

Yugoslav Women Intellectuals: From A Party Cell To A Prison Cell

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Abstract: The Yugoslav socialist framework enabled major advances in what concerns the legal, economic and social equality of women, advances which radically changed their traditionally subordinated family and social position. In spite of the postwar period of revolutionary enthusiasm, female political activism and the access of women intellectuals to the male-dominated spheres of journalism, diplomacy, administration and governmental offices did not exist for long. Taking into account memoirs and oral histories of five distinguished women, the article reveals the reasons for the Party's antifeminist attitudes: a) the political fear of ambitious female "quality staff"; b) the ideological fear of the women guardians of the traditional and religious foundations of collective identity; c) a cultural mistrust toward the mobile woman who easily transcends family, social and ethnic boundaries. These biographical sources reveal that any attempt at free thought and autonomous action outside of the party line was severely punished.

Keywords: communist repression in Yugoslavia 1948-1956, Yugoslav women political prisoners, Yugoslav women's memoirs on repression

Among numerous antagonisms, paradoxes, possible "contradictions of modernity" (Allcock 2000) or "conflicting complementarities" (Creed 1998) relating to Yugoslav society in the socialist period, the antifeminist treatment of women intellectuals has been the least studied. Indeed, in the entire spectrum of retrospective approaches – from serious academic studies to revisionist daily political discussions – it seems that gender and social egalitarianism was recognized as a civilizational achievement of the communist authorities. Without denying the truth of this principal remark, my starting point is that state sponsored egalitarianism should not overshadow key failures in Yugoslav state feminism, its democratic deficit and many shortcomings pertaining to its

emancipatory claims. As noted by authors with more or less sympathy for feminist scholarship (Sklevicky 1996; Božinović 1996; Slapšak 1996; Ramet 1999; Pantelić 2011), one of the main reasons for the “perverted tragedy” of communism as an “emancipatory project going awry” (Žižek 2001) is the resistant patriarchal sexual contract (Pateman 1988) that treats women as an object of political projection and manipulation (see also Mudure 2006).

Paradoxically or not, by establishing a modern political patriarchy, Yugoslav communist authorities confirmed their affinity for Western political and popular culture as well as its debt to the autocracy, or rather gerontocracy, of other communist regimes. Political patriarchy, whilst a seemingly marginal issue for researchers of communism and post-communism, the Cold War, or the welfare state, is an essential component of feminist scholarship and memory studies. Namely, if the problem of reflecting nodal dates in East-Central Europe, such as 1948, 1956, 1968 and 1989, confronts feminist scholars with the need for inventing a new conceptual apparatus (cf. Iveković 1993; Petö 2002) in order to step out of defined historical periods/categories (Jambrešić Kirin 2004), the issue of the gendered corporality of social agents is unavoidable when the hegemony of official historical narratives and the parochialism of “malestream” paradigms are questioned. As Marianne Hirsch noted in connection with Holocaust studies, gender and sexuality have been used “to create a lens through which we can understand the particularities found in women’s testimonies and memoirs, and to shape a platform that has enabled those stories to emerge and be heard in a context in which masculine and heteronormative stories had for the most part dominated¹.”

My intention is to illuminate the fate of Yugoslav women intellectuals in the period of (counter) Stalinist purges (1945-1953) from the perspective of gender history and a feminist approach to women’s political and intimate citizenship (cf. Pateman 1988; Plummer 2011; Kašić i Prlenda 2013) in an autocratic, hierarchical, and fundamentally homosocial regime of power, characterized by antagonism towards women (intellectuals and rebels) as “the first form of attack on the ‘Other’” (Iveković 1993). Because of the strong communist power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and the erasure of the system’s “constitutive violence”, women’s traumatic historical experiences in post/socialism function as a kind of counter-history or finally verbalized trauma. They were not a part of the narratives of Yugoslav domestic dissidents or political victims, and thus not exaggerated or re-used in symbolic nation-building processes during the 1990s. Official communist denial of “rebellious women” as equal political prisoners has its echo in the recent rejection to understand those women as “survivors of totalitarianism” or to incorporate them within a specifically female discourse of victimization during and after the war in the nineties.

¹ Hirsch 2012: 17.

Combining an interest in the politics of memory and the transmission of women's historical experiences with a new reading of archival sources and a biographical method, I am looking for answers to the questions of how and why many distinguished professional women and former revolutionaries disappeared from the historical stage in the early 1950s, that is, why they were violently interrupted in their intellectual, public and personal self-realization. The impetus for this study comes from a recent discussion over the role of gender policy in the Cold War (Aspasia Forum 2014) and, on the other hand, from local studies concerning the unsolved "woman question" as a generator of permanent crisis in Yugoslav socialist society.

