

**“Brotherhood and Unity” Among the Sisterhood: The Anti-Fascist
Women’s Front (AFŽ) and the State-Building Project of Postwar
Socialist Yugoslavia**

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List of Acronyms:

AFŽ: Anti-Fašističkog Fronta Žena (*Anti-Facist Women's Front*)

AVNOJ: Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Jugoslavije (*Anti-Facist Council of Peoples of Yugoslavia*)

BiH: Bosna i Hercegovina (*Bosnia and Herzegovina*)

Cominform: Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties

KPJ: Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije (*Community Party of Yugoslavia*)

NDH: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (*Independent State of Croatia*)

NF: Narodni Front (*People's Front*)

ORA: Omladinske Radne Akcije (*Youth Labor Action*)

WIDF: Women's International Democratic Federation

“Brotherhood and Unity” Among the Sisterhood: The Anti-Fascist Women’s Front (AFŽ) and the State-Building Project of Postwar Socialist Yugoslavia

In her speech to the First Congress of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front (AFŽ)¹ in June 1945, Yugoslav communist cadre and Partisan fighter Vida Tomšić, incited the crowd of women by saying, “Precisely in this work, which will be carried out by united and fraternal peoples through mutual cooperation, we women, will strengthen unity and brotherhood even more, in which we will guarantee a happy future for our children.”² Within Tomšić’s rallying call, lies a key tension for women in the new socialist Yugoslav in the immediate postwar period. The Community Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) used the slogan of “brotherhood and unity” to establish harmony under the ethnically divided, war-torn country. Women within the KPJ like Tomšić became major supporters of this “brotherhood and unity” even though it excluded women, focusing on “brotherhood” as a key pillar of the new socialist Yugoslavia. As the country looked to build itself on the key principle of “brotherhood and unity” how did women fit into this state-building project and the country as a whole?

Historical Context of the AFŽ

The Second World War in Yugoslavia was a brutal and divided conflict, with many different forces fighting for control of the country. Before the war, the country of Yugoslavia was a kingdom ruled by the Serbian Karadjordjević dynasty.³ The Kingdom was marked by internal strife, and according to historian Barbara Jančar-Webster, “most of the participating nationalities were ambivalent or even hostile toward the existing situation, and none, except perhaps the

¹In my paper I will use the acronyms of the organizations in the local language. For the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front or Anti-Fašističkog Fronta Žena, I will use AFŽ as it corresponds to the local language.

²Vida Tomšić, “Socijalno Staranje Kao Jedan od Najvažnijih Zadataka Anti-Fašističkog Fronta Žena u Obnovi Zemlje.” [Social Care as One of the Most Important Tasks of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front Renewal of the Country] *I Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1945), 133.

³Željko Šuster, *Historical Dictionary of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1999), 155.

Serbs, felt any loyalty to the reigning monarchy.”⁴ After the Second World War started, and Germany began its expansion across Europe, the Yugoslav monarchy aligned itself with Nazi Germany by signing the Tripartite Pact in March 1941.⁵ However, this move was met with significant dissatisfaction, and was followed by a national uprising and military coup.⁶ The



Figure 1. Axis Occupation and Partition of Yugoslavia, Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axis_occupation_of_Serbia#/media/File:Axis_occupation_of_Yugoslavia_1941-43.png

instability in Yugoslavia provided an opening for Germany to invade the kingdom in April 1941 and take power.⁷ From there, the kingdom was occupied and divided between the Croatian Nazi puppet state known as the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), the Germans, Italians,

⁴Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*. (Denver: Arden Press INC, 1990), 15.

⁵Ibid, 16.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

Hungarians, and Bulgarians.⁸ While the Nazis occupied much of what is modern-day Serbia, the NDH controlled modern-day Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of southern Serbia.⁹ The ruler of the NDH, Ante Pavelić, was the founder of the Croatia Ustaša, a Croatian fascist political party and militia.¹⁰ The Ustaša committed acts of genocide against Jews, Serbs, Roma, and more peoples as they sent thousands to their death in concentration camps.¹¹

In response to the various occupations taking place within the former kingdom, multiple resistance movements developed. Josip Broz Tito, or Marshal Tito as he was known both during and after the war, was the KPJ's leader and commanded the Communist Party's armed-wing known as the Partisans.¹² While Tito and the Partisans fought for establishing a new communist country in Yugoslavia, there was also the Četnik resistance movement, a Serb nationalist group led by Colonel Draža Mihailović that fought for a "Greater Serbia" seeking to unite Serb populations throughout Yugoslavia.¹³ The country was divided among these various forces which sought to end the occupation and establish their own vision of Yugoslavia.

Within this context, the Communist Party founded the AFŽ in order to mobilize women against the occupation and in support of the Partisan movement. First established by the KPJ on December 6, 1942, in Bosanski Petrovac, the AFŽ carried out several tasks during the war, including providing supplies to Partisan fighters, running hospitals and schools, distributing propaganda, and striving for women's equality both socially and economically.¹⁴ The tasks of the AFŽ were extremely diverse and organized women in several aspects of life, including areas

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid, 38.

¹⁰Željko Šuster, *Historical Dictionary of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, 317.

¹¹Ibid, 139.

¹²Ibid, 232.

¹³Marko Attila Hoare, "Introduction: Understanding the Partisan-Chetnik Conflict," *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans the Chetniks, 1941-1943* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-9.

¹⁴Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 129; Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia* 8, no. 1 (2014): 5-6.

within and outside of the home. The AFŽ also had many publications during the war which sought to mobilize women, including but not limited to *Žena danas* (Women Today), *Žena u borbi* (Women in the Struggle), and *Naša žena* (Our Women).¹⁵ According to Jančar-Webster, these publications sought to persuade the women of Yugoslavia “that a partisan victory would result in a brighter future for them in a new Yugoslavia.”¹⁶ The AFŽ was able to attract a large population of women to its ranks and had as many as two million participants in 1945.¹⁷ Women played a different role in the other resistance movements emerging in Yugoslavia. While the Četniks and Ustaša both relied on the importance of the women within the home, the Communist Party’s rhetoric was one of women’s liberation in the new Yugoslavia it hoped to build after the war.¹⁸

However, the KPJ soon became uncomfortable with the increasing independence of the AFŽ. Only two years into the organization’s existence, in 1944, the KPJ Central Committee issued a letter to the various levels of the AFŽ declaring that the organization had more loyalty to itself than to the tasks of the National Liberation Struggle.¹⁹ Moving forward, the KPJ sought to assert further control of the AFŽ and ordered that the organization transform itself into a mass organization, seeking to encompass as many members as possible and “limiting its objective solely to the recruitment of women ‘to help them in their political understanding to take their place’ in the war alongside men.”²⁰ The move by the KPJ to prevent any dissenting opinions within the AFŽ would continue after the war and would conclude with the official end of the organization in 1953.

¹⁵Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 115.

¹⁶Ibid, 116.

¹⁷Ibid, 144.

¹⁸Ibid, 127.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid, 144.

While the Communist Party emerged victorious from World War II and established the new Yugoslav state, it did not have the support of the majority of Yugoslavs during the war. In order for the KPJ to achieve its goals of consolidating political power, rebuilding the economy, and creating a new socialist system, much support was needed. According to historian Barbara Jančar-Webster, 65 percent of the Yugoslav population were supporters of one of the other sides of the war or supported none of the sides.²¹ Looking specifically at women's involvement within the communist sponsored National Liberation Movement, only about 12 percent of the women among the prewar war population were involved in the movement, which was proportionally lower than men.²² Even though the Communist Party and the AFŽ had both mobilized significant numbers of men and women, there was still work to be done to create a state with loyal citizens who embodied socialist ideals, especially among women.

This thesis will discuss the ways in which the AFŽ contributed to the state-building project under the tight control of the KPJ. In particular, I explore the contradiction between the KPJ's support for gender equality and its relationship to the AFŽ. How did the underlying tensions between the desire for control and the desire to mobilize women for the communist cause manifest itself in both the KPJ's policy towards the AFŽ as well as within the AFŽ itself? I argue that the KPJ used the AFŽ to mobilize women for the Yugoslav state-building project, relying on their positions as mothers, educators, and an untapped labor force, to implement the goals of the regime, without serious consideration of women's equality as a political outcome to which the party seemingly aspired. In the eyes of the KPJ, the AFŽ was a means to the end of consolidating and bolstering the Party, rather than an organization to further the equality of women. Given the close control the KPJ asserted over the AFŽ as well as the elitist nature of the

²¹Ibid, 46.

²²Ibid, 47.

organization, there was little ability or even possibly desire to work against the Party. Even within these contradictions, the AFŽ was able to challenge traditional gender roles and move women beyond the domestic sphere. However, once this challenge to tradition and push for gender equality no longer proved useful to the KPJ, the organization was disbanded, ending its brief, but impactful tenure.

Previous Historiography of the AFŽ

The AFŽ has previously been the object of historical study, notably by Lydia Sklevicky, who laid important groundwork both for the study of women in Yugoslavia and the AFŽ. Sklevicky's book, published in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, *Konji, Žene, Ratovi* [Horses, Women, and War] was one of the first analyses expressly about the AFŽ at the time of its publication in 1996.²³ Arguing for the importance of studying women in Yugoslav history, Sklevicky analyzes the AFŽ during both the Second World War as well as the postwar period, focusing on the Croatian branch of the AFŽ. Sklevicky elucidates the important role that women played in the Partisan movement of the Second World War, while also highlighting the challenges the women faced from within the Communist Party. Sklevicky argues that the postwar story of the AFŽ was one which was dominated by the encroaching control of the KPJ. Sklevicky further analyzes the AFŽ, in her English-language article "Emancipated integration or integrated emancipation: the case of post-revolutionary Yugoslavia." Sklevicky separates political emancipation of women from the cultural emancipation of women, arguing that while the AFŽ did not lead to political emancipation, meaning the achievement of equal political rights based on gender, it was able to establish some level of cultural emancipation by fighting limits set by gender norms and the

²³Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, Žene, Ratovi*. [Horses, Women, Wars] (Zagreb: Druga, 1996).

patriarchy.²⁴ To Sklevicky, the failure to establish political emancipation was a result of tight control exerted by the KPJ over the AFŽ. I argued that the elitist and paternalistic nature of the AFŽ's leadership contributed to its close relationship with the KPJ, challenging Sklevicky's characterization of the relationship between the Communist Party and the AFŽ.

