Participation, Role and Position of Slovenian Women in the World War II Resistance Movement

di Vida Deželak Barič

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The following discussion focuses on the mass participation of women in the resistance movement during the occupation of Slovenia (1941-1945) and compares it with the women’s position in the anti-communist and collaborationist political camp in the context of the civil war, which took place in certain areas of Slovenian territory during the occupation. It analyses the aspects of the liberation struggle activities which women took part in. These activities included the activist fieldwork in the context of various organisations (Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation, Slovenian Anti-fascist Women’s Association – a special women’s organisation), inclusion of women in the Partisan armed formations, intelligence operations, as well as cultural and educational activities. The discussion underlines the monopoly of the Communist Party, the transmissive role of the resistance organisation in the eyes of the communists, problems with the implementation of the equal position of women in the men’s world, as well as fatalities among women.

Key words: Slovenia, resistance, women, partisan women, emancipation
Parole chiave: Slovenia, resistenza, donne, donne partigiane, emancipazione

The resistance and politicisation of women

World War II had a substantial impact on the traditional gender roles in Slovenia. Under the influence of the dramatic situation brought about by the occupation in April 1941 and the functioning of the ideological mechanisms, at that time women in fact took a large step and entered the public space which had until then been in the almost exclusive domain of the male half of the society - however, this does not mean they were not present in the public sphere. Especially within the Partisan camp, that is, the resistance and simultaneously revolutionary camp where initiatives, guidelines and appeals were formed, so that Slovenian women could also respond to the occupation and the fate that the German, Italian and Hungarian occupiers intended for the Slovenian nation (ethnic eradication). Thus the active participation of women in the resistance against the occupiers was intentionally and unintentionally connected with the emancipation processes, which in Slovenia, in view of the circumstances that were created, took place especially in the context of the Partisan camp. In view of the final results of the war and the related takeover of power by the resistance and revolutionary political forces, these wartime processes in many aspects defined the position of women in the post-war period as well, influencing the modernisation of what had previously been a patriarchal society. However, the acceptance of social roles was not smooth and straightforward, not during the
war nor after it. Instead it stumbled against traditions and prejudice in the society as a whole, even among women themselves.

The reservations with regard to the wider assertion of women were not unfamiliar for communists either, despite the fact that ever since the establishment of the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1919 their standpoint was that women, besides carrying out their roles as mothers and housekeepers, should also be enabled to take an equal part in the economic and political life. However, in reality the more extensive work in this area only began in the final period before the onset of World War II.

The changes with regard to the political and general social roles of women in Slovenia during World War II were, to a significant extent, the result of an early, continuous, large-scale and thus also long-term resistance, embodied by the Liberation Front, established in April 1941. The changes also resulted from the ideological orientation of this resistance, which was leftist in its foundations and gradually under increasingly obvious leadership of the Communist Party of Slovenia (CPS) as an integral part of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). The CPS as the decisive political force with regard to outlining the strategy of the resistance attempted to mobilise all the forces and means in order to strengthen this movement and hence also its own position. As far as the inclusion of women in the resistance movement and thus their placement in a social role increasingly comparable to that of men, the CPS based its standpoints on the Bolshevist principles of ensuring the political activation of women as a crucial precondition for the success of national liberation wars and revolutions. In this sense the member of the Slovenian and Yugoslav communist leadership Vida Tomšič spoke at the fifth state conference of the CPY in October 1940. Afterwards, in the post-war Yugoslavia, she was one of the most prominent politicians who focused on the so-called women’s question intensively. At the aforementioned conference, taking place only a few months before the Nazi Germany and fascist Italy attacked Yugoslavia, she underlined, among other things, that with the onset of the imperialist war, the work of communists among women was becoming increasingly important in that their task was to include women in the circle of the revolutionary proletariat by addressing suitable questions pertaining to the position of women, thus making use of their power in order to further the proletarian revolution. In the communist perception the women’s question was seen mostly as a «part of the question of the proletarian revolution», which, however, did not imply a possible insensitivity of the communists for the actual position of women.

The occupation pushed the revolutionary viewpoint to the background, focusing instead on the necessity to form the widest possible front in order to stand against the occupiers. Therefore the Liberation Front strived to include men as well as women into

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the resistance. When convincing women, the Liberation Front built on the basic resistance programme orientations, i.e. the struggle for the liberation and unification of Slovenians, which would, after the end of the war, be followed by the introduction of a social regime more just than that in the pre-war Yugoslavia. However, in these orientations, when addressing women explicitly, the Liberation Front frequently stressed the inequality and exploitation of women in the pre-war society to encourage them to join the resistance, thus ensuring a safer, fairer and better future for themselves and their children.

With regard to the duty to participate in the resistance, the Liberation Front, on principle, refrained from distinguishing between the genders. It kept emphasising that fascism threatened the Slovenian nation as a whole, which is why the entire nation was supposed to resist the occupiers. Only the forms of the resistance could vary: men were usually entrusted with leading the armed resistance, while women were supposed to support this resistance in various ways, in accordance with their abilities as well as their compassionate female nature. For example, in the summer of 1942 a certain activist, otherwise a member of the CPS, addressed women at the Partisan territory in the Ljubljana Province as follows:

> Go and help your comrades, our Partisans, in any way you can. Women are capable of other things than men. If you don’t fight, then you can participate in the liberation struggle by gathering clothes and preparing dried fruits for the winter. You can teach women and girls who have not yet had the opportunity to learn the truth, so that every Slovenian woman and every girl knows what she should do and what her duty is. In this way you can carry out the same duty as men⁵.

Although women, due to various reasons (political-ideological, patriotic, because of the damage inflicted upon them by the occupation etc.), had joined the resistance from the start, initially men were responsible for the largest share of leadership and development of the resistance. In view of the existing gender roles this was quite self-evident. Despite the fact that the Liberation Front was established at the initiative of communists, it is also characteristic of their previous attitude towards women that no women were present at the founding meeting of the Liberation Front in April 1941. However, already in the summer of 1941 we can note the Slovenian section of the Yugoslav Women’s Association among the groups that joined the Liberation Front (altogether around eighteen). At the Supreme Plenum of the Liberation Front this Association was represented by a long-time communist Angela Vode, who had been expelled from the Party in 1939. Her principled and democratic attitude had resulted in her conflict with the leadership of the movement. The Yugoslav Women’s Association, which had proved to be a strategically important organisation in a certain moment, as well as Angela Vode⁶ herself were pushed

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⁵ Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji (hereinafter DLRS), book 2. Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja, Ljubljana 1964, doc. 98, p. 231.
⁶ Angela Vode, defectologist and publicist. In the interwar period she was an active member of various societies striving to abolish gender and social position discrimination. Member of the Communist Party from 1922 until her expulsion in 1939 due to her disagreement with the policy of the Soviet Union. For a short time after the occupation she was a member of the Supreme Plenum of the Liberation Front, but she soon isolated herself from the Liberation Front. Convicted at the so-called Nagode Trial in 1947 and imprisoned until 1952.
out of the Liberation Front in the spring 1942. The work among women was taken over by the so-called founding groups of the Liberation Front: the Sokoli, Christian Socialists, and above all the communists⁷.