However, even studies with a feminist orientation, such as the work of Lydia Sklevicky (1996), Neda Božinović (1996), Sabrina P. Ramet (1999), Svetlana Slapšak (2001) and Ivana Pantelić (2011) have not provided a satisfactory answer to the following question: To what extent did intolerant, suspicious and paternalistic attitudes towards women intellectuals reflect the traditionalism and conservatism of the communist gerontocracy? Perhaps the situation was the other way around, namely the modern "patriarchal contract" was a kind of concession to old mentalities, cultural beliefs and attitudes or a part of an empty rhetorical moral condemnation of "deviant phenomena" in the fast developing socialist society. The reason I relied on biographical sources (women's memoirs, interviews, documentaries) lies in the fact that only they can provide answers to my research questions: What messages did Yugoslav communists send to women - not only through legal, normative, and propaganda discourses, but also through their daily encounters with female colleagues and collaborators? Did they encourage them in their efforts to use their newly acquired rights and win over the new areas of professional and social affirmation? Did they respect them as equal partners, associates, public figures and politicians or just relied on them as devoted, responsible and less ambitious partners in building a socialist society?² Autobiographical discourse is of particular importance for feminist analysis because it brings together the internal and external experience, social and personal history, and uncovers "a person's place in the social order of things in addition to the social background, structures and processes that are at work in a particular context³."

The Yugoslav socialist framework enabled major advances in what concerns the legal, economic and social equality of women that radically changed

² A similar set of questions was already articulated by Barbara Wolfe Jancar but I have discovered it after the article was already completed: „If Communist societies are unique in their pioneering efforts to achieve sexual equality, have women in these societies deliberately refused to take advantage of the opportunities offered them? Has the male leadership presented options to them which make it difficult for women to participate? Is the failure of women to rise to the top of the status pyramid symptomatic of a prevailing disinterest among women in status and power, because they feel they have already achieved equality?" (1978: 3).

³ Šikić-Mičanović 2013: 102.

their traditionally subordinated family and social position. To educated women on the left, the egalitarian system opened up opportunities for successful professional careers. They were better positioned than former partisan women, who were largely engaged in voluntary reconstruction work, propaganda work, the social care of orphans and war victims. The fact that women's share in leadership bodies in 1948 (with women deputies numbering 4 percent in the federal Assembly and 4.8 percent in the CPY's Central Committee) was not proportional to their participation in the partisan combat units (12,5 percent) is the best indicator of their poor integration into communist political life and power-sharing⁴. The postwar period of revolutionary enthusiasm and the access of women intellectuals to the male-dominated spheres of journalism, diplomacy, administration and governmental offices did not exist long. One of the reasons for women's professional stagnation in the period 1948-1952, which is the focus of this paper, was an inherent contradiction of the Titoist political system, which "did make considerable propaganda in favor of gender equality, whether in films or the periodical media or programmatic statements at party forums" but, as Sabrina P. Ramet observed, failed "to take up the task of using the educational system to reshape people's thinking about gender differences"⁵, i.e. to radically and consistently fight against patriarchal values and attitudes.

1. Bare Life at the Bare Island (Goli otok) Stalinist Camp

When the Yugoslav revolution began to eat its children in 1948, the daughters, sisters, wives and mothers of imprisoned "counterrevolutionaries" were among its first scapegoats and collateral victims, thus discrediting the very idea of revolution for future generations. This short episode of Stalinist purges (1948-1953/56), accompanying the Tito-Stalin split, with some 56.000 administratively penalized citizens and internees⁶ never received its juridical epilogue, nor its victims' political rehabilitation.⁷ Instead of the large show-trials of the time – found in Prague, Budapest and Bucharest – the Yugoslav secret police *Udba* organized many small show-trials: provincial Kafkaesque "inquisitional processes" and home detentions in which the ferocity of prewar communist factional fighting became intertwined with blatant careerism, personal animosity, war traumas, antifeminism, chauvinism, and

⁴ Ramet 1999: 93, 99.

⁵ Ramet 1999: 95.

⁶ Banac 1988; Leksikon, 1996, vol. 1: 392.

⁷ In addition to the camp on the Goli Otok island, the Yugoslav authorities developed a whole system of smaller prisons and concentration camps for confining Stalin supporters on the islands of St. Grgur, Ugljan, Rab, Vis and Korčula and in prisons in Bileća, Stolac, Ramskirit, Požarevac, Stara Gradiška and others.

even anti-Semitism. Instead of a seemingly simple division between those who supported Tito and those who opted for Stalin, the startup of the Party's "decision-making and separation machine" continued with the mass production of "enemies of the people" to whom the repressive apparatus had to identify and explain "their, for them invisible, violations and sins"⁸. This intra-party conflict actually created a biopolitical foundation of political community for which the sovereign power of the ruler (not constitution and civil rights) provides the criteria of inclusion and exclusion from the communist "utopian society" and defines the extent of political freedom⁹. According to the Slovenian ethnologist Božidar Jezernik, the concentration camp on the Adriatic Goli otok (meaning the "Bare Island") lies in the very foundation of Tito's Yugoslavia: "While silenced, it was a hard rock on which the state was grounded. When people started talking about it, the state began to disintegrate"¹⁰. For our argument, it would be more accurate to rephrase this claim by saying that only the break of the traumatic silence of women detainees at Goli otok gave us a full picture of the ideology-driven regime whose biopolitical reality began where the state ended together with its law, rules and humanist rhetoric.

