal international camp committee organised by them, reached

23 See Richard Korinth, “Die Dauerausstellungen der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald zwischen 1955 und 1985. Eine Ausstellungsanalyse sozialistischer Narrativ-Konstruktionen” (master's thesis, University of Jena, 2016).

24 The ruling party of the GDR, literally translated as Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

25 The last GDR exhibition was also the product of the professionalisation of the memorial: the historical department, from its creation in the 1970s onwards, researched the history of the camp and revealed new information on various matters (such as the fate of the children deported to Buchenwald or the sub-camp system) that had been included in the 1985 exhibition. See Korinth, “Die Dauerausstellungen”, 67–73.

26 In English: “Museum of Anti-fascist Resistance Struggle”.

its climax in the armed uprising on April 11, 1945, in the self-liberation from the SS".²⁷ To convey such an anti-fascist narrative, thereby reducing the resistance struggle to the collective action of communist inmates, the museum was divided into nine chapters in a space of approximately 1.500 square metres. After an introduction that dealt with the Nazis' rise to power and the establishment of the camp system, chapters two to six dealt with Buchenwald's history, offering a description of the internment conditions and resistance; chapters seven to nine were dedicated to the post-war period. Each part was designed to highlight the ongoing (and positive) role of the communists: first, in their capacity as the first fighters against the Nazi dictatorship in the 1930s, then as leaders of the collective resistance in the camps and finally (post-1945) as active supporters of the GDR.²⁸ Consequently, the ambiguous aspects of collective resistance were set aside, as can be seen in the way the self-administration system and the communists' first resistance efforts were depicted in section 3.2 ("Die Herausbildung des illegalen Parteiaktivs 1938/39").²⁹ After a brief presentation of the most important functions within the system and the conflict between the so-called political inmates and professional criminals, the testimony of Herbert Weidlich was highlighted. According to Weidlich, it was possible, when the most important prisoner functionaries were communists, "to improve in many aspects the inmates' working and living conditions".³⁰ The visitors were then able to read an extract from the post-war indictment against Ilse Koch, the wife of the first Buchenwald SS commandant: "It was difficult and dangerous to be a camp elder. The commandant's staff wanted to have as camp elder a man who was as compliant as possible with their plans to use him, if needed, against his own comrades."³¹ The curators, therefore, circumvented the topic of the prisoner functionaries' morally ambiguous position by emphasising the risks run by the resistance fighters and suggesting that the communists tried to hijack the self-administration system, which was initially designed by the SS to create inequalities amongst the inmates.

27 On this quote and the two other goals of the museum, see Buchenwald Archives/*Archiv Buchenwald, Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 1.

28 Ibid.

29 In English: "The constitution of the illegal party group 1938/39".

30 Buchenwald Archives, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 2.

31 Ibid. It should be noted that, as with all the other documents exhibited in the 1985 museum, neither the date nor the author of this quote was indicated.

To support the idea that the political inmates who obtained positions within the self-administration system used them to help fellow prisoners, several examples of the solidarity shown by (German) communists towards the most vulnerable detainees' groups (the Jews, the Soviet prisoners of war, so-called "gypsies" and the younger inmates) were depicted.³² Since the assistance provided to these groups is beyond the scope of this article, I refer to the two sections dedicated to the children (section 5.10, "Kinder und Jugendliche im KZ Buchenwald" and section 5.11, "Der Kampf der Antifaschisten um die Rettung des Lebens der jüngsten Häftlinge").³³ The first section described the fate of minors. Using lists from 1944, which revealed the high mortality rates amongst them and a mountain of shoes that belonged to children who were deported to Auschwitz and killed there, the exhibition made the visitors aware that underage inmates were especially defenceless.³⁴ The second section began with the following text on the actions of the international committee:

The resistance organisation uses its legal possibilities (camp functions) and its illegal apparatus to save children and teenagers from extermination transports. It facilitates their living conditions and organises lessons, even at the risk of their lives. This deeply humanistic action is based on a great respect for life, special care for the weak, and concern for the future. It succeeded in keeping 904 children from eight countries alive until the self-liberation of the camp. Amongst them is the four-year-old Polish Jewish boy Stefan Jerzy Zweig, the model for the child character in Bruno Apitz's novel *Naked Among Wolves*.³⁵

32 These examples were presented in the following sections: 2.4 on "Solidarität und Widerstand im Lager vor Ausbruch des Krieges 1938/39" ("Solidarity and resistance in the camp before the outbreak of the war 1938/1939"); 4.6 on "Der Widerstandskampf nach dem Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941/45" ("The resistance fight after the invasion of the Soviet Union 1941/45"); 5.11 on "Der Kampf der Antifaschisten um die Rettung des Lebens der jüngsten Häftlinge" ("The fight of the anti-fascists for the youngest inmates' lives"); 5.12 on "Zigeuner in Buchenwald" ("Gypsies in Buchenwald"). See Buchenwald Archives, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 2 and Teil 3.

33 In English: "Children and teenagers in Buchenwald concentration camp" and "The fight of the anti-fascists for the youngest inmates' lives".

34 See Buchenwald Archives, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 3.

35 Ibid. The novel, which was published in the GDR in 1958, told the story of a young child deported to Buchenwald who was saved by the resistance there. The book became a bestseller and was translated into multiple languages. See Susanne Hantke, *Schreiben und Tilgen. Bruno Apitz und die Entstehung des Buchenwald-Romans "Nackt unter Wölfen"* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018).

The visitors were shown the names of the (communist) resistance fighters responsible for the two barracks that were created for the youngest inmates; a list from the end of January 1945 of children who entered block 8; a portrait of Stefan Jerzy Zweig; and photographs of children in the liberated camp.³⁶ These documents did not give any detailed information on how the resistance fighters were able to save the children. Rather, they chiefly served to illustrate the fact that some underage inmates survived. This was especially striking in the case of Stefan Jerzy Zweig's story: though it could have been a great opportunity to deal with the grey zone of collective resistance by discussing the preparation of transports, no details were offered about the exact circumstances of his rescue. It may therefore be concluded that the museum, through very vague and general descriptions of the resistance, tried to overcome its ambiguities.

A further feature of the museum was that given the great emphasis on the role of communist resistance fighters, the non-communist opponents of Nazism were rarely mentioned. What was more, when they were mentioned, it was through the testimonies of left-wing political inmates. This was particularly the case in section 2.4, "Solidarität und Widerstand im Lager vor Ausbruch des Krieges 1938/39",³⁷ which told the story of Paul Schneider, a pastor who was deported to Buchenwald. Because Schneider refused to perform the Nazi greeting on the occasion of Hitler's fiftieth birthday, he was sent to the camp prison, whence he shouted messages of encouragement to his fellow prisoners. Schneider was murdered in July 1939. Following a short biography indicating that the pastor was a Christian and was murdered by the SS, the testimony of Hasso Grabner, a communist resistance fighter, followed: "I often talked with Walter Stöcker about Pastor Schneider and remember quite well the words of warm-hearted appreciation that he, the communist Reichstag deputy, found for the Christian martyr."³⁸ The curators had decided that, rather than providing concrete details about Schneider's actions, they would offer insights into the way prominent communists viewed the so-called preacher of Buchenwald. The preponderance of communist resistance fighters' perspectives meant that some important facts were undermined or ignored, as a closer look at the

36 See Buchenwald Archives, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 3.

37 For an English translation, see footnote 32 above.

38 Buchenwald Archives, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 2. Walter Stöcker, who led the KPD parliamentary group in the Reichstag from 1924 to 1929, was imprisoned in various concentration camps from 1933. From 1937 on he was in Buchenwald, where he died of typhus in March 1939.

representation of the war's end in section 6.3 indicated. This section dealt with "Die letzten Tage vor der Selbstbefreiung des Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald",³⁹ where the focus was set upon the introductory text on the preparation for "self-liberation", which appeared as an uprising that saved the lives of 21.000 inmates.⁴⁰ The visitors were then given examples of the self-liberation thesis (some of the weapons that were smuggled in after the bombing of the Gustloff factories and the radios secretly built by resistance fighters).⁴¹ Stories that did not fit the anti-fascist narrative were left aside (including that of the inmates who did not belong to the international committee and the American soldiers whose proximity to the camp forced the SS to flee).

After 1989: Towards a more balanced representation of resistance

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the German reunification in 1990, the political context of the memorial changed drastically. In short, the memorial lost its credibility as it was regarded as a symbol of the GDR; the staff were regularly described as an "SED clique"⁴² in the press and the exhibition was heavily criticised for focusing on the camp's communist led-resistance.⁴³ To resolve this crisis of legitimacy, the state of Thuringia, which oversaw the administration of the memorial after the reunification

39 In English: "The last days before the self-liberation of Buchenwald".

40 The introductory text stated that "the final stage of the resistance in the camp is characterised by the struggle to delay the evacuation of Buchenwald and the self-liberation of the inmates. As a result of the courageous delaying tactics of the political inmates in the camp administration – along with the efforts of the international camp committee and the illegal military organisation that made preparations for the uprising – 21.000 inmates were saved from evacuation". See Buchenwald Archives, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 4.

41 Visitors learnt about the leaders and the structure of the international military organisation in section 5.6. See Buchenwald Archives, *Dokumentation der Historischen Ausstellg.* 12.4.1985. 18.9.1994.

42 See Volkhard Knigge, "Buchenwald", in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: Beck, 2009), 116–25; Zimmer, *Der Buchenwald-Konflikt*.

43 These criticisms can be found in the museum's guest book. For instance, an English-speaking visitor stated in July 1991 that "the exhibit is extremely well done, however, it is still dominated by Communist propaganda and much is incorrect. Hopefully, this will be corrected". See Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, ed., *Jahresinformation der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald 1991* (Weimar-Buchenwald: 1992), 65.

treaty, chose not to fire the staff⁴⁴ but to create an independent advisory commission.⁴⁵ The commission, which was assigned the task of scientifically formulating justified guidelines for the reorientation of the memorial, advocated a redesign of the camp museum to guarantee an “appropriate representation of the fate of the diverse groups of victims [and] the correct representation of resistance”.⁴⁶ Following this recommendation, the memorial staff developed a concept for the redesign of the exhibition and presented a plan in February 1994. The museum was no longer to be a tool to convey simple political messages and an anti-fascist narrative; rather, it would aim to narrate “the story of crimes against humanity”⁴⁷ and make it possible for visitors to engage individually with the Nazi past.⁴⁸ To achieve this goal, the new exhibition was conceived as an open archive where the introductory and explanatory texts were kept at a bare minimum; artefacts were now to be at the core and visitors were encouraged to offer their own interpretations.⁴⁹ The abstract also suggested the division of the museum into six chapters “deal[ing] with the people, structures, actions, and fates of the perpetrators, the victims, and a society of accomplices that determined the history of Buchenwald concentration camp”.⁵⁰ The first part was dedicated to the general context, the next four presented the history of the camp chronologically and the last focused on the post-war era. After the abstract was approved by members of the historical commission, the memorial employees fleshed out their conceptualisation by elaborating an exhibition script between spring 1994 and the beginning of 1995.⁵¹ The redesigned

44 According to Volkhard Knigge, director of the Buchenwald Memorial between 1994 and 2020, nobody was fired after the fall of the Berlin Wall, apart from employees who had worked with the East German political police. See Volkhard Knigge, “Ich vermisse die Aufbruchstimmung der 90er”. Hanno Müller im Gespräch mit Volkhard Knigge über Arbeitserfahrungen in Weimar-Buchenwald”, in *Geschichte als Verunsicherung. Konzeptionen für ein historisches Begreifen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Axel Dofmann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 469.

45 The commission comprised eleven West German experts (primarily historians); it was chaired by the Nazi history specialist Eberhard Jäckel.

46 Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, ed., *Zur Neuorientierung der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald. Die Empfehlungen der vom Minister für Wissenschaft und Kunst des Landes Thüringen berufenen Historikerkommission* (Weimar-Buchenwald: 1992), 10.

47 Stein, *Konzeption*, 4.

48 *Ibid.*, 6.

49 *Ibid.*, 6–7.

50 *Ibid.*, 11.

51 In 1991/1992, the historians’ commission called for the creation of a foundation to administer the memorial. From 1993 to the beginning of 1994, several of its members took part in debates on the creation of this foundation. Subsequently, in April 1994, the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora

museum was inaugurated in the storage depot (i.e. the same place as the previous exhibition) in April 1995 – the 50th anniversary of Buchenwald’s liberation.

To offer what the historians’ commission called a “correct representation” of resistance, the topic was given lesser prominence. While the titles of around a dozen of the thirty-one sections dealing with Buchenwald’s history in the previous exhibition referred explicitly to resistance, the ratio was now two out of sixteen (section 3.5 on “Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand” and section 4.7 on “Überlebensstrategien und Widerstand”).⁵² Furthermore, the two above-mentioned sections from the 1995 exhibition were not dedicated solely to the resistance organised by the German communists; they also presented acts of protest or solidarity by individuals and non-communist groups. For instance, in section 3.5, Pastor Schneider’s story was depicted in greater detail than in 1985; visitors could now view an SS report and two survivor testimonies (from Leonhard Steinwender, a political inmate from Austria who knew Schneider and Ernst Cramer, a Jewish prisoner who had heard Schneider shouting words of encouragement from his cell).⁵³ Schneider’s life in Buchenwald and the significance of his actions for other deportees were documented in the redesigned museum using perspectives other than those of communist resistance fighters; this was the outcome of the intensive work the memorial staff had carried out in the first half of the 1990s. Schneider’s case was not the only example of individual resistance; visitors were told of the story of a Jewish inmate named Edmund Hamber, who was murdered after protesting the murder of his brother by the SS.⁵⁴ As was stated above, the exhibition also detailed cases of resistance stemming from non-communist groups. Section 4.7 presented, among other things, the so-called People’s Front Committee, which was created in August 1944 by the Social Democrat Hermann Brill to consider what a post-war Germany should look like.⁵⁵ While these examples revealed the efforts undertaken by the memorial staff to emphasise the diversity of resistance, they only took into account acts of

Memorials Foundation was established. See Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, ed., *Jahresinformation der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald 1994* (Weimar-Buchenwald: 1995), 34.

52 In English: “Self-preservation and resistance” and “Survival strategies and resistance”. See Buchenwald Archive, *Gestaltungsbuch* Teil 1, and *Drehbuch* (no pagination).

53 Buchenwald Archive, *Drehbuch*.

54 Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, *Begleitband*, 130.

55 *Ibid.*, 214–15.

protest or solidarity that occurred in the main camp; women's resistance was excluded.⁵⁶

After shedding light on other forms of resistance, sections 3.5 and 4.7 dealt with the solidarity shown towards Jewish prisoners in the first years of the camp and towards Soviet prisoners of war in October 1941, with the creation of the international camp committee and of the military organisation, as well as with the rescue of children and British secret service agents.⁵⁷ It is striking that most of these topics had been broached in the previous exhibition.

The presentation of these elements of the camp's history was, however, quite different from 1985, as proven by the introductory text to the passage on the children's rescue: "By setting up two barracks for children – block 8 (1943) and block 66 in the Small Camp (1945) – at least some of the children and young people in the main camp were saved, in shielded areas, from heavy forced labour, and they survived."⁵⁸ This raised two issues: first, the role of the resistance organisation was, because of the use of the passive, not explicitly underlined, which gave the impression that the memorial staff had downplayed the role of the communist resistance in their attempt not to over-emphasise it;⁵⁹ and secondly, the formulation "at least some" suggested that the resistance fighters could only help a small minority of fellow inmates.⁶⁰ The ambiguity and the difficulty of the decision as to who was to be saved in a world ruled by the SS were made even clearer in the subsection dealing with the rescue of the three British intelligence officers. The visitors were able to read a passage from *SS State*, a book

56 Buchenwald opened in 1937 as a camp for male inmates. Aside from the dozens of women forced to perform sex in the brothel, all the prisoners in the main camp were men. However, around 27.000 women were interned between 1944 and 1945 in sub-camps administered by the camp. According to survivor testimonies, some of these women led the resistance, for instance, by individually or collectively sabotaging war production. See Irmgard Seidel, "Weibliche Häftlinge des KZ Buchenwald in der deutschen Rüstungsindustrie", in *Die Frauen des KZ Buchenwald*, ed. Lagerarbeitsgemeinschaft Buchenwald-Dora e.V. (2016), 69–72.

57 See Buchenwald Archive, *Drehbuch*.

58 Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, *Begleitband*, 215–16.

59 As Bill Niven has pointed out, this was not the only occurrence. See Bill Niven, "Redesigning the landscape of memory at Buchenwald. Trends and problems", in *Rückblick und Revision. Die DDR im Spiegel der Enquete-Kommission*, ed. Peter Barker (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 168.

60 The vitrine on the children's rescue included testimony from Willi Bleicher, kapo of the storage depot, regarding his decision to do everything in his power to protect Stefan Jerzy Zweig. For unknown reasons, even though they appeared to know about Zweig's salvation, the memorial staff did not take the opportunity to mention the practice of name swapping. See Buchenwald Archive, *Drehbuch*.

written by the Catholic resistance fighter Eugen Kogon. In his description of name swapping, Kogon referred to the choice of the officers who were to be saved and their comrades who were to be executed as “a tragic moment”.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the subsection dedicated to the self-administration system (in section 3.2, “*Barrackendasein*”),⁶² revealed other dimensions of the ambiguities of resistance. For example, it presented an excerpt from the testimony of Austrian Social Democrat Benedikt Kautsky: “For the prisoners who took part in the camp administration, there was a constant series of problems that were difficult to solve because they had to take and carry out orders from the SS.”⁶³ Not only did section 3.2 shed light on the role of the prisoner functionaries as SS executioners, it also depicted the privileges enjoyed by those who held such positions in the self-administration system. The curators used sources that were located in 1992 in the East German party archives documenting hearings organised by the SED in 1946/47 to investigate the behaviour of the communist prisoner functionaries.⁶⁴ Franz Dobermann explained in October 1946 that “the notables had more than enough to eat and to booze, while others starved”.⁶⁵ The dichotomy between “notables” and “others” suggested the existence of a hierarchy among the inmates and indicated that hunger (not resistance) was the principal concern amongst most prisoners.

That resistance was depicted as one of the many dimensions of Buchenwald’s history was confirmed in an analysis of the representation of the events of April 1945. Chapter 5 on the camp’s end dealt first with the perspective of non-communist prisoners (i.e. inmates who were not part of the international resistance organisation), which enabled the curators to pay closer attention to the subject of evacuation transports from Buchenwald than before.⁶⁶ The camp committee’s actions were still portrayed through a

61 Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, *Begleitband*, 216.

62 In English: “Barrack life”.

63 Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, *Begleitband*, 99.

64 These documents were at the core of the so-called red kapo controversy. In 1994, the tabloid *Bild* published excerpts from the hearings (without providing any context). It gave the impression that the communist prisoner functionaries collaborated with the SS to save their necks and, rather than helping their following inmates, committed crimes against them. See Zimmer, *Der Buchenwald-Konflikt*, 181–82.

65 Because this quote was difficult to translate, the German original is also provided here: “Die ganze Prominenz hatte reichlich zu fressen und zu saufen, während andere hungerten”. Buchenwald Archive, *Drehbuch*.

66 *Ibid.*

display of the secretly-built radios and the flag of the French brigade within the illegal military organisation, but the role of the US army was also taken into account (in the form of testimonies of American soldiers describing their arrival in the camp).⁶⁷ Thus, the redesigned exhibition presented a “liberation from inside and outside” narrative,⁶⁸ wherein the camp committee’s actions were recognised to have been otherwise impossible had the SS not fled.

Conclusion

The case of the Buchenwald Memorial shows that the fall of the Berlin Wall triggered important memorial transformations that impacted the representation of resistance in the exhibition. Under the GDR, resistance tended to be reduced to that of a collective fight led by communist inmates, flawless heroes using their functions within the prisoner administration to help the weakest groups of prisoners and organise the self-liberation of the camp. The end of the communist system in East Germany made it both possible and necessary to break away from this simplistic anti-fascist narrative and develop a more nuanced representation of resistance at the museum. After 1989, the moral ambiguities of resistance were indeed addressed through precise descriptions of the self-administration system and the privileges it bestowed. Moreover, while the merits and the role of the international resistance organisation were not denied, forms of protest or solidarity by individuals as well as non-communist groups were also depicted, thus offering a more comprehensive picture of resistance. Finally, the exhibition made clear that the majority of the prisoners had nothing to do with organised resistance. Because the museum presented such a complex image of resistance, it was difficult to understand, especially for young visitors who did not have a great deal of prior knowledge on the camp’s history. When the memorial staff redesigned the exhibition in the 2010s, they therefore chose to make it more comprehensible. They still placed objects at the core of the exhibitions and underlined the different forms of resistance (while depicting their ambiguities), but they took great care to provide

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

more context and interpretative markers.⁶⁹ The question of how an exhibition is understood by the public could be interesting for further research: How do visitors perceive the presentation of resistance in the exhibition? What do they keep in mind, what not? Are they able to grasp complexities and ambiguities, or do they prefer to find simple answers? To what extent do visitors understand that the existence of an international camp committee in Buchenwald was a unique feature in comparison to other Nazi concentration camps? The question of visitor perceptions could be investigated through interviews, questionnaires and the analysis of entries in the exhibition guest book.

69 For an overview of the new exhibition see: Zofia Wóycicka, "Buchenwald revisited", *Cultures of History Forum*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.25626/0080>.

Part 7.
(Why) Do We Need Museums about
Resistance? Working on Resistance within
Changing Sociopolitical Contexts

What Remains from the Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia? A Personal Perspective

Nataša Mataušić

The collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija* – SFRJ) and the establishment of the Republic of Croatia in the early 1990s greatly affected heritage and museum institutions. Like the other Republics in the SFRJ, Croatia had a Museum of Revolution largely dedicated to the Partisan struggle during World War II and the establishment of the new socialist order in its capital city, Zagreb. As in other former Yugoslav Republics, the name, the aims and the content presented in those institutions changed completely during the 1990s.

In June 1991, the Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia (*Muzej revolucije naroda Hrvatske* – MRNH), which had been established in 1945 and was run by the Republic, was merged with the Historical Museum of Croatia (*Povijesni muzej Hrvatske* – PMH) which was run by the City of Zagreb. This produced a new state institution, named the Croatian History Museum (*Hrvatski povijesni muzej* – HPM). While the MRNH was officially integrated into a new structure, this merging meant de facto abolition for the MRNH. Since then, there has not been a single museum in Zagreb dedicated to the antifascist struggle of World War II.

Faced with this situation, I started an initiative to establish a new museum, which in 2022 led to a first result: the opening of a virtual museum, called the Museum of Antifascist Struggle (*Muzej antifašističke borbe* – MAB), by the Union of Antifascist Fighters and Antifascist of Croatia (*Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Hrvatske* – SAB AH) and with the financial support of the Ministry of Croatian Veterans (*Ministarstvo hrvatskih branitelja*). Hopefully, this is the first step on the way to the establishment of a three-dimensional museum on this topic.

In this text, I will present and analyse the different steps leading from the abolition of the MRNH to the creation of the new virtual museum. I will do

this from the perspective of someone who has been part of this process. Indeed, from 1984 on, I have worked as curator in the MRNH, overseeing the Collection of photographs, films and negatives. I also worked in the Croatian History Museum from 1991 to 2021. I will focus on the establishment and work of MRNH, its integration with PMH and my efforts to establish a new museum of Antifascist Struggle. I will try to explain these processes by including my personal experience over the decades and present the arguments for why I think it is necessary that Zagreb gets a real museum about the antifascist struggle in Croatia during World War II once again.

The history of the Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia

The idea of gathering and keeping “materials of the history of the uprising” already started to rise during World War II. It was realised shortly after the war ended with the founding of the Museum of People’s Liberation (*Muzej narodnog oslobođenja*) in Zagreb.

Preparations for the establishment of the Museum of People’s Liberation began in September 1945 at the Third session of the Presidency of the Croatian National Assembly. The Act on the Establishment of the Museum was passed by the Presidency of the Croatian National Assembly of the Federal State of Croatia (*Federalna Država Hrvatska – FDH*) on 16 October 1945. The decision to establish the museum at the highest level of the Croatian government speaks of its importance for the country at that time, as well as throughout almost the entire time of its existence.

The museum’s aim was “to collect, preserve and exhibit all objects and documents about the course and development of the people’s liberation struggle and all the great achievements that were won and to nurture the cult of national martyrs and victims, fallen fighters and heroes of the people’s liberation struggle”.¹

The museum’s main task was aligned with the political and ideological context of the time, in which the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije – KPJ*) played a dominant role. The museum, as an institution that was most trusted and had indisputable authority when it

1 FDH (Zagreb): *Službene novine* no. 47 (1945).



Fig. 1: View of the MRNH building on Trg žrtava fašizma, museum entry ticket – postcard.
(Courtesy of Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)

came to events from the past (because museums cannot lie), was supposed to promote the KPJ's political programme and ideological positions in public discourse.

In the 45 years of its work, its name changed three times. In its first years, the museum focused on the period of the People's Liberation Struggle (*Narodno-Oslobodilačka Borba* – NOB) from 1941 to 1945. The Museum of People's Revolution (1953-1960), the second variation, focused on the history of the Workers' Movement and KPJ. The later Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia (1960-1991) chronologically and thematically expanded on the subjects with documents concerning socialist construction. These changes were mostly conditioned by the social context in which the KPJ's politics and ideology had a major influence. It was the first and largest museum of its kind in the country and there were efforts to make it the main museum in Croatia.

In fall 1949, the museum moved into its permanent location in the building of the House of Fine Artists on the Square of Victims of Fascism (*Trg žrtava fašizma*), i.e. the Meštrović Pavilion (named after its architect, Ivan Meštrović). The monumental circular building, on one of the most beautiful squares in Zagreb, was certainly not chosen by chance. The Meštrović



Fig. 2: Second permanent exhibition of the MRNH, museum entry ticket – postcard.
(Courtesy of Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)

Pavilion occupies an exceptional place in Croatian and European architecture of the interwar period and is an exceptional work of Croatian architecture. It is cylindrical in shape with a colonnade of rectangular columns, covered with an elliptical glass-reinforced concrete dome, which represents the largest construction of this type in Europe. Its monumental architecture must have had a significant psychological impact on every visitor.