Along with Sklevicky, Jančar-Webster provides one of the earliest published analyses of the AFŽ. While Jančar-Webster's book mainly focuses on women in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, her last chapter discusses the AFŽ and women in the immediate postwar period. Similar to Sklevicky, Jančar-Webster is interested in the desire of the KPJ to assert control over the political system in the postwar period. Although Jančar-Webster's analysis is helpful in understanding the origins of the AFŽ, her focus on the desire of the KPJ to exert control of the AFŽ is a one-sided analysis of the relationship of the AFŽ to the larger Yugoslav system, focused solely on the Communist Party. I look to challenge her focus on the party alone by evaluating the goals of the AFŽ and the women involved in order to understand the organization's self-perception within the communist system.

More recently, Chiara Bonfiglioli has looked to reassess some of the arguments made by Sklevicky and Jančar-Webster, challenging their perspectives on the organization. Bonfiglioli's analysis of the AFŽ largely evaluates the place of the organization within the Yugoslav state, revising the analysis of Sklevicky and Jančar-Webster. Bonfiglioli diverges from the previous two scholars by arguing that increasing control by the Yugoslav state was not what led to the disintegration of the AFŽ, but instead the contradictions between what party leaders preached versus what they practiced regarding women's equality in daily life were the cause. Bonfiglioli writes that the real conflict in the organization was between the "discourse of women's equality

²⁴Lydia Sklevicky, "Emancipated integration or integrated emancipation: the case of post-revolutionary Yugoslavia." In *Current Issues in Women's History*, eds. Arina Angerman, Geerte Binnema, Annemieke Keunen, Vefie Poels, Jacqueline Zirkzee, (London: Routledge, 1989), 105.

promoted at the federal level... and the actual behavior of male and female Party members when it came to everyday practices.”²⁵ While I am not focusing on the causes of disintegration, I think that Bonfiglioli’s critiques of the party leaders are important in understanding the context for the AFŽ’s activism. Bonfiglioli also argues that the AFŽ was not an autonomous organization but instead was part of the Liberation Front of the Second World War. Locating the position of the organization within the larger communist system, as put forth by Bonfiglioli, is vital for better understanding the motivations of the AFŽ and its limitations within the state.

Jelena Batinić, similar to Jančar-Webster, discusses the AFŽ at length in her book, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance*. Like Jančar-Webster, Batinić places the AFŽ in the larger discussion of the mobilization of women for the Communist Party in the Second World War. Batinić notes the revolutionary nature of establishing a group composed exclusively of women to support a resistance movement and the importance of the AFŽ in the war-effort and eventual victory of Tito and the Partisans. Batinić also points out the “double-edged sword” of the creation of a women’s group. While the creation of the AFŽ allowed women to become politically involved in an unprecedented way, the inferior status of women in Yugoslav society resulted in the inferior status of the AFŽ within the larger the communist system. Acknowledging this “double-edged sword” remains critical for comprehending how communist leaders understood the AFŽ in the immediate postwar period as that understanding played a major role in the AFŽ’s involvement in the state-building project.

Much of the scholarship of Batinić, Bonfiglioli, Sklevicky, and Jancar-Webster has been focused on leadership of the AFŽ during the Second World War and its efforts to support the Partisan army. Diverging slightly from this approach is scholar Tea Hadžiristić’s “Unveiling

²⁵Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," 12.

Muslim Women in Socialist Yugoslavia.”²⁶ She argues that the Yugoslav state used the AFŽ to carry out unveiling campaigns which symbolized the state’s goals of creating a secular and multiethnic society. Hadžiristić’s work demonstrates how the KPJ used the AFŽ to enforce its vision of the new Yugoslavia it was planning to build. While Muslim women are not the overarching focus of my thesis, Hadžiristić’s work has helped me understand how the AFŽ interacted with Muslim women. I will expand on her analysis in my larger discussion of the AFŽ and use it to further enlighten how the organization interacted with women they perceived to be “backward.”

Within the former Yugoslavia, Andreja Dugandžić, and the non-profit, leftist, feminist, organization CRVENA based out of Sarajevo, have headed many avenues of study and research on the AFŽ. CRVENA has published a collection of essays on the AFŽ by local and international authors, edited by Dugandžić titled *Izgubljena Revolucija: AFŽ Između Mita i Zaborava* [Lost Revolution: the AFŽ Between Myth and Forgetting]. *Izgubljena Revolucija* argues that the importance of the AFŽ was erased from the National Liberation of the Second World War and seeks to reinsert the importance of the organization into the historiography. In Bonfiglioli’s chapter, she argues against the binaries of “state” and “woman” by looking at the motivations and biographies of women involved in the AFŽ.²⁷ This paper continues in line with Bonfiglioli’s challenge to the perspective that the AFŽ was a victim to the KPJ, by examining closely the women involved within the organization and their own perspective on their work. I will problematize Bonfiglioli’s claims on the organization’s desire for the transformation of

²⁶Tea Hadžiristić, “Unveiling Muslim Women in Socialist Yugoslavia: The Body between Socialism, Secularism, and Colonialism.” *Religion and Gender* 7, no 2 (2017).

²⁷Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Biografije Aktivistkinja AFŽ-A: Interseksionalna Analiza Ženskog Djelovanja” [AFŽ Activists’ Biographies: An Intersectional Reading of Women’s Agency] in *Izgubljena Revolucija: AFŽ Između Mita i Zaborava*. [Lost Revolution: the AFŽ Between Myth and Forgetting], eds. Andreja Dugandžić and Tijana Okić. (Sarajevo: Dobra Knjiga, 2016), 23.

peasant women, pointing out the paternalistic approach present among the elite of the AFŽ. CRVENA also put together an online archive of documents about the AFŽ of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as secondary sources regarding the organization and women in Yugoslavia, known as the Archive of the Anti-Fascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia.²⁸ The creation of an online archive not only helped my work, but has made the knowledge of and study on the AFŽ more accessible to the broader public.

Diverging from much of the previous literature, my thesis focuses specifically on the period from 1945 to 1950. I chose to concentrate on these five years because they were instrumental in the creation of the new socialist Yugoslavia as the country sought to rebuild from the war and faced multiple international and domestic changes. Previous authors largely glossed over this period in the historiography of the AFŽ, choosing to focus on the war years and leaving out important analysis on how the organization, and women more broadly, contributed to the state-building project. Through understanding more comprehensively how women participated in this vital period in Yugoslav history, we can learn more about the Communist Party in Yugoslavia, the consolidation of power, and more broadly, women under socialism.

In the immediate postwar period, states were created across Eastern Europe under the banner of communism, whose political rhetoric created a particular relationship of women to the state. Communist regimes often espoused rhetoric of gender equality and many included legal provisions in their constitutions declaring the equality of men and women.²⁹ In the larger historiography of women and communism, there has been much focus on the relationship between women in the USSR and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Scholars have often posited the importance of women, in particular the transformation of gender, in the establishment

²⁸ Accessible here: <https://afzarhiv.org/>

²⁹ Alfred G. Meyer, "Feminism, Socialism, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe," In *Women, the State, and the Party in Eastern Europe*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 19.

of communist power in the Soviet Union.³⁰ However, the same attention has not been applied to Yugoslavia, especially in English language-published scholarship.

The experience of Yugoslav women should not be grouped with that of Soviet women, and instead requires individual study. Given the major changes that Yugoslavia underwent in the five years after the end of the war, the country poses a telling example of gender in a communist context. The independence of Yugoslavia from the Soviet bloc and Tito's eventual break with Stalin is unique among other Eastern European communist countries. As a result of the Tito-Stalin split, Yugoslavia began to move away from the Soviet style of socialism, eventually resulting in the unique Yugoslav socialist self-management system. How women and the AFŽ responded to these changes as well as how perception of the KPJ towards women was altered by the surrounding context is particularly important in understanding how women were involved in this tumultuous period of power consolidation.

Through my analysis, I hope to better understand how socialist Yugoslavia was created, constructed, and implemented and how women contributed to the state-building project. Ultimately, we know that the Yugoslav state-building project failed, and culminated with the country's disintegration amid a bloody and brutal conflict in the 1990s. Without taking a teleological view of the country being destined for failure, I will evaluate how the KPJ imagined state-building and women's roles in that project. My paper will not try to judge the success or failures of the state-building project; my discussion aims to make room for further investigation and scholarship regarding women, Yugoslavia, and state-building.

³⁰Sarah Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. (London: Routledge, 2000), 8; Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 74.

Archives Consulted

I conducted my primary research at the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, Serbia, and the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in June 2023. At the Archive of Yugoslavia, I examined the collection of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front, mainly looking at the publications from the Congresses and Plenums produced by the federal level of the organization. I also studied the folder which contained communications and publications of the Bosnia and Herzegovina branch of the AFŽ as well as a folder with the materials of AFŽ's Central Committee (Centralni Odbor). At the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I reviewed the museum's collection on the AFŽ, consisting of three boxes with varying materials, including biographies of women killed during the war, political essays, and lists of women interned, killed, or tortured by the various occupation forces. The museum was previously known as the Museum of the National Liberation Movement during the socialist period and it was during this time the collection was established, therefore almost all of the sources were from the Second World War. The final archive I utilized in my research was the online Archive of the Anti-Fascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia created by CRVENA. All of my documents were in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, except one which was in French, and I conducted the translations myself.