The fact that nearly half of the prisoners in the Goli otok camp belonged to the old "Bolshevik guard", the Spanish volunteers, prominent communists, and former prisoners of Nazi and Stalinist camps, meant that the newly established Yugoslav Gulag was faced with the most difficult task – to denigrate and disintegrate heroes and "revolutionary saints", to break the unbreakable, those who do not ask for mercy, nor offer it to anyone. Namely, prisoners and their interrogators or judges were often close friends or former members of the same party cell or partisan unit. The new moment in this horrific, but familiar story of the reversal of political power was an attempt to erase written, archival and lived histories of Yugoslav communism embodied in some prominent figures of politicians and intellectuals. In this way, the caesura between prewar and postwar societies and cultures was deepened and filled with new ruptures, regressions, censorships and transgenerational traumas. Actual Stalinists or

⁸ Beganović 2007: 274.

⁹ Agamben 2006: 160. Scholars writing in the field of post/socialism studies generally agree about a "pure modernity of communist experience" and about some specificities of totalitarian effects "different from earlier forms of dictatorship" (Courtois 1999: 13). For some historians, the mass violation of civil rights is an embarrassing reminder of "the ideological connection between Yugoslavia and the Soviet bloc countries" (Banac 1988: 253). There is a broad consensus concerning the legal and socio-psychological meaning of the Stalinist purges, but the ethical and political implications of this "irrational" violence for Yugoslav society as a whole remains a challenge for (feminist) interpretation.

¹⁰ Jezernik 1994: 686. The Croatian Political Establishment does not yet agree about what to do with the "difficult heritage" of political violence and the "bare island" as a synonym for the Yugoslav form of "Prison communism". The Croatian Alcatraz, as one local agency depicts the island to tourists, is today part of local grassroots offering of "horror tourism", with visitor figures apparently numbering approximately 50,000.

those unjustly accused of being so, stigmatized as “political criminals”, were deprived of a future, but also of their (revolutionary) past; the hardest part of their sentence was the imposed self-destruction of personal biographies. Ženi Lebl named this perfidious method of imposed brainwashing and the reinvention of self “automortography” (1990), because it referred to self-denial, symbolic death and the loss of the right to testify in public. Contrary to the basic idea of communist emancipation, according to which oppressed people and proletarians began to manage their own time by narrating their own history for the first time¹¹, former prisoners signed a formal pact of silence in order to regain their freedom but also be written out of the history of Yugoslav communism.

The number of women who served a sentence officially named “socially-useful work” (cca 860) is perhaps negligible compared to the total number of detained political prisoners (cca 17.000), according to sparse and incomplete data¹², but the technology of penal “auto-correction” hurting women’s integrity and self-esteem, as well as destroying their political prospects, had long-term effects on the status of distinguished women in politics and social life (cf. Jambrešić Kirin 2010). Like the victims of Stalinist purges, Yugoslav women, female relatives of those considered to be “traitors of the homeland”, were blackmailed with imprisonment, as well as the deprivation of civil rights, if they did not sign divorce papers, did not give up their loved ones or additionally charge or “denounce” them as enemies of the people. The mere fact that they were wives, sisters or daughters of “compromised comrades” blocked any career prospects for many women. Communist morality based on a total correspondence between the private life of the individual and the political one was regarded as superior to a civil morality, although both shared patriarchal values and the authority of the “law of the father”. In the revolutionary context, the strong homosocial bond between “brothers in arms” and the hierarchical structure was considered to be a positive achievement, but during the rift in the party-family, the “unfit” members often had to cope with (symbolic) vendettas and fratricide.¹³

Perhaps the best common denominator for the different experiences of women confined in Soviet gulags (Vilensky 1999; Adler 2001), Bulgarian camps for “socially useful work and rehabilitation” (Todorov 1999), and Greek island camps for communists (Voglis 2002), is revealed by the Russian name for one kind of women’s camps – ČSIR (*člyen sem'i izmennika Rodini*), Camp for the female family of the traitors of the Homeland – which suggests a metaphorical blending of family and patriotic honor in relation to members of the political community.

¹¹ Badiou 2008: 122.

¹² Banac 1988; Leksikon 1996, vol.1: 392.

