



WER IST WALTER?

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Elma Hašimbegović, Nicolas Moll and Ivo Pejaković

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)

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 Bihaćkoj krajini*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Sanja Horvatinčić (Bihać: JU Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona, 2023), 11, 18, 35.

19 Cvetković, *Gubici pripadnika partizanskog pokreta*, 841.

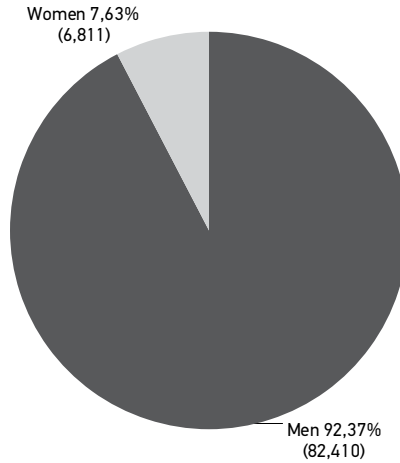


Chart 1. NDH, Partisans – Gender structure of losses

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.

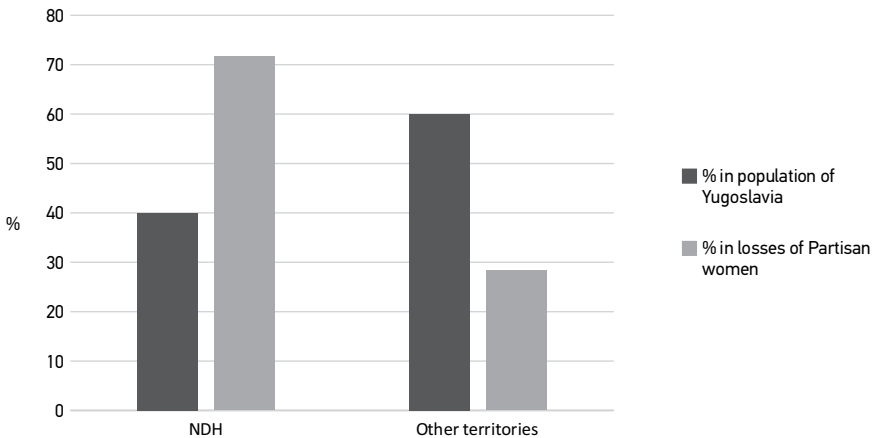


Chart 2. Yugoslavia, Partisans, women – Proportion of population and losses in NDH compared to other territories of Yugoslavia

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.

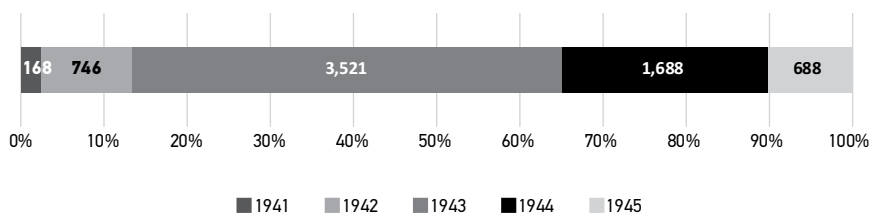


Chart 3. NDH, Partisans, women – dynamics of losses

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.

