In the Name of the Daughter. Anthropology of Gender in Montenegro

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How the Female Subject was Tempered. An Instructive History of 8 March and Its Media Representation in *Naša Žena* (Our Woman)

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Abstract: The author explores the socialist emancipation of women in Montenegro during World War II and its aftermath, using the example of the 8 March celebrations. The social life of this ‘holiday of the struggle of all the women in the world’ speaks powerfully of the strength and fortitude involved in the mobilization of women during the war and during the postwar building of socialist Yugoslavia, as well as the sudden modernization and unprecedented political subjectivation of women. The emancipatory potential of these processes turned out to be limited in the later period of stabilization of Yugoslav state socialism and largely forgotten in the postsocialist period. The author argues that the political subjectivation of women needs to be thought anew, as a process that does not take place in a vacuum or outside of a certain ideological matrix, whether socialist or liberal.

Keywords: 8 March, Women’s Antifascist Front (WAF), Montenegro, political subjectivation of women

Introduction

The twentieth century saw the most intensive tempering of the female subject in the region of the former Yugoslavia, including Montenegro. The metaphor of tempering, with its emphasis on the heating and sudden cooling down of an object in order to achieve solidity and optimal strength (as well as its direct reference to a classic of socialist realism, the 1936 novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* [Kak

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zakalyalas‘ stal’ by Nikolai Ostrovsky¹), illustrates the problematic process of the political subjectivation of women in this region. Of course, unlike steel (which will eventually achieve the desired set of qualities, even if repeated tempering is needed), the becoming of a woman is ‘processual and necessarily unfinished’,² while ‘the process of solidifying an idea of a woman simultaneously undermines and improves the work of the norm’.³ I explore this dynamic in some detail by focusing on the representation of 8 March during the war years and under state socialism in *Naša žena* (Our Woman), the main periodical of the Women’s Anti-fascist Front of Montenegro and Boka (*Antifašistička fronta žena Crne Gore i Boke*, WAF), the largest women’s organization in this region, between 1944 and 1953.

In the early period of socialist Yugoslavia, 8 March symbolized the political subjectivation of women and was a clear marker of the conditions, tensions, limitations, and possibilities of this process. Its dialectical nature was most obvious within one of the key concepts of women’s subjectivation—motherhood—that was simultaneously used as an emancipatory tool and as a tool for the retraditionalization and repatriarchalization of women. In the late socialist period, 8 March became a day dedicated to mothers, teachers, and colleagues. It was drained of its revolutionary political charge and became merely a commercialized kitsch-holiday, stuck halfway between Mother’s Day and Valentine’s Day.

The wars in the former Yugoslav region and the restoration of capitalism during the 1990s led to an increase in poverty, retraditionalization, and the repatriarchalization of society. In such a context, the representation of 8 March in the Montenegrin media has also been determined through a traditionalist patriarchal lens. In addition to officials’ declaratory promises to achieve gender equality, this holiday has been celebrated with gentle praise of the ‘prettier’ and ‘gentle’ sex, promotional sales in perfumeries, organization of special evening events in hotels and restaurants, or vouchers of symbolic value given by companies to their female employees. For the most part, 8 March has provided an almost ritual-like opportunity to reproduce stereotypical gender roles and the position of women in Montenegrin society.

In the post-Yugoslav countries-in-information, voices that opposed such retrograde tendencies and the dominant macho (and often warrior) discourse were mostly alone in their local communities. Thus, these voices began to establish connections across the newly created borders, forming a network of activist as well

1 For an English translation, cf. Nikolai Ostrovsky, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, 2 vols., Sydney 2000 and 2002, <https://www.cpa.org.au/resources/cpa-presents/how-the-steel-was-tempered-book-1.pdf> and <https://www.cpa.org.au/resources/cpa-presents/how-the-steel-was-tempered-book-2.pdf>. All Internet references were accessed on 14 January 2021.

2 Adriana Zaharijević, *Postajanje ženom* [Becoming a woman], Belgrade 2010, 11.

3 Zaharijević, *Postajanje ženom*, 12.

as academic resistance. In Montenegro, the resistance was primarily activist, initially articulated by individuals gathered in informal groups and, from the end of the 1990s, in women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since 2009, the NGO Centre for Women and Peace Education (Anima) has continually celebrated 8 March at annual conferences whose goal has been to reaffirm the political meaning of this holiday and to strengthen the women's movement by connecting women and women's NGOs from Montenegro and the former Yugoslav region through various educational events, lectures, workshops, discussions, exchanges of experiences, and public performances in Montenegrin town squares.

Fighting Grounds

In the period between the two world wars, there were several competitive ideologies in the Yugoslav region, which in different ways conceived a project of female emancipation. The struggle for a truly universal right to vote was guided by different ideological starting points—the liberal and the socialist—from which female agency and political subjectivation, undoubtedly advocated by both, were conceived in fundamentally disparate ways. While the liberal approach was focused on the emancipation of women within the existing political system, the socialist approach questioned the latter and demanded more radical change.

Women's feminist organizations, characteristic of urban areas, did not exist in the territory of Montenegro until the unification of the 'Yugoslav provinces',⁴ that is, until the entry of the Bay of Kotor (Boka Kotorska) into the composition of Montenegro in 1921. The work of feminist organizations in the area of the Bay in this period has not been sufficiently explored.⁵

The first celebrations of 8 March as International Women's Day, established as a symbol of the battle for the universal right to vote and peace in the world, were organized, understandably, by socialist women in the region of former Yugoslavia. The first public celebration of 8 March in the territory of today's Montenegro was held in Kotor in 1919. At that time, in cooperation with members of the workers', socialist, and communist organizations, the Kotor socialists organized a 'public protest against the costliness and the provision committee', which was attended by

4 Jovan Bojović / Đuro Vujović, *Žene Crne Gore u revolucionarnom pokretu 1918–1945* [The women of Montenegro in the revolutionary movement 1918–1945], Titograd 1969, 29.

5 But cf. Ervina Dabižinović, *Diskursi o ženama Boka Kotorske. Rodni identiteti 1815–2015* [Discourses on women from Boka Kotorska. Gender identities (1815–2015)], PhD thesis, University of Novi Sad, 2018, https://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/handle/123456789/9138?locale-attribute=sr_RS.

more than 300 male and female workers.⁶ The proclamation of 8 March 1919, the censored version of which was published in the periodical *Radničke novine* (Workers' News), stated:

A woman cannot become free by the tiny crumbs collected from the table of bourgeois society. Smaller reforms revolt and corrupt further, instead of making things better. [...] Today, conscious women (censorship) condemn the idiotic and chaotic order of the capitalist society and demonstrate for the achievement of a socialist society in which the woman will be equal to man in everything, both in duties and in rights.⁷

The issues of the political organization of women and their liberation were explicitly addressed and theorized in the party press, in which special attention was given to the specific difference between the social and democratic struggles for female liberation and more traditional feminist conceptualizations. The latter moved within the framework of the status quo and tried to settle the problem of female subordination in an isolated manner, leaving the oppressive class order untouched. Women socialists assumed a radically different perspective:

First of all, a woman will be able to free herself only as a human being, and nowadays she can act towards this aim only as a worker, whether intellectual or physical. [...] For this reason, the social and democratic women's movement should never act under the sign of some sort of feminine struggle, but in the name of the general social-democratic movement. This movement needs to be free of all separate and specialized ideas [...]. Every other observation varies widely and leads to cheating the proletarian families in the first place.⁸

Interwar socialist women saw in feminist organizations a remnant of the *Ancien Régime*, an outdated bourgeois ballast that intended to realize the liberation of women and their right to vote through a capitalist system of deprived legitimacy. This standpoint was supported by both the activists and the functionaries of the WAF; they never thought of themselves or called themselves feminists, although the results of their work from today's perspective could be considered feminist.⁹ Socialist women did not consider a liberation based on 'separate and specialized ideas' to be a real liberation, and the price of such partial liberation would be paid by the most vulnerable—the proletariat. In this context, each individual struggle represented not only a waste of time, energy, and focus, but also the corruption of

⁶ Bojović / Vujović, *Žene Crne Gore*, 34.