I recognize that the documents offer a particular perspective on the involvement of women of both the AFŽ and larger Yugoslav society at the time. All archives I examined were collected and curated within the Yugoslav socialist period, meaning that they would have likely been screened by those involved with the KPJ. Furthermore, as most of the federal-level documents were concerned with broader policies, I have little information about the ground-level work of the AFŽ. However, I still believe that these documents provide vital insight to how the

KPJ viewed women in the state-building project and reflect how women of the AFŽ saw themselves within this project.

Throughout my thesis, I will balance these different perspectives while discussing how both the KPJ and AFŽ related to larger Yugoslav society at the time. Given that most of my archival documents were created and/or collected by central authorities within the KPJ or AFŽ, they mainly represent the opinions of the upper levels of political power in Yugoslavia. I hope to better understand how the tasks set forward by the political elite affected women in Yugoslavia at all levels, reading against the grain of their information and reports.

As I interrogated these documents, I looked at the motivations of the speakers and also focused heavily on the broader political and social context in order to better understand the goals that the KPJ and AFŽ hoped to achieve. Since many of the documents I read clearly stated the intended goals of the Party and AFŽ, I used the surrounding context from secondary sources in order to understand how these intentions fit into the larger Yugoslav postwar state-building project. It is important to acknowledge that as is inherent with archival research, there will be unavoidable silences in my paper but I will do my best to counter the silences within the work of the AFŽ and KPJ.

Chapter Outline

In my first chapter, I interrogate the relationship between the AFŽ and KPJ. In order to understand the connections between the two, I discuss the structure of the AFŽ both within the KPJ's apparati as well as the structure of the AFŽ, highlighting the importance the KPJ placed on structure in establishing control. I also discuss the women involved in the AFŽ, arguing that the elitist and paternalistic nature of the leadership ensured that the women most involved in the organization were those with strong ties to the Party. As a result, I argue that there was little

room or desire for the AFŽ to maneuver outside of the goals of the KPJ in the immediate postwar period.

My second chapter seeks to analyze how the KPJ saw the AFŽ's role in the immediate post war Yugoslav state-building project. Using the speeches given by Josip Broz Tito at the First, Second, and Third Congresses of the AFŽ, I contend that Tito and the KPJ, in their rhetoric, looked to include the women of Yugoslavia in the state-building project as active participants. Their rhetoric did not come from a place of sincere desire for gender equality however, even as the new constitution legally enshrined the equality of men and women. The inclusion of women in Yugoslav state-building was done to achieve the Party's political goals of consolidating their power, establishing a loyal citizenry, and rebuilding the economy. As the goals of the KPJ changed, so did its perception of women's place in the Yugoslav state. Within these changing goals, women's role as mothers and child-rearers continued to be important and women remained relegated to a patriarchal framework.

My third chapter focuses on the structure of the AFŽ and how the organization saw its role within the Yugoslav state-building project. In particular I highlight the importance that the idea of motherhood played in the organization, reflecting on how this emphasis was part of a larger trend towards the reconstruction of the family and country in the postwar period. I also enlighten on how the AFŽ challenged traditional norms by pushing for women's political and economic involvement.

I conclude by arguing that although the AFŽ played a vital role in the state-building project which initially shifted beyond the traditional roles assigned to women, it was ultimately because the AFŽ was expedient to the Communist Party. When the goals of the Party changed and women were no longer necessary for economic or political mobilization, their status as

mothers and caretakers remained central, confining women again to traditional patriarchal domestic roles. Eventually, the KPJ no longer found it valuable to have a women's organization at all, the AFŽ was officially disbanded in 1953, with the KPJ having firmly established its power.

Chapter One - The Paternalistic Party: the Relationship between the KPJ and AFŽ

In order to understand the relationship of the AFŽ to the larger state-building project of the Communist Party, it is necessary to investigate how the organization was structured. The AFŽ's ability to mobilize and act was defined not only by its organizational structure but also its ability to maneuver within the Yugoslav political system. Considering both the structure of the AFŽ at the organizational level, as well as in the larger Communist Party apparatus, the AFŽ's deep entrenchment in the party's system and control becomes apparent.

Throughout the tenure of the AFŽ, the organization was tightly connected and controlled by the KPJ. In the immediate postwar period, the AFŽ was one of the organizations under the KPJ-controlled mass organization, the People's Front (NF). Situated under the NF, the AFŽ became even more absorbed into the KPJ's system of power. The AFŽ's own structure even mimicked that of the KPJ, highlighting the close control the KPJ exerted on the organization. Beyond the structural command of the organization, the individuals involved in the AFŽ also had strong personal or political ties to the KPJ. The top leadership of the AFŽ were largely KPJ activists who had political positions in the Yugoslav government, and one leader, Mitra Mitrović-Đilas, was married to a top leader of the KPJ. As a result of the elitist nature of the AFŽ leadership, the peasant women whom they aimed to help were largely disengaged from the organization. Overall, the relationship between the KPJ and AFŽ was extremely close, leaving little space for the AFŽ to move outside of the goals of the Party.

The Structure of the AFŽ

The origins of the AFŽ were rooted in the KPJ's desire to standardize mobilization in support of the Partisan movement throughout the occupied country, as a way of ensuring communist power and control. The AFŽ was first created in Croatia in 1941, as an initiative of

the Croatian wing of the Communist Party and until the conference at Bosanski Petrovac, the organization operated only in Croatia.³¹ With the establishment of a country-wide AFŽ, the Party believed that the organization would mobilize women across Yugoslavia.³² Furthermore, it would be easier for the KPJ to control the AFŽ if the organization was more centralized, providing greater ability for regulation and supervision. Jelena Batinić argues that the creation of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia was part of a larger desire of the KPJ to consolidate its mass organizations after the creation of the Anti-Facist Council of Peoples of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in November 1942.³³ While AVNOJ was organized and set up by the KPJ, it gave the council “a very broad programme, with which almost everybody could identify,” seeking to unify Yugoslavs around anti-fascism, and not necessarily communism.³⁴

The AVNOJ’s inception was similar to other ‘popular front’ movements across Europe, a tactic originally pushed by Bulgarian communist leader and Comintern General Secretary Georgi Dimitrov to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935.³⁵ Dimitrov proposed creating ‘popular front’ coalition organizations with other anti-fascist groups in order to combat rising fascism in Europe.³⁶ The ‘popular front’ push of Dimitrov was revived again during the Second World War, as a way for communist parties to work with other organizations to fight fascist occupation.³⁷ While Tito was reluctant to cooperate with other resistance groups in Yugoslavia, AVNOJ was his compromise to the Soviet government, which had been pushing Tito to create an

³¹Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 92.

³²Ibid, 94.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Tommaso Piffer, “Stalin, the Western Allies and Soviet Policy towards the Yugoslav Partisan Movement, 1941–4,” In *Journal of Contemporary History* 54 no. 2, (2019), 427.

³⁵Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism, 1917-1991*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 78.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid, 129.

anti-fascist coalition.³⁸ In the Soviet case, the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee had been formed in 1941 in response to the start of the war in the USSR and German aggression, in order for women to organize against fascist Nazi Germany; as well as to appeal to women across the world to join to the anti-facist struggle.³⁹ While the AFŽ did exist on a local scale before the Soviet push for a popular front in Yugoslavia, KPJ officials likely looked to the Soviet example for mobilizing women within its own interests. Ultimately, the country-wide creation of the AFŽ was born from the desire of the KPJ to both appeal to Soviet power and organize their control over the resistance to the occupation.

The creation of the Yugoslavia-wide AFŽ was also a deliberate move by the KPJ to further their armed struggle and political goals by bringing women into the resistance activities. During the war, the AFŽ was motivated by a “dual function” as articulated by Batinić, both mobilizing women for the support of the Partisan armed resistance as well as preparing women for the creation of a new socialist country.⁴⁰ Therefore, along with actions such as collecting money and supplies for the Partisans, the organization also carried out literacy campaigns and held “political courses” to prepare women for political life in the new socialist country that the KPJ aimed to establish.⁴¹ However, in the eyes of the KPJ, the AFŽ could only carry out actions within the system that the KPJ controlled, and they refused to allow them to work autonomously from the Party.

In January 1944, barely over a year into its existence, the KPJ issued a directive reprimanding the AFŽ for becoming too independent from the Party's system.⁴² According to

³⁸Tommaso Piffer, “Stalin, the Western Allies and Soviet Policy towards the Yugoslav Partisan Movement, 1941–4,” 427.

³⁹Melaine Ilic, “Soviet women, cultural exchange and the Women's International Democratic Federation” in *Reassessing the Cold War*, eds. Sari Autio-Saraso and Katalin Miklóssy. (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 158.

⁴⁰Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 98.

⁴¹Ibid, 99, 102.

⁴²Ibid, 118.