On 15 May 1955, the museum's first permanent exhibition was officially opened. At the time of its creation, it was, according to the press, “an exemplary type of contemporary historical collection” and one of the “most beautiful and modern in the country”.² On 9 April 1959, on the eve of the 40th anniversary of KPJ, the first permanent display was removed for the opening of an exhibition titled “Forty Years of KPJ” (*Četrdeset godina KPJ*). After minor architectural interventions on the building, the second permanent exhibition was opened to the public in 1962. It was mainly dedicated to the NOB and remained unchanged until 1991.

The MRNH became the central institution of all museums of the revolution in Croatia. After 1955, regional museums of the revolution were

2 Pavle Franjković, “Četvrt stoljeća Muzeja revolucije naroda Hrvatske (1945-1970)”, *Vijesti muzealaca i konzervatora Hrvatske*, no. 6 (1970).

established in other major cities (Pula, Rijeka, Slavonski Brod, Makarska, and two in Split). Departments of the revolution were also created at memorial museums and memorial areas, to which the museum provided professional assistance and also allocated its materials. Examples of such places are the museum in Kumrovec, the birthplace of Josip Broz Tito, and the memorial museum part of the Jasenovac Memorial Area, the concentration and extermination camp run by the fascist Ustasha between 1941 and 1945.

There were six memorial museums in Croatia under the MRNH umbrella. These museums were external parts of the MRNH and were linked to important events and figures of the KPJ and the NOB in Croatia. The museums were: Memorial Museum of the Fifth Country Conference of KPJ, Memorial Museum of the First Conference of the Communist Party of Croatia (*Komunistička Partija Hrvatske* – KPH), Memorial Museum of the Eighth Conference of the Zagreb organisation of KPJ (all in Zagreb), Memorial Museum of Rade Končar³ in his birth house nearby the Plitvice Lakes, Memorial Museum of Ivan Goran Kovačić⁴ (in his home village, Lukovdol) and the Memorial Museum of the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army and Partisan detachments of Yugoslavia and the People's Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (on the island Vis).⁵

The Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia in the 1980s: New approaches and challenges

In 1984, the museum hired four new young employees as curators. That the political situation was slowly changing is evident from the fact that it was no longer necessary to be a member of the Alliance of Communists (*Savez Komunističke Partije – SK*) to be employed there. We were chosen because we scored

3 Rade Končar was one of the leading figures of the KPJ and the Partisans in Croatia, He was executed in 1942 by the Italian occupation forces in Šibenik. Posthumously he was named the first People's Hero of Yugoslavia. His left shoe is preserved as a museum object in the Collection of three-dimensional objects. How the shoe came to the museum is not recorded. The shoe's museum signature is: *Hrvatski povijesni muzej/Muzej revolucije naroda Hrvatske* – HPM/MRNH:V-564.

4 The poet and writer Ivan Goran Kovačić joined the Partisans and was killed in 1943 by Chetnik troops. His most famous work is the poem "Jama" (The pit) about the atrocities committed by the Ustasha.

5 After the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, the island of Vis became a Partisan military fortress. The Germans never managed to conquer it.

the highest on a test about the World War II period. I was appointed curator of the Collection of photographs, films and negatives.

At that time, the MRNH was one of the best organised museums in Croatia. It had over 125.000 original museum objects that, thanks to the efforts of 18 professional employees, also included objects from daily life that went beyond the prescribed thematic scope. It also had one of the best organised museum depots where museology professors from the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb brought their students.

The museum's exhibitions in those years were still limited by the calendar of significant events and personalities from the period of the People's Liberation Struggle, which was established by the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Croatia (*Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Hrvatske – SSRNH*).⁶

The first exhibition on which I collaborated was related to the 40th anniversary of the holding of the National Antifascist People's Liberation Council of Croatia (*Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske – ZAVNOH*)⁷ in Topusko in May 1944 and the holding of the Congress of Cultural Workers in June 1944, a unique cultural event in all of occupied Europe. My colleague and mentor, Rudolf Polšak, the author of the exhibition, struggled with the supervisor's request to have both the Croatian and Serbian flags in one photo, because there was simply no such photo. So, he took a pair of scissors and cut the two photos into one that met the requirements.

By hiring young curators unencumbered by ideology, completely new and unexpected perspectives opened up for the museum. Thus, at the Professional College of the Museum, we combined our efforts to destroy the concept of the exhibition on the Spanish Civil War and created a completely new, previously unseen exhibition at the MRNH. Instead of a flat, linear exhibition full of facts (to avoid that something is not accidentally forgotten or someone not mentioned) and photographs, my colleagues Snježana Pavičić and Đurđa Knežević created, in 1986, an exhibition with ambient scenes from the war. The exhibition aroused the interest of the wider public. There were also envious people who reported to the local SK committee that the exhibition's authors had painted the originally black Nazi swastika

6 The SSRNH was the largest social-political organisation in Croatia.

7 The ZAVNOH was founded in June 1943 in Otočac. It was the highest political body of the NOB in Croatia.

in red. However, everything ended without any consequences for the exhibition's authors.

In the 1980s, we opened many other exhibitions. I note in particular "Andrija Maurović, an old cat in NOB" (*Andrija Maurović, stari mačak u NOB-i*, 1986) by Snježana Pavičić, dedicated to an exceptional Croatian artist, antifascist, author of comics motivated by the People's Liberation Struggle. This highlights that artistic and cultural dimensions of the Partisan movement became one of the most important topics we worked on.

In those years, we organised the following exhibitions, among others: Women of Croatia in the Revolution (*Žene Hrvatske u revoluciji*, 1985); The War in Spain 1936-1939 and the Yugoslav Interbrigadists (*Španjolski građanski rat 1936.-1939. i Jugoslavenski interbrigadisti*, 1986); The Liberation – We don't want what doesn't belong to us – we don't give what belongs to us (*Oslobođenje, Tuđe nećemo – svoje nedamo*, 1985); The Third session of ZAVNOH in Topusko (*Treće zasjedanje ZAVNOH-a u Topuskom*, 1984); First Congress of Cultural Workers of Croatia (*Prvi kongres kulturnih i javnih radnika*, 1984); First Conference of JNOF Croatia⁸ (*Prva konferencija JNOF Hrvatske*, 1985); First Session of ZAVNOH in Otočac (*Prvo zasjedanje ZAVNOHA u Otočcu*, 1988); Croatian Fine Arts in NOR⁹ (*Hrvatska likovna umjetnost u NOR-u*, 1987); Ivan Goran Kovačić (1983); People's Front (*Narodna fronta*, 1984); Testimonies of the Uprising in Croatia (*Svjedočanstva o ustanku u Hrvatskoj*, 1981, traveling exhibition); Vladimir Bakarić¹⁰ (1987); New Acquisitions (*Nove akvizicije*, 1984), Republic Awards and Social Recognitions in Socialist Republic of Croatia (*Republičke nagrade i društvena priznanja u SRH*, 1988); Petar Šimaga Šumski¹¹ (1989); Partisan Caricature 1941-1945 (*Partizanska karikatura*, 1989); The War Years of Edo Murtić¹² (*Ratne godine Ede Murtića*, 1988).

8 JNOF is the abbreviation for *Jedinstveni narodnooslobodilački front Jugoslavije* – Unitary People's Liberation Front, which was headed by the KPJ and gathered parties and individuals from different political tendencies during World War II. In 1945, it was renamed *Narodni Front*, People's Front of Yugoslavia.

9 NOR is the abbreviation for *Narodnooslobodilački rat* – People's Liberation War.

10 Vladimir Bakarić was one of the organisers of the NOB in Croatia during World War II. He became one of the highest ranking politicians in Croatia and Yugoslavia in the decades after the war. He died in 1983.

11 Petar Šimaga Šumski, academic painter, since 1942 in the Partisans. During the war, he was nicknamed Šumski (*šuma* – forest).

12 Edo Murtić, academic painter. In the spring of 1944, Murtić joined the Partisans, with whom he designed graphics, posters, and books.

That the concept of MRNH was changing in terms of content is best evidenced by the “Croatian Political Poster 1940-1950” (*Hrvatski politički plakat 1940.-1950.*) exhibition, by Snježana Pavičić. For the first time, almost all museum material from the Art Collection of MRNH related to the subject was shown at the exhibition, regardless of the ideological side. This also meant posters made by the Ustasha authorities. The accompanying catalogue provided an aesthetic valorisation of all the exhibits. The exhibition and the catalogue were made at MRNH and for MRNH, but the exhibition was realised as HPM’s first exhibition in 1991.

Publishing was a constant form of communication between the museum and the public. Along with the exhibitions, catalogues, brochures, posters and accompanying materials were printed. We also used part of the exhibition space for guest exhibitions on various topics in the framework of inter-republic and international cooperation. Furthermore, we cooperated with primary and secondary schools and the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb to educate pupils and students about the past using original museum objects. At the same time, as one of the first museum institutions in the country, we started building an IT system for which we were also technically well equipped.

In spring 1986, we launched the “Bulletin MRNH” magazine, which was supposed to report on the work of the MRNH and other museums of the revolution in Croatia and Yugoslavia, bringing “scientific contributions from the field of museology, research and placing museum materials in a historical context”.¹³

However, in contrast to our efforts to form a diverse and thematically broader collection of museum materials, the permanent exhibition and the quality of the exhibits was far below the (qualitative and quantitative) potential of the contents of the museum depot. The permanent exhibition was frozen for almost 30 years. It was characterised by historical and scientific unsustainability (separation from the historical whole, glorification of the KPJ’s role and ignoring the existence of all other political parties) and outdated museological presentation (a museum object was added to certain content as a mere illustration, and not an object that speaks for itself, numerous legends that explained events abstractly or very generally). This also triggered objections from the professional public. At the end of the 1980s, when the party’s influence on the museum’s activities was weakening

13 MRNH (Zagreb): *Bulletin MRNH*, no. 1 (1986).

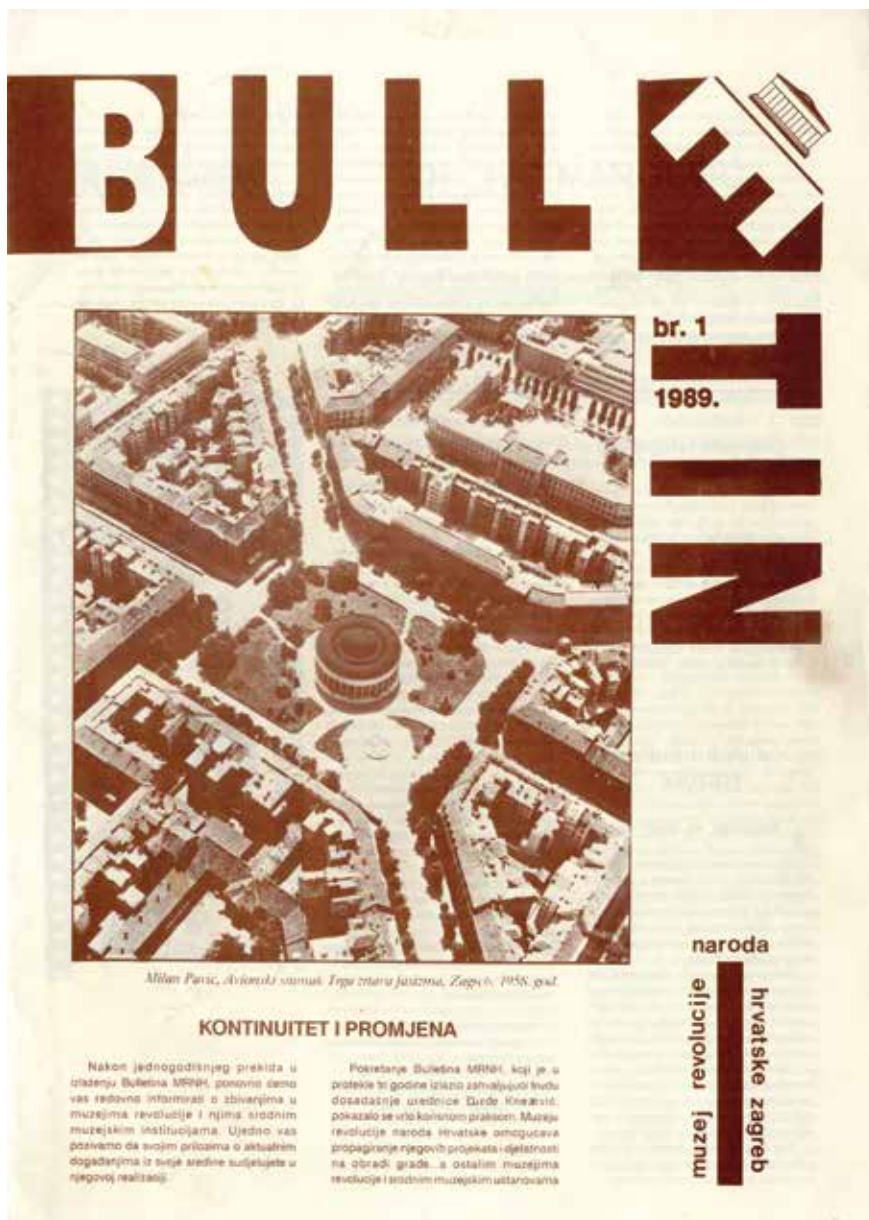


Fig. 3: Cover page "Bulletin" number 1/1989, MRNH, Zagreb.
(Courtesy of Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)

or almost non-existent, the museum's Expert Council set itself the priority task of changing the permanent exhibition. The new permanent exhibition was supposed to use modern museological and museographic means to show the completeness of the historical development of Croatia from the

19th century to the present. An initiative was launched to create an architectural project for remodelling the interior of the building and returning it as much as possible to its original form. At the same time, the museum's employees tried to convince the relevant experts and the Croatian public of the need to expand the concept and scope of the museum's work.

The last issue of our Bulletin was published in autumn 1989. At this time, the existence of the museums of the revolution had already started being questioned. In the introductory text of the magazine, editor Dubravka Peić-Čaldarević stated:

We emphasise once again the necessity of their [museums of revolution] recognition and not degradation... Highlighting some of the unavoidable problems not only of recent practice, but also of the perspective of the museum of the revolution in general, we would like to initiate a discussion that, with the help of similar and conflicting reflections, would contribute to an introspective analysis, the establishment of professional ambitions and rational reflection of our "professional" future.¹⁴

In the early 1990s, despite all our efforts, the museum's future seemed increasingly uncertain. Those "smarter" museum workers, not just the curators, who were former members of SK, very quickly joined the new political party, The Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* – HDZ) which won at the first free parliamentary elections in spring 1990. And then, what we feared most happened.

The policy that created the MRNH in certain socio-political conditions and promoted its ideological and program tasks, sent the MRNH, when in its opinion it became unnecessary, to history. This is best evidenced by the opening speech of the President of the Executive Council of the Zagreb City Assembly, Mladen Vedriš, at the working meeting with the representatives of the MRNH held on 17 August 1990: "In changing social conditions and within the framework of the new cultural policy, there is no justification for further retention in its current form and content, historical and other materials from the period of the People's Liberation Struggle and the revolution of 1941-1945." He declared his support for moving the Museum

¹⁴ MRNH (Zagreb): *Bulletin MRNH*, no. 2-3 (1986).

of the Revolution to the History Museum, seeing it “not only with regard to the current social, democratic and civilizational moment” as justified, reasonable and professionally-scientifically based.¹⁵

Vedriš obviously ignored that the museum preserved and collected material from 1918 to 1990. In order to address his incorrect statements and his ignorance of the real situation, on 24 August 1990, the museum’s Expert Council (not all members because some feared losing their jobs) sent an open letter to the then-minister of education and culture of the Republic of Croatia. We emphasised that the City Assembly’s initiative, which was characterised by haste and lack of any cultural context, had two intentions: 1. evict the MRNH and 2. disintegrate it as an independent institution, under the euphemistic name of integration with the Historical Museum of Croatia. Although published in the daily press, our open letter did not receive a response. The articles in the press were on our side or against us.¹⁶

In September 1990, all the museum’s curators, reflecting on its future, drew up an “Elaborated proposal for changing the activity and the name of the MRNH”.¹⁷ The proposal was based on the analysis of the museum’s funds and the permanent exhibition, as well as new museological, historical and scientific findings. Basically, it was to become an independent, complex museum determined to deal with the entire social reality of Croatia from 1918 to the modern day.

Work on the conceptual design of the new permanent exhibition was at the final stage. The exhibition covered the period from the end of World War I to the 1990s, with special emphasis on World War II and the antifascist struggle.

All our efforts, desires and hopes soon went into oblivion.

The de facto abolition of the Museum of Revolution in 1991

In June 1991, the Law on the new Croatian History Museum (HPM) was published in the “Official Gazette”, ending the MRNH employees’ months

15 “Podsjetnik o radnom sastanku s predsjednikom Izvršnog vijeća Skupštine grada Zagreba Mladom Vedrišem održanom 17. kolovoza 1990”, (Private property of the author).

16 For example “Muzej na političkoj vjetrometini” *Vjesnik* (20 May 1990), “Nepodoban vremenu i prostoru – novo jednodimlje”, *Vjesnik*, 9 September 1990.

17 Andro Purčić, *Elaborirani prijedlog za promjenu djelatnosti i naziva Muzeja revolucije naroda Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Vlast. Nakl., 1990). In the library of the MRNH.

of agony.¹⁸ With this act, the two museum institutions were integrated into one: MRNH (national level) and the PMH (municipal level) joined to form the HPM (national level). And what did we get? A megalomaniac national museum characteristic of the periods of national integration in the 19th century.

The authorities' motivation for merging the two museums into one remains unknown to me. Perhaps one of the reasons lies in the fact that the PMH collected and processed museum materials from the 13th century to 1941 and the MRNH from 1941 to modern times, and their integration would result in a rounded whole telling the story of seven centuries of Croatian history? However, the main reason may also lie in the banal fact that the MRNH had to be expelled from its premises in the Meštrović Pavilion where Franjo Tuđman, who had become president of Croatia in 1990, wanted to place some kind of Croatian pantheon dedicated to Croatian rulers. This hypothesis is supported by the following facts: All the streets leading to the Square of the Victims of Fascism bore the names of Croatian national heroes from World War II. Soon after the HDZ came to power, they were renamed after Croatian mediaeval rulers, and the Square Victim of Fascism itself was renamed the Square of the Croatian Greats.¹⁹ At the same time, the building of the Meštrović Pavilion, in which the MRNH was located, was exempted by law from the possession of the newly founded HPM.

Integration was carried out hastily, without prior consideration of the museum's structure, premises and the fate of the employees. This meant the *de facto* abolition of the MRNH. This is confirmed by the fact that out of 39 MRNH employees, only three professional employees and several

18 RH (Zagreb) *Narodne novine*, no. 27 (1991).

19 The changes of the name of the square and the purpose of the building are also interesting. Designed in the 1920s, the square was first called Square N, then, from 1927 to 1941, King Peter I Liberator Square, from 1941 to 1942, III Square, from 1942 to 1946, Kulina bana Square, from 1946 to 1990, Square of Victims of Fascism, when it became the Square of the Croatian Greats. In 2000, after a long struggle between non-governmental organisations and the authorities, the name Square of Victims of Fascism was returned. During World War II, it was precisely on this square that important Ustaša authorities were located. Many citizens of Zagreb, Croats, Jews and Serbs who were deported to camps departed from that square. In that sense, it was a truly authentic square of victims of fascism. Regarding the Meštrović Pavilion built in 1938, it was primarily dedicated to art. However, during the war it was turned into a mosque at the request of the Ustasha authorities. After 1945 it was briefly returned to its original purpose, and then turned into the People's Liberation Museum. The idea of turning it into a pantheon did not come to life, and the building was returned to the Croatian Society of Fine Artists in 1993. This was also supported by former MRNH employees.

auxiliary, technical employees remained employed in the newly founded museum. A little later, two more professional employees were hired (one of them was me).²⁰ None of the employees of the HPM were affected by this harsh and unfair selection, which was orchestrated by the then-ruling political party.

These were terrible times for all MRNH employees. In those harsh times of war, which started in July 1991 after Croatia's declaration of independence, we witnessed the bombing of cities, including Zagreb. Most of the MRNH employees had been dismissed, but still had to come to work during the notice period. We did not know why some were selected to stay and others were fired, but every day, we came to work and had to look each other in the eye. It was prescribed: four hours at work, four hours looking for another job.

By integrating two museum institutions, the systematisation of individual museum collections was defined superficially, without investing in their actual material content and/or chronological determination. The collections of the former MRNH (apart from the Fine Art Collection and the Collection of Photographs, Films and Negatives) were thus disbanded, and divided according to the type of material into individual collections in the HPM.

Despite the efforts made by the museum's administration and its employees, the HPM still does not have, more than 30 years after its creation, a permanent exhibition to present national history from the Middle Ages until the times of sovereignty, including the World War II period.

Over 30 years of collaborative and joint efforts, our curator team created numerous thematic exhibitions. But only about one third of the realised exhibitions interpreted different themes of the 20th century. After a period of silence about the period of World War II, at the end of 2007, a team of authors under my leadership (the team was composed of former employees of MRNH: Dubravka Peić Čaldarević, Snjezana Pavičić and Rhea Ivanuš) organised an exhibition titled "El Shatt – Refugees from Croatia in the Sinai Desert, Egypt 1944-1946". The exhibition received the Croatian Museum Society's annual award as the best museum project in the year 2007. At the same time, the exhibition catalogue was awarded for the design. Without

20 After I had been fired, I asked my friend, then in a high position in the city's HDZ, to return me to the position of curator at HPM. One phone call, I don't know to whom, was enough to bring me back to my old workplace.

much publicity, the exhibition aroused great interest of the public, as evidenced by the largest number of visitors to that time in HPM (13.000 visitors from December 2007 to December 2008) as well as the completely sold-out first edition of the catalogue. The reason for such success lies in the multitude of awakened emotions related to the topic, as to the way in which its content was presented: photographs and documents about life and work, original objects made in the workshops in El Shatt from the collections of the HPM and other museums, personal objects of people who were there and their stories, film footage and more.²¹

An antifascist no-man's land? World War II's place in Croatia's museum landscape since the 1990s

The de facto abolition of the MRNH also affected the fate of the six memorial museums that had been under its umbrella. In January 1991, the buildings of the memorial museums of the first and fifth conferences of the Communist Party were handed over to the Zagreb City Assembly for management and use. During the Croatian War of Independence, also called Homeland War, the Memorial of Rade Končar was destroyed and all materials stolen. Of the six former MRNH memorials within the HPM, only the Memorial Museum of Ivan Goran Kovačić in Lukovdol remains. Regarding the memorial museum on the Partisan movement on the island of Vis, I proposed transforming it into a more general museum about the island. In this perspective, the exhibition "Towards the Native Museum of the Island of Vis" was opened in 1999, with a selection and reinterpretation of the museum materials kept in the Memorial.²² Due to numerous problems and with the consent of the Ministry of Culture and the Split Archaeological Museum, it was incorporated into the Archeological Museum in 2004.

Other museums of the revolution related to the content of the labour movement, the People's Liberation Struggle and socialist revolution had similar destiny to the MRNH. The Museum of the People's Revolution in

21 I will quote one note from the book of impressions: "I am glad that the exhibition shows the refugees from World War II. The organisation of life can be seen and is clearly shown... As one of these refugees, I confirm all this..."

22 Nataša Mataušić, "Prijedlog transformacije Memorijalnog muzeja VŠ NOV i POJ i NKOP u Zavičajni muzej otoka Visa" *Informatica museologica* 26, no. 1-4 (1995): 70-73. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/144370>. All internet sources were last accessed on 2 April 2024.

Split was abolished, and its materials were handed over to the Museum of the City of Split; the Museum of the People's Revolution in Istria in Pula was renamed the History Museum of Istria. The Museum of the Revolution in Rijeka became part of the Museum of the City of Rijeka.

What led to the renaming, cancellation and/or devastation of all these museums after Croatia gained its independence and after the Homeland War? We have to take into account that many of the aforementioned museums had been founded during socialist Yugoslavia as a result of politically dictated decisions. This occurred even when there were no real preconditions prescribed by the museum law (original museum material, professional staff, means for maintenance...), and that museum presentation was dominated by ideological rather than scientific and professional motivations. With independence and the Homeland War, new ideological visions came to dominate in Croatia. This led to new interpretations of World War II: the KPJ's role in the liberation movement was contested or perceived negatively while there were simultaneous attempts to rehabilitate the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) created in 1941 as a German-Italian puppet state and run by the fascist Ustasha. The Ustasha were presented as Croat patriots or at least emphasised as victims of the Partisans in 1945. At the same time, the crimes the Ustasha committed against Serbs, Jews, Roma and antifascists during the war were downplayed. This resulted in regular polemics and controversies not only in professional and scientific literature, but also in public and social consciousness. Since 1990, a large number of professional and scientific books, syntheses and articles have been published about the period of World War II. Nonetheless, a consensus on certain topics has not been reached, and a system of values based on the realistic and scientifically founded meaning of certain historical events, processes, events and personalities from the recent past still does not exist as we yet have to define it.

Today, there are only four museums that deal with individual themes of World War II left in Croatia. These are: the memorial dedicated to the Battle of Batina in eastern Croatia,²³ the Memorial "Lipa remembers" in

23 Author of the new exhibition inaugurated in 2001: Nataša Mataušić, See: Nataša Mataušić, *Batinska bitka* (Zagreb: Ministarstvo kulture Republike Hrvatske, 2001). Catalogue in Croatian and Russian. The battle of Batina, which took place in November 1944 near the Danube River, was one of the most important battles on the Yugoslav soil during World War II. It was fought by units of the Red Army and the Yugoslav Partisans against the Wehrmacht and its allies.

Istria,²⁴ the Memorial Museum in Jasenovac,²⁵ and the Museum of Victory in Šibenik about the war and the liberation of Dalmatia, which was organised by members of the Alliance of Antifascist Fighters and which is the only new museum related to World War II that was opened since Croatian independence.

As the registrar for all historical museums and historical collections in the Republic of Croatia, I can emphasise that all materials related to the period of World War II and the antifascist movement that had been gathered by the former museums of revolution have been preserved and are further processed according to all the rules of the museum profession. But, these materials do not yet have the right to be exhibited in most museums. Exceptions are only confirmation of such a state. It is most likely a case of self-censorship by museum staff who avoid proposing exhibitions with NOB themes in their work programs.