The circumstances with regard to the share of women in the resistance organisations soon started changing, at first at the very core of the resistance movement – in Ljubljana. There the conditions for illegal political work had kept becoming increasingly difficult since the spring of 1942, especially because of the mass arrests and internments of men, enclosure of the city in wire, departure of many men who joined the Partisan units, and the ever expanding activities of the Liberation Front’s political opponents⁸. In fact these circumstances necessitated that most of the work started coming into the domain of women. Afterwards the dominant role of women in the management of the resistance remained characteristic of Ljubljana until the very end of the war, reaching its most evident expression in 1943 with the women’s demonstrations, taking place over several months. The aforementioned demonstrations were provoked by the severe violence of the Italian occupiers in 1942 (mass deportation of the population to Italian concentration camps, shooting of hostages) as well as the violence perpetrated by the collaborating city guard in Ljubljana at the end of 1942. The actions of the city guard, who were very familiar with the supporters of the Liberation Front and the situation among the citizens of Ljubljana, considerably upset the adherents of the Liberation Front, as they, in light of the emergence of a Slovenian opponent, became increasingly concerned for the fate of their family members held in prisons and concentration camps. The existential distress prompted women to organise demonstrations in January 1943. At first they demanded that the inhumane situation in the Ljubljana prisons be improved, but gradually they intensified their actions and finally, before the Italian capitulation, demanded the release of all Slovenians from prisons and concentration camps in Italy. In view of their participants, the reoccurring demonstrations were exclusively female in nature, which is a rare if not unique example in European resistance movements. Only after the fall of fascism in August 1943, were the mass demonstrations also joined by men⁹.

Furthermore, the increasing political engagement of women was encouraged by the situation, favourable for the resistance, in the wider regions of the Ljubljana Province in the spring and summer of 1942, when a large part of this territory was controlled by the Partisan units. This opened the possibility for more carefully-planned political activities among women also in the rural regions. However, the Liberation Front activists frequently ascertained that it was relatively hard to encourage peasant women to take part in the resistance due to their lack of interest¹⁰.

In May 1942 the leadership of the Liberation Front recognised the women’s right to vote in the *Ordinance establishing the national authority in the liberated Slovenian ter-

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ritory\textsuperscript{11}. Although in the given circumstances, the Ordinance’s importance was mostly as political propaganda, it affirmed without a doubt the legal position regarding this question after the war. With the introduction of the active and passive voting rights of women in the election of the authorities (the National Liberation Committees) in the Partisan territory in 1942, the demands of all those who had endeavoured for universal suffrage in the interwar period as well as earlier were fulfilled, as these rights essentially represented an important precondition for the implementation of women’s equality in practice in the political and thus also the wider social field.

However, due to the traditional notions of the social position of women as well as their underestimation, their inclusion in public life, and in bodies of the Partisan or the people’s authorities, in the urban as well as rural areas of the Ljubljana Province (where the resistance activities were the most extensive until the Italian capitulation), gave rise, in the ranks of the resistance itself, to individual cases of open rejection of this public involvement and thus to a more visible assertion of women.

In some cases men, otherwise supporters of the Liberation Front, opposed women’s right to vote in the elections of the authoritative bodies in the Ljubljana Province Partisan territory in the middle of 1942\textsuperscript{12}. The commissioner of the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front and Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia for Ljubljana Vladimir Krivic\textsuperscript{13} in August 1942, was completely mistrustful of the District Committee of the Liberation Front for Ljubljana that consisted exclusively of women. He believed that such a Committee «is handicapped and has no authority»\textsuperscript{14}. Further developments in the resistance movement in Ljubljana completely negated Vladimir Krivic’s assessment. Only a few months later, Krivic himself would no longer have written an assessment like that.

In the beginning of 1943 the participation of women in the resistance movement also gained an institutionally-specified framework, of which, an important milestone was the first conference of the Women’s Anti-fascist Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽJ) in December 1942 in Bosnia. Here Josip Broz-Tito defined the purpose of a separate women’s organisation as follows: «The main purpose of the Women’s Anti-fascist Front, which managed to unite women for the purposes of the greater goals of the struggle – victory against the occupiers and its lackeys – is that women shall finally be free, having won their civic and social equality». Participation in the resistance therefore also represented the path and the means for achieving women’s equality, apart from the liberation efforts. However, Josip Broz stressed, in the concrete circumstances of leading the armed resistance, the pragmatic political goals were often equally important, i.e. the organisation of the Parti-

\textsuperscript{12} DLRS, book 2, doc. 98, pp. 254, 255.
\textsuperscript{13} Vladimir Krivic, lawyer. He operated illegally in Ljubljana since April 1941, also as the Secretary of the District Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia for Ljubljana and the Secretary of the Commission of the CK KPS since the autumn of 1942. After the war he was the assistant of the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, public prosecutor in Slovenia, and President of the Supreme and Constitutional Court in Slovenia.
san hinterlands with the support of women, capable of providing material assistance to the increasingly numerous Partisan units.\textsuperscript{15}

The establishment of AFŽJ also encouraged the organised inclusion of women in the special women’s organisation in Slovenia, where the Slovenian Anti-Fascist Women’s Union (SPŽZ) was established in January 1943. In the related circular mail the Liberation Front leadership explained that such an organisation was established with the aim of encouraging additional national forces to join the liberation movement. It set out that the organisation had to be closely connected with the Liberation Front, that it was an integral part of the AFŽJ, while its tasks included the following:

1) by any means support the Liberation Front in its struggle against fascism, occupiers and their collaborators: the supporters of Mihailović [author’s note: supporters of the Chetnik leader and Minister of the war in the Yugoslav government in exile Draža Mihailović] and the White Guard [author’s note: MVAC - Milizia volontaria anticomunista, political opponents of the Liberation Front and collaborators with the Italian occupier forces, who named themselves Village guards];
2) encourage all Slovenian women to join the struggle;
3) collect money, food, clothes, shoes, and medical supplies for the national army;
4) educate Slovenian women politically in order to implement the women’s political and social rights in the sense of equality and democracy;
5) ease the suffering and heal the wounds of the victims of occupiers and traitors […];
6) prepare proposals for a more effective struggle and promotion of the liberation organisations of the Slovenian nation; etc\textsuperscript{16}.

These orientations were subsequently emphasised at the first congress of the SPŽZ in October 1943 as well. At that time a statement was made that «the encouragement of women to join the liberation movement should not only result in them providing material support to the liberation movement: the SPŽZ is facing a great and righteous duty to educate Slovenian women about politics [...]». It was also underscored that the SPŽZ was not an organisation of a select few, but a mass organisation of all Slovenian women, which should support the Liberation Front with all of its might and all the means at its disposal\textsuperscript{17}.

The importance of the political work of women and their direct involvement in the resistance solidified especially after the introduction of compulsory military service, proclaimed by the Partisan leadership in September 1943. Because mobilisation did not include them, at that time women started assuming increasingly important roles in the political, economic, cultural, educational and social fields in the Partisan hinterlands as well as in other occupied zones as activists of the Liberation Front, asserting themselves in the everyday life in ways more and more comparable to the social role of men. In view of these changing roles, we can state that the assertion of women in public life was, besides being encouraged ideologically and otherwise in the time of the occupation, also closely related to the concrete needs or requirements of the resistance move-

\textsuperscript{16} DLRS, book 5, Partizanska knjiga, Ljubljana 1978, doc. 84, pp. 270-272.
\textsuperscript{17} «Organizacijski referat Helene Puhar na I. kongresu SPŽZa», in: Slovenke v narodnoosvobodilnem boju, II-1. Borec, Ljubljana 1970, p. 35.
ment, which urgently required the support and participation of women in various fields. Simultaneously stronger efforts were made to suitably educate women in the political and ideological sense, also by means of special newspapers for women (Naša žena [Our Woman], Slovenka [Slovenian Woman], Slovenke pod Karavankami [Slovenian Women under the Karavanks], Borbena Slovenka [Slovenian Fighting Women]), familiarising them with the current events and political processes at home and abroad\(^{18}\). The spreading of the political awareness or stirring of interest in the political questions was becoming an important element of women’s equality. With regard to the propaganda intended explicitly for women we should emphasise the extremely idealised as well as distorted descriptions of the position and role of women in the Soviet Union. To Slovenian women the position of the Soviet women and their support for the war efforts of the Red Army were often presented as the best model or greatest ideal\(^{19}\).