Batinić, the KPJ listed a number of problems with the structure of the AFŽ including the organization creating its own “apparatus of offices, instructors, and functionaries,” establishing a new “women's group” within the Party, and putting the AFŽ before Partisan institutions.⁴³ Clearly, the KPJ became worried about the supposed independence of the AFŽ and the creation of a group of women which was more loyal to the AFŽ than to the Partisan movement. Batinić notes that it was not the case that the AFŽ challenged the KPJ, but rather that the party was frightened by “the *very possibility* of the [AFŽ's] organizational independence.”⁴⁴ As a result, the KPJ called for a complete reorganization of the AFŽ which resulted in the organization's further subservience to the KPJ and transferring the work of the organization “into the hands of the party, national-liberation councils, and other mass organizations.”⁴⁵ The KPJ's reorganization of the AFŽ reflected how the Party saw structure as synonymous with control, thus any attempts at autonomy were immediately shut down. In the postwar period, the KPJ would continue to assert tight control over the structure of the AFŽ in order to prevent any further attempts at autonomy.

Both as the war came to an end, and after the occupation was over, the Communist Party consolidated its power using mechanisms it had employed during the war. AVNOJ was renamed to the People's Front (NF), which the Communist Party used as a front to entrench its power within the Yugoslav system.⁴⁶ With its roots in AVNOJ and the ‘popular front’ movement, the NF was structured as a mass organization which incorporated many organizations and political parties that were allies of the KPJ.⁴⁷ While the Communist Party was technically one of the many organizations “within” the NF, in reality it controlled the mass organization.⁴⁸ While the AFŽ was technically an organization equal in status to the KPJ within the NF, truthfully it was

⁴³Ibid, 118-119.

⁴⁴Ibid, 120.

⁴⁵Ibid, 122.

⁴⁶Geoffrey Swain and Nigel Swain, *Eastern Europe since 1945*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 23.

⁴⁷Željko Šuster, *Historical Dictionary of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, 212.

⁴⁸Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 162.

subservient to the KPJ. In the 1945 elections for the Constituent Assembly, Yugoslavs were given the option to either vote for the NF or a blank space (meaning no real opposition), resulting in the NF winning the election by a wide margin.⁴⁹ The KPJ therefore had essentially elected itself into power with the NF taking control of the Constituent Assembly, therefore ensuring its one-party rule for decades to come.

The connections between the NF, KPJ, and AFŽ ensured that the KPJ was able to exercise tight control over the AFŽ and its actions. Not only were the organization's goals and policies dictated by the KPJ, but its members were also tied to the NF and by extension the KPJ. The Second Article of the Statute of the AFŽ from 1948 clearly states the members of the AFŽ are members of the People's Front.⁵⁰ Through the organization's statutes, we can understand that the place of the AFŽ within the People's Front defined the organization's role in society and its uses for members. The AFŽ did not stand alone but rather was heavily involved with the NF and as a result the KPJ. While women could join the AFŽ out of the desire to improve the position of women in Yugoslav society, they could not do so without joining the NF, and by extension providing greater legitimacy to the KPJ.

Within the AFŽ, the organization was structured among a series of bodies meeting at the local, republic, and federal levels. At the lowest level, were the AFŽ bodies of villages, cities, and counties, which were composed of individual members. Beyond the more local level AFŽ sections were the republic level AFŽ organs. Each of the six republics in Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia), had a federal Congress of the AFŽ composed of delegates from the local level AFŽ bodies. These Congresses would then elect the Republic Central Committees of the AFŽ, which were the executive body for the

⁴⁹Zeljan Šuster, *Historical Dictionary of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, 212.

⁵⁰Anti-Fascist Women's Front, "Statut Antifašističkog Fronta Žena Jugoslavije." [Statute of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 6.

organization within these republics. Figure 2 illustrates the hierarchical nature in which the AFŽ was organized. According to the AFŽ’s Statue from 1948, the Republic Congresses were allowed to have at most 150 delegates and Executive Committees held at most 30 members.⁵¹ The largest body of the AFŽ was the federal level Congress, which met at least once every two years and had over 200 members. The federal AFŽ Congress would then elect the Federal Central Committee of the AFŽ, which was the main governing body of the organization, and had at most 40 members.⁵² Although the Central Committees were elected, Jelena Batinić notes that during the war, these elections were largely staged events, with party-designated candidates.⁵³ While it is clear that the KPJ had tight control over the AFŽ, Batinić remarks, “there was some, if limited, room for authentic expression and spontaneous input from below,” showing some space existed in the AFŽ for the women involved to provide their own thoughts, as peasant women would often interrupt speeches with their thoughts and questions.⁵⁴



Figure 2. Structure of the AFŽ.

⁵¹Ibid, 7.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid, 94.

⁵⁴Ibid.

The hierarchy of power within the AFŽ mimicked the political structure of the KPJ. According to Jure Gašparič, the highest body of the KPJ was technically the federal Congress, which was hierarchically placed above republican Congresses.⁵⁵ In between the periods when Congresses were held, which was about every four years, the party was ruled by a Central Committee, which elected an executive body that was the decision making body of the KPJ.⁵⁶ The identical systems of the KPJ and AFŽ are no accident, highlighting how deep of an influence the KPJ had on the AFŽ. The structural independence of the AFŽ during the war signaled to the KPJ that the organization could move away from the control of the KPJ. Therefore KPJ later ensured that the AFŽ would not assert independence by establishing parallel structures and the AFŽ in turn was able to signal its devotion to and dependence on the Party.

Through the structure of the AFŽ and its place within the larger KPJ apparati, both during the war and in the postwar period, it is clear that the KPJ asserted strong control over the organization. The KPJ's structural control of the AFŽ was paternalistic, as the Party encouraged the mobilization of women solely under the restriction of its own political system. While the structure may have allowed for some expression of personal opinion at the local levels as Batinić writes, at the top levels of the AFŽ, there were strong connections between the leadership of the organization and the KPJ which unified the goals of the two bodies. By looking more closely at the women involved in the AFŽ, we can better understand the communist influence over the organization and the goals of the women of the AFŽ.

⁵⁵Jure Gašparič, "The Yugoslav Federation and the Concept of One Ruling Party in its Final Hour." in *Parties as Governments in Eurasia, 1913–1991: Nationalism, Socialism, and Development*, eds. Ivan Sablin and Egas Moniz Bandeira. (London: Routledge, 2022), 299.

⁵⁶Ibid, 300.

The Women of the AFŽ

The KPJ's strong connections with the AFŽ did not stop at the structural level, but encompassed the individual women involved in the organization. The leaders of the AFŽ were often deeply involved with the Party either through personal connections or political appointments. Batinić, in her analysis of AFŽ during the Second World War, points out that the highest levels of the AFŽ were run by largely elite prewar communist activists.⁵⁷ This wartime trend continued in the state-building period, as the many of the same women who controlled the AFŽ during the war continued to do so in the immediate postwar period.

One of the main leaders of the AFŽ, Vida Tomšić, was a high ranking member of the Communist Party. In a record from the Second Congress, Tomšić was listed as the "President of the Control Commission of Slovenia," an important communist political body.⁵⁸ Tomšić joined the KPJ in 1934, which at the time was an illegal organization.⁵⁹ During the war, Tomšić mobilized for the National Liberation Movement, and in December 1941, she was arrested along with her husband by Italian and German police.⁶⁰ While Vida Tomšić was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment and sent to prison in Italy, her husband was executed.⁶¹ Another key figure in the AFŽ, Mitra Mitrović-Đilas, was deeply connected to the Yugoslav communist elite. She was listed in the Second Congress as the Minister of Education of Serbia, and notably, her husband at the time was Milovan Đilas, one of the top leaders of the Communist Party.⁶² Cana Babović,

⁵⁷Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 97.

⁵⁸Anti-Fascist Women's Front, "Plenum Centralnog Odbora AFŽ-a." [Plenum of the Central Committee of the AFŽ] *II Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 884.

⁵⁹Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi, "Vida Tomšić" in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*. (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 575.

⁶⁰Ibid, 576.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Anti-Fascist Women's Front, "Plenum Centralnog Odbora AFŽ-a," 883; Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Revolutionary Networks. Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957)", (Ph.D., Universiteit Utrecht, 2012), 125.

another key AFŽ figure, was listed in the same document as Minister of Labor of the Republic of Serbia, another major political position.⁶³ Other political occupations that women of the AFŽ were listed as having included President of the Committee of Higher Education under the Federal Government of Serbia, President for the Committee for Secondary and Vocational Schools of Sarajevo, Inspector of the Control Commission of Belgrade, and President of the Central Committee of Macedonia.⁶⁴ The record from the Second Congress lists over 171 women, the overwhelming majority of whom were not listed as having a political occupation, but nevertheless it is telling that the main leaders of the organization were those who had strong ties to the KPJ.

Tomšić, Mitrović-Đilas, and other AFŽ leaders, as Communist Party activists, did not seek independence from the Communist Party for the AFŽ to implement its own goals. We can imagine that Tomšić and the other key leaders did not desire separation between the goals of the KPJ and AFŽ because to them, the goals were one and the same, or rather that the AFŽ was subservient to the KPJ. In a report from 1945, Tomšić argued, “Everyone, without exception, especially we, women, will give initiatives, cooperate, carry out everything that the state does, in a word, with our initiative, activity, get involved in the care organized by the state, which is the embodiment of our common will.”⁶⁵ It is clear that Tomšić’s ultimate loyalty was to the communist state, and therefore the Party which controlled the state. The AFŽ does not exist independently of the desires of the party-state but rather to implement those desires, not only to further the emancipation of women.

⁶³Anti-Fascist Women’s Front, “Plenum Centralnog Odbora AFŽ-a,” 882.

⁶⁴Ibid, 883-885.

⁶⁵Vida Tomšić, “Socijalno Staranje Kao Jedan od Najvažnijih Zadataka Anti-Fašističkog Front Žena u Obnovi Zemlje.” [Social Care as One of the Most Important Tasks of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front Renewal of the Country] *I Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1945), 127.