In a country that can be proud of its antifascist movement, this pride has today been replaced by amnesia. The reason for this lies in a contradictory and inconsistent government policy: Politicians gladly refer to Croatian antifascism and at the same time silently pass over every increasingly present form of its denial, that is, affirmation of the Ustasha movement and its followers. Most of us have ancestors who were Partisans or Ustasha and Home Guard (the army of the NDH) during World War II. Although emotionally attached to them, we cannot turn their faults into virtues if historical facts say otherwise.

The struggle to establish a new museum of antifascist resistance

Like other European countries where the history of World War II is documented and presented in modern museums, for example the Warsaw Uprising Museum and the German Resistance Memorial Center in Berlin, I believe that it is necessary to establish a museum of that kind in Croatia as well.

24 Lipa is a village in Istria whose inhabitants were subject to a terrible terror unleashed by German units in April 1944. All those caught – men, women and children – were locked up in one of the village houses and set on fire. The new Memorial Centre was inaugurated in 2015, on the site of the older memorial that was created in 1968 and closed in 1989 due to lack of funds.

25 Conceptual design of the new exhibition inaugurated in 2006: Nataša Mataušić. Authors: Nataša Mataušić, Filip Škiljan, Jelka Smreka, Đorđe Mihovilović and Rosana Ratković.

Why? One of the strongest antifascist resistance movements in all of occupied Europe was the one that emerged on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which includes Croatia. More than 11 percent of Croatia's total population participated in the antifascist resistance. In Zagreb, where the most important German authorities and the administrative apparatus of the NDH were located during World War II, every fourth resident participated in the antifascist resistance movement.

These are indisputable facts. However, there is little or almost no mention of those facts in current school textbooks, daily newspapers or on television. Many streets and squares, schools, kindergartens and industrial plants were once named after "People's Heroes" from World War II. Today they all bear other names. From 1990 to 2000, 731 monuments and 2.233 other symbols of fallen fighters and civilian victims of World War II were destroyed.²⁶

In the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia from December 1990, the historical right of the Croatian people to full state sovereignty is based on the period of World War II, i.e. on the decisions of the National Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia from 1943. However, that is unimportant to those who, despite the historical facts, continue to tie contemporary Croatia to the puppet and fascist NDH, created and defeated during World War II.

Preservation and promotion of positive ideas of antifascist resistance, their enduring values and significance for the contemporary status of Croatia in a united and decidedly antifascist Europe is necessary for current and future generations living in the society faced with accelerated globalisation processes and the resurgence of extreme right movements across Europe.

In 2008, I wrote the conceptual design of a new museum of antifascist resistance, which I presented at the Eighth colloquium of the International Association of Historical Museums in Belgrade.²⁷ The somewhat modified and expanded concept was supported at the meeting of the SAB AH in the same year. But the journey from an idea to its realisation is sometimes long and arduous.

26 For a list of the destroyed monuments and symbols see Juraj Hrženjak ed., *Rušenje antifašističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj 1990-2000* (Zagreb: SABA RH, 2002)

27 *Museums as places of reconciliation: collection of papers from the 8th colloquium of the International Association of Historical Museums* (Beograd: Istorijski muzej Srbije, 2009), 253-267.

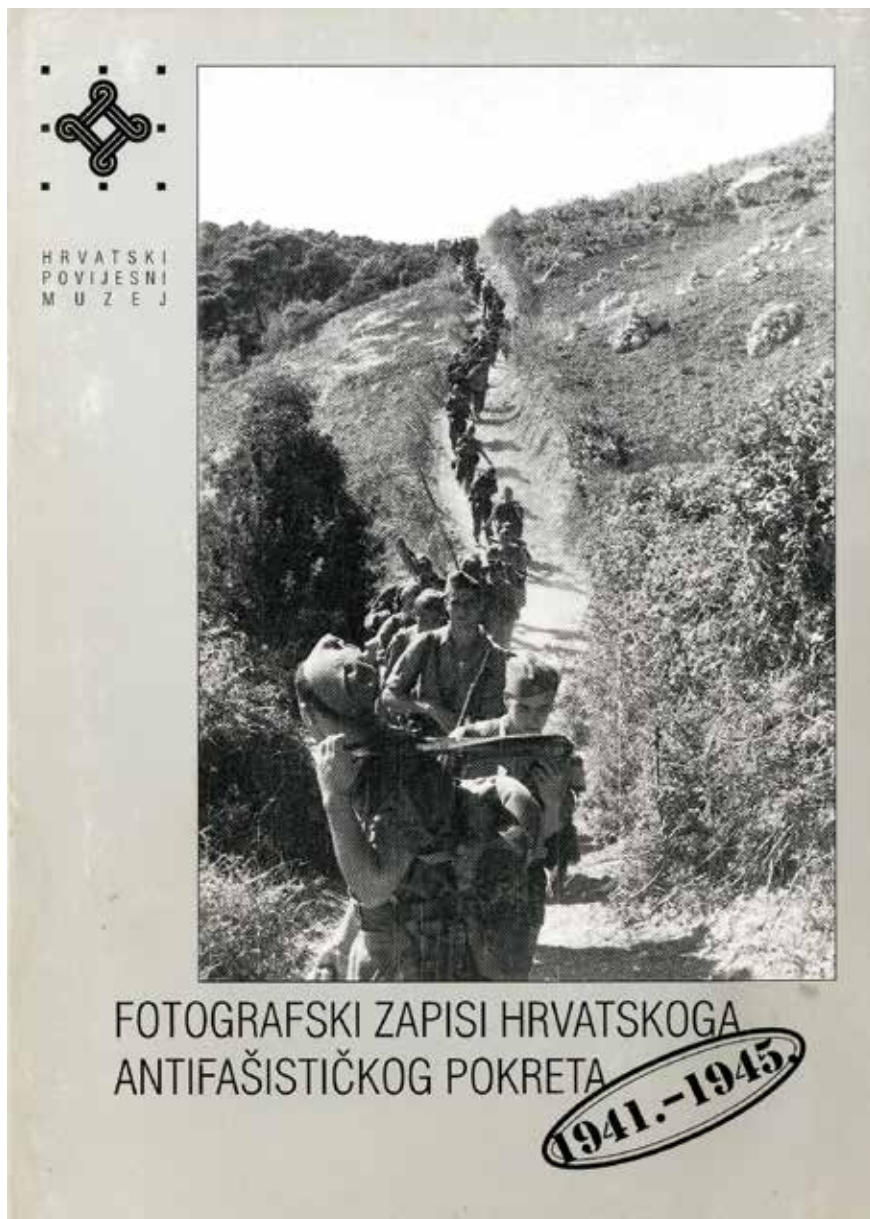


Fig. 4: Cover page catalogue of the exhibition “Photographic records of the Croatian Antifascist Movement 1941-1945”, HPM, Zagreb, 1995. (Courtesy of Croatian History Museum, Zagreb)

My first contact with the SAB AH happened quite by accident in 1995. That year, I was asked to create an exhibition on the antifascist resistance in Croatia on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War

II. The exhibition was also supported by the Ministry of Culture where one of the former employees of the MRNH worked as a cultural consultant. Financial resources were scarce, and the task in those times was extremely demanding. The anathematization of the Partisan resistance movement was already widespread in the general public and Partisan songs almost forbidden and undesirable. In this context, I decided to select 50 photographs from our Collection of Photography to show and document the antifascist movement in Croatia. Photographs are not just illustrations; they are just as valuable documents as written ones. It was a cold, snow-covered day when the exhibition was planned to open at the Mimara Museum in Zagreb. I thought that no one would come and that all my efforts were in vain. Little by little, visitors arrived and filled the large exhibition hall to the last place. My dad also came, a Partisan and a wounded fighter. And when the Partisan songs were played, the whole hall sang along with the choir members present there. It was an indescribable event. After years of silence, a Partisan song was finally heard. Of course, no one from the then-ruling political party attended the event, and of course there were no journalists to report on it, but our hearts were filled with happiness and pride at the glorious days of the Croatian past in which many gave their lives for the freedom of Croatia. For reasons unknown to me, the exhibition was taken down, long before the scheduled date.

Conceptual idea of the a new museum of antifascist resistance

In the initial phase of development of the Museum of Resistance's content structure, it was necessary to define the basic conceptual design. This basic concept establishes the criteria for selecting facts and artefacts. From the wealth of facts at our disposal, I needed to select precisely those that would mediate and reaffirm the subject matter without any ideological overtones. Content-wise, I wanted to show the Partisans' importance. I also sought to show other forms of resistance, for example in camps, or helping and rescuing neighbours, and other activities of non-armed resistance. At the same time, I wanted to emphasise the basic differences of the Croatian (Yugoslav) antifascist movement in relation to other countries that resisted Nazism and fascism, as expressed in the set goals, methods of struggle and numerous organisational forms.

My concept focused on the “Brotherhood and Unity” slogan, which was proclaimed in the war. I decided to attribute a universal meaning to it as the slogan refers to understanding and accepting others and those who are different. The Partisan slogan “Death to Fascism – Freedom to the People” also gained universal meaning. It meant refusal of all forms of totalitarianism, racism and wars.

Content structure:

1. Introduction – the pre- World War II period
2. World War II
 - 2.1. The Independent State of Croatia
 - 2.2. The forms of resistance:
 - 2.2.1. Organised antifascist resistance under the leadership of the KPJ/ KPH: The People’s Liberation Movement
 - 2.2.2. Examples of individual civil resistance
 - 2.2.3. The Croatian righteous – heroes from our neighbourhood
 - 2.2.4. Resistance in the wires
 - 2.2.5. Resistance within the ruling group
 - 2.6. The Allies
 - 2.7. Civilian life
 - 2.8. The Catholic Church and the clergy
 - 2.9. Culture and art in the service of propaganda
- And as separate entities:
 1. Art collection of SAB AH
 2. Library of SAB AH (list of book collection)
 3. Video testimonies of fighters
 4. Exhibitions about World War II realised by SAB AH

In 2015, we established and professionally processed the SAB AH’s Collection of art works, protecting it according to all the museum profession’s rules. Knowing that it would not be realistic to get enough funding to establish a museum in a physical place, we decided to first try to establish a virtual museum. In 2016, for the first time, we applied to the Public Tender of the Ministry of War Veterans of the Republic of Croatia. We repeated this in the following years, and in 2020 we were finally granted 20.000 euros in funding.

At the end of 2021, a webpage was launched as the initial elaboration of the thematic structure. It is officially named Museum of Antifascist Struggle

(*Muzej antifašističke borbe* – MAB), but also referred to as Virtual Museum of Antifascist Resistance (*virtualni Muzej antifašističkog otpora*) and as Museum of Antifascist Heritage (*Muzej antifašističke baštine*).²⁸ Unfortunately, the variety of names of the website points to initial misunderstandings in the approach of the topic: heritage, struggle, resistance... which are three different terms in many ways. But we did our best with the available financial resources. I hope this is just the beginning of a systematic upgrade of our website.

In the introduction, I emphasised the following: “The content elements of the virtual Museum of Antifascist Resistance presented here are only a matrix for its further systematic reflection and elaboration. However, they already indicate that antifascist resistance in Croatia, both organized and individual, civil, is one of the concrete elements of our history and cultural-historical identity.”

Reactions to the website reflected the socio-political situation in Croatia. These reactions ranged from approving of to demanding the resignation of Croatian Minister of Defence Tom Medved because he approved the financing of what some called lies and the revision of history.²⁹

There is no interest in establishing a Museum of Antifascist Struggle in Croatia. When the HPM elaborated a conceptual design for a permanent exhibition in 2011, I was the author of the part for the period from 1941 to the present. Out of three reviewers, one gave a negative review because, according to that person, I used only literature from socialist Yugoslavia and gave too much importance to antifascist resistance, which had its ugly sides. The first remark was completely unfounded because I used all available literature in my work. Yes, the antifascist resistance had its ugly sides, especially in dealing with political dissidents, but the Croatian Partisans, together with the other peoples of the former Yugoslavia, won with great sacrifices over Nazism, fascism and the Ustasha regime. The moral value of this fight against fascism cannot be emphasised enough.

28 Homepage Museum of Antifascist Struggle/*Muzej antifašističke borbe*, <https://mab.hr/>.

29 For media reports about the virtual museum, see: “Virtualni Muzej Antifašističke Baštine u Hrvatskoj”, *Historiografija.hr: Portal hrvatske historiografije*, 15 February 2023, <https://historiografija.hr/?p=34480>; “Pokrenut virtualni Muzej antifašističke baštine. Financiran je novcem Ministarstva branitelja”, *Novilist*, 3 June 2023, <https://www.novilist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/pokrenut-virtualni-muzej-antifasisticke-bastine/>.

Conclusions

Over the last three decades, and especially in recent years, the minimisation and criminalisation of the antifascist Partisan movement has been increasingly present in Croatia. Many important historical dates were erased from the calendar of public holidays, the names of streets and squares were changed, the institutions of the “old socialist order” were abolished and many monuments demolished. In the collective consciousness, the attitudes towards the antifascist heritage, moral values and righteousness of persons and events from the period of the People’s Liberation War are re-examined. Commemorations for victims of fascism provoke controversy, and monuments are erected to people from the Ustasha troops who are glorified as the only fighters for a free Croatia.

We historians and the broader public, are faced with division, polemics and controversies on topics on which we should have agreed upon a long time ago. In a situation where the competent state authorities do not respond to Holocaust denial and genocide committed against compatriots during World War II, along with the anathematization of the antifascist Partisan movement, it is difficult to find the right interlocutor for the establishment of the Museum of Antifascist Struggle. The culture of remembrance is under attack from new historical narratives. It is turning into a culture of oblivion, or a loud silence in which censorship and self-censorship are present.

Why do I think that museums of antifascist resistance are important to us? I will quote a part of the text from the brochure “Instructions for the collection of materials for the history of the national uprising in Croatia” from June 1944:

It was a difficult journey, until it was possible to convince the foreign world that the struggle in Croatia was being led by the People’s Liberation Army... The enormous sacrifices of our people, the great feats of the People’s Liberation Army, the great help that we provided to the Allies in the most critical days of the war, must be known to our people and to the entire cultured humanity. This will give impetus to our new generations, that they will know how to appreciate the freedom and progress for which such great efforts and sacrifices were made.³⁰

30 *Upute za prikupljanje materijala za povijest narodnog ustanka u Hrvatskoj* (Propagandni odjel Oblasnog odbora JNOF za Istru, 1944.)

At the same time, we should look at the need for a museum of antifascist resistance in the European context as well. European history is marked by numerous conflicts based on national, ethnic and religious diversity. But the community exists. It is based on common history, established social values and culture regardless of the differences between nations. So, instead of emphasising the differences, we should focus on what unites us morally and what we had in common during World War II, regardless of the differences in intensity and goals: resistance to Nazism and Fascism. Museums of the antifascist struggle or museums of resistance can become places to connect different European nations, to oppose revisionist and nationalist interpretations of this period of our common history, and to contribute to tolerance and respect for the role of each individual nation in the victory over Fascism and Nazism.

Art as Resistance and Representation in Museums and Memorials: A Case Study from France

Marie-Édith Agostini

Introduction

Having trained as an artist, my approach as a curator is hardly academic; I rely on my intuition when I write to create a narrative that speaks to diverse audiences. My ten years of experience as the head of temporary exhibitions at the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris – a critical space for collective memory – taught me much about how to share information in ways that ensure it reaches audiences. That is the crux of my profession.

When I started to work in 2009 at the *Mémorial de la Shoah*, I did not know much about the institution or about the history of World War II. My knowledge of the extermination of Jews was limited to my school education, a few films and readings. Housed in a building of contemporary architecture in the heart of the capital and a stone's throw from the Marais – the Jewish quarter of Paris – the *Mémorial* is home to an extensive research and archive centre, a museum, rooms for temporary exhibitions, an auditorium for weekly events, and a bookshop. There is also a very active education department that deploys considerable resources to raise awareness of the Shoah among schoolchildren, teachers, policemen and even ex-convicts accused of racist crimes. What attracted me to work in this environment, which was totally new for me? I am not a historian, have no family history linked to the Shoah, and had never worked on this topic, which I found too difficult to confront. When I submitted my application to the *Mémorial* for the position of temporary exhibitions manager, I was one of 400 candidates and I never thought I would make it. And I was surprised that I was invited to successive interview rounds. I was very honest in these interviews. When, during the last one, the director of the *Mémorial* asked me “Do you know the history of the Shoah?”, I answered “Not at

all.” What I could bring was my sensitivity as an artist and my experiences with different artistic approaches, as well as good contacts in the cultural milieu. And it is probably this what the *Mémorial* was looking for: not to engage one more academic, but somebody with a look from outside, with a fresh approach.

Though the *Mémorial’s* mission is not to focus solely on resistance, it was a common theme or undercurrent in many of the projects I presented between 2009 and 2019. The aspect that interested me most was how men and women used art to resist and how this relates to the role of museums today.

Art and resistance

Resistance is not only armed revolt; it can take many forms. The Nazis understood the power of artistic expression and its influence on contemporary thought, so as early as 1933, they barbarically burned all books that could awaken consciences to revolt and removed so-called “impure” works from circulation to make way for what they saw as true German art – a purified expression of the Aryan race. By persecuting and seeking to deride artists and their “degenerate” art (*entartete Kunst*), they aimed to erase the work of men and women who, in their view, failed to contribute to Germany’s greatness. In *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, Éric Michaud establishes that art was a central question for the Third Reich, since Nazi ideology held that art had the power to embody the ideal of the Aryan race.¹ For the Nazis, the mission of art (and propaganda) was to “render visible the protector God who would make it possible for the body of the German race to live eternally”.²

That did not prevent artists from creating, of course – quite the contrary, in fact. Producing art despite the prohibition was a defiant act of spiritual and intellectual resistance designed to denounce and condemn the law itself. It also helped artists escape their imprisonment, hold on to their humanity, and bear witness to Nazi oppression, which the regime took such care to disguise by controlling the image of reality under the Third Reich. In these darkest hours, creating was about surviving against all odds. Though

1 Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004).

2 *Ibid.*, 24.

“Resistance Art” is a term reserved for illegal practices whose clearly affirmed goal was to hinder the efforts of the occupiers or collaborators, artistic production also provided an outlet for people to share their stories and bear witness via non-verbal media through which their whole bodies could speak. For example, the painter Charlotte Salomon (1917-1943), a German Jew who took refuge on the French Côte d’Azur before ultimately being murdered in Auschwitz in 1943, gave us the moving work that is part-picture, part-literary: *Leben? oder Theater?* (Life? Or theatre?). She handed the work over to someone she trusted when she was arrested after being denounced, in a clear attempt to survive and construct her identity in the face of persecution.³ Art is truly an “anti-destiny” as André Malraux explains in the conclusion to *The Voices of Silence*. This neologism reveals the essence of art; it is a human response to a world that seems meaningless or, at the very least, a world that completely escapes our comprehension.⁴

Resisting through art is also about expressing a moral struggle. It embodies the artist’s commitments and convictions and, intimately or collectively, combats dehumanisation and prevents us from forgetting the victims. Whatever the medium (writing, photography, music, painting, etc.), art is a critical resource for those whose freedom has been severely curtailed. The diversity and sheer quantity of works produced under such terribly uncertain circumstances is remarkable proof of that. Moreover, by creating, artists also fostered a form of solidarity amongst victims, boldly thumbing their noses at methodical dehumanisation, totalitarianism and systematic genocide. For example, Germaine Tillion, who was deported to Ravensbrück for her participation in the French Resistance, wrote a light-hearted, carefree operetta entitled *Le Verfügbar aux enfers* (The Verfügbar in the Underworld) in the camp in 1944. “Laughter, even in the most tragic situations, is revitalising”, she later said.⁵

From the beginning of World War II, artist activists used their art to share their experiences of the war, deportation and life in the camps. They were the first to bear witness. Boris Taslitzky (1911-2005), for example, became a member of the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (AEAR) in 1933; arrested and interned in the Buchenwald camp, he produced nearly two hundred sketches and drawings, as well as five watercolours, thanks

3 Charlotte Salomon, *Leben ? oder Theater?* (Köln: Taschen, 2017).

4 André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

5 Germaine Tillion, *Une opérette à Ravensbrück, 1942 – 1945* (Paris: Points, 2007).

to the solidarity and organisation of the underground resistance. The poet Aragon paid tribute to him by publishing his work in 1946.⁶ While Taslitzky survived life in the concentration camp, Felix Nussbaum (1904-1944), a German painter who initially took refuge in France, did not. He left behind a major body of work in which themes of fear, persecution and the curse of the Jewish people are clearly apparent in the paintings that followed his first imprisonment in the Saint-Cyprien camp in southern France reserved for foreign Jews in 1940. After these three months of internment and humiliation, all his work became denunciation. In the many self-portraits, the figure in the foreground questions the viewer, his hard gaze turning the viewer into a witness. He seems to be saying: “If I die, don’t let my paintings follow me, show them to men”. As early as 1939, he signed this premonitory work: *Le réfugié / Vision européenne* (The refugee / European vision). At the back of a room, a man sits with his head in his hands, finding neither shelter nor hope. The globe on the table in the foreground is a warning, and the outside world beyond the open door is threatening, with its grey landscape of bare trees over which birds flutter like scavengers. He and his wife, the Polish artist Felka Platek, were arrested again in July 1944 and exterminated at Auschwitz in the following months.⁷

For several decades, it was difficult for survivors to talk about their experiences in concentration camps. Were they to be believed? And how could the survivors pass on what happened to their children without feeling ashamed? Artistic expression has enabled the generation born after the war to express themselves on a subject that was still taboo for society as a whole, caught between guilt and the need to move on. Art Spiegelman is an emblematic figure of the underground American comic strip movement of the 1970s. Born in 1948 to Polish Jewish parents who had survived Auschwitz, he is best known for his masterpiece *Maus*, which was published in two volumes: the first in 1986 and the second in 1991.⁸ Art Spiegelman ended up handing a microphone to Vladek, his father, to break the silence that covered him like a leaden blanket. *Maus* tells the story of his father’s life, from the period when he met his wife Anja (who committed suicide in 1968)

6 Boris Taslitzky, *111 dessins faits à Buchenwald* (Paris: La Bibliothèque Française, 1946).

7 On Felix Nussbaum see for example: Karl G. Kaster, *Felix Nussbaum: Art Defamed, Art in Exile, Art in Resistance* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1997). For the painting “The refugee”, sometimes also called “European vision”, see: *Yad Vashem*, <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/nussbaum/refugee.asp>.

8 Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (New York: Pantheon Books, vol. 1: 1986, vol. 2: 1991).

until the period when they reunited after the war. In the middle, the Shoah, the war and the concentration camps. But *Maus* is also the story of the difficult relationship between a son and his father, full of unspoken words, denial, hatred and rejection. Spiegelman would say of his work: “I wanted to know where I came from and to make a distinction between the image I had of my father and his story.”⁹ This is the autobiographical graphic novel of a child of the Shoah, which does not seek to tell the truth about historical facts, but rather to express symbols and feelings, and to undeniably mourn. It is in this that this masterful and profoundly humanist work touches us.

From the 1960s onwards, people began to speak more freely, and the generation of children of survivors allowed themselves to explore their feelings about their parents’ experiences. Every story has its own unique experience. Besides Art Spiegelman, Michel Kichka (born in 1954 in Liège) is another example. In his graphic novel *Second Generation – Things I never told to my father*, he also recounts his relationship with the past of his father, the only survivor of his family, over which the shadow of the Shoah hung to the point that the author, with this work, seeks to emancipate himself from it.¹⁰ But for this author, it is a calmer tale, taking readers on a journey through nightmares, funny memories, joyous moments and acts of deliverance. A very active member of the international “Cartooning for Peace” network, committed to promoting freedom of expression, human rights and mutual respect between people of different cultures and beliefs through the universal language of press cartoons, Kichka continues to explore his relationship with his Jewishness.

Even today, artists continue to explore this period from our past, trying to understand how the unthinkable came to be and to move beyond the “past that will not pass”, as Henry Rousso calls it in his book on France under the Vichy regime.¹¹ Today, for the generation of grandchildren of survivors, it is about preserving memory and accepting the past, which continues to echo through contemporary society at a time when challenges to peace are legion.

9 Olivier Delcroix, “Art Spiegelman, une œuvre à l’ombre de ses parents”, *Le Figaro*, 20 March 2008.

10 Michel Kichka, *Second Generation – Things I never told to my father* (Europe comics, 2016).

11 Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press, 1998).

Presenting resistance to Nazi persecution in museum

I will use three examples of exhibitions designed for the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris to showcase the positions we adopted in presenting the topic of resistance to persecution and Nazism through arts.

A. Point of view

The exhibition *Regards sur les ghettos* (Scenes from the Ghettos) opened in 2013 at the *Mémorial* with guidance from Professor Daniel Blatman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.¹²

Images are omnipresent in our societies, and those of ghettos are no exception. When the *Mémorial* suggested this topic, it raised some questions: what do we show and how do we show it? How do we tell the heartrending stories of the victims without crossing the line into voyeurism? What will a new exhibition bring to a topic that has already been addressed by many others?

Though we were advised against it, we organised the exhibition by category of photographer, focusing on the person behind the lens. We wanted to understand who each of them was, understand how they saw their contemporaries, and learn more about their stories and life experiences to better contextualise the images on display. By opting against a classification by theme (such as hunger, disease, death, children), we were able to present a comprehensive look at the work of each photographer and at the same time to bring so many nameless victims back to life by weaving their stories back together.

We chose to display the collections by sorting their photographers into three categories: Jews interned in ghettos, German soldiers, or Nazi propagandists. Once collected, these numerous testimonies handed down to posterity can be used to piece together a jigsaw puzzle, revealing both the staged propaganda and the frank, sincere faces photographed by friends and comrades in misfortune. Although many of these images were already known, they were not always contextualised, and this can distort our

12 *Regards sur les ghettos*, 13 November 2013 – 28 September 2014, exhibition designed by the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris under the direction of Daniel Blatman, Sophie Nagiscard and Marie-Édith Agostini, assisted by Anne Bernard. *Regards sur les ghettos*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Mémorial de la Shoah, 2013). See also the website made by the *Mémorial* about the exhibition: <https://regards-ghettos.memorialdelashoah.org/>.