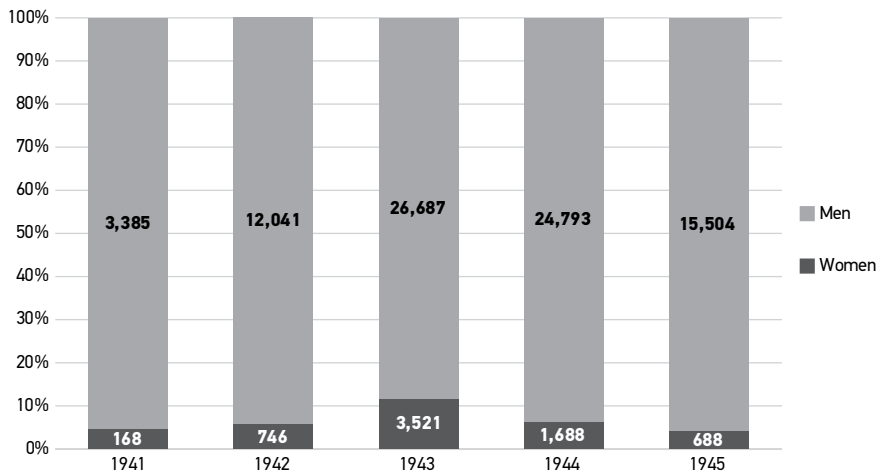


Chart 4. NDH, Partisans – Losses according to gender and year of death

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.

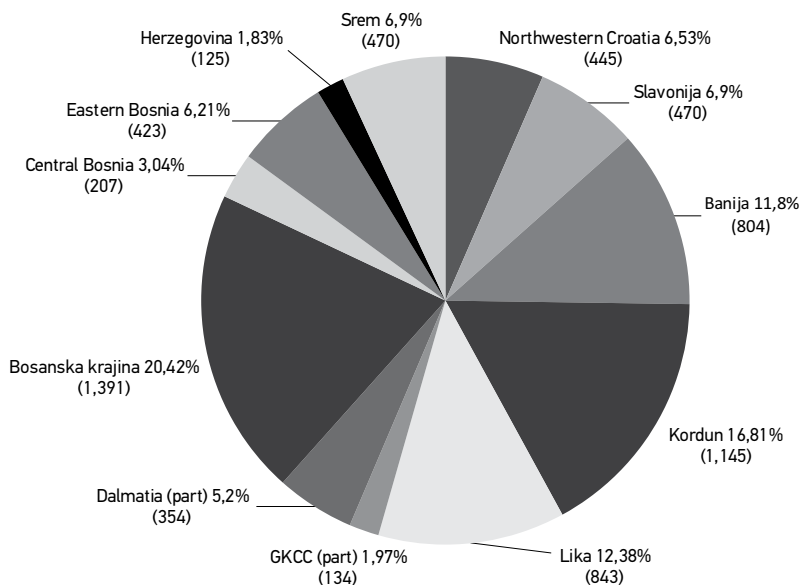


Chart 5. NDH, Partisans, women – Losses according to regional affiliation

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.

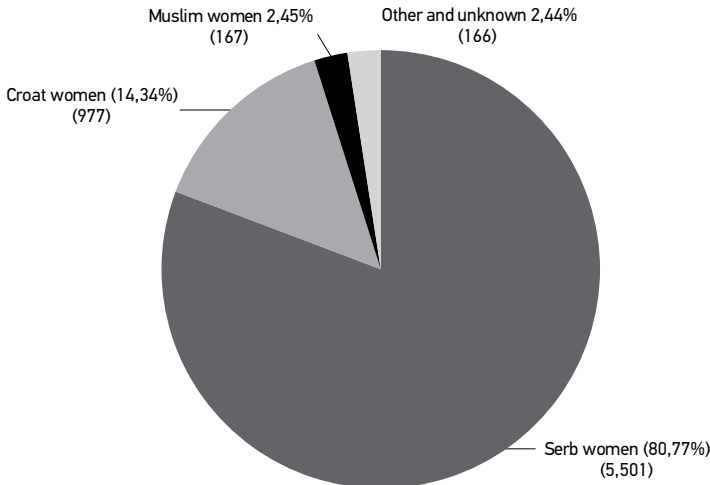


Chart 6. NDH, Partisans, women – National structure of losses

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.