⁷ Quoted after Bojović / Vujović, *Žene Crne Gore*, 30.

⁸ From *Glas slobode* 38 (1918), quoted after Bojović / Vujović, *Žene Crne Gore*, 29.

⁹ Adriana Zaharijević, The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism. Feminism and Socialism in 'The East', *Montenegrin Journal for Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2017), 135–157, 140, <http://www.mjss.ac.me/index.php/en/archive/24-articlesmagazineeng/37-issue2>.

the only intrinsically legitimate goal—the liberation of humankind, the liberation that only the socialist revolution could produce.

World War II brought with it the revolution of the whole lifeworld of Yugoslav women, transforming all its spheres, above all the public one, and opening the door for them to participate in social, political, economic, and cultural life. During and long after World War II, the only form of activism, resistance, and struggle by women in Yugoslavia was realized first within the framework of the struggle against fascism during the war, and later through the reconstruction of a war-torn country led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ). The struggle for national liberation provided a unique opportunity for Yugoslav women to achieve their political and historical subjectivation, which continued in the economic and cultural spheres in the postwar period. The Women's Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia, founded in Bosanski Petrovac in 1942, represented a massive women's organization, unmatched in the history of women's social and political organizations in Yugoslavia. The most important goal of this organization created during the war was certainly the struggle against fascism, which implied the mass mobilization of women, not only through participation in the ranks of the National Liberation Army, but also through background work—military assistance, care of the wounded, courier services, the making and collection of clothes, shoes, food, and sanitary materials. However, since the very beginning of the WAF, one of its main goals, understood as a precondition for female emancipation, was the education of women, the celebrated struggle against 'inherited illiteracy'.¹⁰

The WAF for Montenegro and Boka was founded on the free territory of Kolašin on 5 December 1943. The congress was attended by 400 women delegates, who adopted the Resolution of the First WAF Congress for Montenegro and Boka. The Resolution defined the main tasks of the organization: forming the WAF in all places and improving organizational strength; expansion of the organization by including women in the unliberated territories; participation of women in the building of the national government and raising the political awareness of women; helping the army; inclusion of women and men in armed action; and educational and cultural work, with an emphasis on the initial step—courses for the illiterate. The last, but not the least important task was the launching of a WAF periodical for Montenegro and Boka. This periodical would 'be the tool of unification, an exchange on experience and the proper line of WAF activity'. Its task would also be to 'spiritually prepare women for

10 Gordana Stojaković, *Antifašistički front žena Jugoslavije (AFŽ) 1946–1953. Pogled kroz AFŽ štampu* [The Women's Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia (WAF) 1946–1953. Overview of the WAF publications], in: Lidija Vasiljević, ed, *Ciklus tribina. Rod i levica* [Roundtable series. Gender and the left], Belgrade 2012, 13–39.

greater participation in the nation-liberation struggle'.¹¹ The WAF press was thus modeled to become the most powerful instrument of female liberation, an instrument that explained and spread the ideological message to a massive and largely uneducated base of women who would, as soon as they learned to read, subscribe to it:

The WAF press system was based on the hierarchy within which *Women Today* [Žena danas] was a monthly periodical which delivered axiomatic messages, or directives (as they were called at that time) addressed to the WAF leaders of middle and lower committees, and all the other WAF papers transmitted political messages, presented, and created a reality on a macro (political) plan and a micro plan (everyday life) according to the matrix created by *Women Today*.¹²

It is important, however, to mark one significant and deeper boundary of this emancipatory project. What remained significantly beyond the reach of the root-deep transformation of women's positions was the sphere of privacy, in which patriarchy found a safe refuge and temporary asylum during the period of the most profound changes, and from which it was gradually drawing the power needed to re-establish itself when the social order stabilized:

Our grandmothers knew that it was not enough to revolutionize only the productive, but that it was necessary to revolutionize the reproductive work as well. As they demanded entry into the productive sphere, they also demanded their exit from a sphere of reproductive work, collectivizing it through the activities of the most significant women's organization in the history of Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, a crucial moment in this restructuring was lacking—the entry of men in the sphere of reproductive work and of collectivizing the work of child and family care.¹³

Motherhood stood at the core of this asylum. Preserved in its naturalized form, untouched by the revolutionary drive and practice, the concept of motherhood was where the project of general emancipation failed. In addition to institutionalizing social childcare through an impressive system of institutional support for parenthood, ideologically guided and widely distributed in print, the essence of

11 Rezolucija Prvog kongresa Antifašističkog fronta žena Crne Gore i Boke [Resolution of the First Congress of the Women's Antifascist Front of Montenegro and Boka], Prvi kongres Antifašističkog fronta žena Crne Gore i Boke, Glavni odbor Antifašističkog fronta žena za Crnu Goru i Boku, Kolašin 1943, 1–2, 2.

12 Gordana Stojaković, Vida Tomšić: Zašto je ukinut AFŽ [Vida Tomšić: Why the WAF was abolished], in: Ildiko Erdei / Branislav Dimitrijević / Tatomir Toroman, eds, Jugoslavija. Zašto i kako? Zašto i kako se baviti Jugoslavijom, da li su nam potrebne (post-)jugoslovenske studije i zašto? [Yugoslavia. How and why? Why and how to deal with Yugoslavia, do we need (post-)Yugoslav studies and why?], Belgrade 2019, 149–174, 151.

13 Paula Petričević, Nasljeđe nedovršene revolucije [The heritage of the unfinished revolution], in: Nataša Nelević, ed, Šta je nama AFŽ. Prilozi za nova čitanja istorije socijalističkog ženskog pokreta 1943–1953 [Contributions to the new readings of the history of the socialist women's movement 1943–1953], Cetinje 2017, 24–32, 28.

motherhood as a determining characteristic of women represented one of the biggest obstacles to women's emancipation through which women were, when necessary, instrumentalized. Motherhood presented the point from which women were mobilized either to engage in war and rebuild the country or to turn from that same point back to the household in the early 1950s.