Fig. 1: Extract of the exhibition *Regards sur les ghettos*, here with a photo taken by Mendel Grossmann in the ghetto of Łódź, showing women and children at forced labour.
 (© ÉricandMarie – *Mémorial de la Shoah*, 2013)

understanding of them. The exhibition's sophisticated scenography, which traced the career of each photographer to help us understand their point of view, shed interesting light on the subject. As for the Jewish photographers, they showed courage and resistance by providing invaluable documentation of life in the ghettos. Defying the ban on photography, which was meant to prevent people from describing the conditions imposed in the ghettos by the Nazi regime, and despite how difficult it was to get photographic equipment, many Jews documented life in the ghettos.

The largest collections are those of George Kadish (1910-1997) and Mendel Grossmann (1913-1945). Kadish, who took over a thousand pictures in the Kovno ghetto, where he was imprisoned, said at the inauguration of a photo exhibition at the Russell Senate Office Building in 1987:¹³

I wanted to get revenge on the Nazis who murdered my people. The more photos I took, the less scared I felt. [...] I came to understand that millions of my fellow Jews executed and exterminated for their

13 *Days of remembrance: Family life in the Kovno ghetto, an exhibition of photographs by George Kadish*, Russell Senate Office Building, Rotunda, Exhibition catalogues, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council (Washington, 1987).

beliefs had given me a sacred order: to share the terrible events of my ghetto with the outside world, with our future children and new generations, to ensure they would know what happened during that time.¹⁴

As for Grossmann, he had studied painting in Łódź before the war. In the ghetto, he worked in the photography department at the Jewish Council, which gave him access to film, some of which he managed to put aside to capture life in the Łódź ghetto. Grossmann died in a death march, but his friends returned to save the pictures he had hidden.¹⁵

Henryk Ross also worked at the Jewish Council, in the statistics department. He too used his position as a photographer there to put aside film, which he used to secretly take thousands of photographs depicting the suffering and daily lives of Jews in Łódź. Not long before the liquidation of the ghetto, he buried the negatives and prints, which he and his wife were able to retrieve after the Soviets conquered the city. He moved to Israel in 1950 and stopped working as a photographer, but he testified about his experience at the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Today his collection is held by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada, which devoted an exhibition to him in 2015.¹⁶

Jewish photographs left behind a tangible memory of the genocide of European Jews during World War II in an international language that is readily understood worldwide. As fellow Jews, they were able to capture expressions and emotions and document the ways daily life continued more than the ways it had changed, all while bearing witness to the growing suffering that set in as the years of hunger and disease took their toll. Their pictures are full of empathy and compassion, unlike the Nazi photographs, which sought only to fuel prejudice and Aryan propaganda by showcasing the “Jewish traits” (*Judentypen*) in the distant looks the subjects gave them.

As Georges Didi-Huberman wrote after working on the Oneg Shabbat Archive, which was put together by Emanuel Ringelblum, who spent the last days of the Warsaw ghetto documenting everything he could:

14 As quoted by Judith Cohen in *Regards sur les ghettos* (Paris: Éditions Mémorial de la Shoah, 2013), 23.

15 For more information about Mendel Grossman, see: Mendel Grossman, *With a Camera in the Ghetto* (New York City: Schocken Books, 1987).

16 For more information about Henryk Ross, see: Bernice Eisenstein et al. eds., *Memory Unearthed: The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

You can only read what remains, of course, which is rather little compared to the scope of the extermination process as a whole. But at least you read it micrologically, as if through a magnifying glass, intimately exploring every situation that left a trace. You feel the emotions of each unique person, separate from the others and yet an integral part of their shared history.¹⁷

For this exhibition, we turned to exhibition designer Ramy Fischler and the graphic designers of the ÉricandMarie collective, who successfully created a contemporary aesthetic showcasing photographers' different attitudes towards Jews during this dark period of history. Swiss artist Anna Katharina Scheidegger created a video montage of shots by Jewish photographers. Using slow tracking shots, the video camera brought the men and women from the images to life, projecting them onto large wooden panels placed against the wall, where the passing historic figures blended into the crowd of museum visitors.

B. Scenography

The *Mémorial* put on the exhibition *August Sander – Persécutés/Persécuteurs des Hommes du XX^e siècle* (Persecuted/Persecutors in People of the 20th Century) in 2018.¹⁸

German photographer August Sander (1876–1964) was an indisputable pioneer of documentary photography. His best-known work, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (People of the 20th Century), which comprises seven volumes and 45 portfolios, was left unfinished upon his death. From the 1920s onwards, August Sander created an “instant physiognomy of his time”,¹⁹ depicting his contemporaries' professions and social classes by capturing the unique traits of anonymous subjects viewed as “types”. Aided by his serial approach, he produced a richly documented portrait of German society. Breaking with the blurred style of romantic photography, Sander's work

17 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Éparses, Voyage dans les papiers du ghetto de Varsovie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2020).

18 Exhibition *August Sander, Persécutés/persécuteurs, des Hommes du XX^e siècle*, 8 March – 15 November 2018, designed by the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris under the direction of Sophie Nagis-cardé and Marie-Édith Agostini assisted by Noémie Fillon and with the participation of Gerhard Sander and Kristina Engels of the August Sander Foundation. For more information about the exhibition. see: <https://expo-photo-sander.memorialdelashoah.org/en/exhibition.html>.

19 August Sander, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (München: Schirmer/Mosel, 2010).



Fig. 2: Exhibition about August Sander: Entry of the exhibition space.
(© Mémorial de la Shoah, 2018)

stands in opposition to the Nazi regime's "blood and soil" ideology, which celebrated the glorification of the body, femininity and virility, myths and heroes, symbols, rurality and farmers, and allegories.

The Sander family worked together, with August's wife Anna (1878–1957) running the studio in Cologne. Their son Erich (1903–1944) also actively participated in the business. The family had close ties to progressive, artistic circles in Cologne, and political discussions between August and his rebellious son also played an important role. While August Sander was a pacifist, Erich was a member of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* – SAPD), and he presided over its section in Cologne starting in 1932. After the the Nazis banned the SAPD in 1933, he actively participated in illegal resistance activities, including carrying anti-Nazi leaflets and confidential information in his bike's innertubes. Arrested in 1934 and convicted of high treason, Erich was sentenced to ten years in the Siegburg Prison near Cologne, where he died in 1944 due to lack of medical care. During his years of incarceration, he worked as a prison photographer and, with the help of his parents, managed to smuggle photographic paper into the prison and photographs and letters out of it to document the prisoners' everyday lives.²⁰

20 For more information about Erich Sander, see: NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln, ed., *August Sanders unbeugsamer Sohn. Erich Sander als Häftling und Gefängnisfotograf im Zuchthaus Siegburg 1935–1944. Begleitband zur Ausstellung im NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2015).

After the war, August Sander incorporated portraits of Cologne Jews who had come to the studio to take identification photos for their new papers marked with a J for “Jew” into *People of the Twentieth Century*. He also added pictures of Nazi leaders in their uniforms. Another portfolio includes striking portraits of inmates that Erich took in prison and managed to smuggle out before he died, bearing witness to his life behind bars. “Although it is certain that a person’s life does not explain his work, it is equally certain that the two are connected. The truth is that that work to be done called for that life,”²¹ Merleau-Ponty wrote about Cézanne. This can also apply to the Sander family’s life’s work. August Sander concludes *People of the Twentieth Century* with a post-mortem photograph of his son. A final image which functions as both a memento mori and a political accusation, a poignant reminder of Sander’s commitment to preserving history and of his grief.

The exhibition focused on three portfolios, named and numbered as follows:

- portfolio IV/23a – *Classes and Professions, the National Socialist*
- portfolio VI/44 – *The Big City, Persecuted*
- portfolio VI/44a – *The Big City, Political Prisoners*

With help from the archivists at the National Socialist Documentation Center in Cologne, we were able to learn more about the lives of most of the Jews photographed by August and Erich Sander by cross-referencing them with photos from the archives. We spent quite a lot of time on the research – an opportunity to honour the people the Nazis tried to eradicate and erase from our memories by giving them back their names and stories.

For the scenography, entrusted to Éric Benqué and German graphic design collective Vier5, we worked hard to find the best way to arrange Sander’s images in the museum: in a big room, curved partitions which narrowed the space into a smaller oval placed oppressors and their victims across from one another. Accompanying texts in three languages (French, English and German) were mounted on wooden planks to symbolise the unstable and fragile nature of the period. Face to face, the subjects’ eyes seemed to meet, inviting visitors to introspect. The scenography of the exhibition encouraged viewers to engage personally.

21 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt”, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 70.



Fig. 3: Exhibition about August Sander: on the right portraits of Nazis in their uniforms, in the middle of political prisoners, on the left of persecuted Jews.
(© *Mémorial de la Shoah*, 2018)

We also worked with the artist's grandson, Gerhard Sander, and great-grandson, Julian Sander. For them, the exhibition took on great meaning, positioning August Sander's work as a sort of antithesis to Nazi ideology. Gerhard would have liked to present the exhibition in Germany, but he unfortunately passed away before the project could come to fruition.

C. Medium

The exhibition *Shoah et bande dessinée* (*The Holocaust and Comics*), presented in 2017, showed visitors how the Holocaust has been represented in comics, especially in Europe and the United States, since the end of the war.²²

For much of their history, comics were viewed as a form of children's literature. In France, they were regulated by a 1949 law that was not updated until 2011. As such, they only began tackling "serious" subjects fairly

22 *Shoah et bande dessinée* (*The Holocaust and Comics*), exhibition 19 January 2017 – 7 January 2018 (extended date), *Mémorial de la Shoah*, Paris, curators: Marie-Édith Agostini, Joël Kotek and Didier Pasamonik, assisted by Géraldine Franchomme. See also: <https://expo-bd.memorialdelashoah.org/expositions.html>.

recently. Moreover, Holocaust remembrance went through several stages in the decades after 1945, as Annette Wieviorka explains. At the end of the war, there was “the shock of discovering the camps [...] followed by minimization”. During the post-war period, the Holocaust was a marginal topic, since the consensus was that all French people were victims of the war; the important thing was to focus on rebuilding. Jewish victims only really began to emerge from the shadows with the Eichmann trial in 1961. In 1979, the American miniseries *Holocaust* aired in France, helping to speed up the process, as did Claude Lanzmann’s groundbreaking documentary *Shoah* in 1986. Since then, the Holocaust “has always been present, deeply integrated into the collective imagination”.²³

Comic strips and graphic novels were also part of this process and contributed to it. The French publication of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman in 1987 “sent an extraordinary shockwave through France and all of Europe, a real cultural revolution”, according to the exhibition’s expert curators Didier Pasamonik and Joël Kotek. Since the 1980s, the Shoah has become a subject in its own right, and a number of graphic novels and comic strips were published exploring this theme in France, other European countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium or the Netherlands, and in the United States. The exhibition even showed some plates from *The Story of the 3 Adolfs*, by Osamu Tezuka, the inventor of the Manga genre and creator of the cartoon character *Astro Boy*, a rather exceptional depiction of the Shoah in Asian comics.²⁴

However, addressing persecution during the Nazi time with the help of comic strips is not only a recent phenomenon. The first artists to fix the narrative patterns of the events were the victims themselves, and did so during the war. The exhibition opened with the presentation of Horst Rosenthal’s notebook *Mickey au camp de Gurs* (Mickey Mouse in the Gurs Internment Camp) in which the artist humorously represents himself as the iconic Walt Disney character. The drawings in the short booklet depict his incomprehension, the role of the French police in arresting people and running the camp, the absurdity of his days, and the lack of food. Made

23 Annette Wieviorka, “Un objet de contrebande” in *Shoah et bande dessinée*, eds. Mémorial de la Shoah and Éditions Denoël Graphic (Paris: Éditions Mémorial de la Shoah/Denoël Graphic, 2017).

24 Didier Pasamonik, “Les enfants d’Holocaust” in *Shoah et bande dessinée*, eds. Mémorial de la Shoah and Éditions Denoël Graphic (Paris: Éditions Mémorial de la Shoah/Denoël Graphic, 2017), 101-105; Osamu Tezuka, *Adorifu ni Tsugu*, (magazine *Shukan Bunshun*, 1983 – 1984); Osamu Tezuka, *L’Histoire des 3 Adolfs* (Éditions Tonkam, 1998-1999).

during his internment in the Gurs camp in Southern France from 1940 to 1942, it shows how this prisoner used drawing as a form of spiritual resistance. Rosenthal was deported and murdered in Auschwitz in 1942, but his notebooks were rescued before by a Swiss nurse working in the camp and by other inmates. His work was finally published in an edited version with comments in 2014.²⁵ A similar allegory can be found in *La bête est morte! La guerre mondiale chez les animaux* (The beast is dead! World war of animals), an album published at the end of 1944, a few months after the liberation of Paris, in which the authors also use animal figures to anchor the narrative.²⁶ A mutilated old squirrel tells his grandchildren the detailed story of the ongoing war. Each nation is represented by an animal: wolves represent the Germans, polar bears the Russians, bulldogs the British, sheepskin hyenas the Italians, bison the Americans, monkeys the Japanese, elephants the Indians. The story demonstrates a good knowledge of current events, and the military phases are described in detail. Not only the consequences for civilians, but also deportation are dealt with extensively in the first volume. Several references are made to prison camps and concentration camps, as well as the persecution and extermination of the Jews, even if the dimensions of the Shoah do not seem to have been known by the authors in 1944. This beautifully drawn book, produced and published during the war, was a way of defying Nazism.

As Elie Wiesel said, “One could not keep silent no matter how difficult, if not impossible, it was to speak.”²⁷ Drawing likely provided an alternative means to break the silence for some. In the exhibition, we also included some of David Olère’s drawings made after 1945. Born in Warsaw in 1902, David Olère moved to Paris in 1920, where he obtained French nationality and worked as a painter, poster artist and film decorator. Arrested by the French police in February 1943, he was deported to Auschwitz where he was assigned to the “special commando”, the *Sonderkommando*, of prisoners forced to take the bodies of the murdered Jews out of the gas chambers. As the Red Army approached, the SS tried to remove all traces of the gas chambers and with them the members of the *Sonderkommando*.

25 Joël Kotek and Didier Pasamonik, *Mickey à Gurs. Les carnets de dessins de Horst Rosenthal* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2014).

26 Edmond-François Calvo (illustrations), Victor Dancette and Jacques Zimmermann (text), *La bête est morte ! La guerre mondiale des animaux* (Paris: Édition GP, vol. 1: *Quand la bête est déchainée*, 1944, vol. 2: *Quand la bête est terrassée*, 1945).

27 Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2006), 2.



Fig. 4: Exhibition *La Shoah et la bande dessinée*, on the right an enlarged figure of *La Bête est morte* (1944). (© Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, 2017)

David Olère managed to mingle with the other prisoners and took part in the death marches to camps in Austria, where he was liberated by the US Army on 6 May 1945. After his return to France, between 1945 and 1962, he produced a series of very precise drawings through which he documented what he saw and experienced in Auschwitz. As Didier Pasamonik, one of the exhibition curators, wrote: “In terms of representation, his narration is close to that of a comic strip, in which he describes each stage of this horror, from the selection of the arrivals to the gassing and cremation of the bodies. He manages to recreate things that no one has been able to photograph or film. [...] These drawings constitute a documentary source of prime importance.”²⁸

The second generation of authors who narrated the Shoah through comic strips and graphic novels – like the already mentioned Art Spiegelman and Michel Kichka – was born after the war. They addressed the events from a more distant but also personal point of view, talking about their parents’ ordinary and extraordinary destinies.

28 Aurélia Vertaldi, “Shoah: comment la bande dessinée représente l’indescriptible”, *Le Figaro*, 19 January 2027, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/bd/2017/01/19/03014-20170119ARTFIG00004-shoah-comment-la-bande-dessinee-represente-l-indescriptible.php>.

And then there is the third generation of authors, like Fanny Michaëlis, who talk about the fate of their grandparents. In *Le lait noir* (Black Milk), Michaëlis took her inspiration from the story of her grandfather who fled Berlin and was forced into exile at the beginning of the war.²⁹ Many of the soft, subdued pencil drawings are poetic and aesthetic masterpieces, though the style quickly becomes sharp and oppressive when the persecutors appear. The book beautifully expresses the emotional nature of fear and violence in a tribute that doubles as therapeutic. This is also the case for German author Barbara Yelin, who in *Irmina* (2014), an album with water-colour drawings, tells the story of her grandmother, who she discovers at the same time as the box containing her diaries; married to an SS man, the young woman was unable to fight Nazism other than by writing her dismay in her diary. The author brings this past to life with great sensitivity in a liberating narrative.³⁰

In parallel to the work of the children and grandchildren, there have been and are comic authors who do not tell their own family stories, but who have been inspired by survivors. Indeed, various accounts written and published by survivors have been turned into comic strips, sometimes with the active participation of the original author. When I worked at the *Mémorial*, I had the pleasure of meeting Joseph Joffo, who was 80 years old at the time. He presented me with a recently published comic strip retracing his memories, which he had originally published as a book in 1973. Seen through the eyes of the Jewish child he was during the German Occupation, the book and the comic, *Un sac de billes* (A Bag of Marbles), recount his escape and his experience as a hidden child. I felt his pride, his almost childlike joy and his relief. It was particularly moving. Published in three volumes, the comic strip has been translated in several languages and won several awards in the United States.³¹

Comics are particularly well-suited to educational settings, and this exhibition is the one that has attracted the most visitors over the past few years. Comics are a medium that facilitates intergenerational discussion. The images are enlightening, and their sequential nature encourages viewers to move from figurative intuition towards an exercise in reflection. The

29 Fanny Michaëlis, *Le lait noir* (Paris: Éditions Cornélius, 2016).

30 Barbara Yelin, *Irmina* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014).

31 Joseph Joffo, Kris and Vincent Bailly, *A Bag of Marbles* (Graphic Universe, 3 volumes, 2011-2013). For the US edition, see: <https://lernerbooks.com/shop/show/12887>.



Fig. 5: The reading corner within the exhibition *La Shoah et la bande dessinée*.
(© Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, 2017)

scenography (Gilles Belley) and graphic design (Cécilia Génard) created for the exhibition added a light, welcoming aesthetic. A reading corner provided visitors with an opportunity to flip through all of the albums whose pages – the original drawings, for the most part – were on display at the exhibition. Visitors could stay as long as they liked, reading and looking at the available books.

Covering a period of more than 70 years, the exhibition presented almost 100 authors of fanzines, newspapers and albums, in all genres and styles of comics and graphic novels. The albums often tell stories of women and men persecuted and deported to camps. Far from being passive victims, they are presented as human beings who fought to maintain their human dignity, even in the camps. This can be seen as spiritual resistance. The exhibition showed that comic book artists have also tackled other forms of resistance: *Varsovie, Varsovie* (Warsaw, Warsaw), by Didier Zuili,³² for example, deals with Jewish civil and armed resistance in the Warsaw ghetto, and *L'autre Doisneau* (The other Doisneau), by Raphaël Drommelschlager and Jean-Christophe Derrien³³ tells the story of photographer Robert

32 Didier Zuili, *Varsovie, Varsovie* (Vannes: Marabulles, 2017).

33 Raphaël Drommelschlager and Jean-Christophe Derrien, “L'autre Doisneau”, in *Vivre Libre ou Mourir! 9 Récits de Résistance* (Brussels: Editions Le Lombard, 2011).

Doisneau who helped Jewish fugitives by producing identity photos and false papers. *Kersten: Medecin d'Himmler* (Kersten: Himmler's Doctor) by Pat Perna and Fabrice Bedouel,³⁴ tells the story of how the doctor who treated the Reichsführer managed to obtain the release of prisoners in exchange for his care. Many of these albums shine a light on the bravery of those who placed the struggle to achieve a more just world before their own interests.

Comics appeal to younger and larger crowds, helping to circulate and share knowledge with a wider audience. In the years since this initial exhibition, the *Mémorial de la Shoah* has put on two more exhibitions focusing on comics: in 2016, *Femmes en Résistance* (Women in Resistance), based on four comic books published by Gallimard, and in 2022 *Spirou dans la tourmente de la Shoah* (Spirou in the Torment of the Shoah), which showcased Émile Bravo's comic about the life of German painter Felix Nussbaum. Each of them enjoyed the same success with both the public and the media.³⁵

Conclusion

For those persecuted by Nazi bans and ideologies, art carried major stakes. In the darkest hours of the Holocaust, it proved itself to be a formidable tool for political, psychological and spiritual resistance for those who wanted to reappropriate their identity and hand down their memories. Artistic creations – whether they were the work of professional artists or amateurs in need of a medium that could amplify their voices – countered the process of dehumanisation implemented by the oppressors. They made it possible for their authors to maintain ties to their pre-war lives or to bear witness and hand down memory in a unifying gesture. For many, art also helped them to survive the individual and collective psychological trauma – the countless works produced by Jews despite the risks is clear proof of that. For the victims, as well as their children and grandchildren, art was and is also an opportunity to process and ease the weight of painful memories and trauma. Art plays a crucial role in exploring and bringing to life collective memory, which is continually forged across generations.

34 Pat Perna and Fabrice Bedouel, *Kersten: Medecin d'Himmler* (Grenoble: Editions Glenat, 2015).

35 For more information about these two exhibitions, see: "Femmes en résistance, la nouvelle exposition du Mémorial", *Mémorial de la Shoah*, <https://www.memorialdelashoah.org/femmes-en-resistance-la-nouvelle-exposition-du-memorial.html>; "Spirou dans la tourmente de la Shoah", *Mémorial de la Shoah*, <https://expo-spirou-shoah.memorialdelashoah.org/>.

Art's presence at memorial sites plays a crucial role in conveying history in a sensitive way. Though not all protagonists share the same memory, their different takes on the same object or event can be confronted to create a more complex and comprehensive picture for visitors, who come away with a more nuanced understanding of the past. The role of scenography in the exhibitions presented at memorial sites is an important one. By showcasing each selection of works or documents depending on their unique characteristics and the story they tell, scenography kindles empathy and identification, helps reach a wide range of audiences, and provides new ways of looking at a pivotal topic for continued exploration by the contemporary world. As Georges Didi-Huberman wrote: "Works of art come to us. We can look at or listen to a piece and believe that it is addressed to us."³⁶ That is how art, whatever its form, touches our deepest emotions to precipitate both intimate, personal memories and collective memory.

36 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2018).

Remembering All-Yugoslav Antifascist Resistance Through Performative Practices in (front of) Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums

Nataša Jagdhuhn

Conceptual roots and political motives of the restored “Socialist Pilgrimages”

For the past two decades, thousands of people from all the Yugoslav successor states have gathered in memorial-museums related to the 1941-1945 People's Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* – NOB) on dates from that era they consider important. The NOB museums, where they rally, were built during socialist Yugoslavia, mainly on sites related to the uprising(s), military-political sessions of the NOB leadership, battles, concentration camps and execution sites. These sites have been strongly affected by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s. Some were heavily damaged in this time and most of them fell into a state of neglect, before being reopened at a later stage.¹ The largest portion of the loyal public that regularly gathers at these sites consists of representatives from the organisations that succeeded the Federation of the Associations of Veterans of the People's Liberation War of Yugoslavia (*Savez Udruženja Boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog Rata* – SUBNOR), and especially those who participated in the renovation of the damaged or neglected NOB museums after the wars in the 1990s. In general, these people are from the genera-

1 The NOB memorial museums that are the objects of these gatherings and of the present article are not to be confused with the Museums of Revolution which were built during Socialist Yugoslavia in the capitals of each Republic and in some regional capitals (e.g. Novi Sad, Rijeka). One difference is that the first were built on authentic sites, and another that the Museums of Revolution were not only dedicated to events and personalities of the NOB but they dealt with a broader period: the history of the workers' movement (1878–1941, the NOB period (1941–1945) and the development of the socialist self-management system (the period after 1950). Also, while the Museums of Revolution have all changed their name and their content, several of the NOB Museums continue to exist today under their former name and their content was not removed.

tions who were born in Yugoslavia or spent most of their life in Yugoslavia, and among them a very few remaining World War II veterans. The younger generations, born in and after the 1990s, mostly come with their families.

In different ways, they all participate in and determine the course and form of these ritualistic and museal events. Many visitors dress up for the occasion in Partisan or Pioneer² uniforms, bringing objects such as badges, medals, T-shirts, banners, posters with various symbols of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije – KPJ*) or of Yugoslavia more generally: flags, orders, decorations, medals, portraits of Josip Broz Tito. In front of museums, or even while walking through the museum, people sing Partisan songs and perform the *Kozaračko kolo*, a Partisan circle dance and symbol of unity and the strength that unity brings. Visitors also reenact Partisan greetings by means of various gestures, such as holding the fist to the forehead or saying the “Death to fascism, freedom to the people” slogan. Often these greetings are exchanged not only between the participants in the events, but also in front of museum exhibits or when laying wreaths.³ The majority of visitors pose for a photograph for the occasion, as much for personal memory as for the various onlooking media from the entire region of former Yugoslavia.

In order to fully understand these sorts of restored “socialist pilgrimages”,⁴ it is important to shed light on the conceptual roots from which

2 During socialist Yugoslavia, all children from the first grade of elementary school became members of the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia. They pledged a solemn oath, which required them to follow the “noble aspirations” of the “anti-fascist struggle”. Frequently, the ceremony was organised on 29 November, Republic Day, often in front of or inside museums. See Igor Duda, *Danas kada postajem pionir: Djetinjstvo i ideologija jugoslavenskoga socijalizma* (Zagreb: Srednja Evropa, 2015).

3 The internet is filled with numerous interviews on different media, including video recordings. I have myself conducted interviews with the visitors of the Museum of the Second AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia) Session in Jajce on 29 November 2013, 2014 and 2015. The people that visit Jajce on 29 November are for the most part the same people that visit Kumrovec and/or Belgrade on 25 May. I conducted an interview with the curator of the Museum of Yugoslavia (House of Flowers) Marija Đorgović in 2016. I visited the “25 May 1944” museum in Drvar 2016 and conducted an interview with former curator Drago Trninić. Materials related to commemorations from the last five years are mostly based on newspaper articles, photo and video-archives of the museums and informal conversations with their employees via email. Research material about ritual visits, i.e. statements of participants and organisers of the “Day of Youth” in Kumrovec, was mainly collected through media reports (newspapers, Youtube, TV reports, podcasts) as well as through consultations with Prof. Nevena Alempijević Škrbić.

4 The Association of World War II Veterans in Yugoslavia wholeheartedly augmented the increase in the number of museum visitors by organising so-called socialist pilgrimages, in the form of “revolution routes”, “partisan marches”, etc.. The socialist pilgrimage as a mnemonic device insured collective experience and patriotic feelings.