Looking at Tomšić's later writings, we can understand that her ideology of women's emancipation was intrinsically linked to the emancipation of workers. In her report, "Woman in the Development of Socialist Self-Managing Yugoslavia" from 1980, which was "prepared at the request of the UN Secretariat on the 'Women and Development,'" Tomšić wrote, "the struggle for the realization of equality between men and women, the struggle for changing their consciousness, is not so much the struggle for "equal rights" but rather for the emancipation of man and his labor."⁶⁶ For most of her political career Tomšić felt the liberation of women would happen as a result of communist revolution, not through the implementation of separate goals to achieve equality. It is understandable that Tomšić would seek to advance the agenda of the KPJ rather than an individual agenda for the AFŽ, as ultimately in her view, the Party and the revolution would bring about the emancipation that she hoped to achieve for women. For Tomšić, the AFŽ existed as an organization subservient to the KPJ, which would be responsible for bringing about the revolution.

Tomšić's ideological commitment to the Party is one that many women under communist regimes either shared, or found to be a source of difficulty. Alfred G. Meyer points out that for female Marxist leaders there was often a choice between feminist ideology and communist support, writing "once women were in the movement, they either had to play down or altogether forget whatever feminist ideas they had had before, or else they found themselves highly suspect, and many of them were eliminated from the Marxist movement in due course."⁶⁷ Meyer provides a binary where women either must suppress their feminist ideology or they would become perceived enemies of the Party. The women of the AFŽ to a certain extent fit this binary as the KPJ was wary of the organization asserting too much autonomy from the Party. However,

⁶⁶Vida Tomšić, *Woman in the Development of Socialist Self-Managing Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Jugoslovenski pregled, 1980), 5, 64-65.

⁶⁷Alfred G. Meyer, "Feminism, Socialism, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe," 19.

Meyer's binary overlooks the desires of leaders like Tomšić to follow the Party, as he automatically assumes that their feminist ideology immediately put them in opposition to the Party. Instead Tomšić and other AFŽ leaders saw the realization of the communist revolution at the hands of the KPJ as what would bring about their goals of women's liberation. Decades into socialist Yugoslavia, long after the dissolution of the AFŽ, Tomšić was still deeply entrenched in the KPJ and viewed the Party as the mechanism to bring about women's liberation.

The AFŽ was not intended to be an organization solely for the female communist elite, but aimed to incorporate as many women as possible, categorizing itself as a mass organization which had open membership to all women in Yugoslavia. According to the 1948 Statute, members to the organization could be "every woman who enjoys civil and voting rights in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, adopts the program of the People's Front and statute of the AFŽ, and the work of the other organization's programs of the People's Front."⁶⁸ The statute made clear that every Yugoslav woman was welcome to join the AFŽ, but membership was contingent on whether they were willing to support both the program of the NF as well as the work of the other organizations involved in the NF. This condition emphasized the importance of the AFŽ in the larger NF structure. The women joining the organization did not solely join for the cause of liberation but to become absorbed in the larger NF organism. The conditional status of women joining the organization reflected how the level of leadership often was correlated with political alignment and activism.

However, the extent of women's involvement in the organization depended on the level that their body occupied within the organization's hierarchy. According to Bonfiglioli, rank-and-file members who made up local AFŽ sections were largely elderly villagers who had

⁶⁸Anti-Fascist Women's Front, "Statut Antifašističkog Fronta Žena Jugoslavije," 6

lost family members during the war.⁶⁹ While the local bodies of the AFŽ relied on volunteers, both the republic and federal level committees hired paid-workers.⁷⁰ In a report on the structural organization of the AFŽ from 1948, the AFŽ pointed out the struggles it faced to connect with rural women. The report remarked that regarding the organization's influence in villages, it was only in villages which had strong connections to the liberation movement during the Second World War that there was a strong AFŽ presence.⁷¹

Meanwhile in cities, the organization noted that its membership largely consisted of the same women who were already employed by or volunteered for the organization, with little recruitment of new members. Overall, the report concluded that “the organization of the AFŽ did not penetrate into the most backward women, but rather it remained for the most part with advanced women – activists.”⁷² The language of the report reflects the elitism that the AFŽ leaders held, seeing themselves as advanced women and those who they sought to mobilize as backward. The AFŽ's perspective on the “backward” women of Yugoslavia, similarly parallels how the KPJ looked at the AFŽ in a paternalistic manner, seeing a marginalized group as something to mobilize but without serious consideration towards the desires and goals of that community.

Batinić highlights a similar problem which occurred during the AFŽ's wartime tenure, discussing the “cultural gap” which existed, “between female party members who were the leaders of the women's front and the masses of peasant women below them.”⁷³ Batinić elaborates on the “cultural gap” noting that the largely older and illiterate peasantry had little in common

⁶⁹Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," 6.

⁷⁰Lydia Sklevicky, “Emancipated integration or integrated emancipation: the case of post-revolutionary Yugoslavia,” 99.

⁷¹Anti-Fascist Women's Front, “Predlog po Nekim Organizacionim Pitanje AFŽ.” [Proposal for Organizational Questions AFŽ] (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 56.

⁷²Ibid, 58.

⁷³Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 103.

with the educated, urban, young communist activists of the AFŽ leadership. The peasant women often viewed the AFŽ leaders as “city dwellers with suspicion and mistrust.”⁷⁴ Meanwhile, according to Batinić, the urban young women of the AFŽ had little knowledge of village life or even how to communicate with peasantry women.⁷⁵

Further evaluating on the “cultural gap” within the AFŽ and KPJ, Bonfiglioli is critical of the perspective put forth by Batinić. She asserts Batinić's argument that the Partisans were able to co-opt the daily needs of peasant and illiterate women in order to mobilize them ignores the many changes that were brought forth by the AFŽ, focusing on the Party alone. She argues that such historical work conceals “that new opportunities for political engagement appeared and work that offer the masses of women the opportunity to choose and enable an unusual generational break in the self-determination of women as citizens and workers.”⁷⁶ In an attempt to challenge this historiography, Bonfiglioli brings forth several examples of women who came from peasant, or otherwise perceived as “backward,” backgrounds, who in turn attempted to provide similar opportunities for women through the AFŽ. Bonfiglioli’s focuses on more local leaders in the AFŽ and as a result, loses sight of the overarching paternalistic and elitist approach of the organization. The women Bonfiglioli discusses are certainly part of the narrative of the AFŽ, however so are the elite women who ran the AFŽ at its highest levels and looked down on many of the women they believed they were helping.

The disconnect between the top leadership of the AFŽ and the women they sought to help clearly continued after the war and was pervasive in the organization. In 1948, three years after the end of the war, the organization was still struggling to move beyond the standpoint of its Communist, activist elite, and effectively integrate the peasant women of Yugoslavia. The

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Biografije Aktivistkinja AFŽ-A: Intersekcionalna Analiza Ženskog Djelovanja,” 22.

disjuncture between the AFŽ's leadership and the peasant women who they sought to mobilize may have contributed to the short tenure of the organization. Had more peasant women been involved in the organization, they may have tried to fight its dissolution by the KPJ, or tried to continue the work of the organization beyond its tenure.

Structure was an important feature used by the KPJ to assert control and ensure that the AFŽ would not attempt to work independently from the Party. By examining the structure of the AFŽ both organizationally and within the larger KPJ apparatus, it is clear that in the immediate postwar period, the KPJ asserted paternalistic control over the AFŽ. Beyond the structure of the AFŽ, the KPJ also significantly influenced the leadership of the organization, as most of the women involved in the higher levels of the organization were intricately tied to the Party. Therefore there was little space for the AFŽ to move outside the goals of the KPJ in the immediate postwar period, and as Tomšić's words demonstrate, there was little desire to do so by AFŽ leadership. By observing how the KPJ saw the AFŽ's role in the state-building project, we can understand the constraints within which the organization existed.

Chapter Two - Constructing New Yugoslavia: The Role of the AFŽ in the Communist Party's

Yugoslav State-Building Project

Yugoslav society was deeply patriarchal as men dominated political, economic, and social structures in the country. Family organization was central to social and economic life, which resulted in a strict division of labor along gender lines.⁷⁷ Since Yugoslavia was a diverse country, the status of women varied by economic status, geographical location, and more. However, in general, women were not considered equal to men, and their work was largely relegated to the home. Under the 1921 Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia women were not granted the right to vote, and women were barred from many professions including practicing law and running for office or serving in government positions.⁷⁸ Women were mainly inactive in revolutionary movements and in the male-dominated Communist Party of Yugoslavia.⁷⁹ Overall, there was little to no political, economic, or social equality for women in prewar and interwar Yugoslavia.

The Second World War, however, saw a dramatic change in the position of women, many of whom became heavily involved in the anti-fascist resistance movement. 100,000 of the 800,000 Partisan troops which fought under the KPJ during the Second World War were women.⁸⁰ The AFŽ was created during the war in order to mobilize Yugoslav women for the communist Partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito, an army general who was the face and leader of the Communist Party, both during and after the war. The Partisans mainly fought against the

⁷⁷Susan L. Woodward, "The Rights of Women: Ideology, Policy, and Social Change in Yugoslavia" in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, eds. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 240

⁷⁸Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*. (Denver: Arden Press INC, 1990), 27.

⁷⁹Ibid, 25.

⁸⁰Sabrina Ramet, "In Tito's Time," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 93.