The WAF was not only an organization for women's emancipation; it was also a massive organization that activated women, trained them, and included them in the job market and social life. It played a key role in the process of building Yugoslav socialism, that is, in the lightning-speed postwar modernization of the country. Just as the liberation of women was part of national liberation and was unthinkable outside of this context, so the WAF statute defined their organization as part of the People's Front, the largest political organization in Yugoslavia, formed in 1945 by the peacetime transformation of the Unified People's Liberation Front of Yugoslavia (UNOFY) (*Jedinstveni narodnooslobodilački front Jugoslavije*), which in turn had represented the political basis of the broad antifascist national liberation movement during the war. The People's Front was renamed the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije*) in 1953 and continued to operate under this name until 1990.¹⁴

Thus, the WAF never existed as an independent organization. One of the most serious limiting factors in the WAF's functioning was its incapacity to autonomously make decisions. In fact, its last achievement was its enforced self-abolition, which masked the decision at the top of the party that 'there has been enough emancipation'. This was primarily due to the fact that the relation between the value and the cost of women's labor had become increasingly unfavorable, since the cost of reproductive work divided between women and the state included the cost of institutional care for children, that is, the system of nurseries, kindergartens, pupils' kitchens, and the like. Women's emancipation, among other things, turned out to be too costly, practically unaffordable for a society that at this stage of self-management had set other priorities for itself.

Nevertheless, women's agency appropriated during World War II represented an unprecedented form of capital in the overall history of women from the territory of former Yugoslavia. In 1946, within the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (*Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija*, FNRJ), women for the first time acquired constitutionally protected equality and the right to vote. The heroism of

¹⁴ Vukman Boričić, *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije. Narodni front Jugoslavije. 1945–1960* [The Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia. The People's Front of Yugoslavia. 1945–1960] Belgrade 1990, http://www.arhivyu.gov.rs/index.php?download_command=attachment&file_command=download&file_id=869075&filetype=oFile&modul=Core%3A%3AFileManagement%3A%3AFileModul.

these older generations grew from the personal, lived experiences of women who pledged and often lost everything to achieve what they had never had under any previous state arrangement—freedom.

8 March, during the War and under State Socialism

As a girl, I enjoyed stories, especially those my grandfather told about the partisans. He was a retired major in the Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija*, JNA), who had left his herd of sheep on the Durmitor mountain when he was only 16 to join the partisans. I remember one of his stories about the beginning of the war when it became clear that one could not stay neutral, and when his wider family was deciding which side to join. I remember well that one of his uncles chose to join the Chetnik movement because he disliked the fact that among the partisans women had the right to participate in decision-making processes. Just as this dismayed the uncles on the Montenegrin hills in the 1940s, today, many researchers, for other reasons, are dismayed to discover that women's emancipation in socialist Yugoslavia proved unthinkable outside of the ideological framework of communism and later, after the war, state socialism.

By analyzing the issues of *Naša žena* (Our Woman) published on the subject of 8 March, I put forth two arguments concerning the process of 'becoming a woman' in the Montenegrin context during the war years 1944–45 and immediately after the war, until the (self-)abolition of the Women's Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia in 1953. The first argument concerns maternity, one of the key areas in which women's mobilization towards emancipation was carried out. I claim that motherhood was the most important area in which the socialist project of the liberation of women was carried out en masse. Simultaneously, it included the Archimedean point of support for patriarchal consciousness, which, even in the most turbulent and most radical moments of the conceptualizations of the 'new woman', did not lose priority, as my analysis shows. In the postwar period, through the collectivization of childcare and families, maternity was significantly facilitated, upgraded, and socially valued, but it remained a form of primary parenthood—a parenthood never opened to fathers in an analogous way. Anatomy still determined destiny in an incomplete process of human emancipation, and the private sphere existed as a conservative island never reached by the revolution. Women remained trapped with a threefold burden: as mothers, workers, and social actors. They suffered the disproportionate and unjustifiable pressure of their own liberation, whose 'costs'

were paid only by them; this is ‘the tragedy of woman’s emancipation’¹⁵ surviving in the heart of a socialist society.

The second, concluding argument concerns women’s agency and examines the conditions under which female political subjects were formed in Montenegro. The key and often-asked question regarding female emancipation within the framework of state socialism is whether women’s work was indeed self-emancipation or whether they were in fact emancipated by the state, motivated by interests that were not inherent to female emancipation.¹⁶

In the following analysis, I first outline the conceptualization of female emancipation in Montenegro in the defined period. I then analyze the representation of motherhood through the way in which the ‘female question’ was set up, contextualized, and instrumentalized. I focus on the way 8 March was acknowledged during the war years and in the postwar period, primarily through its representation in the periodical *Naša žena* (Our Woman), edited by the Central Committee (CC) of the WAF for Montenegro and Boka. Beyond this periodical, I include texts from brochures that were published by the WAF’s CC for Montenegro and Boka before *Naša žena* was established. The life of the ‘holiday of women’s struggle around the world’, as *Naša žena* often called it,¹⁷ clearly demonstrates the strength and the power of the mobilization of women both during the war and later during the construction of Yugoslavia. It serves as a prism of the transformation and diversification of women’s social roles, as well as their limited nature later when the state was consolidated, when a gradual but resolute repatriarchalization led to the abolition of the WAF in 1953.

I divide my analysis into three parts that cover three successive periods (1944–45, 1946–49, and 1950–53), showing different ways of representing 8 March, depending on the dynamics of female subjectivity. I analyzed all issues of *Naša žena* that contain texts related to 8 March, that is, mainly February and March editions, and a few from April, or double issues from March/April, found in the National Library of Montenegro ‘Djurde Crnojević’ in Cetinje.¹⁸ Unfortunately, this record group does not contain all the issues of *Naša žena* that I was looking for, as all those from 1946 and that from March 1952 are missing.

¹⁵ Emma Goldman, *The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation*, in: Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, New York, London 1911, 219–231.

¹⁶ Nanette Funk, *A Very Tangled Knot. Official State Socialist Women’s Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism*, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 21, no. 4 (2014), 344–360.

¹⁷ *Osmi mart* [The eighth of March], *Naša žena*, no. 5 (February 1945), 1.

¹⁸ In addition, Nataša Nelević, one of the founders of the Montenegrin Women’s Museum (<https://www.muzejzena.me/>), sent me issues of the magazine *Naša žena* in electronic form. For this, I wholeheartedly thank her.

Motherhood in the War Years (1944–45)

Thousands of women wrapped in black pledge for revenge, a terrible, merciless vengeance. Mothers, sisters, and women, remember everything! We will forgive nothing and we will be the judges.¹⁹

The WAF press became the most powerful channel for the mobilization of women and the spreading of ideological messages. It is possible to follow on its pages how the acknowledgment of 8 March was transformed, in accordance with the needs of the Communist Party and the women themselves.²⁰

Until the creation of its own journal on 1 April 1944, when the first issue of *Naša žena* came out, the WAF's Central Committee for Montenegro occasionally published brochures. One of them reproduced the Resolution of the First Congress. It clearly states that the basic function of the planned establishment of the WAF journal was the formation of a powerful channel by which the new ideological matrix could be adequately interpreted, i.e. 'on the right line', as the Resolution emphasized, and widely distributed.²¹ The WAF press, in fact, represented one of the most important components of the political education of women in the spirit of socialism. To this aim, women first had to become literate. According to data from 1931, women represented the vast majority of the illiterate population in Montenegro. There were twice as many illiterate women as men, while in some areas female illiteracy reached almost 90%. The exception was the district of Kotor, where the total percentage of illiterate citizens was 26.8%, but here too illiterate men made up 25.2%, and illiterate women 44.4% of the population.²² So, there was basic work to be done before women could be systematically exposed to socialist ideas and, at the same time, widely accessible literature. Apart from learning to read these materials, women were also expected to 'work on' what they were reading, that is, to discuss it in classes, during section meetings, 'circles', and at other gatherings. It concerned the analysis and interpretation of texts that were 'in line' with the governing doctrine and its central mission: the articulation, explanation, and dissemination of socialist political thought and its related practices.