Fig. 1: Photo-collage from the 29 November commemoration in Jajce 2018. Author of the photos: Sandro Nuhanović. (Photos ©Museum of the Second AVNOJ Session)

this phenomenon originates. Namely, as political and museological concepts, they originate from Soviet museology discourse, whose strong influence was felt in Yugoslavia until the very end, especially when it came to commemorative practices.⁵ The practice of celebrating state holidays and important historical dates in museums during socialist Yugoslavia became a medium of bringing the past into the present, with the intention to create circumstances that allowed visitors to become witnesses of the moment in which the past and present were dialectically merged, creating a participatory platform for the creation of a collective sense of belonging.⁶ Socialist pilgrimages to and around NOB Museums reached their peak during the 1970s and 1980s. With the firm collaboration between museums and the purposely formed “Self-Governing Communities of Interest in Culture”, a so-called “consciousness industry”⁷ was created. Mass gatherings in museums and/or memorial sites took place in different forms: Partisan marches, pioneer expeditions, the Relay of Youth,⁸ mountaineering and Partisan “transversals,”⁹ exploration hikes along the routes of World War II offensives as well as car and motor races and more.

5 See for example: Archives of Yugoslavia/*Arhiv Jugoslavije* – AJ, SUBNOR, 297, Materijali Odbora za proslave, 1956-1971.

6 Nataša Jagdhuhn, “Heritage industry”, in *Memory Cultures in Southeast Europe since 1945: Proceedings of the International Academic Week at Tutzing, October 2021*, eds. Christian Voß, Sabina Ferhadbegović and Kateřina Králová (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023), 128.

7 On the term “consciousness industry” see Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Michael Roloff, *The consciousness industry: On literature, politics and the media* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

8 The Relay of Youth (*Štafeta mladosti*) was a relay race held in Yugoslavia every year on 25 May. The relay carried a baton with a birthday pledge to Josip Broz Tito and led through the various republics of Yugoslavia as an illustration of the motto of “brotherhood and unity”.

9 *Partizanske transversale* were Partisan hiking trails/tours along Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. One example was the 1.200 km long Partisan transversal of brotherhood and unity from Petrova Gora in Croatia to Žabljak in Montenegro.



Fig. 2: Collage of photographs published in the newspaper *Glas Kozare*, 4 July 1982.
 Extracts from the newspapers kept at the Museum “Kozara in NOB”.
 (© “Kozara in NOB” on Mrakovica)

In this context, NOB Museums served as stages for this type of cultural and/or diplomatic performances.¹⁰ Wearing their uniforms, army units, sports or recreational associations often gathered in the NOB Museums on state holidays such as 29 November – The Day of the Republic, or 4 July – Fighter’s Day.¹¹ Also, those who took part in World War II, especially those who had won state bravery awards, would come to the NOB Museums for these special occasions wearing their original uniforms, or in civilian dress while still showcasing their medals (People’s Hero and other awards). Many flags and visitors carrying banners would be seen, while shouts of gratitude to Tito could be heard. It was a whole-day, sometimes even several-day event, held within the environs of the museum(s). Many brought harmonicas and other instruments. Partisan songs and the *Kolo* dances would spontaneously begin throughout the events.

The photos above show glimpses of the 1982 commemoration of the 1942 Kozara Battle. They illustrate the dramatic template for the celebration of important historical dates in Yugoslavia’s memorial museums. Those visitors to today’s memorial museums, who bring the experience of the above-described ritualistic museum visits, continue to use the same template, seemingly replicating the organisation of group visits to the NOB

10 For example: at the commemorations for the 15th anniversary of the Battle of Sutjeska on Fighters’ Day (4 July) in 1958, Josip Broz Tito and the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein were guests and the ceremony was broadcast by Yugoslav television. See AJ, SUBNOR, 297, Materijali Odbora za proslave, 1956-1971, f. 35, Materials for the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Battle of Sutjeska 1958, Orjentacioni program proslave.

11 For 29th November/”Republic Day” see the chapter titled “29 November – The Days of AVNOJ” in this text; “Fighters Day” referred to 4 July 1941, when the KPJ decided to launch an armed uprising in occupied Yugoslavia.

Museums in Yugoslavia. If the two photographic compilations are compared (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2), one can see that the socialist choreography, which was planned down to the utmost detail in Yugoslavia and thus inscribed directly into the collective body of the commemoration participants, is now being cathartically re-performed by the generation that spent the greater part of its life in socialism.

The conceptual roots of group visits to museums, as argued in the previous lines, belong to the theoretical framework of the “visitor as witness” museum concept.¹² However, an issue that has thus far not been addressed in the literature concerns the political motives for repeating the outdated Yugoslav commemorative matrix. In media reports, these events are exclusively characterised as nostalgic gatherings. In this way, a generally accepted social attitude has formed: that these are apolitical masquerades with purely entertaining character.¹³ This means that this two-decade social phenomenon has never been discussed, in academic circles at least, as a cultural and political performance. Nevertheless, a deeper look into the developmental stages of this phenomenon clearly points to the fact that these ritual gatherings in museums, on significant historical dates, are not apolitical. Indeed, the main reason for their initiation, as well as their duration to this day, is to demonstrate political *engagement par excellence*. For example, gathering in/near World War II Museums started even in the museum buildings desolated in the most recent Yugoslav wars, which were often fought directly in former NOB Museums.¹⁴ The brutal physical destruction of these museums, a form of nationalist reckoning with the heritage of Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity”, aimed to establish new ethno-national boundaries in the collective memory of Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks. Afterwards, while cultural theorists tried to articulate this social phenomenon

12 For more on the socialist museum visitor as a “witness” and the “pilgrimage” to museums of the Eastern Bloc on the example of Romania, see Simina Bădică, “Curating Communism: A Comparative History of Museological Practices in Post-War (1946-1958) and Post-Communist Romania”, (Unpublished PhD diss. Central European University, 2013), 173-178.

13 What is common to this type of “nostalgia”, as the culturologist Mitja Velikonja reminds us, is that it finds its stronghold in the criticism of the present and projections of a better future. See Mitja Velikonja, *Titostalgia – A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz* (Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut, 2008); see also: Mitja Velikonja, “Between Collective Memory and Political Action: Yugonostalgia in Bosnia-Herzegovina”, in *Bosnia-Herzegovina Since Dayton: Civic and Uncivic Values*, eds. Ola Linstead and Sabrina P. Ramet (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013).

14 Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums. Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 93-105.

through concepts such as *heritocide*,¹⁵ *urbocide*,¹⁶ *knjigocid*,¹⁷ engaged intellectuals felt a moral obligation to document the conditions in which they found the former NOB Museums, and to initiate their restoration. It was as part of these efforts that people began to gather in the ruined museums.

As early as the beginning of the 2000s, when nationalist currents began to lose their intensity, bottom-up citizen initiatives appeared, demanding the restoration of World War II Museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. They were mainly made up of people who had participated in the building of these institutions in Yugoslav times:¹⁸ curators and engaged intellectuals (mainly historians and university professors who deal with the subject of World War II). Members of antifascist associations from all Yugoslav successor states also engaged in these bottom-up efforts in very large numbers. These former “visitors as witnesses”, now facing circumstances in which the survival of the former NOB Museums was threatened and uncertain, decided to act as “heritage guerrillas”.¹⁹ They did so by bringing together individuals from all the former Yugoslav republics to rescue their common heritage and return to it to the supranational values of Yugoslav antifascism, which they had once symbolised. A quote from the prominent Bosnian-Herzegovinian historian Dubravko Lovrenović, who participated in the restoration of the Museum of the Second Session of AVNOJ (in Jajce, in central Bosnia)²⁰ illustrates the motivation behind their engagement:

Life cannot be brought to a standstill simply because we do not have a state level Ministry of Culture. Therefore, we cannot wait for someone to give us a Ministry of Culture, we must work and in some way be guerrilla fighters. Fight a guerrilla war. You aim to be somebody who is recognized as relevant in the world (UNESCO), and you do

15 Marko Sjekavica, “Sustavno uništavanje baštine – prema pojmu kulturocida/heritocida”, *Informativa Museologica* 43, no.1-4 (2012): 57-75.

16 Bogdan Bogdanović, *Die Stadt und der Tod: Essay* (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 1993).

17 Ante Lešaja, *Knjigocid: Uništavanje knjiga u Hrvatskoj 1990-ih* (Zagreb: Profil, 2012).

18 *Ibid.*, 376.

19 The “heritage guerilla” term was taken from Dragan Nikolić. See Dragan Nikolić, “Depolitzacija i rekulturalizacija. Muzej II zasjedanja AVNOJ-a kao lieu de mémoire”, *Glas Antifašista* 7 (2013): 24.

20 During the Second AVNOJ Session, on 29 November 1943, Yugoslavia was proclaimed as a multi-ethnic federal state. In the building where the session took place a museum was opened in 1953.

not have the basic system that can defend this, i.e. defend this cultural good.²¹

Beyond the Museum of the Second Session of AVNOJ in Jajce, several other World War II museums have been renovated in the same manner. Among them are: the Memorial Room to the Battle of Batina (in the Draž municipality, Croatia),²² the “25 May 1944” Museum (Drvar, Bosnia and Herzegovina)²³ and the Museum Battle for the Wounded on Neretva (Jablanica, Bosnia and Herzegovina).²⁴ The priority was returning these museums to their previous functions, literally “returning to the old”, that is, replicating and restoring the exhibitions as they were conceptualised in Yugoslavia. This was only a symbolic act reinstating these institutions’ status. Nevertheless, given the general ethnonationalist climate, the goals of these “heritage guerillas” would be only partially achieved.

Namely, even if many NOB museums re-opened their doors to visitors in the early 21st century, the broken link between identity and the (World War II) heritage was not re-established. The narrative of Partisan resistance during World War II was the pillar on which the identity of socialist Yugoslavia rested, and NOB museums were their most important expression. As mirrors of Yugoslavia, they found themselves targeted by all the warring sides in the first half of the 1990s. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the link between heritage and identity, in other words the socio-cultural values and museum objects, was broken. Consequently, the Yugoslav narrative structure was suddenly no longer present.²⁵ In this situation, after their re-opening, the majority of World War II memorial museums now function as “time-capsules”, retaining and/or replicating permanent exhibitions conceived in Yugoslavia.²⁶ There are however, some museums that

21 Nikolić, “Depoliticizacija i rekulturalizacija”, 24.

22 The battle of Batina in November 1944 was fought by Yugoslav Partisans and the Red Army against the Axis powers. A memorial complex on the site was opened in 1976.

23 See the chapter titled “25 May – Commemoration of the Raid on Drvar” in this text.

24 The museum was opened in 1978 in Jablanica, the title referring to the rescue of 4.000 wounded soldiers by the Partisans during an attack led by the Axis powers in 1943.

25 See Jagdhuhn, “Heritage industry”, 79-144.

26 See Nataša Jagdhuhn, “The Post-Yugoslav Kaleidoscope: Curatorial Tactics in the (Ethno)Nationalization of Second World War Memorial Museums in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Transforming Heritage in the Former Yugoslavia: Synchronous Pasts*, eds. Gruiua Bădescu, Britt Baillie and Francesco Mazzucchelli (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 295-322.

are reconceptualized as “dysfunctional mosaic narratives”²⁷ by adding additional museum niches to the old settings. One example is the “21 October” Museum in Kragujevac, Serbia, related to the massacre of over 3.000 civilians by the German army on this day in 1941. Next to a painting by Petar Lubarda and a sculpture by Nandor Glid, which represent the victims as a collective and in a rather abstract form, a new art installation by Igor Stepančić and Irena Paunović was placed with information and photos of individual victims. The result is an exhibition collage of artworks that do not belong to the same spatial and discursive order. All together, it appears that the Yugoslav successor-states do not really know how to deal with these memorial museums, reflecting the fact that no social consensus has been found in the national frames of these states regarding memory of World War II. That memory is a highly politicised topic in a public sphere dominated by ethnonationalism.

It is because of this broken link between the present and the past that after the reopening of the museums, the restoration of their commemorative scripts from the outside also began. Given that the joint, Yugoslav, supranational, anti-fascist struggle could no longer be communicated through these now decontextualized museum exhibitions, the “guerilla-visitors” reenacted repertoires of commemorative scripts as the only way to communicate the joint resistance in World War II. The performances of these “visitors as mediators”²⁸ transmitted knowledge about the past in a way that the now decontextualized or re-purposed museum exhibitions did not allow.²⁹ They became living exhibits – both observers and subjects of observation. More generally, the ritual visits to World War II museums in the post-Yugoslav context fulfil a role as a social corrective. Bringing Partisan and Pioneer uniforms into museums is the visitors’ response to “amnesiac and hegemonic ethno-national memory narratives”³⁰ in the public sphere and

27 See Jagdhuhn “Heritage industry”, 175-244.

28 Referring to Latour’s notion of “mediators”, see Bruno Latour, “The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things”, in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. Paul Graves-Brown (London: Routledge, 2000), 10-12; Nikolić explains the role of the participants of the Days of “AVNOJ” event through their willingness to travel to another country and bring with them a variety of memorial emblems. See: Nikolić, “Depolitizacija i rekulturalizacija”, 22-24.

29 Here I am recalling Diana Taylor’s question “What tensions might performance behaviors show that might not be recognized in texts and documents?” See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), XVIII.

30 Mirko Milivojević, “Re-reading/Writing Yugoslav Pasts and Presents in Post-Yugoslav Literature: Between (Yugo-)Nostalgia and “Lateral Networks”, in *Reconsidering (Post-) Yugoslav Time*, eds.

the processes of de-ideologization and ethno-nationalisation of World War II memory. In addition, the aim of their wearing costumes, is to re-establish the link between museum sources and communist ideology, which is now blurred in these revalued institutions of memory. The participants in these unusual ceremonies do not claim that they live in the past, nor is it their opinion that Yugoslavia should be restored as a state entity. They insist their aims are to remind the public of certain values that have depreciated with the disappearance of Yugoslavia, values such as solidarity, social justice and equality, universal antifascist values and multiculturalism.³¹ Therefore, their engagement could be a form of effective civic conscience and reminder of what must not be forgotten.

Performing confiscated memory and sense of identity

Since the dissolution of Yugoslavia, almost all forms of Yugoslav remembrance culture have been exiled from public discourse in the post-Yugoslav states, and moved to the space of individual private memory. In accordance with this assessment, Maria Todorova observes in her analysis of “post-communist nostalgia” that “it is, first and foremost, a matter of the wishes of those who lived communism, even when opposing or being indifferent to it, to introduce meaning and dignity to their lives, and not to be considered, remembered or felt sorry for as losers or ‘slaves’”.³² Celebration of former Yugoslav holidays such as 25 May (Day of Youth) or 29 November (Republic Day), can be understood as need to express a “confiscated identity”,³³ based on the experience in the NOB, led by Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The largest gatherings take place on the two mentioned dates, which both had clear political connotations in Yugoslavia: celebration of Josip Broz Tito’s birthday for 25 May, and celebration of socialist Yugoslavia’s “birthday” for 29 November, referencing the aforementioned AVNOJ

Aleksandar Mijatović and Brian Willems (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 149.

31 See Predrag Marković, “Sozialismus und seine sieben ‘S’-Werte der Nostalgie”, in *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie: Die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa (Visuelle Geschichtskultur)*, eds. Ulf Brunnbauer and Stefan Troebst (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 153-164.

32 Marija Todorova, “Reimaginacija Balkana”, in *Dobro došli u pustinju postsocijalizma*, eds. Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2015), 139.

33 See Dubravka Ugrisić, “The Confiscation of Memory”, trans. Celia Hawkesworth, *New Left Review* 218 (1996): 14-39.

session on this day in 1943, which laid the foundation for the Yugoslav Federation. The gatherings on these days follow common patterns, but also have their specificities regarding which museum locations they take place in, as the following four case studies will show. Differences can also be seen in the way the museums that are the target of these new “socialist pilgrimages” react to this social phenomenon.

25 May – *Day of Youth* in Kumrovec

After the 1990s, tensions of the recent wars in the former-Yugoslav region subsided and the war-instigating rhetoric was slowly substituted with a peace-focused rhetoric. In this context, several thousand people started gatherings in Kumrovec (Croatia) on 25 May, around and in the open-air “Old Village Museum”, which to this day also encompasses the house in which Josip Broz Tito was born. Streams of applauding people passed in front of the museums, singing Partisan songs, carrying Yugoslav flags, wearing Partisan uniforms and showcasing medals, using the museums’ exhibitions as *mise en scène* for taking photographs and filming home videos, which were later distributed via the internet and local media. These events still are repeated annually.

The “Old Village Museum” in Kumrovec does not organise such gatherings; the official organiser is the “Josip Broz Tito” association from Croatia. Nevertheless, the museum provides ample tourist content and the event itself is advertised in the media as “The Day of Youth and Joy” (in 2018) or “Youth Day” under the motto “In youth there is joy – in joy there is youth” (2023).³⁴ On this occasion in Kumrovec, most of the visitors, if they were unable to find a Partisan or Pioneer uniform in their closets, choose a T-shirt emblazoned with Tito quotes or with generally known odes to him (such as, *Comrade Tito, white violet, by all the Youth, you are beloved*). An important part of the ritual are the salutations, caresses and addresses made to the statue of Josip Broz Tito, a sculpture by Antun Augustinčić which is placed in the centre of the memorial park, where bouquets of flowers are also laid. As perceptively observed by Hjemdahl and Škrbić Alempijević in their ethnographic study, it is impossible to determine one single, true goal and reason for this event:

³⁴ See the Kumrovec municipality’s website: “Dan mladosti”, *Općina Kumrovec*, <https://kumrovec.hr/dan-mladosti/>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed on 12 January 2024.



Fig. 3: Marking 25 May in Kumrovec, 2006. (Photo © Nevena Škrbić Alempijević)

The Day of Youth is not, as a rule, a moment of glorifying the life and work of Tito, a wish to reclaim a past political system, nor is it regret for the “good old days,” a time-machine of sorts, which through songs, distinct visual symbols, shared memories, takes the participants back to an idealised epoch of youth; nor is it, on the other hand, an opportunity to meet old acquaintances, or good fun, youthful rebellion against the ruling discourse, a quest for unusual souvenirs, nor, simply – a picnic into a Zagorje village. Nevertheless, this celebration can be all of this for all its different participants.³⁵

In Kumrovec, an increasing number of actors from the cultural scene participate in the May event. The festive atmosphere is slowly transforming from being a “nostalgic gathering” to taking the form of a festival. In 2017, the “Old Village Museum” opened its doors for visitor participation, inviting them to share their family memories with the museum on the day of Tito’s death.³⁶ Group visits are increasing year by year at this place.³⁷ When asked why such a large number of people gather in Kumrovec to celebrate

35 Kirsti Hjemdahl and Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, “Kako “misliti u hod” na proslavi Dana mladosti? Fenomenološki pristup Kumrovcu”, in *Etnologija bliskoga: Poetika i politika suvremenih terenskih istraživanja*, eds. Jasna Čapo Žmegač, Valentina Gulin Zrnić and Goran Pavel Šantek, (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, 2006), 162.

36 See the “Old Village” Museum’s website: “Izložba “Umro je drug Tito”, Muzej “Staro selo” Kumrovec, 18 May 2017, <https://www.mss.mhz.hr/clanak/izlozba-umro-je-drug-tito>.

37 In 2004, around 5.000 people attended the event; the following year, the 25th anniversary of Tito’s death, between 8.000 and 10.000 were there. In 2015, the 35th anniversary of Tito’s death, 15.000 people attended. See the conversation between Jovan Vejnović and Peter Korchnak on the Remembering Yugoslavia podcast: Peter Korchnak, host, “One Day in Kumrovec’: Remembering Yugoslavia Podcast Episode #73, Remembering Yugoslavia (podcast), 29 May 2023, <https://rememberingyugoslavia.com/dan-mladosti/>.

the 130th anniversary of Tito's birth in 2022, Jovan Vejnović, president of the "Josip Broz Tito" association, answered: "The reason is the memory, not only of the past, but to a time in which we lived both richer and safer."³⁸

25 May – *Day of Youth* in Belgrade

Besides Tito's birth house in Kumrovec, the House of Flowers (*Kuća Cveća*) in Belgrade is another emblematic place for gatherings linked to the memory of Tito. The House of Flowers, which is situated within the Museum of Yugoslavia, has been Josip Broz Tito's final resting place since his death in 1980, as well as of his wife, Jovanka Broz, who died in 2013. Like the Tito Memorial House in Kumrovec, the House of Flowers in Belgrade is both a remainder and a reminder of the Yugoslav memorial space in a nationally-codified memorial landscape, provoking and dividing its museum audience. Although the Museum of Yugoslavia, like the Museum in Kumrovec, also reached the decision not to interfere in the organisation of such gatherings, it, nevertheless, opened the "Figures of Memory" exhibition in the House of Flowers in 2015, on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of Josip Broz Tito's death and 70 years since the first baton race. This exhibition relied directly on the "surviving holiday" theme by presenting a three-channelled video installation of "Youth Day celebrations" (one segment shows the *Slet* events³⁹ and the other two were video documents from Kumrovec and Belgrade on 25 May, after the breakup of Yugoslavia).

Above rows of relay batons, visitors were able to see the people who brought these objects to the museum. Initially the idea was to install a two-channel video installation in the form of live streaming, simultaneously showing the people visiting the House of Flowers and Tito's birth house in Kumrovec on 25 May. However, because of technical demands, the live-broadcast was abandoned, and the exhibition showed only the photo material, as is demonstrated in Figure 4.

Interestingly, the group of people that embodies the 25 May phenomenon, in front of and within the Museum of Yugoslavia, consists of

38 Hina, "Par tisuća ljudi na proslavi Dana mladosti u Kumrovcu: 'Nekad smo živjeli bogatije i sigurnije'", *Novi List*, 21 May 2022, <https://www.novolist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/foto-par-tisuca-ljudi-na-proslavi-dana-mladosti-u-kumrovcu-nekad-smo-zivjeli-bogatije-i-sigurnije/>.

39 These were gymnastic performances by young people that took place at the Yugoslav People's Army Stadium in Belgrade as part of the "Day of Youth" event from 1965 to 1987.



Fig. 4: Introductory installation to the “Figures of Memory” exhibition.

(Photo © Museum of Yugoslavia)

individuals who are not actively engaged in these projects, but involved in a rather passive way. They are present in the House of Flowers exhibition through recordings of 25 May celebrations and through messages left in the visitors’ books, but not as co-creators of the exhibitions or the public debates organised by the museum. By positioning itself in such a way, the Museum of Yugoslavia clearly dissociates from these groups’ visits, their form and their protagonists. Such a stance was made official by the museum staff following the “May 25th and the Museum of Yugoslav History Today” roundtable discussion in 2013, which was “the first public debate on the topic that aimed to problematize the position of the Museum and its relationship to the visitors linked to this particular date”.⁴⁰

Up until the present, the Museum of Yugoslavia has continued the practice of interviewing those who visit the museum on 25 May, receiving the baton from visitors, and recording conversations with public figures from the fields of culture, art and science on the topics of Yugoslav heritage. Recently, it has been possible to view and write in the book of impressions digitally.⁴¹ In 2021, an exhibition entitled “Comrade Tito died” was opened in the House of Flowers.⁴² The number of visits has not decreased over time.

40 Marija Đorgović, “The Museum as Mediator of Memory. Dealing With Nostalgia at the Museum of Yugoslav History”, in *Nostalgia on the Move*, eds. Mirjana Slavković and Marija Đorgović, (Beograd: The Museum of Yugoslavia, 2017), 98.

41 See: “Utisci”, Muzej Jugoslavije, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/utisci/>.

42 This exhibition also includes art works of contemporary artists: Dragan Srdić, Goranka Matić, Novi kolektivizam and Milenko Mihajlović. See: “Umro je drug Tito”, Muzej Jugoslavije, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/exhibition/umro-je-drug-tito/>.

On 25 May 2022, five buses from North Macedonia were parked in front of the museum. Among the visitors was Mirjana Lalić from Lika in Croatia, who described the reasons for paying respect to the former president of Yugoslavia with the following words: “Tito freed us and helped us build houses that were destroyed by the Ustasha, and then he educated us.”⁴³

29 November – *The Days of AVNOJ*

Unlike the celebrations of most other World War II or Yugoslavia-related dates that take place in museums (though not as part of their exhibition complex), the celebration of 29 November in Jajce was inaugurated in 2008 and has for the past consecutive years been organised by the Museum of the Second AVNOJ Session. The 65th anniversary of the historical session was not only an opportunity to reinstitute the original function of this museum; the ritual of marking the historical meeting in Jajce was also reestablished on this date.⁴⁴ Since 2008, 300 to 500 people from the whole former Yugoslavia region have participated in the annual “Days of AVNOJ” event. The central moment is a gathering within the AVNOJ-museum, in the hall where the historic session took place in 1943, with a script following the dramaturgy of the gatherings on this day during socialist Yugoslavia: welcome speech by the host (every year there is a different person in the role of host), the playing of the “Internationale” anthem, the host’s speech on the importance of preserving memory of the AVNOJ; an address by a representative of the “Society of the Antifascist Fighters of the People’s Liberation War of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, an address by the mayor of Jajce, then the host’s speech on historical date of 29 November 1943, addressing representatives of antifascist associations from all republics of the former Yugoslavia, the host’s speech about AVNOJ’s decisions, a performance by a cultural-artistic association (a different one each year), and a closing speech and acknowledgements by the host.⁴⁵

43 BBC News, “Tito, istorija i Jugoslavija: “Umro je drug Tito” – 42 godine kasnije”, *b92.net*, 4 March 2022: https://www.b92.net/bbc/index.php?yyyy=2022&mm=05&dd=04&nav_id=2149370.

44 Shortly before the opening of the Museum of Second AVNOJ Session, the scenario of the “Solemn Academy” – based on the script of ceremonies that took place in Yugoslavia – was written by Dijana Duzić (senior associate for information and protocol in the Jajce council) and Enes Milak.

45 For a more detailed description of the scenario – the transcript of the scenario Days of AVNOJ from 2013 – see: Nataša Jagdhuhn, “Walking Heritage: Performance as a Method of Transmitting a Confiscated Memory and Identity”, in *Nostalgia on the Move*, eds. Mirjana Slavković and Marija Đorgović (Beograd: Muzej Jugoslavije, 2017), 90-91.