The SPŽZ achieved quite a response among women. At first it was recognised in the Ljubljana Province and in the Slovenian Littoral, and gradually it also expanded to other parts of Slovenia, though, as a rule, not on such a large scale due to more difficult conditions for the liberation movement in those territories. At the same time it gave rise to some concern, stemming from the known communist reservations with regard to distinct women’s organisations and the communist sensitivity for all kinds of actual and supposed separatisms. The introduction of a special women’s organisation would supposedly eventually result in the aspirations for the excessive emancipation of women or the separation of the SPŽZ from the Liberation Front.

The first criticism on account of the activities of the women’s organisation came from the Central Committee of the CPY in the beginning of 1944. Afterwards an extensive campaign against the so-called faults followed in Slovenia as well. As it was, the Party leadership started seeing the women’s organisation as an impending competition to the existing Liberation Front or as dangerous due to the possible revival of feminism and transformation of the SPŽZ into a merely intendant organisation without actual political goals. Therefore, the Party leadership tried to prevent those events and processes\(^{20}\). Allegedly these «unhealthy» phenomena spread in the Littoral region in particular, where the SPŽZ truly developed into an important political organisation, stronger than the Liberation Front Committees in many villages and representing a living proof of the women’s initiative and their mass inclusion in the resistance. Individual activists from the Littoral later denied any conscious separatist tendencies and believed that the subsequent organisational measures harmed the resistance rather than helped it, because women supposedly preferred to take part in the liberation movement in the context of a women’s organisation rather than in the


\(^{19}\) For example see booklet Položaj žene v SSSR (Arhiv Republike Slovenije (ARS), AS 1887, tisk NOB, box 22, No. 826).

context of a «men’s» Liberation Front\textsuperscript{21}. The reorganisation restricted the autonomy of the SPŽZ severely, degrading it especially to the manifestation function (e.g. organisation of rallies), while the majority of the work was transferred to the Liberation Front\textsuperscript{22}. Tight connection of SPŽZ and OF, with goal of strengthening the liberation movement, was planned already in the time of establishment of SPŽZ in January 1943.

Towards the end of the war the character of the SPŽZ as an auxiliary Liberation Front organisation became increasingly evident. We can talk about a two-level transmissive function of the SPŽZ\textsuperscript{23}, which was supposed to assure the communists that after the war the power would remain in the hands of the so-called patriotic elements in the context of the people’s democracy. For women, as was generally the case, participation in the resistance movement itself did not ensure prominent positions in the political and people’s authoritative bodies, because the SPŽZ was only one of the auxiliary organisations of the Liberation Front. These were established mostly as «movements, aimed at stirring the masses from their sleep», and the so-called women’s masses were often seen as backward as well\textsuperscript{24}. Regardless of the communist instrumentalisation the SPŽZ, which organised its branches throughout the Slovenian ethnic territory, carried out an important task, especially as far as activating the peasant women was concerned. It also managed to include a significant part of them in the Liberation Front.

The resistance leadership under the communist monopoly strived to promote the resistance movement as democratic, also from the viewpoint of its attitude towards the so-called women’s question. It emphasised that the women’s right to equality belonged among the basic programme demands and requirements of any true democracy. Of course, the latter was seen as people’s democracy, presupposing a massive participation of the people in deciding about the public matters, but under a distinctive communist leadership. The participation of women in this struggle (that is, directly in the army, assisting the army in the hinterlands, participating in the political organisations and authority bodies) undoubtedly represented a radical change in comparison with the previous position and role of women. Shortly before the end of the war Boris Kidrič\textsuperscript{25}, the leading communist in the Liberation Front, established that there can no longer be any dilemma about whether to acknowledge the equality of women or not, for they had already won their equality in battle. He emphasised, however, that the question remained open of how the women were going to implement this right also in the future, how they would educate themselves in order to be capable of using this right to the fullest, and how they would assert themselves as equal citizens in the post-war period, just like the female fighters had proved themselves during the war\textsuperscript{26}.

\textsuperscript{22} «Okrožnica glavnega odbora SPŽZ spomladi 1944 o reorganizaciji SPŽZ», in: Slovenke v NOB, II/1, 529–533.
\textsuperscript{23} I am referring to the transmissive role of the women’s organisation in relation to the Liberation Front, which, on the other hand, was a transmission of the Communist Party of Slovenia.
\textsuperscript{24} ARS, AS 1664, Glavni odbor SPŽZ, box 1, Pismo Mire Kraigher 18 January 1945.
\textsuperscript{25} Boris Kidrič, pre-war member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CK KPJ), founder of the Liberation Front. Besides Edvard Kardelj he had the leading role in the Slovenian resistance movement as the Political Secretary of the Liberation Front, Commissioner of the Slovenian Partisan Army, Secretary of the Presidency of the Slovenian People’s Liberation Council and President of the National Government of Slovenia (May 1945 – June 1946).
Activities of women in the resistance movement

A look at the activities women were involved in as insurgents, revolutionaries or supporters of the resistance movement in the sense of the broadest identification with the Liberation Front, reveals their involvement in all forms of the resistance. The resistance gradually grew into a mass movement, thanks to the women who joined it, although with various degrees of intensity. However, the share of their involvement in the individual areas differed from the men’s. Women operated especially «in the field», legally or illegally. There they joined the Liberation Front Committees – committees of the so-called mass organisations, as the particular women’s, youth, humanitarian (Slovenska narodna pomoč – Slovenian national aid), economic (gospodarske komisije – commissions for economic matters) and other organisations were called. After the 1944 elections for the authoritative bodies in numerous liberated regions of Slovenia, a large number of women were active also in this area. Naturally, they also kept joining the CPS field organisations and the communist youth organisations, frequently becoming a majority. The task of all these organisations was to spread the insurgent ideas throughout the Slovene ethnic territory and familiarise people with the goals of the Liberation Front, in order to ensure that the network of organisations became as extensive and reliable as possible, supporting the Partisan units in the political and material sense, but especially assisting the Communist Party in its preparations for the takeover of power as well. In the political-ideological premise of the Communists, empowerment is important in the gaining of support, in terms of executing revolutionary goals. After the revolution becomes victorious, participation and role of women in building a new society is perceived as very important.

Although this type of women’s participation is difficult to measure, as it involved formalised as well as informalised participation, which also fluctuated due to the general military and political circumstances, the involvement of women can nevertheless, to a certain degree, be presented through their participation in the committees of various organisations and activities of various institutions, even though that is only one of the indicators. Generally it was characteristic that with the ongoing war and the mobilisation of men into armed formations, the percentage of women in the committees of the aforementioned organisation increased. Towards the end of the war, the activist fieldwork relied on women more and more often.

Apart from this general activist work women were markedly dominant in a few other areas, among these definitely the Partisan education, spreading especially in the Ljubljana Province and the Littoral region after the Italian capitulation. It became a sort of a proof of the nation’s life force and protagonist of new educational goals. In the Littoral, where it was also accepted most eagerly due to fascistic denationalization, Partisan education had a special importance. 263 teachers – of these only 54 men – were registered.

in the Littoral region without its southern part (the so-called south-Littoral district)\textsuperscript{28}. In the area of Bela krajina, which was a permanent Partisan territory after the capitulation of Italy, only 12 of 121 registered teachers were men\textsuperscript{29}.