The Resolution also emphasized the importance of women's participation in the war: 'It has been shown that the national liberation struggle and the victory

¹⁹ From the Proclamation published on the occasion of 8 March 1944 by the Central Committee of the WAF for Montenegro and Boka.

²⁰ Gordana Stojaković, *Rodna perspektiva u novinama Antifašističkog fronta žena (1945–1953)* [Gender perspective in the publications of the Women's Antifascist Front], Novi Sad 2012, 39–40.

²¹ Rezolucija Prvog kongresa Antifašističkog fronta žene Crne Gore i Boke, 2.

²² Quoted after Adnan Prekić, *Položaj žene u prvim godinama komunističke vlasti u Crnoj Gori* [Women's situation in the first years of communist rule in Montenegro], *Matica* 67 (2016), 397–420, 399.

over fascism cannot be imagined without the general participation of women.’²³ The importance of the war for women was similarly emphasized by the assertion that during the war ‘a most significant historical upheaval’ had happened—equality. For women, this was meant to be

complete equality with men. On the freed territories, women got the right to vote and to be voted for, so that they became members of the national liberation committees and the territorial antifascist committee for the national liberation of Montenegro and Boka. They have gained the right to high military and political ranks of the National Liberation Army and the partisan detachments. In this way, through our national liberation struggle, the centuries-old inequality of women is being torn off, thus strengthening and awakening the people’s liberating powers. To us, this equality is a part of the greatest and most beautiful heritage of the sacred and rightful war that our nation waged.²⁴

The prevailing optimism associated with the achievement of ‘full equality with men’ and the ‘tearing off of the centuries-old inequality’ had, without a doubt, a powerful and stimulating effect at the time when it appeared. However, at a distance of 75 years and with the sobering historical experience accumulated in the meantime, such optimism seems excessive and, unfortunately, unfounded, especially given that similar arguments were later used in support of the abolition of the WAF.

In March 1944, the WAF’s Central Committee in Montenegro and Boka published another brochure, on ‘the day of combative solidarity of women of the world’, as 8 March was described in the text.²⁵ This brochure contained only the proclamation relating to the holiday, which is centered primarily around the figure of the mother, but also of the sister and the wife. It utilized a powerful emotional element that was easy to activate—the loss of loved ones:

We will punish the murderers of innocent children, executioners of our sons, robbers and violators. And no evildoer will escape us. We will find them all. Without hesitation and fear, firmly and decisively we go forward! Fight alongside your husband, brother, and son! We want this Eighth of March to be the last Eighth of March in slavery. Into the fight, we all will go.²⁶

The pain caused to women by their huge losses during the war was used to mobilize them on a large scale for participation in the national liberation struggle, one of the tasks set by the Resolution. The ‘wrath of revenge’ was directed in the

23 Rezolucija Prvog kongresa Antifašističkog fronta žena Crne Gore i Boke, 1.

24 Rezolucija Prvog kongresa Antifašističkog fronta žena Crne Gore i Boke, 1.

25 Glavni odbor Antifašističkog fronta žena za Crnu Goru i Boku, Osmi mart [The eighth of March], 1944, 1–10, 9.

26 Glavni odbor Antifašističkog fronta žena za Crnu Goru i Boku, Osmi mart, 2–3.

same way, to catalyze women into getting involved in combat or logistical tasks. As well as praising the partisans' mothers and the ultimate piety of their great love for their sons—daughters were of incomparably less concern—on the one hand, and their stoic endurance of their sons' death on the other, an anonymous author warned the mothers of the German soldiers in a threatening tone:

Mothers of the whole world will shout to German mothers: Your sons have embarrassed your mother's milk. They became the killers of innocent Polish, Czechoslovak, French, Serb, Soviet children. You did not raise your children worthy of maternal love. For us, the mothers, who above all love our children, the greatest holiday will be the one when your sons—fascists—killers of children—disappear from this world. Out of love to mothers and children of the whole world, we will be merciless to your sons. Your black attire for your fascist sons no longer hurts us. It is a shame for a mother to wear black for the killers of innocent children. The Eighth of March this year will be in the sign of a terrible revenge upon your sons.²⁷

Dehumanization of the enemy alleviates and even enables their elimination because they are deemed to have written themselves out of the human register by 'embarrassing [their] mothers' milk' through the act of killing innocent children. Yugoslav women in the 1940s knew well what it meant to be a mother, and thus the mother figure ensured the intelligibility of some key categories—the enemy, the necessity of mobilization, but also the reasons and the goals of the fight. In the proclamation of 1944, 8 March was conceived as essentially a women's holiday of vengeance. It was done in an indicative way: the mothers of the fascist murderers were addressed first. Montenegrin women are disconnected from the German mothers because their offspring are on the two sides of the war: heroes on one side and the murderers of children on the other. The death of the German sons '*no longer hurts*' Montenegrin mothers (my emphasis, P. P.). At the same time, they—being mothers—know how much their sons' death will hurt the women of the 'embarrassed milk', to whom they are sending the message that their shame should be larger than their pain.

It is important to recognize the paradoxical nature of essentializing motherhood, obvious here. It is depicted as an essential and decisive characteristic of a woman, natural and inalienable to her. At the same time, however, social conventions—feelings of pride and embarrassment—are depicted as overpowering a mother's love, that is her pain. The young ideology's *nomos* thus suspended the *physis* of motherhood, and thus affirmed its quest as an imposing power.

In *Naša žena*, the first text about 8 March was published in February 1945. It reiterates the history of this holiday as the holiday of advanced and conscious women around the world, then goes on to describe the experiences of repression

27 Glavni odbor Antifašističkog fronta žena za Crnu Goru i Boku, Osmi mart, 2–3.

and resistance of Yugoslav women in the prewar years, something that continued into the war years, when 8 March had been celebrated in various ways: ‘in damp dungeons and camps of the occupiers’, at hidden places in fear of the occupier, or at the front, with a rifle in one’s hand—‘it was most beautifully celebrated by the first women soldiers in our firing battalions’. 8 March 1945 was celebrated by most Yugoslav women living in the freed territory, ‘in the ruined but free country. And so do we, the women of Montenegro and Boka celebrate our great holiday in freedom for the first time’.²⁸ Importantly, this text about 8 March is the only one that does not mention mothers and motherhood, but instead focuses on the combative and progressive character of the holiday and the significance of the emancipation of women for the fight against fascism. It does possess the powerful educational and instructional character typical of the texts relating to the holiday, which qualifies them as political texts.²⁹ However, they gradually changed over time and began to deal more with the demands imposed on women and with their preferred social roles, and less with the revolutionary charge with which the earlier texts of the March issues of *Naša žena* abounded.