Fig. 5: “Days of AVNOJ”, 2022. (Author of the photos: Sandro Nuhanović.
Photo © Museum of the Second AVNOJ Session)

On the one hand, the “Days of AVNOJ” event was envisioned as a reminder of the Second AVNOJ Session’s importance to the renewal of statehood of the states created after Yugoslavia, in the sense that the borders of the Yugoslav Republics decided by AVNOJ during World War II also constituted the legal basis for the new independent states that emerged in the 1990s. On the other hand, it was also the initial idea of Enes Milak, the first director of the museum, that “Days of AVNOJ” should “loosen nationalists’ frictions in the region”.⁴⁶

The “Days of AVNOJ” cultural performance has opened the possibility of transmitting hybrid Yugoslav heritage on a transnational, post-Yugoslav level – respecting the ties and divisions between Yugoslav successor states – which to this point has not been achieved by a single museum or exhibition. Furthermore, the purpose of the principle that drives the perpetuation

46 Enes Milak, interview with the author, 21 September, 2012.

of Yugoslav rhetoric, from the perspective of the representatives of the city of Jajce, is promoting Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity, emphasising the unity of its different nations against dominating nationalist parties. Conversely for museum visitors, the purpose of the AVNOJ Museum and its “holiday” is the preservation of the “antifascist tradition”, as one often hears the “Days of AVNOJ” speakers saying. As a result of both these motivations, the “Days of AVNOJ” ceremony “opens the space for broadening our understanding and awareness, not solely regarding the historical event – 29 November 1943 – but also forms of its ritualization”.⁴⁷

25 May – Commemoration of the Raid on Drvar

25 May was celebrated in Yugoslavia as Youth Day in connection with Tito’s birthday, even though his real day of birth was actually 7 May. Tito chose 25 May, which he considered as his second birthday, in reference to a major event in the Partisans’ struggle during the war. On 25 May 1944, he escaped a massive aerial and ground German attack on Drvar in northwestern Bosnia where his headquarters were situated in a cave.⁴⁸ In socialist Yugoslavia, the “25 May 1944” memorial complex related to the “raid on Drvar” was established in different steps in and around the city; after being destroyed during the 1992-1995 war, parts of the complex were reopened 15 years later. Similar to the AVNOJ days in Jajce, the annual commemorations in Drvar are full of socialist, Yugoslav symbols, and the Museum in Drvar is directly part of the organisation of the commemorations, together with the municipality and the Center for Culture and Sports. However, while in Jajce a crucial part of the gatherings takes place within the museum, the events are organised in the outside space in Drvar. The cultural and artistic program in Drvar is mainly dedicated to the presentation of musical performances by youth from the local folklore society, school choirs and kindergartens. As part of the 2023 commemoration’s program, Drvar High School students carried the youth relay to the “25 May 1944” memorial complex. They handed it over to Olga Stoiljković Trifunović from SUBNOR Serbia, who led a delegation of fighters, descendants and admirers of the 6th Lika

47 Jagdhuhn, “Walking Heritage”, 84.

48 See Igor Duda, “Ritam godine”, in *Nikad im bolje nije bilo?: modernizacija svakodnevnog života u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji*, ed. Ana Panić (Beograd: The Museum of Yugoslavia, 2014), 95.



Fig. 6: Commemoration of the Raid on Drvar in 2023.
(Photos: ©Archive of the First Proletarian NOU Brigade)

Division and the First Proletarian People's Liberation Strike Brigade which had been part of the Partisans army during the battle of Drvar in 1944.⁴⁹

In addition to laying wreaths of flowers on the remains of the destroyed Monument to the victims of fascist terror, as part of the program, in 2017, "Drvar was flown over by aeroplanes of the Aero Club from Prijedor, and a descent of mountaineers down Tito's path was organised, as well as a paraglider flight over Tito cave."⁵⁰ One of the major motivations for organising these commemorations stemmed from their touristic potential. Drvar receives between 5.000 and 10.000 visitors a year, which is, as Nebojša Jovičić, the director of the 25 May 1944 memorial claims, a negligible figure compared to the 190.000 who would come in the Yugoslav period, when, as the inhabitants of the city testify, it was possible to make a living from tourism.⁵¹ Jovičić also emphasises that Drvar "is a monument of regional resistance and heroic struggle against fascism."⁵² Transnational reading of the heritage of World War II as a political demand of peaceful coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and the region) is obviously the wish of the visitors to the "Raid on Drvar" ceremony as well. At the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of this event, one of the visitors in a Partisan uniform – Rade Pilipović from the "Josip Broz Tito" association from Banja Luka – stated:

49 See: "Godišnjica obeležavanja desanta na Drvar", *Subnor Serbia*, 25 May 2023, <https://www.subnor.org.rs/godisnjica-obelezavanja-desanta-na-drvar>.

50 See: "Antifašisti na obilježavanju godišnjice Desanta na Drvar", *Visoko.ba*, 26 May 2019. <https://visoko.ba/antifasisti-na-obiljezavanju-godisnjice-desanta-na-drvar/>.

51 See: Edis Bulić, "Drvar – razglednica iz Titovog doba", *Al Jazeera*, 25 May 2017, <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2017/5/25/drvar-razglednica-iz-titovog-doba>.

52 Ibid.

It would be a sin for future generations to forget that here on that day, before and after that day, there was a fighting brotherhood of one, second and a third nation. Only this truth can lead future generations to a better life. We would not have been winners in 1945 if that fighting brotherhood would not have existed or been passed on to the people. There is only one solution for Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the most complicated country in Europe, only a brotherhood of one, second and a third nation! We have a solution, a blessing for the generations who accept it and go for it.⁵³

From the statements of the head of the memorial complex in Drvar, as well as from the above quoted visitor, it can be concluded that the commemoration of the Raid on Drvar has two goals: 1) restoring the city to the status it had in Yugoslavia, when the catchphrase “Tito’s Drvar” gave it great tourist potential and 2) liberating the town and the museum from the stigma brought by the wars of the 1990s and the burning Tito’s cave in 1992.⁵⁴ Taking into account the general political climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina – “fragmented memories in a fragmented country”⁵⁵ – Pilipović proposes as a solution, which can be considered as the ultimate political message of ritual gatherings described in this text, the re-articulation of the politics of inclusion, as symbolised by the common antifascist heritage of all southern Slavs. This type of political demand is not aimed at re-actualising the “Yugoslavisation” of the memorial landscape, or implementing the concept of “Europeanisation” in collective memory. Rather, it is the need to embody the transnational dimension of Yugoslav antifascism, which is missing from the institutional interpretation of the common past in all the successor states. This proposal contains a solution for re-establishing the link between NOB heritage, in the form of the museums, and the social and cultural values that were originally inscribed in them.

53 Banjalučka Hronika, “PUTOKAZ – Desant na Drvar”, YouTube Video, 22:41, 2 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=MMfzRTgbsVk>.

54 See Dejan Šajinović, “Partizani se vraćaju u Drvar”, *Deutsche Welle*, 13 October 2009, <https://www.dw.com/bs/partizani-se-vra%C4%87aju-u-drvar/a-4785992>.

55 Nicolas Moll, “Fragmented memories in a fragmented country: memory competition and political identity-building in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Nationalities Papers* 41(6), (2013): 910-935.

Instead of conclusion: Rituals as last vestiges of a multiethnic, antifascist identity

World War II – related museums in Yugoslavia were, from the very beginning, conceived as gathering places and their repertoire of embodied memory – gestures, dances, speeches – was at least as important as their exhibitions. In this sense, the central message of the NOB Museums was mediated through performance, the collective body of the visitors, rather than through the museum and its artefacts. Their exhibitions did not offer a large number of original objects, relying mostly on archival materials and art installations, but gatherings in/around museums on important historical dates offered an authentic experience in performing memory of the NOB, based on Yugoslav identity.

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the values on which Yugoslav heritage and identity were founded lost their epistemological base. Consequently, Yugoslavs and Yugoslav museums were forced to search for the new realms of belonging. Ritual visits to World War II museums, in the manner described in this text, are one of the ways to resist forced amnesia and “confiscated identity”. Museum visits, which were once common (in Yugoslavia) are now performed as reflection of the “museum in us” – a collection of “our” formative memories. The display of Partisan uniforms, medals, flags and other state symbols retrieved from personal closets, and their transmigration from state to state along with the participants,⁵⁶ is aimed at making an intervention into the domain of official remembrance politics, where there was/is no room for the representation of Yugoslavia’s multiethnic, antifascist emancipatory aspects. In this political climate, where the museums have become hostages of (local) politics and the curatorial profession lost its integrity, the medium of performance seems the only possible way to convey the idea of Yugoslavia’s uprooted heritage.

One conclusion that could be reached is that the subversive nature of marking 25 May, in Belgrade and Kumrovec after the breakup of Yugoslavia, is evident in the act of transferring this “social choreography”⁵⁷ through

56 Nikolić, “Depolitizacija i rekulturalizacija”, 24.

57 I use the term “social choreography” as defined by literary theorist Andrew Hewitt. See Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

the performance of “embodied rituals as a mechanism of the ideology”⁵⁸ of socialism. This ideology was adopted from Yugoslav times into a new socio-political context, strategically into (meta)museums,⁵⁹ which are now “positioned between the past and the future, [as] places in which a certain society creates its own identity values”.⁶⁰ Because of this, the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, as well as the Kumrovec Memorial Zone, become – each 25 May – places where heritage is “acted-out” without curatorial control. That kind of unusual autonomy shown by visitors in abolishing the authoritative framework of the museum institution, is even illustrated by the entries in the visitor books. Participants in the group visits do not address the museum but often write messages to Josip Broz Tito (as a symbol of the former social system).⁶¹ Unlike the gatherings in Belgrade and Kumrovec, the commemorations in Jajce and Drvar are organised by the museums, in cooperation with the parent municipality. In this sense, the commemorative scripts are clearly defined and thus, so is the choreography of the visitor’s movement inside (Jajce) and in front (Drvar) of the museum. However, what is common to all four manifestations is that group visits to museums, as a form of socialist pilgrimages that gather people from all Yugoslav successor states, appeared as a form of resistance to the wave of

58 Hewitt’s “social choreography” concept is explained by performance art theorists Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić. See: Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić, “Uvodnik”, *TkH časopis za teoriju izvođačkih umetnosti*, 21:3 (2013).

59 A Metamuseum is a museum within a museum, a museum that reveals its own history and discovers its own medium (of creating knowledge and memory). Ultimately, the metamuseum is a museum in transition. See Jagdhuhn, “Heritage industry”.

60 Pjotr Pjetrovski, *Kritički muzej* (Beograd: Evropa Nostra Srbija, 2013), 9.

61 An example of this attitude is one of many messages from the delegation of the Alliance of Josip Broz Tito Societies and the Alliance of Anti-Fascists of Croatia dating May 2010:

“Comrade Tito,

On this day, 30 years ago, your physical farewell took place. We are in mourning that you no longer lead us, and we are sad that we no longer live in a time worthy of man. Today we are without self-managing specificity and we are reduced within the framework of capitalist exploitation, lacking human dignity.

This year we will mark 65 years of the victory over Nazi-Fascism and domestic traitors, which you directly contributed to as head of the reputable People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. On this year’s event Day of Youth-Joy, leaders of the Fighter’s Alliance from all SFRJ republics will meet to express, in unity, their commitment to NOB heritage, won freedom and the building of a self-managing socialist society.

In the past years, intentional lies have been written about you and your achievements. The intensity of the downpour is as great as the power of the people’s realisations of what they had and the extent to which they cared.

Your devout followers from the Alliance of Josip Broz Tito Societies and the Alliance of Anti-Fascists of Croatia.”

NOB heritage destruction that occurred during the 1990s. They are also a result of the radical (ethno)nationalism-charged turn in remembrance culture, caused by Yugoslavia's bloody dissolution. By comparing the commemorative scenarios in Yugoslavia and the now ritualised visits to World War II memorial museums after the breakup of Yugoslavia, this text opens a space for the identification and analysis of the continued transmission of historical messages through a sensory repertoire – from wearing a certain suit, to certain ideologically coded gestures, to the performing particular songs and dances – both in front of and within museums.

Researching and Communicating the Diversity of Resistance Since 1967: *Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945*

Thomas Altmeyer

The history of the *Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945*¹ is inextricably linked to post-war German history. The *Studienkreis*'s founding in 1967 was a response to the omissions in the historical confrontation with National Socialism and the marginalisation of the political left in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. During the era of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, German politics were strongly anti-communist. By governmental decree, the so-called "Adenauer-Erlass" in 1950, members of two right-wing and eleven left-wing organisations were suspended from state services. Among them were the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – KPD) and all their related suborganisations as well as the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Nazi-Regime* – VVN), an organisation founded in 1947 by victims of Nazi persecution.² In 1956 the KPD was banned altogether.

The founding of the *Studienkreis* was also an answer to the deficiencies of the early research on resistance. Most researchers of the time concentrated on military resistance and the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, churches' opposition and resistance and the group of student resistance known as White Rose (*Weißerose*). The broad research field of resistance from the labour movement, especially pertaining to communist organisations, was scarcely noticed in academic research in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).³

1 The full name of the *Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945* is *Studienkreis zur Erforschung und Vermittlung der Geschichte des deutschen Widerstandes 1933-1945 e.V.* The English translation is "Study Group for Research and Communication of the History of the German Resistance 1933-1945".

2 In 1971, the VVN added the League of Antifascists (*Bund der Antifaschisten* – BdA) to the organisation and changed the acronym to VVN-BdA.

3 The situation was quite different in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), where communist resistance was emphasised while other areas of resistance were neglected.

Last but not least, the *Studienkreis*' founding was a reaction to political developments in the early and mid-1960s with the strengthening of right-wing extremism in the FRG. In the second half of the 1960s, the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD)⁴ was a part of seven federal state parliaments. The experiences of resistance and the history of resistance were seen as a basis for a democratic society in Germany. When Max Oppenheimer, one of the founders of the *Studienkreis*, wrote about the two main founders, Joachim Heydorn and Wolfgang Abendroth, he emphasised that:

Both came from the resistance and knew from their own experience about the brutality of the Nazi dictatorship: both were concerned about the re-emergence of fascist activities and propaganda in the Federal Republic. Both saw the main tasks in the analysis of fascist rule and its causes as well as in the research of workers' resistance in order to develop antifascist counterstrategies on the basis of this knowledge. The *Studienkreis* plans its work in their spirit, which should help to preserve the intellectual and moral values of the resistance struggle, make them known to the public and pass on its militant tradition to the younger generation in particular.⁵

Therefore defending democracy is seen as one legacy of resistance. In the words of Joseph C. Rossaint, a former Catholic resistance fighter, at the founding conference in 1967: "Resistance itself was a school in which many things were learned and can be learned. It opens up the realisation that the conscious step into history means a choice, a choice in which one must accept the consequences. It was not a comfortable thought, but a struggle [...]."⁶

4 The *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, literally translated as the National Democratic Party of Germany, was an extremist right-wing party founded in 1964.

5 Max Oppenheimer, "Antifaschismus und demokratisches Identitätsbewusstsein", *informationen* 27 (März 1988), 10.

6 J. C. Rossaint, "Sinn und Wert der Vermittlung der Geschichte des Widerstandes", in *Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945. Aspekte der Forschung und Darstellung im Schulbuch*, ed. Edgar Weick (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1967), 15.

Organisational and structural development

The *Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945* was founded in February 1967 by former resistance fighters, scientists and pedagogues. Among them was the aforementioned university professor Wolfgang Abendroth, the “partisan professor in the country of followers” (“*Partisanen-Professor im Land der Mitläufer*”), as Jürgen Habermas once called him. Abendroth, lawyer and political scientist, joined the dissident communist group *Kommunistische Partei-Opposition* (KPO) in 1928, and was involved in the *Neu Beginnen* resistance group (also known as the Miles group) after 1933. In 1937, he was imprisoned with a four year sentence because of his work in the resistance. Then, in 1943, he was ordered to join the Penal Battalion 999 (*Bewährungsbataillon 999*) to fight as part of the German Wehrmacht in Greece. Once there, he deserted and joined the Greek resistance and partisans.

Other members of *Studienkreis* included Professor of Education Heinz Joachim Heydorn, who had been a member of the Confessing Protestant Church and deserter from the Wehrmacht in 1944 and Max Oppenheimer, a Jewish socialist who emigrated to Great Britain through Switzerland after a short internment in Dachau concentration camp. There he was involved, until the end of the war, in the national group of German trade unionists in Great Britain.

The starting point for the *Studienkreis* was a conference on history textbooks and the presentation of resistance in Germany after World War II. Here the gaps in the representation of the resistance became clear. One of the most central deficits was the insufficient representation of the resistance of the labour movement in West German textbooks.⁷

7 Edgar Weick, “Die Widerspiegelung des Widerstandes gegen den Nationalsozialismus in den Schulbüchern”, in *Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945*, ed. Weick, 123-136. For an overview of the development of the scientific research about German resistance see: Johannes Tuchel, “Vergessen, verdrängt, ignoriert – Überlegungen zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Widerstandes gegen den Nationalsozialismus im Nachkriegsdeutschland”, in *Der vergessene Widerstand. Zur Realgeschichte und Wahrnehmung des Kampfes gegen die NS-Diktatur. Dachauer Symposium zur Zeitgeschichte Bd. 5*, ed. Johannes Tuchel (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 7-35; Gerd R. Ueberschär, “Von der Einzeltat des 20. Juli 1944 zur ‘Volksopposition’? Stationen und Wege der westdeutschen Historiographie nach 1945”, in *Der 20. Juli 1944. Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime*, ed. Gerd R. Ueberschär (Köln: Bund-Verlag 1994), 101-125; Wolfgang Wippermann, “Geschichtspolitik und Widerstand”, in *Der aufrechte Gang. Antifaschistischen Widerstand neu bedenken, verstehen, weitergeben. Reader zur Tagung vom 28.11.1998 in Frankfurt a.M.*, ed. Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945 (Frankfurt: 1998), 1-12; Thomas Altmeyer, “Widerstand

The *Studienkreis* was therefore established to research and convey the social and political extent of the resistance movement. The work was also done to give the German resistance more appreciation in post-war West Germany. A look at surveys of these times shows that only 43 percent of men and 38 percent of women had a positive view of the “Men of July 20” in 1951. In 1956, an overwhelming majority of the population rejected the idea of naming a school after Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg or Carl Friedrich Goerdeler. In the following decades the proportion of positive assessments towards the conspirators of 20 July 1944 changed only marginally. It was not until 2004 that a representative survey of the German population showed a predominantly positive assessment of the 20 July plot.⁸ Former resistance fighters were often seen as traitors. Additionally, such resistors confronted the narratives of many Germans who said that they didn’t know about the crimes or could not do anything about them.

In the first years, the work focused especially on giving a broad space for resistance from the workers’ movement. The first travelling exhibition on antifascist resistance was established in 1971 and had its première in the *Paulskirche* of Frankfurt, the place of the first all-German democratic parliament in 1848. The exhibition was a collaboration between the *Studienkreis*, the VVN and two other organisations. Afterwards it was shown in many West German cities. The exhibit’s opening had 20.000 visitors, and 34.000 visitors came to the exhibition when it was shown in Dachau near Munich during the 1972 Summer Olympic Games. The exhibition gave broad attention to the resistance of the workers’ movement, for example, the illegal activities of trade unionists between 1934-1936. Resistance groups and networks like the Schulze-Boysen-Harnack-Group, also called Red Orchestra (*Rote Kapelle*), the communist resistance group around Robert Uhrig in Berlin or the Lechleiter Group in Mannheim were portrayed as well as the resistance group around Herbert Baum in which young communists and Jews were active. However, other aspects such as religious resistance, the White Rose resistance group or the 20 July plot were also important parts of the exhibition.

gegen das NS-Regime. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung”, in *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Perspektiven der Vermittlung*, ed. Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945 (Frankfurt: VAS, 2007), 24-42.

8 Johannes Tüchel, “Zwischen Diffamierung und Anerkennung: Zum Umgang mit dem 20. Juli 1944 in der frühen Bundesrepublik”, *APuZ* 27 (2014): 23.

This exhibition was followed by numerous other travelling exhibitions. Topics included the resistance of young people, women, unionists or children and their drawings and poems in Theresienstadt, or Nazi terror against children.

In 1977, an archive and a library were opened in Frankfurt to make information about the German resistance accessible for anyone who was interested. The initial material came from the VVN and other organisations of persecuted or camp communities. Visitors can find numerous documents of the antifascist resistance such as leaflets, newspapers, camouflage writings, stickers and flyers, as well as memoirs and interviews. Documents of persecution as well as compensation files, lists of graves, documents from associations of former prisoners and the establishment of memorials are also collected in the archive. A special part of the archival stock are bequests from former resistance fighters and objects from the resistance movement and the persecuted, including handicrafts from the women's concentration camps Moringen, Lichtenburg and Ravensbrück, as well as the Waldheim prison. An important part of the collection are the files of the *Süddeutsche Ärzte- und Sanitätshilfe* (SÄS), created by the *Centrale Sanitaire Suisse* (CSS) in order to provide medical and humanitarian support for resistance fighters and victims of Nazi persecution after 1945.⁹ These files concern 5.000 resistance fighters, victims of persecution and their relatives who can be researched.¹⁰

With the establishment of the archive, the *informationen* magazine was founded and published. In the beginning, it was more or less a printed newsletter. The aim of this project was again to make resistance more publicly known, in addition to raising awareness of the *Studienkreis* through its archive and research. Over the years, the character of the magazine has changed. It has become a scientific newspaper, with a very diverse range of topics and authors.¹¹

9 The CSS, a long-existing Swiss organisation, created the SÄS to provide medical care to victims and their families. These organisations' names can be translated literally as the Swiss Medical Centre (CSS) and South German Doctors and Medical Help (SÄS).

10 Hermann Unterhinninghofen, "Die Verfolgten von gestern sind die Erbauer der Zukunft." Zur humanitären Hilfe der Centrale Sanitaire Suisse für NS-Opfer", *informationen* 62 (November 2005): 5-13.

11 Authors include the staff of the universities and memorial sites as well as teachers, students and young academics, local researchers and in earlier times, former resistance fighters. The variety of topics can be seen here: http://widerstand-1933-1945.de/shop/?swoof=1&product_cat=zeitschrift-informationen.

A large-scale project of visualising traces of resistance, persecution and remembrance for different federal states on a local level, even in small towns and villages, started in the 1980s and ended in 2003. The *Studienkreis* added and documented commemorative plaques and streets named after resistance-fighters or a victim of the Nazi era in the federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia. The books printed in this project also show places without any commemorative signs such as places where resistance fighters lived or met or where the persecution took place. This was possible by our own research, as well as with the help of local researchers or local history associations and communal archives.¹²

A follow-up to this project was the creation of a website about memorial sites elsewhere in Europe.¹³ The initiative for this project came from *Studienkreis* volunteers, who realised that information about the crimes of the German occupation is almost non-existent in German travel guides. They started visiting small local resistance museums during their holidays in Italy and France (later the project expanded to other countries), searching for commemorative plaques and memorial sites. Many of the *Studienkreis* volunteers at the core of this project are now close to or over 80 years old, so it is unclear if and how this project can be continued. For the future a new team and new findings are needed.

Besides these projects, *Studienkreis*' everyday reality consists of librarian and archival activities, answering scientific questions, giving lectures or being part of discussion events, giving workshops, city tours and many other activities.

Looking at the history of the *Studienkreis*, one can see that the organisation is currently going through a process of institutionalisation, professionalisation and historicization, like all memorial sites do.¹⁴ The *Studienkreis* started as an association with 18 members. Now there are more than 200

12 For example: Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand ed., *Heimatgeschichtlicher Wegweiser zu Stätten des Widerstandes und der Verfolgung 1933 – 1945. Thüringen* (Frankfurt: VAS 2003).

13 The website www.gedenkorte-europa.eu provides information about memorial sites in France, Italy, Greece, Lithuania and Poland. It also has short biographies of resistance fighters and information about the German occupation and the resistance movements of these countries.

14 About the history of memorial sites in Germany see for example: Habbo Knoch, *Geschichte in Gedenkstätten. Theorie – Praxis – Berufsfelder* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2020); Thomas Lutz, "Zwischen Vermittlungsanspruch und emotionaler Wahrnehmung. Die Gestaltung neuer Dauerausstellungen in Gedenkstätten für NS-Opfer in Deutschland und deren Bildungsanspruch" (PhD Diss., Technische Universität Berlin, 2009).

members, 30 of whom joined in the last three years. The committee board has evolved since the *Studienkreis*' founding. In the beginning, former resistance fighters played a major role, but they never made up more than one third of the board committee. Today, a diverse group of people serve as board members: unionists, pedagogues, scientists and curators. In the past, descendants of resistance fighters were also part of the committee, but at present, there are no descendants serving on the board. Some are members of the association.

Following the VVN's organisational connection with the League of Antifascists in 1971, in 1974, the *Studienkreis* also formulated the goal of attracting young progressive antifascists, be they historians, educators, political scientists, work councillors, trade union functionaries or youth functionaries. At the same time, the *Studienkreis*' aim was to go beyond just the research of the persecuted associations and camp communities. The above-mentioned development process was therefore deliberately initiated by the founding generation.¹⁵

Unlike classic resistance museums or memorial sites, the *Studienkreis* is a hybrid structure. On the one hand, it is an association with a mixed membership of descendants, scientists, students, unionists, political activists and people who think that it is important to support an organisation to spread the knowledge about antifascist resistance in Nazi Germany. *Studienkreis*' meaning – study circle – is a good example of this: People of different ages and professions come together to do projects on history, education and remembrance. As part of the association, members can develop or join forces to collaborate on projects. The curating team for an exhibition is for instance usually a mixture of employees, project staff and volunteers. Another example for this kind of work is a research project on women who were deported from Frankfurt to Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. In this case, five female volunteers, the *Studienkreis*' former director among them, researched documents in different archives and published their findings in a book.¹⁶

15 Archive of the Studienkreis/*Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945/Dokumentationsarchiv des deutschen Widerstandes*, Max Oppenheimer, Vorlage zur Tätigkeit des Studienkreis zur Erforschung und Vermittlung der Geschichte des deutschen Widerstandes 1933-1945, 5 June 1974, Vereinsunterlagen (no archival number).

16 Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945 ed., *Frankfurt am Main – FrauenKZ Ravensbrück – Lebensspuren verfolgter Frauen* (Bad Homburg: VAS, 2009).