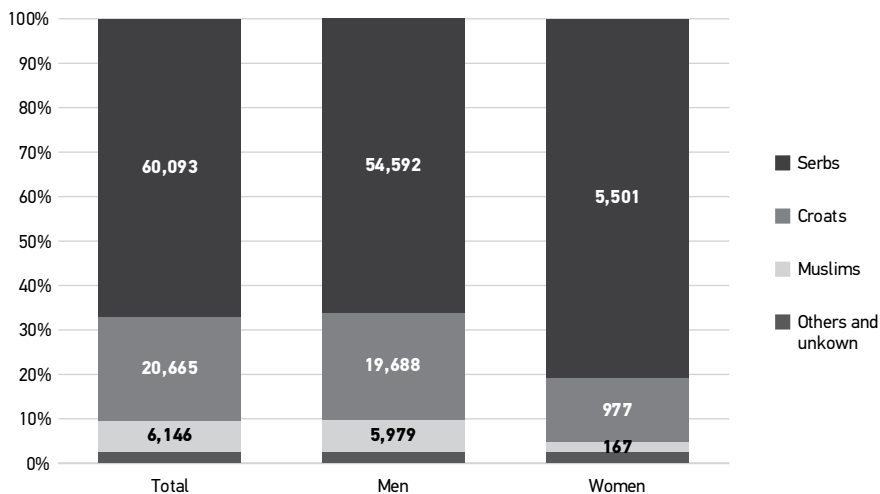


Chart 7. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in gender losses according to nationality

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

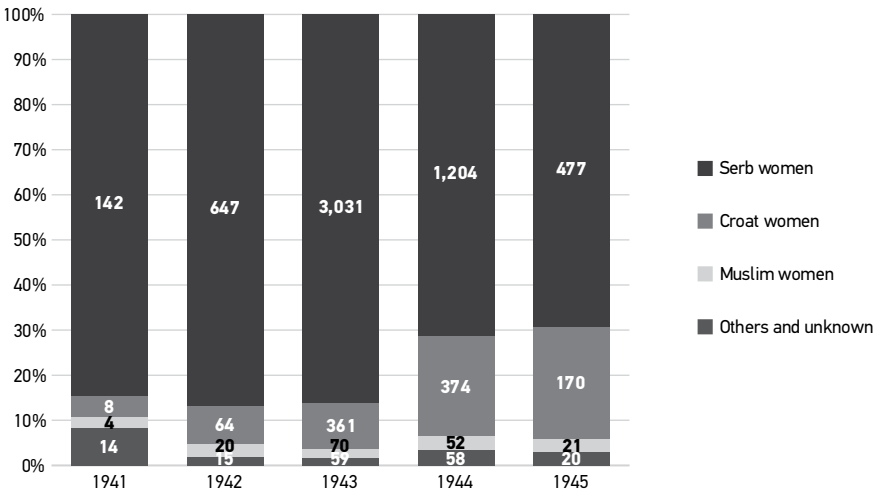


Chart 8. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in losses according to nationality and year of death

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%).