The Function of Motherhood in Building Yugoslavia (1947–49)

All of this strengthens the awareness of our women that they should work on themselves, for the better future of their children.³⁰

The interests of women in the postwar period became more persistently connected with the interests of children. Now, they needed to build a new socialist society for the younger generation, and the role of the mother remained crucial. The pillar of the education of the ‘new socialist man’ was a new woman, tempered in the struggle, the woman who ‘had graduated from the school of war’, which ‘had eradicated the artificially maintained inferiority of women for all time’.³¹ Now the political subjectivation of women took place in the wider context of developing a society of democratic socialism, of which one inseparable part was emancipation. However, the first and the most important role of a woman remained the reproduction of society, in the biological, the social, and the symbolical sense.

²⁸ Both quotes in *Osmi mart* [The eighth of March], *Naša žena*, no. 5 (February 1945), 1.

²⁹ Stojaković, *Rodna perspektiva*, 39–40.

³⁰ Spasenija Cana Babović, *Ovogodišnji 8. Mart* [This year’s eighth of March], *Naša žena*, no. 3 (March 1947), 1.

³¹ Prlja, *Žene, zauzmimo naša mjesta* [Women, let us take our places], *Naša žena*, no. 3 (March 1944), 2.

Motherhood was substantiated and activated in different registers, in the realms of the family, the economy, the social, as well as the political commitments of women. In each of these niches, women were mothers in the first place, ‘personally interested’ in the work of love and care. Nothing similar, of course, had ever been demanded or expected from men.

The introductory chapters in the 8 March issues of *Naša žena* from 1947 to 1949 are largely educational. In April 1947, the first five-year plan (*prva petoljetka*) was launched in Yugoslavia, the major goal of which was the industrialization and electrification of the country. This colossal project demanded massive participation from women, which was to be ensured by their growing organization and by the WAF press. Expectedly, as time passed, the texts in *Naša žena* increasingly omitted their contextualizing and enlightening tendencies and focused on a more directive tone, especially after 1950.

The year 1948 presented a turning point in the work of the Yugoslav Communist Party. In June of that year, it parted ways with the politics of the Soviet Union (USSR). While problematizing the ideological tension between the two countries, the *Naša žena* issues from February and April 1948 still celebrated the ‘gigantic Soviet Union’ which ‘fearlessly stands [...] at the head of a peaceful democratic camp’.³² The turn away from the USSR, the uncritically adored ally, was one of the last important political lessons that were necessary to ‘communicate on the right line’ to Montenegrin female readers. Talking about the break with the USSR and the repression that followed was particularly important in shaping the political subjectivity of Yugoslav women. Namely, the detention camps for political prisoners founded in 1948 represented ‘a short totalitarian episode of communist violence’.³³ A total of 55,663 ‘cominformists’, who to a large extent were war veterans and chose the ‘wrong’ side in the Tito–Stalin conflict, were detained in a network of camps, most notably on the Adriatic island of Goli Otok. There are no reliable data on the number of detained women; the figures range from 500 to just over 800.³⁴ Although the number of detained women was considerably lower than that of men, this ‘episode’ had significant consequences for women’s participation in social and political life. Especially illuminating were the motives for their imprisonment. As anthropologist Renata Jambrešić Kirin writes, ‘women were punished for political mistakes made by

32 Ljubica Radanović, 8 mart [The eighth of March], *Naša žena*, no. 1–2 (January–February 1948), 4–5, 4; Proglas Centralnog odbora Antifašističkog fronta žena Jugoslavije [Announcement of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Women’s Antifascist Front], *Naša žena*, no. 3–4 (April 1948), 1–2, 2.

33 Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje. Ženska trauma i Arhipelag Goli [Tito sends you on vacation! Archipelago Goli otok and female trauma], *Treća* 1, no. 9 (2007), 9–38, 10.

34 Jambrešić Kirin, Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje, 11.

their male family members, because they refused to denunciate or renunciate their mistakes, or because of their education, and for being born in the USSR'.³⁵ She elaborates that

despite the 'superhuman' sacrifice that women made on the altar of revolution, the benefits of a new human society were available only to the loyal and disciplined women. Those who were called by the nationalist propaganda to fight for a progressive and human society, for their own political subjectivity, after their first attempt to exploit this newly-elected right and choose a side in the Tito–Stalin conflict, were reduced to the status of (political) criminals and sent to prisons, or women's detention and work camps (Ramski rit, Zabela, Goli otok, Sveti Grgur).³⁶

The above-mentioned February 1948 issue of *Naša žena*, published a few months before the Informbureau's resolution to expel Yugoslavia, contained the last text on 8 March in which motherhood and raising children and youth were *not* the exclusive topic. Here, 8 March was presented as 'a symbol of the struggle of the disadvantaged part of humanity—women—for a worthy place in the human community'.³⁷ This struggle was emblematic: 'Destroying the enemy, she tore apart the slavery chains of her people, broke the double chains of the imprisoned Yugoslav woman.'³⁸ The 'double chains' referred to women as members of a people enslaved by the occupiers and by the patriarchy within her own society.

In the following issue of April 1948, motherhood was already being postulated as women's most important task:

In the first place, women-mothers will increase their care for the nurturing of healthy generations. By opening up a range of health and other institutions, with great concern, we will do everything we can to nurture healthy generations. Enhanced work on literacy, systematic education, and political work with women will ensure that their children are better and more properly educated in the spirit of the national liberation struggle and in the love of the new Yugoslavia.³⁹

As I show in the following, the subsequent years brought a noteworthy tendency of ossification and bureaucratization, as well as linguistic mannerisms, to the 8 March articles published in *Naša žena*.

³⁵ Jambrešić Kirin, Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje, 9.

³⁶ Jambrešić Kirin, Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje, 33.

³⁷ Radanović, 8 mart, 3.

³⁸ Radanović, 8 mart, 3.

³⁹ Proglas Centralnog odbora Antifašističkog fronta žena Jugoslavije [Announcement of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Women's Antifascist Front], *Naša žena*, no. 3–4 (April 1948), 1–2, 1.

Education of the First Educator. The Social Function of Motherhood (1950–53)

From the very beginning, we have emphasized that we should consider our work among women also from the standpoint of an education of the mother as the first educator.⁴⁰

From 1950, a more directive tone dominated the issues about 8 March. A stronger focus was placed on women's tasks in the development of democratic socialism and on the operational elaboration of these tasks, with a constant emphasis on the authority of the party. The education of women was now emphasized less. Motherhood was articulated as a social task for women in the context of the fight against Stalinism, and was transferred from the family to the society at large. The political decision to abolish the WAF was taken that very year, in 1950.

The February issue of 1950 did not open with an article about 8 March, but with an excerpt from Vida Tomšič's report from the 4th Plenum of the WAF's Central Committee, 'On the role of the WAF in the upbringing of the socialist human'.⁴¹ The main precondition for the projected reproduction of socialist society, whose direction was determined by the Communist Party, as Tomšič accentuated, corresponded to Karl Marx's third 'Thesis on Feuerbach', which claimed that in the materialist doctrine, 'it is essential to educate the educator'.⁴² The educator to be educated was the mother. Tomšič emphasized the importance of 'reinforcing socialist democracy', which gave 'great international significance to our development of socialism'.⁴³ This, above all, addressed the USSR, the head of the 'counter-revolutionary conspiracy' against Yugoslavia. The big new enemy and the danger inherent to the situation would determine the curriculum applied to the 'first educator'.