On the other hand, the *Studienkreis* is a memorial site not tied to a special historical landmark. It is also an archive aiming to research and support research from others, as well as an educational organisation with exhibitions and varying pedagogical offers.

As a membership-based organisation it is unsurprising that some debates and conflicts have occurred throughout the years. Some conflicts were with members of the political left concerning the *Studienkreis*' work. For example, members of the board committee decided to leave the association because of debates about the Prague Spring in 1968 or the Gulf War in the early 1990s.¹⁷

An existential crisis occurred at the end of the GDR in 1990. This was a consequence of the crisis of the VVN-BdA.¹⁸ At the time, the VVN-BdA was the most important financier of the *Studienkreis*' work. It received funds from the GDR through the German Communist Party (*Deutsche Kommunistische Partei* – DKP). As a result of the end of financial support from the VVN-BdA, the *Studienkreis* had to clarify if and how the work could be continued. Even closing the archive and transferring the documents and archival materials to another archive or memorial site was an option.

A new start was made. A new board committee was elected and the city of Frankfurt's cultural department could be won as a financial sponsor. Nonetheless, the *Studienkreis*' existence was still in jeopardy. Funding was cut from 110.000 deutschmarks to 60.000 deutschmarks with plans to reduce it again to half of this amount. Protests prevented this from happening. Again, proposals to give the archive documents to other archives like the Frankfurt city archive were still debated.¹⁹ Luckily, the *Studienkreis*' existence could be secured, albeit with a current municipal institutional funding of just under 25.000 euros for research on resistance.²⁰

17 Ludger Fittkau, "50 Jahre 'Studienkreis deutscher Widerstand'. Ziviler Ungehorsam als Teil der Bürgerkultur", *Deutschlandfunk*, 16 February 2017, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/50-jahre-studienkreis-deutscher-widerstand-ziviler-100.html>. All internet sources were last accessed on 1 March 2024.

18 Karl Kropotnik, "Deutsche Kommunisten stoßen VVN in die Pleite", *TAZ, Die Tageszeitung*, 7 December 1989, <https://taz.de/Deutsche-Kommunisten-stossen-VVN-in-die-Pleite/!1788649/>. For the BdA, see footnote 2 above.

19 "Vergessene Opfer der Diktatur. Studienkreis in Finanznot", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 20 November 1997; Studienkreis Widerstand, "Begräbnis letzter Klasse", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 February 1996; "Kein Geld mehr für den Widerstand", *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, 28 November 1996.

20 The funding of the memorial site is separated from this. Unfortunately, the federal state of Hesse does not provide sufficient funding for memorial sites. There are just two memorial sites pertaining to the Nazi era which are institutionally funded and not just by short-term funds for projects.

New beginnings and growth

Reunification in 1990 led to an important development in Germany. Two different perceptions of resistance came together, each selective but at the same time related to one another: a main focus on conservative resistance in Western Germany, and on communist resistance in Eastern Germany. In this process, it was important that the German Resistance Memorial (*Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*) in Berlin, located where the 20 July plot was organised, defended an inclusive and pluralistic concept of resistance, even in the face of strong political opposition. It was stipulated, for instance, that communist resistance must be part of the permanent exhibition. According to the former director Peter Steinbach, the story of resistance must be told in its plurality, even if the political goals and motives are alien to oneself. Furthermore, the crimes of National Socialism must be clearly named.²¹

At the same time, one can see that the *Studienkreis* has expanded into new fields of research. This is presumably because of new members in the association and in particular in the board committee, as well as the discovery of new research topics. Originally, the representation of resistance's social and political aspects specifically meant the representation of resistance from the labour movement. But since the 1980s, resistance from women and women in prison and concentration camps have also been important research topics. Several exhibitions have been developed. These range from the first travelling exhibition in 1984, "Sisters do not forget us!" (*Schwwestern, vergesst nicht: Frauen im Konzentrationslager Moringen, Lichtenburg, Ravensbrück 1933-1945*), to *Nichts war vergeblich. Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Nothing was in vain: Resistance of women against Nazi Germany) a book about Frankfurt women imprisoned in the concentration camp of Ravensbrück, guided city walks or lecture events.

Another good indicator for how *Studienkreis* became more open to different topics are the different editions of the *informationen* magazine. These editions explored topics such as: Jewish resistance in Europe (1991), Sinti and Roma (1993), "forgotten" victims (1996), and Wehrmacht soldiers between refusal and resistance (1997). Besides topics directly linked to resistance, the editions also take a look at topics like perpetratorship or the Nazi Euthanasia

²¹ Peter Steinbach, *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der zeitgeschichtlichen Auseinandersetzung* (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1995), 52.

Program, on movies, arts, photos and exhibitions, or they have a regional focus within Europe (e.g. Poland, the Benelux countries or the Balkans).

Another indicator of change was the work group researching “excluded victims”, based in the *Studienkreis* archives from between 1998 and 2006. Representatives from the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the “Euthanasia” victims, the Sinti and Roma communities, and others collaborated on the project together.

Over the past decade, one can observe that educational work has taken on a larger role in the *Studienkreis*’ projects. In 2010, materials for historical-political education became an important element of the *informationen* magazine. This is demonstrated by the rising requests for guided city walks, workshops or talks with survivors, by schools, groups of unionists and adults. Additionally, the *Studienkreis* was given the task of developing the *Geschichtsort Adlerwerke: Fabrik, Zwangsarbeit, Konzentrationslager* memorial site.²² Since its opening in March 2022, the association has become more visible in Frankfurt’s society and beyond.

A new memorial site

With the conception and implementation of the *Geschichtsort Adlerwerke*, the *Studienkreis* has had to fundamentally change how it works. The memorial and educational site opened on 25 March 2022 and is dedicated to the “Katzbach” concentration subcamp in Frankfurt’s *Adlerwerke* and the topic of forced labour in Frankfurt.²³

22 The English translation of the memorial site’s name is: Historic Memorial Site Adlerwerke: Factory, Forced Labor, Concentration Camp. For more details about the memorial see the next chapter.

23 Andrea Rudorff, *Katzbach – Das KZ in der Stadt. Zwangsarbeit in den Adlerwerken. Frankfurt am Main 1944/45* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021); Ernst Kaiser and Michael Knorn, “Wir lebten und schliefen zwischen den Toten”. *Rüstungsproduktion, Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung in den Frankfurter Adlerwerken*. (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998). About the curators ideas for the memorial site: Thomas Altmeyer and Gottfried Kößler, “Geschichtsort Adlerwerke: Fabrik, Zwangsarbeit, Konzentrationslager”, *Gedenkstättenrundbrief* 207 (7/2022): 22-32. “Katzbach” is a camouflage name given to the concentration camp. It was usual to give camouflage names to subcamps with armaments projects. The name Katzbach was a reference to the 1813 Battle of Katzbach, when the Silesian army under Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher’s command defeated the Napoleonic troops. The phrase “He’s going at it like Blücher at the Katzbach!” was regarded as a paraphrase for an energetic and determined approach to the implementation projects of any kind. The camouflage name “Katzbach” appears for the first time one day before the arrival of the first prisoners. See Rudorff, *Katzbach*, 60-61.

Why did this memorial site become part of the *Studienkreis*' work? After a long period in which demands from civil society for a memorial site at the former concentration camp went in vain, the situation changed beginning in 2016. A new support association for a memorial site was founded to bring different people and associations together. At the same time, a new Deputy Mayor in charge of culture and science in the city of Frankfurt was elected, opening a new window of opportunity. New scientific research was funded by the city of Frankfurt and the *Studienkreis* was asked to develop the new exhibition in cooperation with the supporting association. Experiences in creating exhibitions and the work of the *Studienkreis*' scientific director in another memorial site as well as his pedagogical experiences were all arguments for this decision to be made. Another reason was the *Studienkreis*' collaborative and participative nature. The city of Frankfurt wished for the memorial site to be a part of civil society, which the *Studienkreis* association could offer. Therefore the memorial site is partially funded by the city of Frankfurt but is not an integral part of the municipal museum landscape.

In just 15 months, a small team set about to build a new memorial site. Two initial considerations were taken in establishing the memorial. First, the exhibition was to tell the historical site's story, in particular the history of the concentration camp at the *Adlerwerke* factory as well as forced labour in Frankfurt. Second, the exhibition was to create a space for school groups and other visitors to work and debate in.

The *Adlerwerke* factory was a traditional Frankfurt company and an important employer. The company made industrial history as the producer of the first German low-profile bicycles with pneumatic tires and the first typewriters in Germany. In the early 1900s, the company started producing motorcycles and automobiles as well. The *Adlerwerke* benefitted from National Socialist policies, becoming part of the armaments production and profited from the "Aryanization" of land from four companies owned by Jewish entrepreneurs. During World War II, the *Adlerwerke* was closely involved in the Nazi dictatorship's armaments industry. They mainly produced half-track vehicles, engines and vehicle parts for the Wehrmacht. When the shortage of labour became more and more pressing because of the war, the factory management attempted to continue production by exploiting forced labourers. From 1941 onwards, civilian forced labourers and prisoners of war had to work in the factory. However, their numbers were not enough to meet production demands. In August 1944, the Katzbach

concentration camp was set up on the factory premises. On 22 August 1944, the first 200 concentration camp prisoners arrived from Buchenwald concentration camp. Later, Viktor Heitlinger, the labour deployment engineer at *Adlerwerke*, went to the Dachau concentration camp to select 1.000 concentration camp prisoners for Frankfurt.

A total of 1.616 concentration camp prisoners worked for the *Adlerwerke*. The majority of these men came from Poland; others came from the Soviet Union, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, France and Czechoslovakia. One third of the prisoners died in Frankfurt, while others lost their lives after being transferred to other concentration camps or on the death march to Buchenwald.

On the one hand, the memorial site is linked to European resistance: 85 percent of the prisoners were arrested during the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944 and were then deported to Frankfurt via Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps. On the other hand, the site's central story is that of the German society in which the camp was situated, or, what was called the *Volksgemeinschaft*²⁴ in Nazi terminology. The memorial site asks questions such as what is the history of exploitation, denouncement, torture, or looking away? When was support extended, even if it was just giving some food, cigarettes and so on? The memorial site focuses on these questions and the lack of remembrance of the existence of a concentration camp in Frankfurt over the past decades.

The exhibition mainly consists of documents. These documents include transport lists and documents from the Arolsen Archives which provide historical framing for the areas of forced labour and the “Katzbach” concentration camp in the exhibition. The exhibition contains photos, drawings, documents and explanatory texts. The exhibition space is bright and open. This is intended to counteract the heavy topics on victims and forced labour related to the “Katzbach” concentration camp's brutal history.

The exhibition space's openness reflects the emphasis placed on not overwhelming visitors. This was formulated as a pedagogical guideline in the Beutelsbach Consensus.²⁵ Instead, the exhibition aims to invite visi-

24 *Volksgemeinschaft* can either be translated as “People's Community”, “National Community, or “Racial Community”.

25 Based on a conference in the city of Beutelsbach in 1976, the Beutelsbach Consensus gathers pedagogical guidelines which became the foundation for civic education in Germany. Markus Gloe and Tonio Oeftering, “Der Beutelsbacher Konsens”, *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 17 February 2022, <https://www.bpb.de/lernen/inklusiv-politisch-bilden/505269/der-beutelsbacher-konsens/>.

tors to participate in learning and discussing these topics. That is why the exhibition has a large workshop area for groups as well as with a small thematic library and archive boxes with opportunities for individual in-depth study.

The exhibition is designed to be flexible and interchangeable and strives to be participatory. New research findings will become part of the exhibition. Works from workshops with pupils and students or other history enthusiasts are also to be exhibited and included at the memorial site. For example, in workshops, students are to research and write biographies of the forced labourers which will become a permanent part of the exhibition. Visitors are invited to rearrange the panels about the companies and locations of forced labour in the exhibition. The exhibition section on the “Struggle for Work, Compensation and Remembrance” (*Konflikte um Arbeit, Erinnerung, Entschädigung*) was also designed in a participatory manner with those who are or were involved in remembrance work in Frankfurt.

The media stations and interactive elements in the exhibition appeal to the visitors’ different senses. Biographies can be heard or read and a large interactive map shows the locations of forced labour in Frankfurt. The urban environment is integrated into the educational offerings through district tours and geocaches for school groups.

With the addition of the *Geschichtsort Adlerwerke*, a significant organisational change has taken place for the *Studienkreis*. More employees and volunteers are now a part of our daily responsibilities. New projects have been started and are adding to the already existing ones, whether they are a database project on forced labour or new pedagogical offers. One of the projects focuses on the workers at the *Adlerwerke* factory. There are reports about leaflets circulating within the factory and donation collections for the Spanish Civil War as well as workers who were imprisoned. This new research will be added as a new guided city walk and collected in our learning boxes.

Additional exhibitions

Even though the *Geschichtsort Adlerwerke* needed a lot of attention the first year, the *Studienkreis* was able to present two new exhibitions to the public in 2023/2024. These exhibitions differ from previous ones. The first is about

scopes for action (*Handlungsspielräume*) from within the Frankfurt police department during the National Socialist period.²⁶ This exhibition looks at acts of resistance and (partly) dissident behaviour of police officers and came about by chance. The starting point was the research of a young historian and her master's thesis on resistance and dissident behaviour within the Frankfurt police.²⁷ Additionally, the president of the Frankfurt police contacted the *Studienkreis* upon being confronted with racist behaviour and right-wing activities within the police department. The *Studienkreis* was asked to give a city walk for police officers on the anti-Nazi resistance in Frankfurt. After a call for projects on resistance by police officers, the *Studienkreis* decided to develop an exhibition intended for the Frankfurt police.

The exhibition presents ten biographies of police officers and their (partly) resistant actions during the Nazi era, contextualised within the broader picture of the police's role as a criminal agency in the Nazi Party apparatus. The biographies are framed by an introduction panel titled "An Instrument of the Unjust State" and a concluding panel titled "New Beginnings and Old Comradeship". It clearly states that the police as an institution and the vast majority of individual officers took part in the crimes of National Socialism. Each biographical text is accompanied with a context panel. On these panels, the history of the police in the Nazi state is traced from the *Gleichschaltung* – the Nazification of state and society after 1933 – through police participation in the deportations and mass shootings in the East, police service in the ghettos, to continuities in the police apparatus after 1945. They illustrate police officers' involvement in the crimes of National Socialism, including officers who were also involved in acts of resistance or smaller points of nonconforming actions. The exhibition makes clear that all police officers who remained in service after 1933 were therefore also part of the instrument of terror – even if they sometimes said "no".²⁸

The second exhibition, which opened at the beginning of 2024, tries to bridge the gap between the Nazi era – which began on 30 January 1933 – and the Weimar Republic in the years before. The first thoughts for this

26 Exhibition organised by: Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945, *Handlungsspielräume. Frankfurter Polizeibeamte im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt 2023.

27 Lisa Schrimpf, "Polizeibeamte! Vergeßt nicht". *Widerständiges und resistentes Verhalten Frankfurter Polizeibeamter im Nationalsozialismus* (master's thesis, Frankfurt: Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaft, 2022).

28 Nevertheless, there are some members in the association who doubt that the *Studienkreis* should deal with this topic. For others, it is seen as a good additional aspect to the work.

exhibition were formulated in a workshop in 2019. The starting point was the goal of making an exhibition in a different manner than the two previous ones. One guiding principle was the search for a new type of narration, rather than individual biographies. Another goal was integrating more media stations within the exhibition, making the exhibition more interactive and participatory. Overall, the aim was to encourage visitors to think and reflect upon the presented topics. The last goal was to create a new mode of displaying information for this travelling exhibition, rather than the standard roll-up banners. Unlike other exhibitions, this one focuses on the time period prior to 1936.

The new exhibition looks at opposition to the right-wing nationalist-ethnic movement, which had formed long before 1933. This opposition was initially directed against the emerging Nazi movement and after the NSDAP came to power, against its establishment as a dictatorship. The exhibition's chapters are: "Weimar Republic: A contested democracy" (*Die Weimarer Republik: Eine umkämpfte Demokratie*), "Together! Against the Right" (*Gemeinsam! Gegen Rechts*), "Public! Debate and Propaganda" (*Öffentlich! Debatte und Propaganda*), "Secret! Hidden Resistance" (*Geheim! Widerstand im Verborgenen*) and "Exile! Flight and Resistance" (*Exil! Flucht und Widerstand*). They show how people opposed the Nazis in the crisis-ridden Weimar democracy and then under the conditions of the Nazi dictatorship. The exhibition also shows the role of the trade unions at the end of the Weimar Republic, until trade unions were banned in May 1933, as well as the failed attempts to establish a united front within the political left against the Nazi dictatorship.

Conclusion

Without volunteer employees, the *Studienkreis* could not have accomplished all that it has. On the one hand, this is a result of limited financial resources, on the other hand it is an enrichment for the work it does. It enables a democratic and participatory remembrance culture, with different ages, sexes, origins, levels of knowledge and professions working together. The volunteers are also advocates for the *Studienkreis'* topics and goals.

At the same time, the complex structure of volunteer workers and paid staffers can be challenging. Besides the many volunteers at *Studienkreis*,

the staff currently consists of one full-time and two part-time employees, plus many project staff at the memorial site and at the archive. That is why it is important to create enough space for conversation, explanation and supporting volunteers, trainees and guests regarding content and technical questions. The process is an ongoing dialogue and understanding within the team and the members about resistance: What do we understand when we talk about resistance? What meanings does resistance have today? The perspectives on resistance may differ between historians, students, political activists, descendants, or unionists. People who were part of the 1968 movement and who confronted their parents about their activities during the years 1933-1945 may see things differently than younger people with other scientific, political or social socialisation. For the former, discussing Nazi Germany was an act of opposition in a society that did not want to talk about the past. They joined the fights of the survivors of Nazi terror to establish the first memorial sites in FRG. Now there are a large number of memorial sites, but as right-wing parties contest that consensus, it is important not to forget about the crimes committed in and by Nazi Germany.

One aspect of this are web-talks, lectures and discussion events in which the *Studienkreis* gives space for perspectives of the descendants of resistance fighters. These descendants tell their parents' and grandparents' stories and share how post-war German society has dealt with the legacy of the past and with the resistance movement and former resistance fighters.²⁹ One topic that often comes up in these talks is a feeling of being different from a broader society that consists mainly of bystanders and perpetrators and their descendants. A special sensitivity is conveyed and there is often a special relationship with people and families with a connection to resistance or persecution.

Another important challenge relates to financial questions. The institutional funding from the cultural department of the city of Frankfurt is modest, while institutional funding from the Hesse state government is completely lacking. In times of increasing costs for energy, wages and beyond, more and more time is needed to find funding for our work. At the moment, funding for new projects is possible. Smaller projects with a budget under 5.000 euros are easier to fund than larger projects. Some funding is more generous but has the disadvantage that the time between

²⁹ Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand, Youtube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-9Q0P2LG9Kdb5HedQaFagoQ>.

authorization and project start and the prescribed project end is sometimes just around half a year.

With upcoming right-wing protests in Germany and the rise of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AFD) as a right-wing populist and extremist party in the past few years, the use of the term “resistance” has become more popular. Demonstrators against measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, for instance, compared their situation to those of resistance fighters in Nazi Germany. One major task of the *Studienkreis*’ work is to now clarify the differences between opposition and (even critical) democratic participation in democracies and resistance in a totalitarian dictatorship. One workshop in particular addresses this issue for students. Even the new exhibition about early resistance leads to questions about political engagement today, hoping to stop the rise of right-wing extremism in Germany. The exhibition as well as the sources in the archives provide materials to reflect on the question of why the engagement over 90 years ago did not stop the NSDAP. With this historical experience, maybe new conclusions for today can be drawn. In the words of Peter Gingold (1916-2006), a German Jewish communist resistance fighter, who was engaged in the resistance in Nazi Germany, in the French Resistance and the Italian Resistance:

1933 would have been prevented if all Hitler’s opponents had created a united front. There was only one excuse for the fact that it didn’t come about for Hitler’s opponents of my parents’ generation: they had no experience of what fascism meant once it was in power. But today we all have this experience, today everyone must know what fascism means. For all future generations, there is no excuse if they do not prevent fascism.³⁰

30 “Porträt Peter Gingold”, Trotz alledem! Ein Porträt des antifaschistischen Widerstandes im Rhein-Main-Gebiet, <http://www.widerstand-portrait.de/portraits/peter-gingold.html>.

List of Abbreviations

ADF	Archives diplomatiques françaises / French Diplomatic Archives
ADHM	Archives départementales de la Haute-Marne / Departmental Archives of Haute-Marne
AEAR	Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires / Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists
AFD	Alternative für Deutschland / Alternative for Germany
AFŽ	Antifašistička fronta žena / Women's Antifascist Front
AJ	Arhiv Jugoslavije / Archives of Yugoslavia
AJCY	Association of Jewish Communities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
ALN	Armée de Libération Nationale / National Liberation Army
AN	Archives Nationales / National Archives
ANACR	Association Nationale des Anciens Combattants de la Résistance / National Association of Resistance Veterans
APMA-B	Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau / Archive of the Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum
ASCG	Archivio Storico Città di Garesio / Historical Archive of the City of Garesio
AVNOJ	Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije / Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia
BArch	Bundesarchiv / Federal Archive
BBC	British Broadcast Corporation
BiH	Bosna i Hercegovina / Bosnia and Herzegovina
CFLN	Commissariat français de la Libération nationale / French National Liberation Commissariat
CKJ	Crveni krst Jugoslavije / Red Cross Yugoslavia
CK SKJ	Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Jugoslavije / Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia
CLN	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale / Committee of National Liberation
CMN	Comité Militaire National / National Military Committee
CNR	Conseil national de la Résistance / National Council of Resistance
CRHA	Citoyens Résistants d'Hier et d'Aujourd'hui / Resistant Citizens of Yesterday and Today
CSS	Centrale Sanitaire Suisse / Swiss Health Centre
DELASEM	Delegazione per l'Assistenza degli Emigranti Ebrei / Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants
DEP	Département de l'éducation publique / Department of Public Education
DKP	Deutsche Kommunistische Partei / German Communist Party

EHM	École de Haute Montagne / Mountain Warfare School
ENA	École nationale d'administration / National School of Administration
FDH	Federalna Država Hrvatska / Federal State of Croatia
FIR	Fédération Internationale des Résistants / International Federation of Resistance Fighters
FFI	Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur / French Forces of the Interior
FFL	Forces Françaises Libres / Free French Forces
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale / National Liberation Front
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FTP	Francs-Tireurs et Partisans / 'Free Shooters' and Partisans
FTP-MOI	Francs-Tireurs et Partisans – Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée
GDR	German Democratic Republic / Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR)
GMR	Groupes mobiles de réserve / Mobile Reserve Groups
HDZ	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica / Croatian Democratic Union
HR-DARI	Državni arhiv u Rijeci / State Archives in Rijeka
HR-HDA	Hrvatski državni arhiv Sabor Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske / Croatian State Archives Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia
HMBiH	Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine / History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina
HPM	Hrvatski povijesni muzej / Croatian History Museum
HSS	Hrvatska seljačka stranka / Croatian Peasant Party
ICOM	International Council of Museums
ISK	Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund / International Socialist Militant League
JA	Jugoslovenska armija / Yugoslav Army
JDC	Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
JGU	Johannes Gutenberg Universität / Johannes Gutenberg University
JMO	Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija / Yugoslav Muslim Organisation
JVuO	Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini / Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland
KJVD	Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands / Young Communist League of Germany
KL	Konzentrationslager / Concentration Camp
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschland / Communist Party of Germany
KPH	Komunistička Partija Hrvatske / Communist Party of Croatia
KPJ	Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije / Communist Party of Yugoslavia
KZ	Konzentrationslager / Concentration Camp
LVA	Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs / Latvian State Historical Archive
MAB	Muzej antifašističke borbe / Museum of Antifascist Struggle
MIJ	Muzej istorije Jugoslavije / Museum of Yugoslav History
MOI	Main-d'œuvre immigrée / Immigrant Labour
MRNH	Muzej revolucije naroda Hrvatske / Museum of the Revolution of the People of Croatia
MRNJ	Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije / Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations
MRNNJ	Muzej revolucije naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije / Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities

MUR	Mouvements Unifiés de la Résistance / Unified Resistance Movements
MV	Muzej Vojvodine / Museum of Vojvodina
MVAC	Milizia Volontaria Anti Comunista / Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia
MŽG	Muzej žrtava genocida / Genocide Victims Museum
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDH	Nezavisna Država Hrvatska / Independent State of Croatia
NKFD	Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland / National Committee Free Germany
NKVD	Народный комиссариат внутренних дел / People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NOB	Narodnooslobodilačka borba / People's Liberation Struggle
NOO	Narodnooslobodilački odbori / People's Liberation Councils
NOP	Narodnooslobodilački pokret / People's Liberation Movement
NOPOJ	Narodnooslobodilačkih partizanskih odreda Jugoslavije / People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia
NOR	Narodnooslobodilački rat / People's Liberation War
NOVJ	Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Jugoslavije / People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands / National Democratic Party of Germany
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei / National Socialist German Workers' Party
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht / High Command of the Wehrmacht
OKW/WPr.	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Abteilung für Wehrmachtspropaganda / Wehrmacht Propaganda Department at the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht
OLG	Oberlandesgericht / Higher Regional Court
OSS	Office of Strategic Services (USA)
PCF	Parti Communiste Français / French Communist Party
PMH	Povijesni muzej Hrvatske / Historical Museum of Croatia
POW	Prisoner of War
RGASPI	Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории / Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History
RGO	Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts-Opposition / Communist Revolutionary Union Opposition
RMfdbO	Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete / Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories
RPF	Rassemblement du Peuple Français / Rally of the French People
RSI	Repubblica Sociale Italiana / Italian Social Republic
SAB AH	Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Hrvatske / Union of Antifascist Fighters and Antifascist of Croatia
SÄS	Süddeutsche Ärzte- und Sanitätshilfe / South German Doctors and Medical Help
SAPD	Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands / Socialist Workers' Party of Germany
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands / Socialist Unity Party of Germany

SFRJ	Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija / Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SH	Sonder-Hachshara / Special Hachshara
SHD	Service historique de la défense / Defence Historical Service
SIM	Servicio de Información Militar / Military Information Services
SK	Savez Komunista / Alliance of Communists
SKOJ	Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije / League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia
SMRE	Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito/ Royal Army General Staff
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands / Social Democratic Party of Germany
SS	Schutzstaffel / lit. "Protection Squads"
SSJ	Savez sindikata Jugoslavije / Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia
SSRNH	Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Hrvatske / Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Croatia
Stalag	Stammlager / Main camp (for prisoners of war)
STO	Service du Travail Obligatoire / Compulsory Work Service
SUBNOR	Savez Udruženja Boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog Rata / Federation of Associations of Veterans of the People's Liberation War of Yugoslavia
SZS	Savezni zavod za statistiku / Federal Statistical Office
UCPA	Union des Centres Sportifs de Plein Air / Union of Outdoor Sports Centres
UFF	Union des femmes françaises / Union of French Women
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VGH	Volksgesichtshof / People's Court
VVN	Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes / Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime
VVN-BdA	Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund der Antifaschisten / Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime – League of Antifascists
WIZO	Women's Zionist Organization
WWII	World War II
ZAVNOBiH	Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine / State Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
ZAVNOH	Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske / State Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia
ZNOR	Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda / Collection of documents and data on the People's Liberation War of the Yugoslav peoples

Notes about the contributors

Marie-Édith Agostini has a Master of Arts from Rennes University. She received a theatre design diploma from the London College of Fashion and an Art History diploma from the Sorbonne in Paris. Having worked as a costume designer in every area of the entertainment industry, she then decided to try her hand at exhibition curating. For ten years, she managed the temporary exhibitions at the Shoah Memorial in Paris. With contemporary design, she enlightened the readability of the contents using new pathways in the exhibition space. She places transmission and inclusion at the centre of her thinking, aiming to offer a personal approach to the visitors, whoever they may be. Therefore, each singular theme is approached with an original and transversal perception to give shape to narratives that allow real contact with audiences. In 2020, she created her own company, agostini&simonneaux, and has continued to work with museum institutions as a freelancer. She is in the process of obtaining a diploma in art therapy.