¹³ The close connections between the mentality of the patriarchal family and that of the Communist Party is best witnessed by prewar conspiratorial code names: *Ćaća* (daddy) for the Central Committee, *Djed* (grandfather) for the Comintern, *Familija* (family) for the Communist Party and *Svadba* (wedding party) for the Party congress.

2. Discarded Women Revolutionaries: From a Party Cell to a Prison Cell

My arguments are based on the analysis of four life stories by women who have spoken out publicly – on their own or a scholar’s initiative – half a century after the initial trauma. They are a part of a rather small, but important corpus of women’s narratives concerning their experiences of living, working, acting publicly and being punished in socialist Yugoslavia (cf. Dragović-Gašpar 1990; Lebl 1990; Grlić 1997; Žicina 2002; Iveković 2003; Dijanić et al 2004; Balen 2009; Winter 2012 at al.). Miljuša Jovanović (1917-1991) had one of the leading positions in the Yugoslav National Office for War Invalids until she doubted the official explanation of the murder of her brother, General Arsa Jovanović, who had been accused of trying to escape to the USSR via Romania and of his support for the Cominform Resolution. Although she joined the partisan movement in Montenegro in its early days and earned the rank of captain, in addition to being an invalid who could hardly walk after both her feet froze during a march through Mount Igman in January 1942, Miljuša was sentenced to four years at the Goli Otok camp because she chose not to renounce her brother and because she insulted Milovan Djilas, the closest collaborator of Josip Broz Tito and the head of Agitprop, and also a former friend of her family. In 1948, one of her pre-war comrades greeted her on the street in Belgrade, calling “Hello, resistance fighter”¹⁴ - knowing that Udba¹⁵ had been monitoring her for months and that she was out of favor with the Party (Jovanović audio 1996, CD 1). This collegiate-mockery compliment (*resistance fighter*) epitomized her resistance to Bolshevik party loyalty, which turned former revolutionaries and movers & shakers into dull, autocratic rulers. The authority of communists stemmed from long-term activity in the underground movement; they were not simply efficient and brave, but they were always prepared for the worst: for spying, privacy, trial and armed action, built on the belief that “they would rather be in jail than be jailers”¹⁶. However, the external threat of Soviet intervention, the temptations of political power, and the struggle for social benefits resulted in inappropriate behavior and actions typical of Stalinism. In such an environment of real and political paranoia, individualism and critical thought

¹⁴ The original phrase is “Zdravo ilegalac!” (Jovanović 1996, DVD 1). The transcript of the oral history style interview with M. Jovanović was made and publicized by Dragan Simić. It is also available online, in Serbian, at <http://www.audiofotoarhiv.com/gosti%20sajta/MiljušaJovanovic.html>.

¹⁵ The State Security Service (SDB or SDS), more commonly known by its original name as the State Security Administration (UDBA or UDSA), was the Yugoslav secret police from 1946-1991. It was primarily responsible for internal state security - for identifying and obstructing activities conducted by the “domestic enemy” (i.e. the “bourgeois right-wing”, clericalists, members of the Cominform, nationalists, and separatists).

¹⁶ Hobsbawm 2009: 124, 125.

were made possible only through “illegal” activities, at the cost of internal exile or dissidence because *party loyalty* entailed strict adherence to hierarchy, discipline, and collectivist consciousness. However, from the mid-1950s reforms onwards, political life was greatly democratized and a critique of social issues from the pen of the “entitled critics” of the system and hotline comedians (Nela Eržišnik, Mija Aleksić) was more than welcome. This was a specific form of channeling “permissible speech of the forbidden”, which included the critique of luxury, political abuse, etc., and functioned as a “necessary outlet to political discipline”¹⁷. Nevertheless, for the women purged, sentenced and imprisoned without formal judgment there was no social or symbolic rehabilitation or return to public life until the 1990s. During the People’s Liberation War of Yugoslavia, Marija-Vica Balen (1910-1984) acted as an AFŽ activist and Agitprop journalist on the front line (Lika, Kordun, Banija, Slavonija); the end of the war saw her take a position as a headmistress of a children’s home in Buzeta, near Glina, and after the liberation she worked as editor for the Croatian Radio. As the wife of the Yugoslav press attaché in Washington, her family moved to the United States in late 1948, but as early as 1949 she was taken to the prison on Savska Street in Zagreb, along with her three sisters, as her husband Šime Balen did not want to testify against Andrija Hebrang, the leading Croatian communist reputed as one of Stalin’s favorites. In her memoirs written in the early 1980s and published in 2009, she recalls the degrading treatment of political delinquents, as they were often dubbed, a term which equated political activists and intellectuals, who were in the position to co-create the official policy on women who were criminals and prostitutes, and who were considered as the greatest threat to both petite bourgeois and communist morality:

I kept shaking from the cold and damp and choking from the lack of air. Not only was it impossible to sleep there but also to survive, so I began to protest and shout, demanding that they move me to another room. And - and they did move me. But, among criminals and prostitutes (...) So, fifteen years later when I was treated the same way in the UDBA prison in Zagreb, I realized that all the police were the same!¹⁸

As a distinguished communist and partisan, she felt that not a single risk, even bringing her three children into mortal danger, should waver her “sacred duty to her people and her country in the most dramatic lessons of their recent history”¹⁹. She was nevertheless amazed, during the set-up process against Hebrang, by the ease with which the new nomenclature, as perfidious Anti-Stalinist dictators, eliminated all undesirable “elements” and required blind

¹⁷ Bosanac 2010: 192.