Tomšič acknowledged 'large-scale political work among women'⁴⁴ as the basic task of the WAF, which would ensure the adequate education of the socialist

⁴⁰ Bosa Pejović, Pred 8. mart [Ahead of the eighth of March], *Naša žena*, no. 1–2 (January–February 1950), 3.

⁴¹ Vida Tomšič, O ulozi AFŽ u vaspitanju socijalističkog čovjeka. Iz referata drugarice Vide Tomšič na IV plenumu CO AFŽ Jugoslavije [On the role of the WAF in the upbringing of the socialist human. From the report of comrade Vida Tomšič at the 4th plenum of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Women's Antifascist Front], *Naša žena*, no. 1–2 (January–February 1950), 1–2, 1.

⁴² Karl Marks, Teze o Foerbachu, in: Fridrih Engels, Ludvig Foerbah i kraj klasične nemačke filozofije, Belgrade 1947 (orig. 1888), 59–61, 60. For an English translation, cf. Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, appendix to Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, Moscow 1969, 13–15, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.

⁴³ Tomšič, O ulozi AFŽ u vaspitanju socijalističkog čovjeka, 1.

⁴⁴ Tomšič, O ulozi AFŽ u vaspitanju socijalističkog čovjeka, 2.

human. Thus, she presented the education of women more as a prerequisite for the proper education of young generations than as a goal in itself. At the same time, Tomšić emphasized the necessity to fight against reactionary ideas and to get involved with everyday political activities that aimed at freeing ‘not only our women but also our men from wrong and backward opinions’⁴⁵ about the patriarchal presocialist society. However, the problem with this project remained in its ambivalent, or rather partial relation to these ‘wrong and backward opinions’. After all, as Tomšić confirmed, the state was to educate and train a woman in order to enable her to enter the economic and social sphere, provide her with economic freedom as the foundation of all other freedoms, and ‘liberate the working mother at the time of her work in the economy’.⁴⁶ At the same time, it would disburden her of her inherent (rather than woman’s and man’s mutual) ballast of reproductive work, and educate her as the first educator rather than a socialist human being equal to men.

In the same issue, Bosa Pejović, member of the Montenegrin WAF executive committee, reviewed the tasks that the Communist Party placed in front of the WAF. She did not argue that the patriarchy was *de facto* defeated. Rather, she insightfully located the ‘serious obstacle’ standing in the way of the realization of the elaborated tasks for the women of Montenegro. This obstacle, precisely, consisted of ‘backward opinions’, such as

that her home and care of her children is enough for a woman. While we are not denying these important social tasks, it is necessary to persistently fight for an understanding that *the real equality of women is realized only when she is equal in the field of economy, when the division between female and male labor is gone*.⁴⁷

The partial release of women from reproductive work, through the provision of state care for the offspring and the household, was never followed by the entry of men into the sphere of reproductive work. Thus, the claim for ‘the disappearance of the division between male and female labor’ exclusively concerned the ‘economic field’, while this same division in the field of reproductive work remained a permanent blind spot and one of the most painful points in the liberation of women within the frames of Yugoslav state socialism; that is, ‘the revolution [...] stopped at the doorstep’.⁴⁸ The continued integrity of the patriarchy in the private sphere, in which reproductive work remained exclusively a woman’s concern, represented

⁴⁵ Tomšić, O ulozi AFŽ u vaspitanju socijalističkog čovjeka, 2.

⁴⁶ Tomšić, O ulozi AFŽ u vaspitanju socijalističkog čovjeka, 2.

⁴⁷ Pejović, Pred 8. mart, 3 (my emphasis, P. P.).

⁴⁸ Petričević, Nasljeđe nedovršene revolucije, 24.

the hard and sad limit of women's liberation in the early postwar period.⁴⁹ The consequence of this was a threefold load borne by women, which exhausted them within a relatively short time, and, after the dissolution of the WAF, brought most of them back into the household.

This directive tendency was strengthened in the March 1950 issue of *Naša žena*, which included an unsigned text titled 'Our most important tasks this year'. This text summarized the decisions made at the Second Plenum of the Central Committee of the Montenegrin WAF concerning the tasks for the following year: work on the pre-school and out-of-school education of children aged six to nine through the opening of year-round and seasonal kindergartens in village labor cooperatives, enterprises, and industrial centers; intensification of political activity among women through elaborated economic measures; inclusion of women as a permanent force in the economy; professional development of women; involvement of women in the socialist reconstruction of villages; increasing women's involvement in the work of the cooperatives; intensified cultural and educational activities; as well as organizational strengthening of the city and district WAF committees. Through repeated use of the phrases 'it must not be understood as' or 'it should be understood as', the article emphasized the importance of the 'correct' interpretation of these measures and tasks targeting women: one that abided by the party line. It also listed the ways in which to ensure such acceptable interpretation—lectures, discussions of manuals on specific topics, exhibitions, films, etc.⁵⁰

The 'correct' interpretation of the WAF's exclusion from the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), again within the context of the conflict with the USSR, came in the 8 March issue of 1951, that is, almost two years after the exclusion.⁵¹ Following the defamations of the USSR, Informbureau, and IDWF, Vujović announced that this 8 March would be celebrated as a *mother's day*, because one of the most important tasks for women was the upbringing of their children 'in the spirit of love for their homeland'⁵²: 'The upbringing of our children and all the working people of our country is, in fact, a continuation of the struggle our party led during the National Liberation War.'⁵³ Thus, the representation of motherhood in *Naša žena* in the period 1950–53 was strongly influenced by anti-Stalinist ideas, conceived as the continuation of the struggle for national

49 Zaharijević, *The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism*, 145.

50 Naši najvažniji zadaci u ovoj godini [Our most important tasks this year], *Naša žena*, no. 3 (March 1950), 1–2.

51 Dragica Vujović, Osmi mart – međunarodni dan žena [The eighth of March – International Women's Day], *Naša žena*, no. 1–2 (January-February 1951), 1–2, 1.