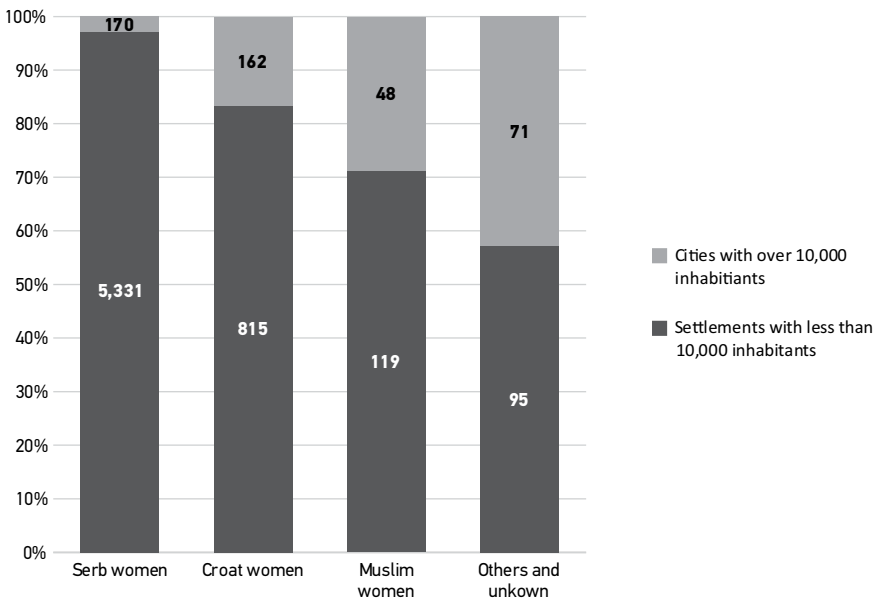


Chart 9. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in losses according to nationality and settlement size

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.

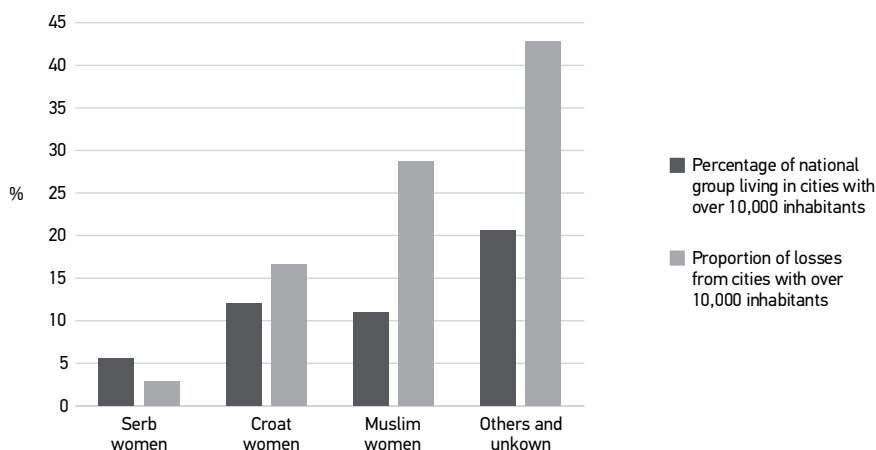


Chart 10. NDH, Partisans, women – Representation in the population and share of losses of cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants by nationality

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

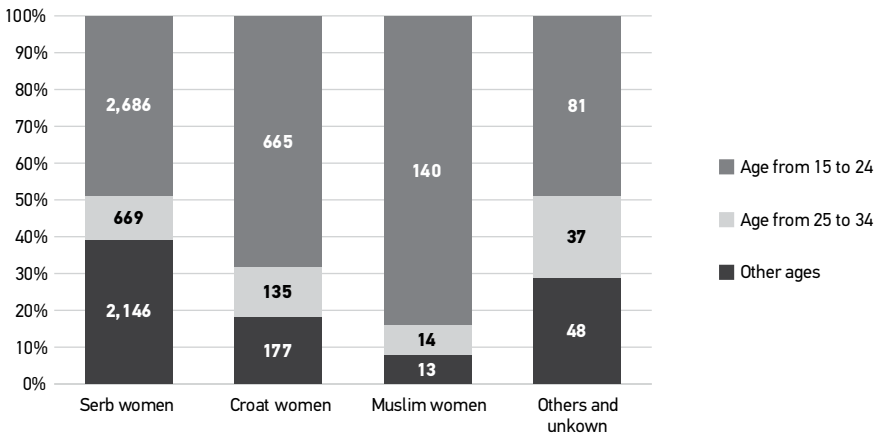


Chart 11. NDH, Partisans, women – Age structure of losses according to nationality

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%).