¹⁸ Balen 2009: 103.

¹⁹ Balen 2009: 72.

Bolshevik obedience²⁰. Instead of creatively developing her potential as a journalist and political activist, Marija-Vica Balen, who had been a prominent member of the Communist Party since 1928 and had met prominent Yugoslav communists during the course of her extensive underground activism, spent the rest of her life working as a proof reader at the *Školska knjiga* publishing house where she laboriously attended to other people's manuscripts, work and careers. There is a striking similarity between Eva Grlić (1920-2008) and Marija-Vica Balen's life stories: both were part of an "elite" prewar leftist intelligentsia close to Josip Broz, whereas after they joined the Partisans, they could see their children only in the photographs smuggled out of occupied Zagreb by the same comrade. For a while they shared the same cell in the prison in Savska Street in early 1949 and, eventually, both were degraded to jobs far below their professional competence.

Dragica Srzentić-Vitolović (1912 -), from the region of Istria, was a prewar communist from a circle of respectable Belgrade intellectuals, a regular contributor to the feminist-socialist magazine *Žena danas* (Woman Today) and one of the founders of the magazine NIN. Together with her husband, she fought with the Montenegrin partisans, and upon the call from the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ), she departed for Vis and then to London, where she worked as a BBC announcer in the Yugoslav section. After the war, she co-organized the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in charge of the diplomatic service and cooperation with non-European countries), and as government commissioner she personally took to Moscow the letter in which Tito famously said "NO to Stalin". In the documentary film by Želimir Žilnik, *One Woman, One Century* (2011) - her first notable public appearance in sixty years - Dragica Srzentić talks about similar methods of torture in the socialist UDBA prison in Podgorica, in the very same prison that was used by Italian Fascists. This is a constant theme in the memories of pre-war revolutionaries; for instance, Ženi Lebl (1927-2009), in her autobiographical book titled *Suddenly Different, Suddenly the Other* (2008), describes a similar method of "testing" by Bulgarian interrogators in Niš, as well as by UDBA agents in the *Glavnjača* prison in Belgrade. It consisted of physical and mental torture with elements of sexual violence. However, what especially hurt these two successful young women with perfect wartime biographies were the backstabbing, insinuations and false accusations by their fellow workers and close party comrades.

²⁰ Ivo Banac offered a good explanation on the mentality of Yugoslav anti-Stalinist Bolshevism: "Yet the conflict with Stalin played the same part in the shaping of Yugoslavia's political system that collectivization and the purges of the 1930s played in the history of Soviet communism. The frank accounting for this period which the Yugoslavs will ultimately have to provide is made more difficult by Western analysts who assume that every manifestation on anti-Stalinism or anti-Sovietism within a socialist state is necessarily a sign of emerging political pluralism" (1988: 257).

Namely, at the time of her arrest in May 1952, Srzentić was Deputy Secretary General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FNRJ, while Lebl worked as a journalist for the newspaper *Politika* and had been promised a position as foreign correspondent in Paris:

I was already working as journalist for the *Politika* when I turned twenty, and two years later I became senior reporter in this newspaper. I was also accepted to attend the Journalism and Diplomacy College without being a member of CPY. (...) I didn't know that my success would produce envy among my close friends and that I would fall victim to their insidious slander. I did not know that they would decide my fate. But that's another long story, a story of the Yugoslav GULAG, told partly in the book *White Violet* (1991)²¹.

Both women were experienced revolutionaries, educated and talented, with a knowledge of foreign languages, enthusiastically devoted to building a new democratic society, and with respectable war experience - from captivity in the Berlin Gestapo prison (Lebl) to negotiations with the British government about the set-up of the new Yugoslav government (Srzentić) – yet the methods of torture on the islands of Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur or in the women's prison in Stolac permanently changed not just their path in life, but also the way in which they described the world and people.

3. From a Female Role Model to the “Queen of the Stalinist Ball”

The threat of further detention resulted in their decades-long silence and led to their suppression of experienced trauma. So-called “status degradation ceremonies” had a particularly destructive effect on the psyche and self-esteem of female detainees. These consisted of theatrical forms violating certain individuals' dignity and integrity through the use of derogatory songs and slogans, i.e. short plays that “staged their guilt” and ridiculed their private life, feminine outlook and professional achievements. According to the sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1956), the intention of the status degradation ceremony is to denounce and stigmatize an individual as unworthy of the privileges that go along with his or her former role in society or in an institution. The paradigm of such moral indignation is public denunciation or the ritual destruction of the person denounced with the rhetorical formula: “I call upon all men to bear witness that he is not as he appears but is otherwise and *in essence* of a lower species”²².