52 Vujović, Osmi mart – međunarodni dan žena, 1.

53 Vujović, Osmi mart – međunarodni dan žena, 1.

liberation, now directed against the former ally, but also against those who were not (or allegedly were not) ready to give up their alliance with the USSR. Accordingly, the text concluded in a militant spirit, appealing to the combat readiness of the mothers-educators with a warrior call resembling that from 1944, only this time in a much more sinister key:

Along with teaching our children to love their country, our children shall be educated to hate our enemies; *we shall strengthen in them the hatred and contempt for the traitors of their country and their people, hatred of all the saboteurs and speculators that hinder the development of socialism.*⁵⁴

This call went out at a moment when a large number of people were sent without trial to work camps on the islands of Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur, to attend hellish courses on ‘corrective pedagogy’,⁵⁵ which ‘killed the human in any human’.⁵⁶ Prisoners, victims of political persecution, were forcefully turned into torturers in this endemic system of prison self-management, through which their moral integrity was annihilated in a planned way. For this reason, former prisoners, many of whom had experienced the national socialist concentration camps, believed that the terrors of the *Arhipelag Goli* were worse than any they had experienced before. This is true also for female internees. This dark and repressive episode of Titoist ‘democratic socialism’ had far-reaching consequences for their political agency. In fact, herein lies the key to understanding the task of ‘educating the educator’: it was about fostering hatred and contempt for the ‘traitors’ of one’s own country and one’s people, which was then to be conveyed to the younger generations and built into the basis of the ‘upbringing of a socialist human’.⁵⁷

The idea that the subordination of women was a matter of the past, as found in Vida Tomšič’s report, is echoed in the February issue of 1952, addressing 8 March: ‘While the women in other countries are still fighting for their basic rights and equality in society, against exploitation and national oppression, for the women of our country *these issues are a matter of the past. They have won these rights by participating in the National Revolution.*’⁵⁸ The important and unanswered question remains as to how much and in what ways this conviction of having overcome patriarchy, as displayed by some WAF officials and female authors in the WAF

54 Vujović, Osmi mart – međunarodni dan žena, 2 (my emphasis, P. P.).

55 Jambrešić Kirin, Šalje Tito svoje na ljetovanje, 27.

56 Vladimir Bobinac, quoted after Jelena Butković, Goli otok. Logor u kojem se lomilo ljude [Goli Otok. A camp for breaking people], *Sušačka revija*, no. 60 (2007), 27–35, <http://www.klub-susacana.hr/revija/clanak.asp?Num=60&C=5>.

57 Tomšič, O ulozi AFŽ u vaspitanju socijalističkog čovjeka, 2.

58 S. Delević Šabović, Živio 8. Mart [Long live the eighth of March], *Naša žena*, no. 1–2 (January–February 1952), 1 (my emphasis, P. P.).

press, was grounded in reality. What, in the 1950s, did the (self-)convincing claim that equality had been achieved actually mean? What was the aim of such a claim? If the enemy was defeated, then the struggle was over. In fact, the claim that patriarchy was defeated entailed a high price for the WAF. The same claim would soon turn against the WAF, and therewith against the, in reality, unfinished project of the liberation and political subjectivation of women.

It is surprising yet indicative that the January–February and March–April issues of *Naša žena* of 1953 did not contain texts devoted to 8 March. Instead of the habitual 8 March histories and authored texts, these issues contained extracts from official documents and minutes of meetings: conclusions of plenums, reports from the congress of the Socialist Party of Montenegro, reports from the meetings of the WAF’s Central Committee, parts of speeches from various congresses, and so on. They struck a new note: the insufficient participation of women in the political life of the country. In an attempt to determine the causes of this, these issues of *Naša žena* refer to both twofold and double-sided messages, the nucleus of which was the ambivalent vow that continued to break down Montenegrin women’s existence into the private and the public, the personal and the social, that is, the political. Several texts identify the causes of the lack of women’s political participation in their insufficiently overcome ‘nonsocialist’ attitudes, while others, such as an article signed by Lidija Jovanović, convey a deep distrust of the young political subjects and their agency, expressed through a destructive self-critique and placing the largest part of the guilt on ‘unassertive and passive women’.⁵⁹

The ambivalence goes further though. In contrast to the plenum conclusions, the dubious blaming exercise, and the expressed conviction that the patriarchal order was defeated in everyday life, the highest officials of the Yugoslav Communist Party in Montenegro in 1953 recognized the subordination of women as a problem. In its March/April issue, *Naša žena* published part of the report of the president of Montenegro’s People’s Assembly, Blažo Jovanović, presented at the 4th Congress of the Montenegrin branch of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia, the former People’s Front. In this report, Jovanović claimed that the question of the equality of women was a general problem for the whole country, and a mutual problem, not only for the female population, because ‘the proper attitude towards women does not yet exist’.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Parts of Lidija Jovanović’s speech were published in *Prosvječivanje žena. Osnovni zadatak* [Enlightenment of women. The essential task], *Naša žena*, no. 3–4 (March–April 1953), 4–5, 4.

⁶⁰ Sa četvrtog kongresa Socijalističkog saveza Crne Gore [From the 4th Congress of the Socialist Alliance in Montenegro], *Naša žena*, no. 3–4 (March–April 1953), 2–3.

However, the report from the meeting of the WAF's Central Committee, while abiding by the main theses developed in Jovanović's report, carried an incomparably more critical and also at times condemnatory tone. It shifted the responsibility, almost exclusively, for the small number of women in the state government onto women themselves. While confirming that she knew well that 'some male comrades misunderstand women's labor', Lidija Jovanović, the first secretary of the WAF's Central Committee in Montenegro, emphasized: 'However, one thing remains—that we, women, are unassertive and passive about the issue', and that, therefore, most of the blame for the inadequate participation of women in government was on women themselves. Women were also inadequately devoted to their education, she continued: 'Our female comrades are developing very slowly on this terrain. Why is this so? *They alone are guilty*.'⁶¹ Jovanović's criticism, directed 'from woman to women', gives proof of how the voice of patriarchy was loudest when it came from women, providing it with centuries-old legitimacy. She did nothing less than insist that it was the responsibility of women to rise up quickly, with the threefold burden that emancipation hitherto had put on their shoulders. Such self-criticism, however, which was very dear to socialism, had already acquired a more perverse character. It was, on one hand, the Orwellian new-speech of the anti-Stalinist purges,⁶² while, on the other hand, it was a 'malicious transformation' à la Michel Tournier⁶³ of the original thesis that the question of the liberation of women was a social rather than merely a women's question, which was then turned into the main argument for the dissolution of the WAF.

This dissolution was based on the correct hypothesis that partial liberation does not exist. But it was also based on the incorrect hypothesis that 'women's equality had already been achieved',⁶⁴ that 'the process of "raising women" to the "political level" of men (was) completed',⁶⁵ and that it was high time for this massive women's organization to be abolished. In this way, the significant insight into the impossibility of partial liberation was turned against the interests of women by depriving them of the only mass organization whose basic task was their comprehensive emancipation.

⁶¹ Lidija Jovanović, quoted in *Prosvječivanje žena*. Osnovni zadatak, *Naša žena*, no. 3–4 (March–April 1953), 4–5, 4. Blažo Jovanović was Lidija's husband, which makes the difference in their argument even more interesting.

⁶² George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, London 1949.

⁶³ Michel Tournier, *Le roi des Aulnes*, Paris 1970.

⁶⁴ Quoted after Stojaković, Vida Tomšić: *Zašto je ukinut AFŽ*, 159.

⁶⁵ Stojaković, Vida Tomšić: *Zašto je ukinut AFŽ*, 160.

Subject or Object of Emancipation?