The Security and Intelligence Service is one of the areas we have to mention as a special field in which women were also active. For the resistance it was significant that certain women from the ranks of the Communist Party (for example, Zdenka Kidrič\textsuperscript{30}, Francka Klinc\textsuperscript{31}) had already been informants before the war, while professional revolutionaries had also been educated in this vein in the Soviet Union. The most important of these women was Zdenka Kidrič, wife of one of the leading Slovenian communist and ideologist of the Liberation Front Boris Kidrič, who led the Security and Intelligence Service of the Liberation front (VOS OF) from its establishment in August 1941 to its abolishment in 1944. Women were comparatively numerous in the intelligence sector, but more rarely in the security section of this Service. In many cases women informants were able to access important sources of information – for example, the secretary in the provincial Rupnik’s\textsuperscript{32} Administration Marica Malahovsky\textsuperscript{33}. In the Littoral, the informant Ilka Devetak\textsuperscript{34}, married to the Italian Army General Riccardo Bignami worked for the VOS. Both of them paid for their efforts with their lives\textsuperscript{35}.

Women also took part in cultural activities, spreading throughout the resistance movement after the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, when a number of cultural workers left Ljubljana for the Partisan territory. Among them were several younger theatre actresses, who then worked in the Partisan Slovenian National Theatre in Bela Krajina. With more than 160 performances as well as numerous occasional events and radio broadcasts this theatre was one of the rare examples of such activities in occupied Europe, especially as it also had the education of children in mind. Its repertoire was


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pp. 289-291.

\textsuperscript{30} Zdenka Kidrič, educated in Moscow from 1935. Attended a training course for communist activities among women and the School of Intelligence of the main political administration. Afterwards she was a courier of the CK KPJ in Vienna, Prague and Paris. She was the Head of the Security and Intelligence Service since its establishment in August 1941. After the war she worked in the Commission for Personnel of the CK KPS and in the Personnel Department of the CK KPJ.

\textsuperscript{31} Francka Klinc, employee. Active in the youth communist movement in Ljubljana already from 1924 to 1930, when she emigrated to the Soviet Union. There she attended the Communist University of International Minorities and a course in radiotelegraphy at the School of Intelligence of the Ministry of the Interior. Between 1939 and 1942 she worked on intelligence operations in Zagreb and Belgrade. After the war she was a lecturer and Head of the CK KPS Party School. After the Cominform dispute she was arrested and committed suicide in prison.

\textsuperscript{32} Leon Rupnik, general of the Yugoslav King’s Army and Mayor of the city of Ljubljana from June 1942 to the capitulation of Italy. After the German occupation of the Ljubljana Province in September 1943 he became the President of the Provincial Administration in Ljubljana. Rupnik was one of the initiators and organisers of the new anti-Partisan formation, Slovenian Home Guard. He and his administration focused on anti-Partisan propaganda, especially with his speeches at the anti-Partisan gatherings. For the Liberation Front and the Allies, Rupnik was the personification of the collaboration with the occupiers. After the war he was sentenced to death.

\textsuperscript{33} Marica Malahovsky worked, as an official of the former Ban’s Administration, at the High Commission and later a secretary in the Rupnik’s Provincial Administration, informing the Liberation Front throughout the war. Before the end of the war she was identified, arrested, and murdered on 4 May 1945.

\textsuperscript{34} Ilka Devetak was able to associate with the Italian military commanders due to her husband’s prominent position. Since the beginning of 1943 she kept informing the Partisans. After the capitulation of Italy she became a closer associate of the Liberation Front, often intervening for the release of people who were arrested with the Italian and later also the German authorities. In June 1944 she was arrested and taken to Auschwitz, where she died in December 1944.

thoughtful and it brought together propaganda and artistic endeavours, while women certainly had a prominent role in its productions. Simultaneously the Slovenian National Theatre the so-called frontline theatres with amateur actors in the 7th Corps in the territory of the Ljubljana Province, the 9th Corps in the Littoral, and the cultural group in the 14th Division in Lower Styria were also active. The Partisan Puppet Theatre became operational as well, also thanks to the efforts of women.

Furthermore, women also became recognised as journalists and newspaper editors. For a time the editor of the Slovenski poročevalec (Slovenian Reporter - newspaper of the Liberation Front) was Marija Vilfan, who also published many introductory articles, commentaries and interviews. For a while Vida Tomšič and Lidija Šentjurc were the editors of the Party newsletter Ljudska pravica (People’s Right). Naša žena, the central publication of the SPZŽ, was, naturally, edited and by the women from the leadership of this organisation (Helena Puhar, Mara Rupena-Osolinik, Angela Ocepek, Angela Mahnič, etc.), who also published their articles in it.

Moreover, we should not overlook the women who were, often quietly, working in the literary field, and whose expressive power only became evident during the war. We are referring especially to the poetry of the resistance or the poems that women wrote as Partisan fighters, activists, nurses, as well as in exile. These were the verses of the resistance

38 Marija Vilfan, journalist, publicist. Since May 1944 she was the editor-in-chief of the Slovenski poročevalec (Slovenian Reporter) newspaper. After the war she was the Head of the Press Department with the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Director of the Cankarjeva založba publishing house, and President of the Yugoslav Commission for UNESCO.
39 Vida Tomšič, lawyer, since 1940 a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Arrested in Ljubljana in December 1941 and sentenced to 25 years in prison. After the capitulation of Italy she headed the Ljudska pravica (People’s Right) newspaper, and since January 1945 she headed the Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia for the Slovenian Littoral. After the war she was active in the leading Party, state and political bodies and represented Yugoslavia in several international institutions of the United Nations.
40 Lidija Šentjurc, pedagogue and pre-war communist. Between 1941 and 1943 she operated illegally in Ljubljana as the secretary of the youth Liberation Front, secretary of the district committee for Ljubljana. In July she relocated to the Partisan territory, became a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Slovenia (CK KPS), Commissioner of CK KPS and the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front in the Slovenian Littoral, Gorenjska and Koroška regions, as well as organisational secretary of the CK KPS. After the war she was the Minister of Education and Municipal Affairs in the Slovenian government, Vice-President of the Yugoslav Assembly, and State Secretary for Social Policy and Municipal Affairs.
41 Helena Puhar, teacher. During the war she carried out important agitation and propaganda assignments in the context of the Slovenian Anti-Fascist Women’s Union. After the war she was the editor of the Naša žena (Our Woman) magazine, renowned pedagogical advisor and writer.
42 Mara Rupena-Osolinik, teacher. During the occupation she was active in the Liberation Front since its very beginning. After the end of 1942 she was mostly active in the Slovenian Anti-Fascist Women’s Union as the editor and contributor to women’s magazines. After the war she mostly focused on agriculture, addressing the position of peasant women and their families.
43 Angela Ocepek, worker. Before the war she was the Secretary of the Commission of the CK KPS for Activities among Women. After the occupation she operated illegally in Ljubljana and organised the women’s demonstrations. In 1943 she became the Vice-President of the Main Committee of the Slovenian Anti-Fascist Women’s Union, member of the Slovenian People’s Liberation Council and Executive Committee of the Liberation Front. After the war she was active in various women’s organisations.
44 Angela Mahnič joined the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia for Gorenjska in 1944 and was responsible for the work among the youth and women’s organisations.
(some of them already published during the war) as well as various mood poems, which their authors frequently wrote for themselves and thus remained unknown for a long time\textsuperscript{45}.

Women had an important role in the Slovenian Partisan health care. Well-organised and widespread, it was a unique example in occupied Europe. At least 75 female doctors and medical students joined the resistance movement. The percentage of women was most notable among the assisting medical personnel (almost 1600 female nurses in the Partisan units and hospitals). This represented more than a half of the total assisting personnel in the Partisan health care, and 200 women lost their lives in this role\textsuperscript{46}. Medical doctors Dr. Pavla Jerina Lah\textsuperscript{47} and Dr. Franja Bojc Bidovec\textsuperscript{48} have become particularly ingrained in the historical memory. These two selfless doctors managed two Partisan hospitals in the Slovenian Littoral region, which were also named after them: the «Pavla» hospital in the Trnovski gozd forest and the «Franja» hospital near Cerkno, where numerous Italian anti-fascists from the Partisan brigades also received medical attention\textsuperscript{49}.