During one of the ceremonies of public humiliation at the Goli otok prison, Dragica Srzentić-Vitolović was disguised as “The Queen of the Stalinist

²¹ Lebl 2008: 189.

²² Garfinkel 1956: 421.

Ball”: she was given a crown of thorns and nettles and sneakers that read: “Made in the USSR”. This theatre of cruelty aimed to ridicule, cause pain and result in a psychological crackdown and the imputation of “guilt” on those who until yesterday had represented a moral role model for the community. Members of the repressive apparatus willingly and frequently used traditional derogatory practices against women by manipulating shame as “the most emotional tone of every personality” (Agamben 2006), as the primary means for the patriarchal devaluation of women based on the premise that women’s lives are not worth much and that there is, as historian Michelle Perrot has formulated, a woman’s shame that has existed since time immemorial²³. Such degradation and threats to reproductive health, imposed on women political prisoners arrested according to the law of having violated public peace and order, just as prostitutes, their fellow prisoners, say a great deal about the contradictions of an ideology that fundamentally changed the institutions and social relations, but not the patriarchal premises concerning the natural supremacy of men (in power) over women (without power and influence). This Stalinist “penal orthopedagogy” directed against the “Stalinists” suffers from a surplus of ideological signifiers, but lacks an ethical aspect, namely the one that, according to Foucault (1997), would constitute the difference between religious dogmatic self-denial and the modern constitution of subjectivity.

Unlike male prisoners, who since the 1960s gradually gained the right to appropriate the story of Goli Otok as a relevant historical experience, women political prisoners had neither social support, nor a model or framework for the narrative of their own experience of being “inner dissidents.” Their loss of self-esteem, depression, a sense of helplessness and post-traumatic symptoms resulted in a withdrawal from public life, and sometimes from the world of work. The interviews and memoirs of these remarkable women, written after more than half a century, were partly motivated by the wish of their authors to testify about the collective (Ženi Lebl published several books on the destiny of Jewish communities in the territory of Yugoslavia) or about their “great husbands” (Rudolf Bičanić, Danko Grlić, Šime Balen, Vojo Srzentić) with whom they shared the fate of “the oppositional left intellectuals”, but most importantly, they provided reflections on the experience of morally and politically incriminated and marginalized women intellectuals who, through their work and public activities, left a permanent mark on that period, but were ignored both by socialist and post-socialist historiography.

²³ “A prominent function of shame for the person is that of preserving the ego from further onslaughts by withdrawing entirely its contact with the outside. For the collective shame is an ‘individuator’. One experiences shame in his own time. Moral indignation serves to effect the ritual destruction of the person denounced. Unlike shame, which does not bind persons together, moral indignation may reinforce group solidarity” (Garfinkel 1956: 421).

4. Paternalism in the Party

The so-called objective difficulties – the negative consequences of rapid industrialization and urbanization, the uneven development of the country and the fight against the “fifth column” after the conflict with Stalin – pushed “women’s issues” into the background. The Party and state leaders controlled the organized activity of women and defined its objectives and tasks. Paternalistically structured “socialist feminism” enabled women to have legal protection and economic equality, but not equal participation in decision-making and political power. I was surprised how the descriptions of bureaucratic measures (instrumentalization, atomization and abolishment) taken by the Czechoslovakian communist government in the 1950s in order to reduce, discipline and control women’s organizations fits the Yugoslav scenario²⁴. In the Yugoslav case, too, as the Croatian feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky pointed out in her study based on meticulous archival research, the communist government was literally afraid of an autonomous, strong women’s mass movement. Thus, the Yugoslav communists abolished the AFŽ (Antifascist Women’s Front) in 1953 and abruptly closed down the progress of the social revolution and emancipatory women’s activism.

In his speech at the last Congress of the AFŽ (the Antifascist Front of Women) in 1953, Milovan Djilas said that one of the reasons for the abolition of the AFŽ was the strengthening of democracy and women’s equality in Yugoslavia, and that the time had come for society as a whole to take over the tasks of such “semi-political organization”, i.e. the Socialist Alliance of Working People and the future alliance of women’s societies²⁵. It was felt that the gradual increase in living standards and material conditions of life would lead to a general improvement in the social position of women. However, in reality this led to a de-politicization of “women’s issues” and women’s associations, to an underestimation of women’s political force, and therefore to a reduced influence women might have had on the further development of socialist relations. In relation to the period of rebuilding and development, in the mid-1950s women’s activity decreased, cases of women’s labor rights’ violations and worker layoffs became more frequent, as did regressive attitudes. After the

²⁴ Forum 2014: 175-76.