Croatian fascist puppet-state controlled by the national Croat militia known as the Ustaša that had occupied the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

With the victory of the Partisans and the assumption of power by the KPJ, the position of women in Yugoslavia became an item on the agenda of the Partisans. The 1946 Yugoslav Constitution transformed the lives of women as the country emerged from the previous monarchical system. For the first time in Yugoslav history, there was constitutionally established equality between men and women. Article 24 of the Constitution clearly states, “Women are equal to men in all areas of state, economic, and socio-political life.”⁸¹ Building upon the general statement of equality, the article also guaranteed women equal pay as well as paid maternity leave both before and after birth.⁸² Further legal reforms in support of women rights were introduced in the immediate postwar period including the expansion of divorce rights and the establishment of equal rights between children born out of wedlock and those born to married women.⁸³ However, even as the legal rights of women were expanded, abortion remained illegal in cases other than strict medical necessity until 1951, with high legal punishment.⁸⁴

With the new legally codified rights of women, the AFŽ took a new position, different from its war-time placement, as the AFŽ became a key organization for the mobilization of women in the Yugoslav state-building project.⁸⁵ In the immediate postwar period, in his speeches to the AFŽ, Marshal Josip Broz Tito, the leader of Yugoslavia, argued that the women of Yugoslavia would be active participants in the state-building project. However, Tito continuously emphasized that the most important responsibility of Yugoslav women was education, given their roles as mothers and their proximity to children within the home. Even as Tito and the KPJ

⁸¹Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, “Ustav” [Constitution], (Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1946), 10.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 217.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Lydia Sklevicky, “Emancipated integration or integrated emancipation: the case of post-revolutionary Yugoslavia,” 94.

looked to mobilize women, his addresses framed their mobilization as an extension of their traditional maternal and domestic roles. In this chapter, I examine speeches given by Tito to the AFŽ at the First, Second, and Third Congresses of the organization, taking place respectively in 1945, 1948, and 1950, in order to understand the KPJ's conceptualization of the AFŽ's role in the state-building project. I argue that the placement of women within the state-building project did not seek to challenge patriarchal norms but instead operated within them, as the Party did not strive to achieve gender equality as codified in the Constitution, but rather only aimed to implement its own goals of political consolidation, economic rebuilding, and creating a new socialist Yugoslavia.

Tito's First Speech to the AFŽ Congress

In Tito's speech to the First Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia in June 1945, he set out the KPJ's agenda for the new Yugoslavia. Tito was speaking to a population of women who were part of a new country with a completely different political system than its predecessor and had been devastated by a brutal and bloody war. In the speech, Tito mentioned that the AFŽ was the first organization in the Yugoslav community to hold a Congress after the end of the war.⁸⁶ Therefore, Tito was not only setting forward the important tasks of the AFŽ in his speech, but also looked to set a broader course for the new country he was leading. Tito outlined four tasks he believed to be the most important for the AFŽ: "consolidating the power of our people; the education of children, our young generations, our future generations; strengthening brotherhood and unity; and constructing our country."⁸⁷

Tito elaborated on the first task, the consolidation of power within the country, by issuing a rallying call to the women of the AFŽ, urging the women to help in a way "that will clean those

⁸⁶Josip Broz Tito, "Maršal Tito o Novim Zadacima Žena." [Marshall Tito on New Tasks for Women] *I Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1945), 52.

⁸⁷Ibid.

who interfere in the consolidation of power!”⁸⁸ Coming out of a war fought by multiple parties within the territory that now made up the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia,⁸⁹ Tito and the KPJ faced a fractured country where other political and military groups still sought to challenge the Party’s power. Tito’s call to action for the women of Yugoslavia to help consolidate power reflected his desire to utilize all KPJ support in order to prevent dissenting groups from gaining influence. Tito’s use of the word “clean” is particularly telling, as it holds a strong violent connotation. By using “clean,” Tito meant to remove completely, potentially alluding to death. The KPJ was not against using violence to stifle dissent, as noted by historian John Lampe, “The execution or trial of wartime opponents, all painted in the villainous black that only the Croatian Ustaša and Ljotić’s smaller Serbian movement deserved, set a precedent for the intimidation or arrest of all political opponents.”⁹⁰ While Tito may not have been calling on these women to kill remaining enemies, he was making clear the power and influence of the KPJ and the possible lengths it would go to in order to ensure their power.

In the speech, Tito was particularly consumed by potential enemies within Yugoslavia that could threaten the new state. The enemies that Tito argued threatened the consolidation of power of the KPJ were the same enemies who threatened “bratstvo i jedinstvo” (“brotherhood and unity”) within Yugoslavia. Tito’s call for the protection of “brotherhood and unity” was particularly important as the slogan was a key part of new socialist Yugoslav messaging.⁹¹ The Second World War in Yugoslavia was brutal, and competing nationalisms had been used in order to justify ethnic cleansing and mass murder. In contrast to the nationalist Ustaša and Četnik militias that preached ethno-religious nationalism, the Communist Party sought to build a

⁸⁸Ibid, 53.

⁸⁹The Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was later referred to as the Socialist People’s Republic of Yugoslavia but in the discussion of this paper it will be referred to as the Federal People’s Republic.

⁹⁰John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 226.

⁹¹Josip Broz Tito, “Maršal Tito o Novim Zadacima Žena,” 53.

coalition between the various ethnic groups of Yugoslavia. “Brotherhood and unity” was part of a larger effort to forge a new Yugoslav identity rather than identities based in ethno-religious or ethno-linguistic groups. As historian Hilde Haug articulates, “brotherhood and unity” looked to replace ethnic-nationalist loyalty with patriotism towards the new Yugoslav state.⁹² Tito called on the women of the AFŽ to display greater patriotism towards the new Yugoslavia, urging them to defend “brotherhood and unity.”

While Tito’s call to protect “brotherhood and unity” in this speech was specific to women, they were excluded from the imagined fabric of Yugoslav as the emphasis was on brotherhood as a male-centric concept. Tito urged the country’s women to action, saying, “Fight against everyone who sows hate against our peoples. That is the duty of all (female) Croats, Serbs, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and others, that is your task.”⁹³ Notably, Tito called on individual ethnic groups to stop ethno-nationalism. In his call out to each group, he used the female nouns, not the general ethnic group noun. Tito was arguing that as women of these ethnic groups, and not just as Yugoslavs, it was their duty to stop hatred. He was not above engaging in ethnic distinctions, if they were used in order to prevent hatred and support the “brotherhood and unity” of the Yugoslav state-building project. Even as they were called to defend it, the term “brotherhood and unity” excluded women from the imagined fabric of Yugoslav as it relegated a key pillar of Yugoslav identity to men alone, leaving out women from the imagined belonging of the country.

After Tito discussed the tasks of consolidating power and strengthening “brotherhood and unity,” he then invoked the importance of educating youth, emphasizing the special role that women play in this task. Tito framed the role of education in particular as a role unique to

⁹²Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership, and the National Question* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 122.

⁹³Josip Broz Tito, “Maršal Tito o Novim Zadacima Žena,” 55.

women, as they largely stay at home, raising children. Tito assigned what he deemed to be an extremely important role of education and indoctrination to the women of Yugoslavia. Tito spoke to the mothers and sisters of Yugoslavia, to ensure that “our children from an early age are brought up in a new spirit; in a spirit of love for our new homeland, our Yugoslavia and love for that great asset of brotherhood and unity, the new regime and more.”⁹⁴ Haug argues that the KPJ looked to develop the “social consciousness” of Yugoslavia through education, and sought to transfuse party ideology throughout society.⁹⁵ Tito expected Yugoslav women to contribute to this development of a “social consciousness” by educating their children to be loyal to the country and to the KPJ with the zeal expected of a military mission, declaring that “our children should have instilled in their souls the kind of love that our soldiers carried on the battlefield.”⁹⁶

The final important task, on which Tito only briefly elaborated, was the construction of the new Yugoslavia. Devastated by the Second World War and on the cusp of a revolutionary economic transformation to socialism, Yugoslavia’s postwar economy faced significant hurdles. The KPJ, looking to implement rapid industrialization, required labor in high numbers, and women represented untapped potential. According to Barbara Jančar-Webster, in 1939 before the start of the war, only 28 percent of the women in Yugoslavia were employed in the labor force.⁹⁷ Given that such a large number of Yugoslav women had previously been inactive in the labor force, these women presented a major population of workers whose labor power could help build the new socialist Yugoslavia and facilitate rapid industrialization. Tito’s call for the AFŽ to mobilize women for constructing the country came from the desire to gain as large a work force as possible. Tito argued that “economic uplifting of our country, the construction of our country,

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership, and the National Question*, 123.

⁹⁶Josip Broz Tito, “Maršal Tito o Novim Zadacima Žena,” 55.

⁹⁷Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 19.

is a problem to which all citizens of our country must dedicate all their energies.”⁹⁸ While Tito did not elaborate significantly on what specific labors women should perform to uplift the country, he made it clear that Yugoslav women should be active participants in both the reconstructing and economic transformation of the country.

Overall, Tito’s speech to the first Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia reflected his desire for the AFŽ to help bolster support for the KPJ after the end of intense internal conflict, while also relying on women’s traditional roles within the home. He called on the women of Yugoslavia to be active in augmenting the power of the state and reifying the loyalty of current Yugoslavs, children, and future generations to the regime. While Tito did call on the women of AFŽ to be active participants in the process of state-building, their main roles were still rooted in patriarchal conceptions of women’s care in the domestic sphere. To Tito, the AFŽ was a mechanism through which the KPJ could entrench their power and further their political and economic goals, and he sought to mobilize women within the prevailing gender roles of the time.

Tito’s Speech to the Second Congress

In Tito’s address to the AFŽ at the Second Congress, held in January 1948, he relied on the same rhetoric of the importance of women in the home, educating the future generation of Yugoslavs. The speech began with Tito commending the AFŽ and the women of Yugoslavia for their work since the previous Congress, citing the “the huge service of our women in constructing our country.”⁹⁹ However, Tito’s tone quickly shifted and he began to criticize the AFŽ for its failure to fully incorporate all women into its efforts as there were a small number of Yugoslav women who had not joined the workforce. Here Tito even criticized mothers who had

⁹⁸Josip Broz Tito, “Maršal Tito o Novim Zadacima Žena,” 55.