The question of whether women emancipated themselves or were emancipated by the Yugoslav state through interests not inherent to their very emancipation has no simple and unambiguous answer. What is beyond doubt is that emancipation began, but also that it was not completed. Using a theoretical framework developed by Judith Butler as well as her analysis of the genealogy of the subject,⁶⁶ I argue that the ‘tempering’ of the female subject traceable in the work of the WAF shows that the opposition between a subject who actively emancipates themselves (that is the liberal, Western notion) and a subject who carries out their own emancipation in an allegedly passive manner by replicating the state and social order (that is the socialist, and conditionally speaking Eastern way) is substantially false.⁶⁷ I claim that the liberal concept of women’s agency proposed by Western feminists is not and cannot be the only one. Women’s agency articulated within the frame of state socialism is of no less value; all women’s movements need to be studied comprehensively. By failing to problematize the genealogy of its own creation, the alleged ‘paradigmatic’ political subjectivity of women within the framework of Western liberalism proclaims itself to be the only possible subjectivity. The conditions of the emergence of political subjectivity, on the other hand, are proclaimed to be the universal conditions of subjectivity. In this way, feminists arguing from within the framework of Western liberalism subscribe to the atavism of Western cultural imperialism and declare impossible those forms of political subjectivation that occurred in a completely different framework, namely under the conditions of a state socialist society.

During a certain period, mostly during the war years and in the postwar period up to the 1950s, the interests of female liberation coincided with those of the party. The party needed women, both in the war and in the reconstruction and development of the country, and the typical ‘prewar women’, locked in their homes and surrounded by children, would not have been adequate. The party needed women warriors and women workers, and so it produced them. In this sense, the state carried out a systematic project of female emancipation, which guaranteed Yugoslav women the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of which they could only have dreamed before the war. We still (or once again) dream of this today, with economic and social rights having been rapidly curtailed in the neoliberal context. Back then, women were the performers of the work of their own emancipation, but did this make them a subject of their emancipation?

⁶⁶ Judith Butler, *Nevolja s rodnom*, Belgrade 2016. For the original, cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York 1990.

⁶⁷ Such as Funk, *A Very Tangled Knot*.

The traditional conception of what a subject is suggests that it is solidly ontologically-based as ‘a rational transparent entity that could convey a homogeneous meaning on the total field of her conduct by being the source of her action’.⁶⁸ This concept of subjectivity has suffered complex theoretical reconstructions over the second half of the twentieth century, mainly through poststructuralist, post-modernist, fertile, and occasionally burning dialogues with feminist theories.⁶⁹ According to Judith Butler, the subject ‘is itself the effect of a genealogy which is erased at the moment that the subject takes itself as the single origin of its action’.⁷⁰ Thus, a genealogy is at work here, a genealogy whose contours are clearly outlined: the woman became a subject in the great construction site of developing the socialist society, in the literal dust of labor action, in operating machines in factories, among the knotty letters in the courses for the illiterate. This was a magnificent and unfinished process of emancipation of Yugoslav women, who however were *pars pro toto* of women in general. Vida Tomšič praised the achievements of the WAF, comparing them to the experience in other countries:

The WAF, unlike many other women’s organizations, has to the greatest extent achieved not only successes in its work among women, but also that the women in the WAF *have not been the object of someone else’s work* on their education, but have become *an active factor* both in their own education and in society at large.⁷¹

What Tomšič mentioned as an ‘active factor’ was the new, young, female political subject, the woman, to use her terminology, as a ‘conscious builder of socialism’. In this sense, the WAF is a good example of how political subjectivity needs to be redefined. Subjectivity never happens in a vacuum, never beyond a given ideological matrix, be that socialist or liberal, or otherwise. The tempering of the woman subject in the socialist collectivist context did not produce a liberal-like subject whose main goal was women’s autonomy, but it did not make Yugoslav

68 Chantal Mouffe, *Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics*, in: Linda Nicholson / Steven Seidman, eds, *Social Postmodernism. Beyond Identity Politics*, Cambridge 1995, 315–331, 316.

69 Paula Petričević, *Ucjenjivački identiteti – dometi i granice politike identiteta* [Blackmailing identities – reaches and limits of identity politics], MA thesis in Political Science, University of Belgrade, 2018, 15.

70 Judith Butler, *Contingent Foundations. Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism’*, in: Steven Seidman, ed, *The Postmodern Turn. New Perspectives on Social Theory*, Cambridge 1994, 153–170, 161.

71 Vida Tomšič, *Rad među ženama nije samo dužnost drugarica, već i svih političkih aktivista i organizacija* (dio iz izlaganja na IV Kongresu Narodnog fronta Jugoslavije) [Work among women is not just the duty of women comrades but of all political activists and organizations (part of the declarations during the 4th Congress of the People’s Front of Yugoslavia)], *Naša žena*, no. 3–4 (March–April 1953), 6 (my emphasis, P. P.).

women less of a subject, and neither did it reduce the WAF to solely a transmission belt of the Communist Party, in spite of its imposed, or ordered, self-dissolution.⁷² The biggest problem with the WAF—and possibly, on a different level, the biggest problem of Yugoslav socialism as such—was that it ceased to exist too early, by suddenly declaring that equality was achieved and leaving the female subject in a state of painful incompleteness. The WAF officials, led by Vida Tomšič, had, at their best, too much confidence in the ‘higher’ social bodies that ‘simply’ were not ready to recognize and acknowledge women as a political subject of the new society that is not determined by their gender. At their worst, the WAF officials were ‘the representatives of the Yugoslav Communist Party’s policy towards women and not authentic representatives of women’s interests’, while the WAF was ‘abolished upon the Communist Party’s decision, which was contrary to the interests and the will of the organization’s members’.⁷³ In any case, while women were indeed educated, empowered, and politically subjectivated through the WAF, the working people more generally were not, or at least not to a sufficient extent. The WAF officials were premature in proclaiming that their job was successfully completed and in leaving the fate of women to the good will of the working people and the Communist Party. Finally, women were betrayed not only by the socialist ideology that they believed in, but also and above all by the unsurpassable patriarchal order which survived and unfortunately outlived even the ideology itself.

The destiny of 8 March was similar to the history of the WAF, in terms of both mistakes and successes:

Therefore, there is no—and this is one of the most valuable lessons to be drawn from the WAF’s experience—spontaneity or automatism in the project of liberation: history almost cynically demonstrates that there is no greater or more radical revolution or emancipation that we should uncritically trust that it would not betray its daughters, as soon as it counts and buries the dead who gloriously fell for its cause.⁷⁴

Time has shown how realistic it was to expect that the 10 year existence of the WAF would transform the everyday life of Montenegrin women forever and from its roots. With the strengthening of the socialist system, women gradually retreated to the niches from which they had previously run towards freedom—but they never fully retreated. Not even in the period of transition after 1990, which, in the

72 Cf. Raluca Popa, *Translating Equality between Women and Men across Cold War Divides. Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women’s Year*, in: Shana Penn / Jill Massino, eds, *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, London 2009, 59–74.

73 Stojaković, Vida Tomšič: *Zašto je ukinut AFŽ*, 6.

74 Petričević, *Nasljeđe nedovršene revolucije*, 27.

successor societies of socialist Yugoslavia, tried to erase or suppress the history of its largest women's movement. The ambivalent legacy of this struggle remains with women today, as well as its pledge and its goal—the problematization and improvement of the project of liberation that the women comrades began in the long-gone December of 1942.

Translated from Montenegrin by Marija Krivokapić.

Bionote

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