²⁵ The AFŽ was gradually transformed, first into the League of Women’s Associations (1953-1961), and then into KAZDAŽ, the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (1961-1965), fatefully following the Communist Party line, that is, the conviction that “our socialist society functioned in a genderless way.” The second period, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, was characterized by the loss of the second and most important dimension of women’s activism—work for society and work for/on themselves. The third period of socialist women’s activism was marked by grassroots feminist and civil initiatives called *neofeminizam* (“new feminism”) or second wave feminism, which was visible only in big Yugoslav cities such as Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana.

abolition of the AFŽ, socially active women lost their independent platform for political action and became more exposed to attacks and insinuations and more dependent on the fatherly figure of Tito, who had always had a patronizing and paternalistic attitude towards women. Describing the ambiguous and complex relationship between communism and feminism in socialist Romania, Mihaela Mudure reached a similar conclusion:

The communist project of modernizing society granted women some rights: universal suffrage, the right to education, political visibility. But these successes were only apparent, these rights were void of content, as voting and political visibility was fake political agency in a dictatorial system. The right to education was also affected by the imposed ideology of the time. Women were not granted these rights as autonomous social agents, the greatest patriarch became the Party, and within the Party, the secretary general²⁶.

The failure of party policy to solve the problem of gender and social inequality, feminist scholars believe, lies in the communist renewal of the “will to power” and with it, the restoration of a social hegemony that “once again reproduces not only inequality, but also new forms of oppression and a lack of freedom”²⁷. The ongoing asymmetry of power was more likely “a consequence of the operation of the Communist system itself” than the product of “centuries of oppression”²⁸. Given that the “new woman” was a symbol of the transformative potential of Yugoslav socialist society, her moral discreditation and criminalization because of her political and public engagement – which took place during the Tito-Stalin conflict – represented a dangerous backlash. According to my research, at least three elements of a post-revolutionary patriarchal anxiety of the Party authorities can be detected: a) the political fear of ambitious women (“quality staff”); b) the ideological fear of the women guardians of traditional and religious foundations of collective identity; c) a cultural mistrust toward the mobile woman who easily transcends family, social and ethnic boundaries. The testimonies of women political prisoners show that the attempts at resisting ideological dogmatism, discriminatory practices and the patriarchal structure of the Party from within resulted in severe sanctions, and that attempts at free thought and autonomous political action outside of the party line were severely punished.

Numerous examples of the coexistence of anti-intellectualism and anti-feminism, nominal egalitarianism and resistant patriarchal consciousness are stated in Gordana Bsanac’s (b. 1936) “philosophical autobiography” *Visoko čelo* (High Forehead) (2010), which describes in detail her intellectual development during the 1950s. Her professor of philosophy at the University of Zagreb complemented the issue of dialectical materialism with a discussion of

²⁶ Mudure 2006: 421.

²⁷ Bsanac 2004:12.

²⁸ Jancar 1978: 3.

the difference between intelligent men and less intelligent women's facial physiognomy, claiming that men have a high-brow because their "box of thoughts" needs more space. The professor demonstrated a full range of gender discriminatory practices in his academic work without ever being sanctioned for them. From that moment on, this student, the future Marxist philosopher and sociologist, began to think about the obverse and reverse of the official policy of gender equality:

However, it turns out that there is a stronger, 'more legal' force that governs the will of the people, some unwritten rule, and one that rules gender differences among people, invisible, yet effective, that with all the discipline of real socialism that exists, there is nevertheless that discipline, which he recognizes and subsumes as his own evaluation. This force did not have a name, it was not critically discussed and was not contested, and only much later was appointed as patriarchal consciousness. It never questioned the acknowledged 'socialist consciousness' so they could peacefully exist alongside one another²⁹.

5. Concluding Remarks: From Silenced Revolutionaries to Feminist Activists

The social power of the Yugoslav communist party faced with the large scale recruitment of new members was strengthened by the promotion of emancipatory values and the "cultivation of virtues" – by taking over the Leninist myth of communists as "people of exceptional virtues". An integral part of this myth, based on the belief that socialist society is the best and most just of all social systems, includes psychosocial measures of self-control, namely, the internalization of fight against all human weaknesses, flaws and imperfections. The persistent correction of one's own shortcomings by encouraging virtues (and identification with dead partisan heroes) also implied the correction of biographies of those who did not correspond to the model of an exemplary person of exceptional intellectual abilities and moral qualities, but of humble working-class or peasant family origin. The transformation of repressive measures of discipline and punishment into practices of self-disciplining, self-criticism and self-correction, as described by Michel Foucault³⁰, follows the efforts of an individual to adapt to modern industrialized society and its socialist version. "The Yugoslav paradox" is perhaps best described by Carol S. Lilly, who claimed that the transition away from idealism of Yugoslav male and female revolutionaries originated as a move toward it:

For only when the Yugoslav Communist truly attempted to realize the promises of their ideology did they begin to lose faith in their ability to transform society, culture, and human beings by persuasive means. Party rhetoric, the leaders then discovered, was successful mainly when it relied on preexisting

²⁹ Bosanac 2010: 196.