Thomas Altmeyer has been the academic director of the *Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand 1933-1945* (Study Group German Resistance 1933-1945) since 2005. He has many years of experience as a freelance lecturer in youth and adult education and since 2009 he has been a lecturer at the Seminar for the Didactics of History at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. Since 2011, he has been a member of the Spokesperson's Council of the Regional Working Group of Memorials and Remembrance Initiatives on the Nazi Era in Hesse (*Landesarbeitsgesellschaft der Gedenkstätten und Erinnerungsiniciativen zur NS-Zeit in Hessen – LAG*), and from 2016-2020, he was an educational assistant at the Neckarelz Concentration Camp Memorial. In 2021 and 2022, he curated the new permanent exhibition for the “Adlerwerke History Site”. Since then, he has been the director of this memorial and educational site.

Robert Belot is professor of contemporary history at the Jean Monnet University (Saint-Étienne, France). He holds the Jean Monnet Module “HIS-TEUROPA”. As a specialist in the history of Europe and the European idea, he defended his habilitation to direct research at the Institut d'études politiques in Paris on the federalist resistance fighter Henri Frenay. He recently co-directed, with Daniela Preda, *Visions of Europe in the Resistance. Figures, Projects, Networks, Ideals* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang Edition, 2022). His latest monographs are: *The Rebirth of Europe After the War. Hopes, divisions and failure among the French Resistance* (Lausanne: Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, 2022) and *La mémoire anti-allemande en France. Henri Frenay et l'affaire Speidel (1957)* (Lyon: Presse fédéraliste, 2022).

Milivoj Bešlin is a historian and a senior research fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory (IFDT) at the University of Belgrade. In 2017/2018, he served as a lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Montenegro. He has published a two-volume monograph titled *Ideas of Modern Serbia in Socialist Yugoslavia* in 2022, as well as numerous professional studies, articles, discussions and reports in both domestic and international scientific journals and anthologies. Additionally, Bešlin is the founder and coordinator of the Research Laboratory of Socialism and (Post)Yugoslav Studies (YugoLab) at IFDT. In his research, he has explored various topics such as the political and social history of socialist Yugoslavia, nationalism studies, modernization theory, attempts at reform in socialist Yugoslavia, the fundamental elements of Yugoslav federalism, Serbian-Croatian relations in the 20th century, the issue of antifascism and historical revisionism and the matter of intellectual engagement and nationalism.

Xavier Bougarel is a historian and a senior researcher at the Center for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan and Central Asian Studies (CETOBaC) in Paris. The social history of World War II in Southeastern Europe is one his main research topics. From 2013 to 2016, he was on detachment at the *Centre Marc Bloch* in Berlin, where he carried out archival research about the 13th SS Division “Handschar”, which led to the publication of the book *La division Handschar. Waffen-SS de Bosnie, 1943-1945* (Paris: Passés Composés, 2021). In 2019, he co-edited, with Hannes Grandits and Marija Vulesica, the book *Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020). He recently completed a

book on the Yugoslav Partisan movement in the Bosnian Krajina region, focusing on their political, economic and judicial practices in the liberated territories (*Chez les partisans de Tito. Communistes et paysans dans la Yougoslavie en guerre (1941-1945)*) (Paris: Ed. Non Lieu, 2023).

Kolja Buchmeier is a research trainee at the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation. He studied Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research on Antisemitism in Leipzig and in Berlin, where he obtained his MA. From 2020-2022 he was a research assistant at the Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University of Berlin. He is currently working on his PhD project on the Network of National Socialist Camps in Brandenburg, in which he examines the daily interactions between different prisoner groups as well as contacts with the neighbouring communities of the camps. He is also the editor of a forthcoming volume on prisoners of war in Berlin during World War II, which will be published in 2025.

Dragan Cvetković is a museum adviser and has a PhD in history. Since 1996, he has worked as a curator at the Museum of Genocide Victims (Belgrade). At the museum, he manages a project to revise the 1964 list of *Victims of War 1941-1945*. He has also participated in the collecting and processing of archival material, digitisation and production of the Museum's documentation base and as a co-author of exhibitions. His areas of interest and expertise are World War II in Yugoslavia, human losses in World War II, genocide and the Holocaust. His research spectrum ranges from the losses suffered in the microplane (settlements and municipalities) to the total losses of Yugoslavia, evenly examining the losses suffered by members of the Partisan movement, the casualties of members of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as the losses suffered by civilians, particularly the phenomenon of mass murder of civilians and phenomenon of extermination of humans in concentration camps.

Corine Defrance is a historian and Research Directress at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS, SIRICE, Paris). She is deputy directress of the Research Unit SIRICE (*Sorbonne, Identités, Relations Internationales, Civilisations de l'Europe*) in Paris and teaches at the Panthéon-Sorbonne University Paris 1. She works on the Europe of wars and traces of war, Franco-German relations in the 20th and 21st century,

processes of European reconciliation in the 20th and 21st century, Allied Occupation of Germany and post-war German societies. She is an Alumna of the Alexander-von-Humboldt-Foundation and was a visiting professor at the *Freie Universität Berlin* (2011/12) and Senior Fellow at the Leibniz-Institute for European History in Mainz (2020/21). She recently published the book *Françoise Frenkel, portrait d'une inconnue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2022).

Dino Dupanović is a historian and museum worker. He was born in Bihać in 1990 and studied history at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, where he obtained his master's degree. He is currently working on a PhD in contemporary history. Since 2019, he has been working as a curator and director at the Museum of Una-Sana Canton in Bihać, which, among others, hosts a permanent exhibition on the first session of the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), which took place in Bihać on 26-27 November 1942. He is the author of two permanent exhibitions and several temporary museum exhibitions, as well as several scholarly articles and book reviews.

Jelena Đureinović is a historian interested in memory politics and memory cultures in the 20th and 21st centuries. She is a researcher at the Research Center for the History of Transformations (RECET) at the University of Vienna. Her current project, funded through the APART-GSK program of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, investigates Yugoslav socialism and the global history of the Yugoslav culture of remembrance, focusing on the role of memory in the relations between the Yugoslav Partisans and anti-colonial liberation movements from Africa. Her main research interests include memory studies, global history and the history of Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav space. She holds a PhD in History from Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany. Her book *The Politics of Memory of the Second World War in Contemporary Serbia: Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution* was published with Routledge in 2020.

Yvan Gastaut is a historian and Senior Lecturer at the Côte d'Azur University in Nice (France), in the Migrations and Society Research Unit (URMIS – *Unité de Recherches Migrations et Société*). He specialises in contemporary history, migration, sports and the memory of traumatic events, with a special focus on the Mediterranean space and on questions of civil disobedience

and resistance. He also works as an exhibition curator, working on exhibitions such as *Frontières* (Borders) at the National Museum of the History of Immigration in Paris (2015-2016). Among his publications are *L'opinion française et l'immigration sous la Vème République* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), *Allez la France, football et immigration, histoires croisées* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010, with Claude Boli and Fabrice Grognet), *Les années 30 sont de retour* (Paris: Flammarion, 2014, with Claude Askolovitch, Pascal Blanchard and Renaud Dely) and *Atlas des immigrations en France* (Paris: Autrement, 2021, with Pascal Blanchard and Hadrien Dubucs).

Robert Gildea is Emeritus Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford and specialist in French and European history of the 19th and 20th centuries, with a focus on French politics and culture, also in their transnational and global dimensions. After his PhD at St Antony's College, he became a lecturer at King's College, London, a Fellow in Modern History at Merton College, Oxford, and then Professor first of Modern French History and then of Modern History at the University of Oxford. Among his publications are *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation, 1940–1945* (London: Macmillan, 2002), *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and, as editor, together with Ismee Tames, *Fighters Across Frontiers: Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936–48* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

Elma Hašimbegović is a historian and museum professional born in Sarajevo in 1977. She studied history at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo and obtained an MA and MPhil in Medieval Studies at the Central European University in Budapest. Since 2001, she has worked at the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a curator and has participated in the development of various museum programs and projects, including the permanent exhibition on the *Siege of Sarajevo* (2002-2003). She has been the Museum's Director since 2013, developing and implementing new strategies and policies for the institution, actively promoting the museum as a place of historical research, education and constructive dialogue and as a space open to all.

Aleksandar Horvat, born in Osijek, Croatia, in 1987, is a historian curator at the Museum of Vojvodina in Novi Sad. He received his master's degree in 2011 in History from the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, followed by a PhD in 2016. From 2012 to 2016, Horvat received a scholarship from the Ministry of Education and Science of Serbia. He has been working at the Museum of Vojvodina since 2017 and was appointed as a Research Associate on the recommendation of the Institute of History in Belgrade in 2022. His research interests include the history of World War II in Vojvodina and Yugoslavia, national identities in Vojvodina, and the history of private life in Vojvodina. Horvat has published two books and co-authored four exhibition catalogues, among them *The Day Worth a Century: 1. XII 1918* (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia, 2019, co-author); *Identiteti na periferiji* (Novi Sad: Museum of Vojvodina, 2021). He is currently preparing a book on Partisans in Vojvodina: resistance, everyday life, privacy.

Sanja Horvatinčić is a research associate at the Institute of Art History in Zagreb. Her research focuses on the production of monuments and remembrance culture in socialist Yugoslavia, as well as on heritage and memory politics in the post-socialist context. She has participated in research projects dealing with the history of Yugoslav cultural politics and the Non-Aligned Movement, critical memory and heritage studies, and digital art history. She was a member of the advisory board for the exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Yugoslavian Architecture 1948-1980* (MoMA, 2018). Since 2019, she has led the interdisciplinary heritage project *Heritage from Below | Drežnica: Memories and Traces 1941-1945*. She is currently running the project *Digital Network, Spatial and (Con)textual Analysis of Artistic Phenomena and Heritage of the 20th Century*. She authored numerous academic publications. In 2023, she coedited the book *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Archive Books Berlin, Igor Zabel Association Ljubljana).

Marius Hutinet obtained a bachelor's degree at the University of Toulouse II Jean Jaurès, spent a year abroad at the University of Glasgow, and then integrated the Panthéon-Sorbonne University Paris 1, where he wrote a dissertation about the Langres Section of Gendarmerie at the end of World War II, supervised by Fabien Théofilakis (*Centre d'Histoire Sociale des Mondes Contemporains* CHS). This master thesis will be published as

a book in October 2024 by *L'Harmattan éditions*. At the same time as his master's, he participated in the ANTRACT (*Analyse transdisciplinaire des Actualités filmées*) project, funded by the *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* and directed by Pascale Goetschel (CHS, CNRS (*Centre National de la recherche scientifique*)). The aim of the project, created along with the *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel*, is to develop new tools to study French cinematographic actualities (*Les Actualités Françaises*).

Nataša Jagdhuhn is a museum and cultural theorist. She works as a research associate at the Chair of History of Science at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Her research is located at the intersection of (art) history, critical heritage and memory studies. Currently, she investigates the historico-political grounding of the decolonial turn in museum theory and practice, particularly the Non-Aligned Movement's pivotal role in this process during the global Cold War. Jagdhuhn studied art, art education and artistic museum studies in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Vienna and Berlin. In 2020, she defended her dissertation at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena. Her PhD thesis was published under the title *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums: Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

Mirna Jančić Doyle is a policy analyst and researcher in education, and a visual artist from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). She obtained her post-graduate degree in comparative education at the University of Oxford, and has been focusing on the impact of education on social cohesion in post-conflict societies, and the inclusion of minority students in the school system. She contributed to the establishment of the United World College Mostar, where she currently serves on the governing board. Through her artwork, she has explored the teaching of competing historical narratives to primary school children, exhibited at the History Museum of BiH.

Veselinka Kastratović Ristić, born in 1960, is a museum adviser, graduated with a degree in history from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. She worked at the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities; since 1996 she has worked at the Museum of Yugoslavia managing the collections of historical memorial items. As author or co-author, she has realised a large number of exhibitions, and has been the author of the text

and/or editor of accompanying catalogues. The catalogue of the exhibition *The Day Worth a Century – I – XII – 1918* and the thematic catalogue *Freedom Is Just a Dream for Us*, for which she wrote the texts and was one of the editors, received the award of the National Committee Serbia of the International Council of Museums (NK ICOM) as publications of the year for 2019 and 2022, respectively. She is co-author of the monograph *Tito, a Short Biography* (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslav History, 2015). She is a member of the professional associations NK ICOM of Serbia and Museum Society of Serbia.

Hrvoje Klasić graduated from the Department of History, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Zagreb, where he defended his dissertation titled *1968 in Yugoslavia. Socio – economic changes in international context*. Since 2003, he has been employed as professor at the same Faculty and University. He teaches a number of courses related to world and national (Croatian) history of the 20th century. He won the Annual Award of the Association of University Teachers and other Scholars in Zagreb in 2006, Annual Award of Sisak City in 2006 and Annual Award of Zagreb City in 2022. In 2017 The Serb National Council in Croatia gave him an award for the improvement of Croatian-Serbian relations. In 2019 he won the Award for the promotion of peacebuilding, nonviolence and human rights. He is author of five books and author of two documentary series: *Croatian Spring* and *Independent State of Croatia*. In 2024 he completed a documentary project about the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia during World War II.

Juliane Kucharzweski is a PhD candidate at the University of Potsdam's Chair of War Studies. Her thesis title is *Wives in the German Resistance against National Socialism*, for which she holds a full-time scholarship from the Heinrich Böll Foundation. She gave the keynote for the trinational EU project "Female Stories Unheard. European Remembrance of Women in Resistance Against National Socialism" in 2023. After completing her BA in International Relations at the Universities of Erfurt and Tartu, she finished her MA in War and Conflict Studies at the University of Potsdam with the thesis '*The first lesson*'. *A Comparative Case Study on American and British Early Re-education Attempts in Three Concentration Camps*. She is working as a freelance research assistant. Her research focuses on German female resistance, (anti-)gender politics of right-wing organisations as well as re-education processes after 1945.

Maëlle Lepitre is a PhD candidate at the Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, Germany. She received a bachelor's degree in history at the Paris Science & Letters University and a master's degree in French German History from both the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS) in Paris and the Karl Ruprecht University in Heidelberg. After writing her master's thesis on the 1993 construction of a Jewish Memorial in Buchenwald, she is currently preparing a thesis on the effect of the German reunification on memory culture, focusing on the redesign of the Buchenwald Memorial in the 1990s. She recently published an article about memorial sites in East Germany after 1989/90 for the peer-reviewed *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Cultural Heritage and Conflict*. Since February 2024, she has been working as a Scientific Trainee at the Buchenwald Memorial.

Dagmar Lieske, born in 1978 in Siegen, has been living in Berlin since 2003 and currently works for the German Resistance Memorial Center in Berlin in a project about women's resistance against the Third Reich. She wrote her PhD about the so-called "Criminals" in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen as ignored victims during the time of National Socialism, which was published in 2016. She is a co-founder of an initiative that achieved official recognition of the Nazi victims persecuted under National Socialism as "asocials" and "professional criminals" in 2020 and she is active in a working group researching the history of sexualities. Her main research interests include the history of National Socialism, history of sexuality and history of (sexual) violence.

Nataša Mataušić, born in Belgrade in 1956, graduated in history and archeology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, and worked as curator at the Museum of the Croatian People's Revolution. Her PhD dissertation was titled *Diana Budisavljević and the civil action of rescuing children of victims of the Ustasha regime*. She is the author of more than 30 museum exhibitions, of which the exhibition *El shatt – a refugee from Croatia in the Sinai Desert, 1944-1946* won the award of the Croatian Museum Society as the best exhibition project for 2008. She has been the President of the Management Board of the Jasenovac Memorial Site and a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Organization in the Working Group for Memorial Museums. She is a member of the international expert group for the creation of a new joint exhibition of the former Yugoslav republics at

the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Her main research fields are World War II, culture of memory, museology and photography and film as sources for the study of history.

Nicolas Moll, born in Brussels in 1965, holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the University of Freiburg (Germany). From 1992 to 1996 he worked as a DAAD Lektor at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* in Paris, and from 2001 to 2007 he headed the Department for Intercultural Education and Research at the Franco-German Youth Office in Berlin. He has been living in Sarajevo since 2007, where he works as an independent researcher. He is co-founder and partner of crossborder factory and coordinator of "Memory Lab – Trans-European Exchange Platform on History and Remembrance" (www.memorylab-europe.eu). His research interests include wartime and post-war societies, memory studies and international solidarity movements in Europe, with a special focus on the (post-)Yugoslav space and on Franco-German relations in the 20th and 21st centuries. More information: <https://www.nicolasmoll.eu/>

Ana Panić, born in 1978, is a museum adviser and art historian. She has worked as a curator of the visual art collection at the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade since 2005. She is the author or co-author of numerous exhibitions focusing on the history and popular culture of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as well as the exhibitions showcasing the collections of the Museum of Yugoslavia. She has received several awards for her curatorial work, for example from the Museum Association of Serbia, the Association of Art Historians of Serbia and ICOM Serbia. ICOM Serbia has awarded the thematic catalogue *Freedom Is Just a Dream for Us* in the category Publication of the Year (2023). Her special interests lie in the culture and art of socialist Yugoslavia, the political practices of (post-)Yugoslav art and contemporary art production, the collective memory of Yugoslavia, public monuments and their role in the materialisation of collective memory, and art as a means for constructing (supra)national identity.

Robert Parzer is a historian. His work focuses on Nazi-Euthanasia crimes and the Holocaust. He has worked with many memorial sites, for example the Sachsenhausen Memorial and the Memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. He was a staff member of the Buchenwald Memorial,

responsible for a digitisation project. Since spring 2023, he has been working at the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, where he is responsible for the concept of the “German-Polish-House”. This is to be established in the heart of Berlin and will commemorate the victims of the German occupation of Poland from 1939 to 1945 with a monument. It will also inform visitors with a historical exhibition on German-Polish history, focusing on World War II, and enable encounters through a rich educational program.

Ivo Pejaković graduated from Zagreb University in 2006 with a degree in history. From 2009 he was employed as curator of the Memorial Museum at Jasenovac Memorial Site and in 2017 he was appointed as director of the memorial. He is the author and co-author of several exhibitions related to the history of Jasenovac camp and Jasenovac Memorial, as well as participant of many different international conferences and seminars on topics of Holocaust and culture of memory. Since 2018, he has been a member of the delegation of the Republic of Croatia to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

Élise Petit, Head of Musicology Department at Grenoble Alpes University (France), is Associate Professor in History of Modern and Contemporary Music. She has a PhD in musicology and holds an Agrégation de musique, and diplomas in performing arts. She is a specialist of musical policies in 20th century Germany. In addition to numerous articles, she is the author of the books “*Entartete Musik*”. *Musiques interdites sous le III^e Reich* (Paris: Bleu Nuit, 2015), *Musique et politique en Allemagne, du III^e Reich à l’aube de la guerre froide* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Paris Sorbonne, 2018), and *Des Usages destructeurs de la musique dans le système concentrationnaire nazi* (Paris: Cahiers du CRIF n°56, 2019). She was the curator of the exhibition *La musique dans les camps nazis* at the *Mémorial de la Shoah* (Paris), from April 2023 to February 2024, and authored the exhibition catalogue.

Nedim Pustahija, is a historian and curator from Bosnia and Herzegovina. He attended the University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History, obtaining his bachelor’s degree in 2019 and master’s degree in history in 2021. His research focuses on 20th century history, dealing with topics that combine the Balkans with the global/European context.

He participated in several international projects such as “Talking Borders”, organised by the Association of Borderline Studies, as well as in regional projects dealing with World War II and Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Since 2022, he has been working as a curator at the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and as of 2023, he started his PhD at the University of Sarajevo.

Markus Roth is historian and research associate at the Fritz Bauer Institute in Frankfurt. He earned his doctorate from the University of Jena in 2008 with a thesis on German county administrators (*Kreishauptleute*) in occupied Poland and their careers after 1945. He then became a research assistant at the Herder Institute in Marburg and a staff member of the interdisciplinary institution *Arbeitsstelle Holocaustliteratur* at Justus-Liebig-University in Giessen. He was vice director at the latter from 2010 to 2020 and also managing director from 2016 to 2020. He has been a research associate at the Fritz Bauer Institute since 2020. His main fields of research are the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust, Nazi Germany’s occupation policy in Poland, and resistance to National Socialism.

Alfredo Sasso is a Post-doc Research Fellow at the University of Florence, Department of Political and Social Sciences. He holds a PhD in Political and Social History from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and was a visiting research fellow at the Universities of Rijeka (Center for Advanced Studies – CAS), Graz (Centre for Southeast European Studies – CSEES) and Sarajevo (Institute for History – IIS). He coordinated the international project *What is Left? 110 years of socialism, communism and social democracy in Bosnia Herzegovina* at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Sarajevo, co-editing the related volume (2020). He collaborated in several projects with the Institute for the History of the Resistance and Contemporary Society in Turin (ISTORETO), among them “I partigiani d’Italia” (2022). His research interests include history of late and post-socialism, political systems in Bosnia Herzegovina and (post-)Yugoslav area, multi- and trans-national resistance in Italy during World War II.

Susanne Urban is Head of the Research and Information Office Antisemitism Hessen, affiliated University Marburg. From 2015 to 2022, she was Managing Director at ShUM-Sites Speyer, Worms and Mainz, the Jewish

Heritage from the Middle Ages, since 2021 UNESCO World Heritage. From 2009 to 2015, she was Head of Historical Research and Education at Arolsen Archives. In 2004, she was Fellow Researcher at Yad Vashem and afterwards employed in the Yad Vashem Educational Department. Before this she worked at the Jewish Museum Frankfurt (1990-2009) and was co-editor of the Jewish Journal *TRIBUNE* (1994-2004). She finished her PhD in 2000 on Central-Verein and its strategies regarding Jewish self-defence against Antisemitism between 1893 and 1938 at Moses-Mendelssohn-Centre / University Potsdam. Her book on early testimonies from survivors of Nazi persecution was published in 2019 and was a finalist of the Yad Vashem Book Prize in the same year.

Danijel Vojak is a Scientific Adviser at the Institute of Social Science “Ivo Pilar” in Zagreb. In 2011 he finished his PhD at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb. He has published books and papers on the history of Roma in World War I and World War II and has been working on several research projects regarding the history of Roma. In his work, he focuses on analysing the relations between indigenous (majority) population and the Roma minority population in former Yugoslavia. His current research focus is on analysing the position and extent of the suffering of Roma during World War II in the pro-Nazi Independent State of Croatia.

Vladan Vukliš, born 1984 in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a historian and archival advisor. He completed both undergraduate and graduate studies at the University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History, with primary focus on 20th century contemporary history. In 2022 he defended his doctoral dissertation *Yugoslavs, the Spanish Civil War and the War Émigrés*, which is expected to be published as a book in 2024. He has been employed by the Archives of the Republic of Srpska since 2013, where he currently holds the position of assistant director. He published extensively in the fields of history and information studies. His research interests are focused on the workers’ and the communist movement, antifascism, World War II and history of Yugoslavia.

Matthias Waechter was born in Bonn in 1965. After his studies of History and Philosophy at the Universities of Bonn, Freiburg, Paris, and Rochester,

he took his PhD at the University of Freiburg and joined the faculty of the history department. He was a Research Fellow at the German Historical Institute Paris in 1997/98 and a Fulbright Fellow at New York University in 1999. In 2000, he joined the *Centre international de formation européenne* (CIFE), first as a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Visiting Professor and since 2005 as its Director. He specialises in U.S. history, contemporary France, Franco-German relations and European integration. In his research, he focuses on problems of collective identity, historical consciousness, political myths and transnational intellectuals. His book *Der Mythos des Gaullismus. Heldenkult, Geschichtspolitik und Ideologie* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006) was awarded with the Franco-German Parliamentary Prize and the Daimler Chrysler Services Prize.

Christl Wickert is an independent historian and political scientist and a specialist in contemporary Germany with a focus on National Socialism and the history of women. After her PhD at the University of Göttingen, she worked as a research assistant at the Free University of Berlin and the Technical University of Berlin, held teaching positions in other German universities and cooperated with several Memorials for research and exhibition projects. Among her publications figure, as editor: *Frauen gegen die Diktatur. Widerstand und Verfolgung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*. (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1994), as editor together with Helga Grebing: *Das "andere Deutschland". Im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus: Beiträge zur Politischen Überwindung der nationalsozialistischen Diktatur im Exil und im Dritten Reich* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1994), and *Keine Gerechtigkeit. Die ungleiche Unterstützung des KZ-Überlebenden Fritz Bringmann und des SS-Mannes Walter Filsinger nach 1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2022).

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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