Despite the all-encompassing and mass participation of women in the resistance movement, the results of the elections for the representative bodies and people’s authoritative bodies did not reflect this. When the elections for the Assembly of the Deputies of the Slovenian Nation were held in the autumn of 1943, only 58 of 534 deputies, elected in the field, were women (10.8 %), which is a relatively poor result. However, the election of the delegates in the Army were almost catastrophic, as the existing three divisions did not elect even a single female delegate. The percentage of women in the central authorities, elected at the Assembly of the Deputies in Kočevje, was hardly any better: of 120 members of the Slovenian National Liberation Committee only 11 (9.1 %) were women. However, the elections for the provincial national liberation committees and local and district assemblies in 1944 resulted in a relatively high percentage of women in the local committees (31 % in Bela krajina, 33.9 % in the district of Brdo). After that the percentage of female candidates for the local and district assemblies declined significantly. Such results attest to a certain way of thinking that the voters subscribed to: that women were capable of participating in the local self-management, but not so much when it came to higher functions\textsuperscript{50}.

\textsuperscript{47} Pavla Jerina Lah, worked as a doctor in the Ljubljana hospital. In 1944 and 1945 she was the manager of the Pavla Partisan hospital in the Trnovski gozd forest. After the war she was a pioneer in the field of transfusion medicine and organisation of blood donation in Slovenia and Yugoslavia.
\textsuperscript{48} Franja Bojc Bidovec, general practitioner in Ribnica na Dolenjskem between 1941 and 1943 and Partisan supporter. She joined the Partisans in September 1943. Since January 1944 until the end of the war she was the manager of the Pavla Partisan hospital in the Trnovski gozd forest. After the war she was a pioneer in the field of transfusion medicine and organisation of blood donation in Slovenia and Yugoslavia.
Women in the Partisan units

The participation of women in the armed resistance against the occupiers was only one of the forms of the women’s involvement in the resistance movement. Although in the Partisan units women were in distinct minority throughout the war, this most radical form of the resistance, which women also joined, represented a truly revolutionary change with regard to the position that the society had previously imposed on women. This was why a woman with a rifle in her hands was ingrained so deeply into the wider consciousness, not only as a freedom fighter but also as a symbolic image and guarantee for the assertion of a new, better social position of women on the basis of equality and equivalence – in short, a force breaking away from the tradition. Therefore the resolute rejection of female Partisans by the anti-Partisan camp is not surprising at all.

In 1941, 2,058 Slovenian fighters, male and female, joined the ranks of the Partisans. Of these 1,976 were men and 82 were women, representing 4% of the fighters. Since the very beginning of the armed resistance, women decided to join the Partisan units especially if they were threatened by the occupation authorities due to their leftist or national-defence activities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Some of them joined the Partisans together with their husbands, when the married couples were threatened because of their pre-war political activities.

In the subsequent years of the occupation the percentage of women in the Partisan units remained at the level of four or five percent as well. However, differences between the individual Partisan units existed, partly depending on place and time. For example, the Ivan Cankar Brigade as one of the first four brigades formed in the second half of 1942 in the Ljubljana Province included at least 3,100 fighters between its establishment and the end of the war, of these 148 women (4.7%). At least 3,630 Partisans, of these 197 women (5.4%), fought in the Ivan Gradnik Brigade, established in April 1943 in the Slovenian Littoral. The Ljubljana Brigade, established at the time of the Italian capitulation, only included 90 women out of 3,184 fighters (2.8%)\(^5\). In some cases the below-average share of women was certainly related to the units’ special duties, which women were not notably encouraged to perform. Their share in the «Tone Tomšič proletarian strike battalion» from the middle of 1942 was particularly low, as only three of 214 fighters (1.4%) were female\(^5\). The situation in the special military units established in 1944, for example in the State Security Army (VDV), was similar: in the 2\(^{nd}\) VDV Brigade, operating in the Littoral and in Upper Carniola, only 19 of 1,133 fighters (1.7%) were women; while in the 3\(^{rd}\) VDV Brigade, operating in Styria and Carinthia, only 4 of 720 fighters (0.5%) were women\(^5\). In the beginning of 1944 the 7\(^{th}\) Corps, consisting of the 15\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) Division operating in the Ljubljana Province, was the strongest unit of

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the Slovenian Partisan Army. After a muster on 13 January 1944 the 15th Division consisted of 4,079 troops, of these 168 women (4.1%); while the 18th Division had 1,375 members, of these 93 women (6.8%)\textsuperscript{55}.

The Women’s Partisan Company was a special example among the Partisan units, but it was only active in September and October 1942. It was established in the area of Snežnik in the Ljubljana Province, in the context of the Lož Detachment, during a forceful offensive of the Italian occupiers and the emergence of the MVAC (village guards). At the time of its establishment this company consisted of 18 women fighters, who were occasionally joined by field activists. They joined the Partisans already before the great Italian offensive (from July to November 1942), and earlier all of them had been members of the Liberation Front. Therefore they had already acquired the basic fighting skills until the time when the independent female company was formed. This, besides their strong and explicit adherence to the Liberation Front, undoubtedly contributed to the decision of the Lož Detachment to establish a special women’s military unit in the circumstances of the offensive\textsuperscript{56}.

It has to be emphasised that the Women’s Company had the same tasks as the other companies of the Lož Detachment and that the female fighters enjoyed no concessions because of their adherence to the «gentler sex». This was a general rule in the Partisan Army. Just like men they also fulfilled their guard, patrol and duty officer tasks, ensured the supply of food and water, and carried out the military, political and cultural activities as well as typical domestic chores like sewing and washing. Military training and the implementation of combat actions and longer marches in the context of the Lož Detachment belonged among the most important tasks of this Company. These tasks had military and political goals, which was especially important in the circumstances when the resistance suffered significant blows during the Italian offensive. At the time all of the Lož Detachment fighters were also involved in the military, political and psychological preparations for the march to the Slovenian Littoral over the former Yugoslav-Italian border with the aim of strengthening the local anti-fascist resistance and contribute to the liberation of the «non-liberated brothers». As many as fourteen Women’s Company fighters volunteered for the appeal of the headquarters to join the difficult march to the Littoral. In this manner they most directly confirmed their adherence to the Women’s Company as a military formation. All fourteen Partisan women were therefore among the 120 volunteer fighters who left for the Slovenian Littoral on 20 October 1942. In the words of the Women’s Company Commander Fanika Škrbec Črnugelj, by considering their will the Detachment Headquarters «recognised the Women’s Company and its fighters, their belligerence, discipline, heroic capacity to overcome all the difficulties involved in the Partisan struggle, and, last but not least, their combat skills». However, during the preparations for the deployment to the Slovenian Littoral, the Women’s Company was reassigned to the Detachment Battalions and it no longer existed as an inde-

\textsuperscript{55} Narodnoosvobodilna vojna na Slovenskem 1941-1945, p. 646.

ependent company after the Detachment departed. Here we should underscore the realisation or conviction of the aforementioned commander Črnugelj that the existence of the Women’s Company certainly influenced and contributed to the fact that an increasing number of young women kept joining the Liberation Front or Partisan units. Naturally, this realisation may be applied more broadly, to the role that the Partisan women played in this sense in general.

The Partisan Army was predominantly a matter for men. After all, this was also specified by the announcement of the Supreme Headquarters of the Slovenian Partisan Army and the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front about the general mobilisation into the National Liberation Army of 11 September 1943, as compulsory military service was only prescribed for men, not also women. If we disregard the underlying reasons, we must therefore establish that, unlike men, women decided to join the Partisan Army exclusively on a voluntary basis.