⁹⁹Josip Broz Tito, “Maršal Jugoslavije Josip Broz – Tito.” [Marshall of Yugoslavia – Josip Broz Tito] *II Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 649.

not joined the workforce because of their children, arguing that the care of children is “public work” and should not hold them back.¹⁰⁰

To Tito, the concept of the ‘working woman’ was part of a larger effort to craft an image of a new Yugoslavia. Tito said, “we have to admit that not a small number of women remain on the side of work, and that amount is reprehensible, because it is not a characteristic of new women in new Yugoslavia.”¹⁰¹ Tito wanted the AFŽ to mobilize women economically in order to create “new” women for the “new” nation where women were active participants in the workforce and society, as a way of distinguishing the new Yugoslav from the old. Tea Hadžiristić in her analysis of the AFŽ actions towards Muslim women, highlights the importance of the forging of a “new” Yugoslav woman in order for the regime to distinguish itself from the old.¹⁰² Hadžiristić points out the push for unveiling campaigns were tied to the economic mobilization of women.¹⁰³ Both in Tito’s speech and Hadžiristić’s paper, it is clear that a “new” Yugoslav woman is one who was economically mobilized in support of the socialist regime.

Tito’s further calls for the economic mobilization of women, similar to those in his first speech, took place within a different economic context than that of 1945. While Yugoslavia was no longer facing the same need to reconstruct the country, women’s mobilization was still economically important. In the time between Tito’s first and second speech, Yugoslavia underwent major economic transformation, rapidly rebuilding the infrastructure and industry of the country.¹⁰⁴ However, as Lampe notes, this economic recovery peaked in 1946, before the Yugoslav economy began to face more setbacks.¹⁰⁵ The KPJ, taking after the Soviet model, in

¹⁰⁰Ibid, 650.

¹⁰¹Ibid, 651.

¹⁰²Tea Hadžiristić, “Unveiling Muslim Women in Socialist Yugoslavia: The Body between Socialism, Secularism, and Colonialism,” 185.

¹⁰³Ibid, 193.

¹⁰⁴John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History; Twice there was a country*, 239.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

1947 sought to implement a Five Year Plan of economic development.¹⁰⁶ However, the plan was too ambitious and even by the end of 1947, it became clear to Yugoslav officials that the targets of the plan would not be met.¹⁰⁷ Given the failures of the first year of the Five Year Plan, Tito sought further the economic mobilization of women in order to achieve the demanding goals set forth by the Party's economic advisors. Tito explicitly called on the women of the AFŽ to mobilize the other women in the country for the goals of achieving the Five Year Plan, saying, "You must spare no effort in your work on awakening the consciousness of those women which today still remain on the side instead of being active participants in new historical social transformation with us, in all huge efforts for achieving our five year plan..."¹⁰⁸ Even in a different economic context, the AFŽ and Yugoslav women more broadly, were instrumental in the KPJ's eyes to achieving the economic goals of the Party.

Similar to his rhetoric in the 1945 speech to the AFŽ, Tito discussed at length the importance of education for the children of Yugoslavia. Tito demanded that the women ensure their children were "correctly educated in the spirit of the new Yugoslavia" and that women must take care of the country's children in order for them to become "citizens of our new socialist country."¹⁰⁹ Once again, women's unique placement within society as mothers and child-bearers gave them the important assignment, in Tito's opinion, to shape the loyalty of their children to the Yugoslav state and Communist Party. Women's traditional domestic roles remained central in what the Communist Party perceived their role in state-building to be, higher in importance than even political work.

¹⁰⁶Ibid, 242.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, 243.

¹⁰⁸Josip Broz Tito, "Maršal Jugoslavije Josip Broz – Tito," 651.

¹⁰⁹Ibid, 653.

Diverging from his speech to the First Congress, Tito devoted significant time to foreign policy and international developments. Tito mentioned “warmongering cliques,” who had no morality and were “able to find hundreds of excuses, understandably cynical, just to achieve their imperialistic goals.”¹¹⁰ While Tito did not name specifics, it is clear he was talking about threats from the West, as he favorably mentioned the countries in the East, such as the Soviet Union, “with whom we are connected by common interests in terms of comprehensive cooperation and peaceful development.”¹¹¹ Tito’s emphasis on foreign policy and the external threats to Yugoslavia stand in contrast to the internal threats he was concerned about in his 1945 speech. In 1945, the Communist Party was still consolidating its power, but was able to do so rather quickly. As political scientist Aleksa Djilas notes, between 1945 and 1946, the KPJ was able to establish a complete monopoly of power, faster than other eastern European communist parties which faced more resistance.¹¹² As the KPJ’s power became entrenched domestically, Tito’s focus shifted internationally as evidenced by his speech in 1948. As a result of this shift, the women of Yugoslav no longer play the important role in consolidating power and protecting “brotherhood and unity” as they did in the immediate postwar period.

Still in 1948 however, the women in Tito’s address were not intended to be passive bystanders of this new nation, but instead active participants, influencing the new direction of socialist Yugoslavia. This image of an active, socialist and in Tito’s words, “advanced” woman played a critical role, in concept if not in practice, to the Yugoslav state-building project. Tito and the KPJ were looking to distance themselves from the capitalist, monarchical, patriarchal, and

¹¹⁰Ibid, 652.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Aleksa Djilas, “Federalism and Yugoslavism 1943-1953” in *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 150.

agrarian society that came before. The power of the KPJ at this time depended upon making radical changes that needed to be reflected in a shift of the country's social norms.

Tito claimed to want Yugoslav women to acquire significantly transformed social, economic, and political status, as they built the new country, having the potential to alter previous gender norms and constraints from the old system. His calls unfolded in the context of gender equality within communist ideology and the legal equality enshrined in the 1946 Constitution. However, in Tito's speeches, he did not use the language of equality to encourage the political, social, or economic work of the AFŽ. Tito did not commend the AFŽ on seeking to increase gender equality or even address the material gender inequalities within Yugoslav society. Instead he focused on the AFŽ as a mobilizing force. It is clear in his rhetoric that the expectation he had for the organization was not to increase the equality of women but to expand their labor source and political voice to build the country.

Third Congress and Transformation Over Time

Ultimately as Tito and the KPJ's political and economic goals changed, so did the rhetoric towards the women of Yugoslavia. In Tito's speech to the Third Congress of the AFŽ, made in October 1950, five years after the end of the war, he overhauled his outlook on the economic mobilization of women. While in his previous speech he claimed that mothers must also be contributing beyond the home to the efforts to build the socialist state, in his speech in 1950, Tito argued the opposite. Instead, he criticized the AFŽ's approach to mothers with several children, as the organization sometimes criticized the average mother for "not performing her function as a woman of Yugoslavia or ... not giving her socialist contribution" when they do not leave the house to work.¹¹³ Tito proclaimed that "It is incorrect to view and understand the

¹¹³Josip Broz Tito "Iz Govora Druga Tita Na III Kongresu AFŽ Jugoslavije" [From the Speech of Comrade Tito to the Third Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia] *III Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1950), 731.

mother with many children as not performing socially useful work, that is, not working for socialism, because the proper education of their children is their first duty.”¹¹⁴ This departure from his earlier messaging was quite stark. However, it reflected how the changing social, economic, and political needs of the KPJ shifted how the party viewed the role of women in the state-building project.

Yugoslavia’s economic policies and political system were quite different in 1950, compared to 1945 and 1948, when Tito had last addressed the AFŽ. During the spring of 1948, Tito came into conflict with the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. While Tito and Stalin had previously been allies, the break between the two leaders resulted in Yugoslavia being expelled from the Soviet-led coalition of communist European governments, known as Cominform, on June 28, 1948.¹¹⁵ As a result, the KPJ began to forge its own path separate from the Soviet Union, including the reform of its socialist economy by decentralizing the Party’s political control over industry.¹¹⁶ In June 1950, the Law on the Management of State Economic Associations by Work Collectives was passed, which set up councils of workers to further collectivize industry, in a system known as the workers’ self-management, which through worker’s councils to usher in a Yugoslav-specific economic system.¹¹⁷ The changing Yugoslav economic system was likely behind Tito’s shift in perspective given his speech was delivered a few months after the establishment of this new system. With the decentralization of industry control, Tito may have no longer thought it necessary for women to mobilize economically, and instead left that decision up to local worker’s councils.

¹¹⁴Ibid, 732

¹¹⁵John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History; Twice there was a country*, 249.

¹¹⁶Ibid, 255.

¹¹⁷Ibid, 256.

Through Tito's speeches, we can see how the position of the AFŽ and the women of Yugoslavia as a whole, changed in relation to the evolving goals of the KPJ at the time. In Tito's first speech, women were vital participants in the effort to consolidate the domestic power of the regime and help rebuild the Yugoslav economy. Although there was an importance placed on women as caretakers and mothers, they were still called upon in other non-traditional capacities for the purposes of supporting the regime economically and politically.

In Tito's second speech, however, we begin to see how the changing goals of the KPJ affected the role of women and the AFŽ in the Yugoslav state-building project. While the mobilization of women economically was still important given the failure of the Five Year Plan, the mobilization of women politically for domestic regime consolidation was no longer necessary. The KPJ's shifting priorities from local to international was reflected by Tito's emphasis on foreign policy along with the knowledge that the KPJ had established power by 1946.