³⁰ Foucault 1997 vol.1: 223-251.

values and beliefs, but was much less so when it tried to instill in the population new ideas and new behavioral norms. Persuasion, in other words, could occasionally help realize the party's short-term political agenda but not its long-term transformative one"³¹.

This is a crucial moment for the forming of a symbiosis between the socialist emancipatory agenda and traditional "women's values", nurtured equally in the socialist women's press as well as in the private sphere of the home, where the patriarchal logic of undervalued and invisible women's physical and affective labor fought back against the ideals of "state feminism." The rivalry of two collectivist projects (patriarchal and communist), which in their own way disciplined, socialized and exploited women's labor and reproductive capacity for the paternal or common good, has found a common interest in restoring the discourse of femininity hand in hand with the discourse of successful professional women. As Barbara Wolfe Jancar concluded, "much of the research in Communist countries has an instrumental goal: to provide the leadership with information about the way women feel, work, and live, with the aim of improving their performance at work, upgrading family life, or increasing the birth rate"³². The main problem regarding the unfortunate alliance of Yugoslav leftist women intellectuals with the communists stems from the fact that the political goal of the Party was not to raise autonomous, responsible and well-informed female citizens (cf. Slapšak 1996). As Josip Broz Tito clearly stated in his speech at the first AFŽ Congress held in 1945 in Belgrade, Yugoslav "forward-thinking women" were expected to justify the trust they had been given, and focus all their forces on "issues of strengthening our government"³³. The ethnologist Miroslava Malešević commented on this paternalistic and instrumentalist behavior of former comrades, who concentrated on consolidating power: "Having fulfilled the task enforced by extraordinary circumstances, a former partisan woman and shock worker would (...) withdraw from the social scene as quickly as she emerged on it. Energetic breakthroughs into all professions, including the highest levels of government, were quickly halted"³⁴. The Croatian feminist scholars Biljana Kašić and Sandra Prlenda added that after the joint victory with their revolutionary male comrades in 1945, women "had to turn back to their private histories and, by decoding the revolutionary symbols (both utopian and traditional), exposed the extent to which women's history could undo any ideological narrative closure"³⁵. Evidence of the downplaying of women's (revolutionary and leftist) history lies in the fact that socialist Yugoslavia never established a research institution, archive or museum dedicated to its world-famous women's

³¹ Lilly 2001: 251.

³² Jancar 1978: 10.

³³ Pantelić 2011: 54.

³⁴ Malešević 1988: 70.

³⁵ Kašić and Prlenda 2013: 156.

partisans and revolutionaries, among them ninety-one war heroines with the highest decoration in the country, the status of National Hero. In that sense, it is difficult to say whether “Cold War women’s organization in Yugoslavia and elsewhere played an active [and important – R.J.K.] role in everyday Cold War politics”, as Chiara Bonfiglioli recently concluded in her article³⁶. I do agree that during the 1940s and the 1950s, due to the tightening of relations between the Cold War parties and the continuing struggle for the implementation of women’s rights (abortion was partly liberalized in 1963 and fully in 1977), Yugoslav women in general were politically more active and more upset by measures which prevented them from succeeding in their actions more than their successors in the later decades of the mature “socialism with a friendly face”³⁷. But the fact is that we had to wait for a generational change and the late 1970s to hear the voices of new women, most often the daughters of revolutionary and/or “purged and silenced” mothers, who were able to articulate questions concerning their perplexed positions in the socialist family and autocratic state in feminist terms,³⁸ whilst simultaneously being open to looking for the answers among their activist “sisters” in the East and West alike.

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³⁶ Bonfiglioli 2014: 2.

³⁷ At the same time we must bear in mind that Yugoslav socialist authorities intensively searched for other sources of party legitimacy “including the gradual decentralization of power, a higher standard of living, and greater freedoms (including the freedom to travel abroad) than were available to the citizens of any other Communist regime” (Lilly 2001: 252).

³⁸ Yugoslav scholars and activists who managed to organize the first feminist international conference (“Drugarica Žena. Žensko Pitanje //Comrade Woman. The Women’s Question) in Belgrade in 1978 publicly called themselves feminists. Chiara Bonfiglioli proved in her MA research that this event has been foundational for feminist movements in the following decades that were in some way “part of larger globalised changes occurred since 1989, changes that have also affected the practices and theories of feminism in Eastern and Western Europe” (2009: 277).

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