In view of the minor representation of women it is self-evident that the military leadership was primarily in the domain of men. However, other reasons also partly contributed to such a state of affairs (the question of military training, the traditional outlook on the «male» army). Thus we cannot find any women in the more visible commanding and political positions between the Supreme Headquarters and the Brigade Headquarters. Women only start appearing at the level of battalions, usually as political commissioners and deputy political commissioners, and even then only exceptionally. In spite of the fact that the admission of women in the armed formations represented the highest symbolic expression of the equal and equivalent position of women in the nascent new society, in everyday life female fighters also experienced underestimation and mistrust by their fellow fighters, who frequently assigned the role of «housekeepers» to the women in the Army, thus indicating that they were not ready to transcend the traditional patterns with regard to gender roles.

In many post-war records, mostly written more recently, we can find statements of Partisan women citing specific problems they encountered in the Partisan Army due to their gender, and which they had either believed not worth discussing in the «heroic» post-war years, or had found references to them were viewed as inappropriate, perhaps even intolerable. A part of these specifics pertains to the weaker female physical constitution from that of males, as well as the required fearlessness, which was nevertheless often combined with fear in the real life of the Partisans. The sentiment is vividly illustrated by the following description, reflecting the situation at the earlier stages of the Partisan struggle, but it can also be generalised at least partly:

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57 Ibid., pp. 141-144.
58 Ibid., p. 148.
This was a difficult period for all of us, but especially for female fighters. Living in the woods, in tents and often even without them under an open sky, lacking the most basic necessities that women need so urgently, called for much self-denial and overcoming the physical exertion all the more severe during the marches, guard duty, patrols, night-time duties, ambushes, combat and actions.

We have prevailed over all of these difficulties, in the beginning also fear, and kept our heads high. Don’t think for a minute that the struggle was only joined by a select few, courageous and fearless, far from it! Many of us had been afraid of walking alone in the dark while we were still at home, or were startled by a rabbit suddenly jumping from the bushes. However, the fear was pushed aside by ideas which had made us join the fight: profound hatred towards the occupiers and fascism, growing always in our hearts, and the inexhaustible love for our own freedom, liberty and independence of our nation, as well as the wish and awareness that we were fighting for a better future and a better life than we had previously known.

In general the very fact that women were able to join the armed units of the Partisans represented the greatest symbolic expression of introducing a new position of women in the context of the resistance movement, based on equality. Their courage, discipline and unyielding determination to overcome all of the difficulties involved in the Partisan struggle contributed to a formation of a different relationship between male and female Partisans, manifesting itself in mutual respect, recognition of skills, successes and moral values regardless of gender. It is an undisputable fact that the active participation of women in the resistance during World War II represented a vital foundation for the democratisation of society in the segment related to the role and position of women.

Of course, the interpersonal relations between male and female Partisans should not be idealised, because girls and women who decided to join the Partisan Army did not only join a fighting force, but also men. Namely, in reality things, unpleasant and even grim for women, often happened, and these attitudes were a consequence of their gender. However, during the war as well as in the decades after it women rarely spoke about these issues, either because they were ashamed, loyal to the movement, or afraid. In this sense it is worth mentioning the touching and honest story of Juga Bregant from Ljubljana, who joined the Partisans in July 1942 as a medical student, full of idealism, leaving the peaceful life and comfort of home. When she arrived to the Partisan camp the fighters eyed her «askance», because she had come straight from Ljubljana with new equipment, and she was not yet ragged or plagued by lice. Nobody told her to gather spruce branches for her bed: probably the Partisans wanted to scoff at the «city girl». Thus she spent the night under an open sky, on the cold ground littered with rocks, feeling bad because of the lack of understanding and mistrust that she had experienced. Only thanks to the support of the commander, who could also relate to completely female matters, was she able to struggle through the first and hardest month of her life with the Partisans. For a whole year she could not come to terms with the attitude that men displayed towards Partisan women, the attitude that she saw around her and experienced herself, which, among other things, expressed itself in the unpleasantness caused by the

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violent nature of the men. Until the end of her life, Juga believed in the righteousness of the Slovenian national liberation struggle, but nevertheless she could not forget the reality of it all. She summed up her idealism, disillusionment as well as camaraderie that she had experienced in the Partisan Army in the following statement:

When I joined the Partisans I believed that gender would not be important, that camaraderie would be the bond preventing the unavoidable wartime brutality from being reflected in this manner in the ranks of the Partisans. Because I had also been a student, and a student of medicine, at that, my comrades believed that this was just like being a prostitute and that I could hardly wait for someone to take pity on me. There were comrades who understood the matter after an intelligent conversation, but there were also others who could not come to terms with it and thought that I was pretending, that I’d joined the Partisans only to have as many men as possible.

What Juga Bregant lived through was definitely experienced by many other Partisan women, but they were not strong enough or afraid to stand up to sexual violence. One of the most infamous examples was definitely the commander of the 7th Corps Petar Popivoda, who sexually abused his female subordinates and was remembered by both male and female Partisans as a depraved moral degenerate. His «case» was so notorious that he was dismissed from his commanding position, while the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia expelled him from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as well.

However, the aforementioned painful and unacceptable attitudes in the Partisan units may by no means be generalised. There were many cases of sincere friendships flourishing in the Partisan units, which never transgressed the boundaries of the established Catholic morality, or they concluded in marriages already during the war or after it, so we cannot talk about any widespread debauchery. As the elementary facts of the life of young Partisan men and women could not be restricted indefinitely, the Partisan leaderships gradually started encouraging the formalisation of love affairs. On the other hand, the situation was different in the initial period of the Partisan movement, when sexual relations between the Partisans could result in executions by shooting. At that time even married couples were separated or assigned to different units.

There were also examples of Partisan women asserting their own power over their fellow fighters, and they could even turn vindictive. One such example was Danila Kumar, deputy battalion political commissioner in the Tone Tomšič Brigade. Because she had

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64 Ibid., p. 148.
68 Danila Kumar, sales assistant and pre-war communist. After the Italian occupation she was first a courier for the CK KPS, then the company and battalion Assistant Political Commissioner in the Partisan Army, and finally a member of the provincial committee of the Slovenian Anti-Fascist Women’s Union for the Gorenjska region. She was killed in a German ambush in 1944.
failed to attract the attention of a handsome and courageous sergeant, she insisted on his death penalty due to his alleged short absence from his unit and ensured his death penalty\textsuperscript{69}.

**Women in the collaboration and counter-revolutionary camp**

Unlike the resistance Partisan movement, counter-revolution and collaboration were almost completely in the domain of the men. Here we should underline an important characteristic, evident from the programme documents and statements of the leading personalities of the anti-Partisan camp’s illegal part, connected with the Yugoslav King’s government-in-exile in London and General Draža Mihailović. As it was, these documents did not explicitly focus on the women’s question, and the plans with regard to the post-war democratisation of the Slovenian social and political life did not promise that a universal right to vote would be implemented for women, for example. In the world of collaboration and counter-revolution women still retained their traditional role of, ideally, being mothers who protect the home and bring up healthy children, while the observance of the nation’s moral and religious values was frequently emphasised. The traditional role of women and importance of family were especially emphasised by the collaborating part of the counter-revolutionary camp, particularly the provincial administration headed by General Leon Rupnik in the Ljubljana Province and leadership of the Slovenian Home Guard, which also focused on the question of women in the context of the planned implementation of the so-called anti-communist actions\textsuperscript{70}.