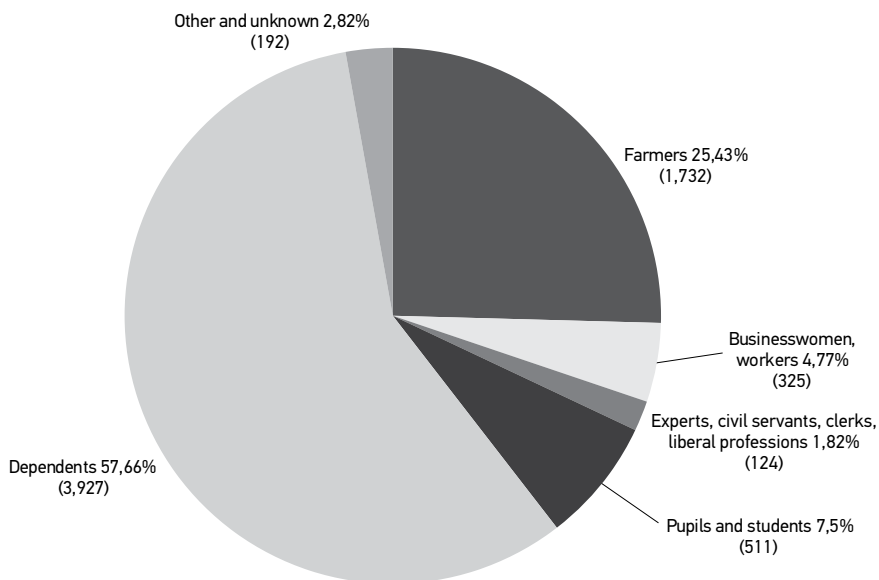


Chart 12. NDH, Partisans, women – Professional structure of losses

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

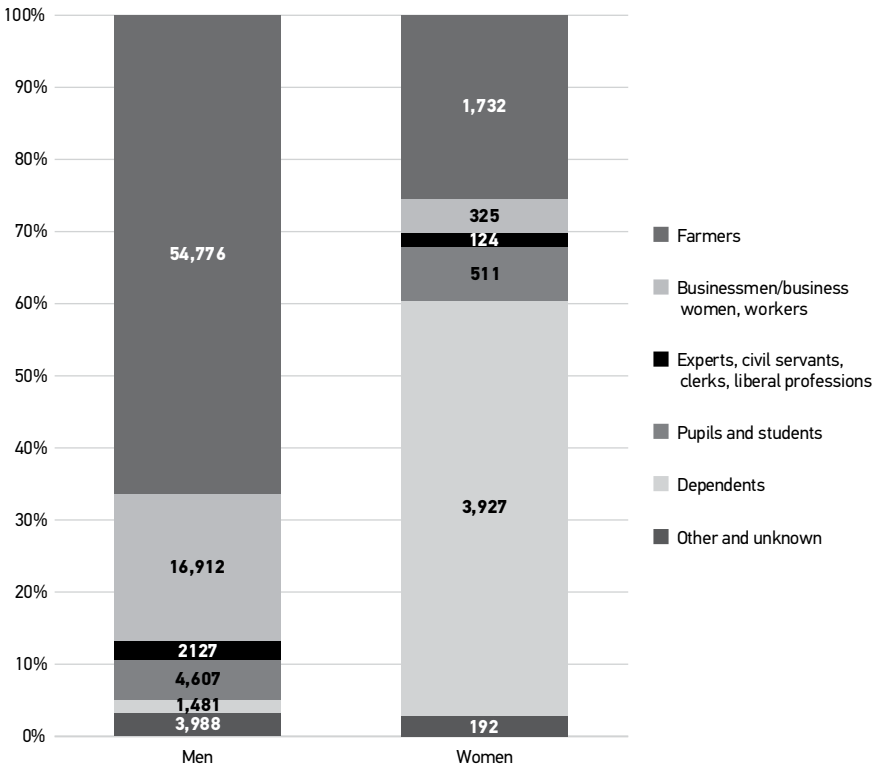


Chart 13. NDH, Partisans – Professional structure of losses according to gender

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.

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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