The anti-communist propaganda described what was allegedly a very poor position of women in the Partisan Army as a total opposite of the traditional and ideal woman-mother. This was frequently supported by anti-Bolshevist stereotypes which had already asserted themselves before the war, as well as with the examples of actual extreme events related to women in the Partisan Army. On this basis a generalised and biased picture of the abuse and moral decay of the female Partisans or communists was being created, while women were at the same time told what they in general should not be like. Partisan women were depicted as sadist and vengeful, as communist «butches» with rifles in their hands, giving themselves over to decadent lives in the partisan «gangs» and «spitting» on their personal and national honour\textsuperscript{71}.

The counter-revolutionary camp propaganda frequently established that some Slovenian women were susceptible to communist appeals and ideas, and they were reproached with sharing the responsibility for the difficult fate of the Slovenian nation. It focused especially on those social strata and professional groups (workers, maidservants, stu-


dents) it deemed as particularly predisposed to the dangerous ideas of communism. In this sense the leading thought from the assembly of the senior-class schoolgirls of the Ljubljana secondary schools in October 1944 is characteristic, as the girls «declared their love for their nation and its basic unit: family» and confirmed their unshakable resistance against communism as the «greatest enemy», seeking to destroy Slovenians as a nation. In view of the gender roles the task of Slovenian Home Guard members was to «defend our land, our homes, our families», while the role of schoolgirls or women was «to recognise the wrongful teachings of communism, unmask its hidden schemes, open the eyes of the deceived, and bring up a new generation, no longer vulnerable to the delusions of communism as it will be reborn internally and unshakeable in its principles...», thus protecting «our holiest of holies» – faith and nation. The divisions between both camps were therefore clear and profound, in line with the atmosphere of the civil war, also reflected by the following motto: «There can be no peace between Slovenian youth and communism!»

The assumptions about how Slovenian women should behave in the circumstances of the communist revolution were often quite incompatible with everyday life. The information office of the Rupnik administration produced a document which included quite a shocking estimate that Slovenian women supposedly wrote «the ugliest chapter» in the moment crucial for the nation, as they did not take part in the anti-communist struggle at all, or they did so only in subordinate and less prominent roles. Allegedly the legal and illegal organisations failed as well, as they had not released any fliers or circular mail containing the appropriate and much-needed instructions which would «get our women in order» and steer them towards fervent anti-communist activities. According to this document nobody had truly warned the women that it was they who caused a greater shame and damage to the nation as men. To support these allegations the author referred to the so-called whoring with Italian soldiers before September 1943 and mentioned 2000 illegitimate children and approximately 3000 «registered Slovenian women and girls, who have been whoring with Italians».

Thus the anti-Partisan and collaboration camp wanted to discourage women from taking part in the Partisan resistance movement, which they equalised with communism. They perceived communism as the main enemy that also had to be resisted by women. The activities of women in the anti-communist struggle was supposed to be in line with their fundamental mission: it could not be demanded of them (nor was that necessary) to take part in the military operations, as their primary concern should be to take care of family as the foundation of the nation, most threatened by communism. However, similar appeals made towards the end of the war could not notably alter the situation with regard to the participation of women in the anti-communist camp.

Despite the defined role of women in the anti-communist camp, as described above, we can nevertheless note a few active women in this camp in the whole period of the

73 Arhiv Republike Slovenije, AS 1912, Šef pokrajinske uprave v Ljubljani, informacijski oddelek, box 115/II, Novi predlogi za antikomunistično propagando.
war. Thus two women joined the first Slovenian Chetnik unit in the spring of 1942. One of them was a nurse. The Legion of Death, established later, included several women, among them a medical doctor, Dr. Bernarda Rihar. Several women, in charge of carrying out the personal examinations of suspicious females, were present in the strongholds of the Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia. Occasionally the remains of the pre-war St Mary’s Society and the girls’ groups of the Catholic Action were engaged in the intelligence and messenger activities, aimed against the Partisans. As the opposition between the Partisans and their opponents, especially in the rural areas, already had the dimensions of a civil war, women were forced to take part in this total conflict as well, although on the anti-Partisan side they were less active or their roles were not as apparent. The most important and in fact the only explicit and organised counter-revolutionary women’s organisation was the Girls’ Legion. It was an integral part of the «male» Slovenian Legion, established by the Catholic Slovenian People’s Party as an illegal resistance formation already in the spring of 1941. Its members (around 200 women) focused mostly on intelligence and propaganda activities in Ljubljana. Its leadership tried to expand the organisation to the Slovenian Littoral as well, but without any success. However, a few of its members were active in the context of the Littoral Home Guard and Slovenian Home Guard in Ljubljana. They were nurses, administrators, propagandists, and especially in Ljubljana members of the controls at the entry points into the city. The Slovenian Home Guard, established in September 1943 after the capitulation of Italy, represented the main military anti-Partisan and collaborating formation. Only around seventy women were directly or indirectly active in its context – apart from various assistants in the rural strongholds there were a few nurses and especially the employees of the adjutant department in the organisational headquarters. A few women were also active in the context of the Chetnik Yugoslav Army in the Homeland. In this sense we should particularly underline the informant Jovanka Krištof, close associate of the Chetnik commander in Slovenia Major Karel Novak, who maintained connections with Draža Mihailović. As far as her influence was concerned, she was not especially popular with the officers, who felt that «they will not be ordered around by some broad».

Although the anti-Partisan camp did not have any female uniformed units of its own, we can see many women and girls in folk costumes as a special kind of uniformed women, standing in the front lines at the anti-communist assemblies and other events, functioning as constant live iconography.

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75 Boris Mlakar, «Mesto ženske v moškem svetu kolaboracije in protirevolucije na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno», pp. 85, 86.
76 Jovanka Krištof, widow of a Yugoslav officer. She was Karel Novak’s secretary and radiotelegraphist as well as his partner. She encoded and decoded dispatches and maintained communications with Draža Mihailović’s Headquarters, reporting regularly about the situation in Slovenia. After the Italian capitulation and defeat of the Chetnik Army she retreated to Italy together with Novak.
77 Karel Novak, officer of the Yugoslav King’s Army. After the occupation he first worked with the Liberation Front, but in September 1941 established connections with Draža Mihailović and became the Chief of Staff of the Chetnik Yugoslav Army in the Homeland for Slovenia. After the defeat of the Chetniks and the Italian capitulation he retreated to Italy and became Mihailović’s delegate for Italy. After the war he lived in the United States and in Greece.
78 Ljuba Dornik Šubelj, «Vloga žensk v obveščevalnih in varnostnih službah na Slovenskem pred, med in po drugi svetovni vojni», pp. 165, 166.
79 Boris Mlakar, «Mesto ženske v moškem svetu kolaboracije in protirevolucije na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno», p. 87.
In a Total War the various kinds of involvement of women as objects and subjects in wartime events – that is, involvement under various social pressures and on a more or less voluntary basis – resulted in a significant number of fatalities of women. The conviction, based on the previous historical experience – that war is especially or exclusively a matter for men – no longer held up, even when the question of life and death was concerned: during World War II Slovenian families were in constant fear not only for their sons, fathers and brothers, but also daughters, mothers and sisters.

Like men, women in Slovenia died in various roles and for a number of reasons. They died as active participants or supporters of the liberation movement in its political and military component, that is, as activists of the Liberation Front, fighters in the Partisan units, messengers, informants, nurses, teachers in the Partisan schools, organisers of cultural and propaganda actions, etc. Because of the occupiers’ denationalisation efforts and the decision to eradicate the resistance movement by force, the occupiers dealt with women in the same way as with men, sometimes even in a crueler manner when sexual abuse took place. Already since April 1941 the Germans imprisoned women, exiled them, and soon also started shooting them, using them as hostages or sending them to concentration camps. A few of the German camps became infamous precisely because of the women’s suffering there. Around 1100 Slovenian women died in Auschwitz, and at least 223 died in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp. As well, in 1942, the Italian occupiers no longer refrained from deporting a large number of women to the concentration camps, after they abandoned what had initially been more lenient tactics. At least 86 women died on Rab, 97 in Gonars, etc.80

Some women were killed in the designated, outwardly apparent roles and extreme situations they encountered, but others, who stayed at home with their families also died as quiet, unnoticeable or occasional supporters of the resistance movement. Women from anti-Partisan families, who may not have been particularly organised but identified with the anti-Partisan camp already due to their family connections, were dying as well. For some of them it is difficult to ascertain whether they were firm supporters of any side at all, and they died, for example, during the occupiers’ reprisals, air raids, accidents involving explosives, etc. Deaths were also caused by the internal Slovenian schism or civil war, and women were also not excluded from the post-war retaliation of the victorious Partisans against the defeated.

However, if we evaluate the involvement of women in wartime events from the viewpoint of the most extreme and irreversible consequence of the war, that is from the viewpoint of fatalities, we can establish that men nevertheless suffered the most casualties. According to research carried out by the Institute of Contemporary History, during World War II, 99,815 inhabitants of what is today the Republic of Slovenia lost their

lives, which represents a 6.5% population loss. 11,147 of these casualties or 11.2% were women. 1,000 of these women were underage girls, of which around 290 were children born during the war and killed by it! This conveys a cruel message about how the war affected people regardless of their age.

With regard to the established year of birth, the generation that suffered the most was born between 1919 and 1927, as the number of fatalities born in this period amounts to 2,057 or a little less than a fifth (18.5%) of all female casualties. This was the generation that had just started to create families or was about to do so. The deaths suffered by this generation and those close to it cut short many plans and longings. As Terezija Zalaznik, an activist of the Liberation Front shot as one of the hostages on 22 July in Celje, wrote in two farewell letters to her parents and sisters: «Today I was sentenced to death... Today I will be shot... I am still young and I want to live, but I must die».

In view of the war statuses the largest percentage of fatalities among women by far consisted of civilians. As it was, at least 905 women lost their lives as members of the armed Partisan formations, but the rest of them were civilians, involved in wartime events in various manners. For example, in the sources and literature, 614 civilian women were described as activists of the Liberation Front and 353 as associates of the Partisan movement. However, to a certain degree such categorisation is questionable, because it depends on the language of the contemporaneous historical sources, post-war documentation, memorial sources and literature as well as historical literature, which has never been precisely defined (not during the war nor after it). It is also questionable because in the past it only focused on the side of the resistance explicitly, ignoring the anti-Partisan side, where actively participating civilian women existed as well. Among all civilian casualties, fatalities among women represent as much as a third. Apart from these, the status of 1,261 fatalities among women has not been ascertained, but some of these were undoubtedly civilians as well. Therefore this aspect attests to the all-encompassing character of the war, which did not spare civilians nor the women among them. Otherwise more than 3,600 women died in concentration camps, in exile, and during forced labour, while 188 of them were among the hostages. Most of the fatalities were caused by the occupiers, particularly Germans. Nevertheless, the number of deaths due to the internal Slovenian struggle or civil war is not negligible, as it claimed the lives of around 2,720 women during the war and the post-war retaliation. This aspect, still very much present in the discussions about the character of World War II in Slovenia or in Yugoslavia, was, quite understandably, already evident from the wartime information and propaganda activities of both of the mutually hostile camps. Already at that time

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83 Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino [Institute of Contemporary History], database: Smrtné žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje na območju Republike Slovenije [Death toll in the population on the territory of the Republic of Slovenia during WWII and immediately afterwards.], state of April 2015;
these camps published a few extensive works about this issue, accusing each other of crimes and illustrating their accusations with concrete tragic fates of women\textsuperscript{84}.

Conclusion

The occupation of Yugoslavia in April 1941 and the subsequent war became increasingly all-encompassing and brutal, also for women. According to one of the opinions women in the Slovenian territory had never before taken part in any war on such a large scale, and not since the Turkish incursions had they been treated in such an appalling manner. This was primarily caused by the fact that the division between the hinterlands and the battlefield disappeared\textsuperscript{85}.

The diverse involvement of women and consequently their part in the resistance was in a special way commemorated by two kinds of decorations given by the Partisans or by the post-war authorities. Already during the war the National Hero medal as the highest decoration for extraordinary bravery and self-sacrifice in the national liberation struggle was introduced (truth be told, the honours were mostly bestowed on the members of the Communist Party, partly because they were more exposed in the liberation movement but partly also because the honours were ideologically conditioned). This decoration was given to 175 Slovenians or other people who fought in Slovenia, of which 20 were women (11.4 %)\textsuperscript{86}. Immediately after the end of the war, the Partisan Commemorative Medal 1941 was introduced. This decoration could be received by everyone who had taken part in the resistance against the occupiers without interruptions from 1941 until the end of the war. The Commemorative Medal was given to 1,811 Slovenians, of which 327 were women (18 %)\textsuperscript{87}. We do not want to imply to what degree the stated information credibly reflects the role of women in the resistance movement, but we definitely have to establish that it confirms the significant participation of women in the resistance.

On the other hand we can also ascertain that due to various reasons women did not rise through the ranks in accordance with their share in the resistance. Women especially had a hard time attaining the most prominent positions, and only a few women were present in the central Partisan leadership. The greatest breakthrough was certainly achieved by the two female members of the Central Committee of the CPS, Vida Tomšič and Lidija Šentjurc\textsuperscript{88}. In view of this situation the complication, which happened just before the end of the war when the Central Committee of the CPS and the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front were organising the staff of the National Government of Slovenia, is not at all surprising. No women were envisioned for it, and only after

\textsuperscript{84} See e.g.: V znamenju Osvobodilne fronte: dokazila o grozodejstvih komunizma v Ljubljanski pokrajini, Ljubljana 1943; Črne bukve o delu komunistične Osvobodilne fronte proti slovenskemu narodu, Ljubljana 1944; Makso Šnuderl, Fašističnodomobranski teror nad Slovenci. Komisija za ugotavljanje zločinov okupatorjev in njihovih pomagalcev pri predsedstvu SNOS, 1944.

\textsuperscript{85} Janez J. Švajncer, „Ženska v slovenski vojni in vojaški zgodovini“, p. 146.


\textsuperscript{87} Arhiv Republike Slovenije, Seznam nosilcev partizanske spomenice 1941 (handbook).

the intervention of Edvard Kardelj\textsuperscript{89} from Belgrade – who stated that it was intolerable to form a government without any women – was Vida Tomšič finally appointed as the Minister of Social Policy\textsuperscript{90}.

The revolutionary developments after the war may have resulted in universal suffrage and abolishment of legal inequalities between the genders. However, the monolithic nature of the politics as introduced by the Communist Party prevented any autonomous articulation of women’s interests. The new socio-political system provided women with equal opportunities for the assertion of their rights in the economic, social and political field. However, the concealed forms of discrimination were preserved, therefore women were gradually forced to face new challenges\textsuperscript{91}. As it was, the actual circumstances lagged far behind the emancipation at the declarative level. Numerous fields remained in the domain of men, among them especially politics. Regardless of this we can nevertheless claim that the new situation allowed, at least formally, for the emancipation of women, which was an important step on the path towards ensuring actual emancipation\textsuperscript{92}.

\textsuperscript{89} Edvard Kardelj, teacher, publicist, pre-war member of the CK KPJ. He had the leading role in the Slovenian resistance movement and was among the closest associates of Josip Broz Tito during the war and after it as well. Among other functions he was the Vice-President of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, Minister of the Constitutional Assembly and Vice-President of the Government of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (1946-1953).


\textsuperscript{91} Marta Verginella, \textit{Ženska obroba: vpis žensk v zgodovino Slovencev}. Delta, Ljubljana 2006, pp. 127-129