Tito's third speech marks the end of the importance of women in the state-building project beyond their traditional roles as mothers. In the aftermath of the Tito-Stalin split, Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform, and the establishment of the workers' self-management system, the mobilization of women politically and economically no longer appeared to be a priority or even a goal for the Communist Party. Instead women's roles became defined exclusively to their position within the domestic sphere. While women in the AFŽ, and the organization itself, were key figures and active participants in the immediate transformation of Yugoslavia, it is clear this inclusion was at the whims of the Party in order to consolidate their power, establish a loyal citizenry, and rebuild the economy. Once the AFŽ was no longer useful to the KPJ, it ceased to exist as an organization. Ultimately, the KPJ saw the AFŽ in utilitarian

and paternalistic terms, in service of its own agenda rather than in idealistic terms in support of the equality of women.

Chapter Three - “Mothers and Builders”: How the AFŽ Saw Itself within the Yugoslav State-Building Project

The AFŽ envisioned itself as an organization which contributed to the state-building project of Yugoslavia through the active reconstruction of the country socially, economically, and politically. Socially, the AFŽ sought to act within the realm of motherhood, as it believed their roles as women in the domestic sphere uniquely placed them to take care of the social reconstruction of the country. The AFŽ’s emphasis on motherhood occurred amidst the broader international push for women to resume domestic roles after the tumult of the Second World War. Economically and politically, however, the actions of the AFŽ also challenged traditional gender roles at times, moving women outside of the domestic space into the labor force and encouraging political participation. Going beyond Sklevicky’s category of cultural emancipation, defined as “fighting the limits set by ascribed gender roles, and radically questioning the patriarchal culture as a whole,” we can further interrogate how the AFŽ not only challenged the patriarchy but also moved within traditional patriarchal ideas, by examining these particular categories of the social, economic, and political contributions to the state-building project.¹¹⁸

The Importance of Motherhood

The women of the AFŽ sought to have an ambitious plan to remedy the destruction of the war as the new Yugoslavia began to form. AFŽ leader and Communist Party activist, Vida Tomšić, in her report to the first Congress of the AFŽ, laid out a comprehensive list of activities in which the women of Yugoslavia should participate. Tomšić’s report, “Social Care as One of the Most Important Tasks of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front of Yugoslavia in the Restoration of the Country,” primarily focused on the role of women in social work in the new country. The

¹¹⁸Lydia Sklevicky, “Emancipated integration or integrated emancipation: the case of post-revolutionary Yugoslavia,” 105.

report sought to address the disruptions to communities as wrought by the massively destructive Second World War, including care for war orphans and those disabled by the war. In addition to those tasks, Tomšić also called on the women of AFŽ to collect money for those in need, offer professional courses for social care institutions, donate furniture, provide homes for those returning from incarceration in Germany, prepare the conditions for laws which enshrined gender equality in the labor force, and more. Tomšić laid out a hefty agenda of different tasks that women could fulfill under the umbrella of social work and encouraged all women to take part in the restoration of the country.

Tomšić and the other leaders of the AFŽ, went beyond just encouraging women to get involved, insisting that it was their duty as women of Yugoslavia to help in the restoration of the country. In another report presented at the First Congress of the AFŽ, “Let’s Preserve and Consolidate the Achievement of the Liberation Struggle,” Mitra Mitrović-Đilas argued that women were primed for social care roles similar to those that Tomšić set forth. She wrote in her report, “Today, every woman really has her place, but that's why today, more than before, there are so many jobs that women can do best, there are countless jobs that should and must become the obligation of almost every woman who has the good of her people, herself and her children at heart.”¹¹⁹ Mitrović-Đilas made it clear that the AFŽ believed that the woman of Yugoslavia had the “obligation” to help in the social reconstruction of the country. Mitrović-Đilas called upon the “maternal instincts” of women, claiming that women should have the good of the people at heart, and even more directly invoked the maternal responsibility of women by emphasizing the “good of her children.” Mitrović-Đilas further referred to the natural predisposition for women in the social field asking, “Who better to take care of hospitals and other health institutions if not

¹¹⁹Mitra Mitrović-Đilas, “Očuvajmo i Učvrstimo Tekovine Oslobođilačke Borbe.” [Let’s Preserve and Consolidate the Achievement of the Liberation Struggle] *I Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 142.

women?”¹²⁰ To the leaders of the AFŽ, the ambitious tasks which they had set out to achieve in the field of social work were well suited to women, and their positions as mothers were key to that “natural” instinct.

Similar to Tito’s speeches to the AFŽ, Tomšić and Mitrović-Đilas both emphasize the importance of motherhood in the AFŽ and the organization’s tasks. However, Tomšić’s rhetoric slightly diverged from Tito’s; rather than focusing alone on educating the youth to be proud citizens of the new socialist Yugoslavia, Tomšić saw the protection and development of motherhood within the communist state as key to the achievement of women’s equality. In her report, Tomšić wrote,

True equality of women does not exist and cannot exist without real care for mother and child, without such protection that will respect a woman's motherhood and enable her, with a sufficient number of maternity and children's homes, public kitchens, with a state childcare center, to perform her maternal functions as a woman has wanted since ancient times. Women's equality becomes a phrase, if it is not followed by the construction of hundreds and thousands of homes, daycare centers for children, etc., which will enable a woman to do her job equally in society, while remaining a gentle mother to her children.¹²¹

For Tomšić, equality for women would only be gained by the state facilitating multiple aspects of motherhood, childcare and homecare, through public services. If children’s homes, public kitchens, and childcare, all which sought to remedy concerns that typically relegated women to the home, were facilitated by the state, women would be able to actively participate in the labor force outside of the domestic sphere. Women’s equality would not be achieved, according to Tomšić, unless the state helped women to operate outside of the house. However, Tomšić did not dismiss the importance of motherhood to women or suggest that femininity and motherhood are not intimately connected, reiterating the importance of motherhood to women going back to ancient times. Tomšić’s call for these public services were met with real action in the AFŽ as the

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Vida Tomšić, “Socijalno Staranje Kao Jedan od Najvažnijih Zadataka Anti-Fašističkog Front Žena u Obnovi Zemlje,” 133.

organization truly did establish public kitchens, children homes, maternity hospitals, and state childcare during its tenure.¹²² Motherhood, and specifically public motherhood, under the communist system remained key to the goals of the AFŽ and their goals for the liberation of women.

Understanding the International Desire for Domesticity

In order to understand the importance of motherhood to the AFŽ in its role within the state-building project, it is helpful to contextualize the organization's position within wider international trends of changing gender roles in the post-Second-World-War period. Throughout the Second World War, gender roles were challenged as women took new positions in the economic, industrial, and domestic spheres, given that many of the men who traditionally occupied those roles were sent to war. As the war ended and men began to return home, there was a desire across Europe and the world, to return en masse to the more traditional, prewar gender roles. According to historian Kelly Ricciardi Colvin, in France "establishing 'normalcy' was an obsession during the postwar years... The very definition of normalcy, though, was historically specific and influenced by gender: France would be stabilized by the heteronormative family."¹²³ Colvin argues that women in France had the responsibility to "make men happy" in order to find love and help restore the traditional heteronormative family that was destroyed by the war.¹²⁴ Beyond finding love to help restore the heteronormative family, women were also expected to become mothers, and raise their babies "in a way which would cement these children's French identity."¹²⁵

¹²²Sabrina Ramet, "In Tito's Time," 93; Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 217.

¹²³Kelly Ricciardi Colvin, "The War for Love" in *Gender and French identity after the Second World War, 1944-1954: engendering French*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 49.

¹²⁴Ibid, 50.

¹²⁵Ibid, 72.

Tito's calls for the women of the AFŽ to raise their children to be proud Yugoslav citizens were similar to the French state's and society's expectations of women in the postwar period. France and Yugoslavia had both seen intense fighting during the war and suffered massive population devastation.¹²⁶ In particular, Yugoslavia faced some of the greatest fighting and destruction in Europe, as Lampe writes, the country endured "four years of more continuous fighting than anywhere in Europe" which wreaked havoc on the Yugoslav people.¹²⁷ According to Leslie Benson, close to 1 million people were killed during the war, out of the 16 million people who lived in Yugoslavia prior to the German Invasion in April 1941.¹²⁸ With more than 6 percent of the prewar population killed in Yugoslavia, there is little surprise that there was a push for a return to normalcy, that emphasized reproduction and the entrenchment of the nuclear family. The desire for repopulation may explain the restrictive abortion rights in the country up until 1951, especially considering that abortions were performed routinely by Partisan doctors during the war.¹²⁹ Yugoslavia's response to this demographic devastation was cultivated under the leadership of the Communist Party which sought to implement socialism in order to rebuild the country and its people.

Understanding the situation of women in the Soviet Union and Communist Bloc can also help place the AFŽ within the broader milieu of motherhood within a socialist state and economy. In the immediate post-revolution Soviet Union, the dismantling of the traditional family unit was seen as necessary for the liberation of women.¹³⁰ According to historian Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, in the 1920s Soviet Union, "the family was seen not as a bulwark of

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History; Twice there was a country*, 239.

¹²⁸While the Yugoslav government officially claimed that 1.7 million people were killed, more recent scientific studies put the number closer to 1 million. Leslie Benson, "War, Civil War, and Revolution" in *Yugoslavia: A Concise History*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 73.

¹²⁹Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 117.

¹³⁰Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 83.

freedom and self-fulfillment but as a significant locus of exploitation, oppression, and humiliation.”¹³¹ As a result, the revolutionary government passed legislation in order to change the position of women within the family, including new legal codes which insisted on equality between marriage partners, the abolishment of inheritance, the outlawing of bride prices, and the granting of the right of divorce to both spouses.¹³² Lapidus concludes that at the end of the 1920s, while there had been changes to the status of women, “the liberation of women was not to be the result of action by women on their own behalf but a function of the policies and priorities of the male leadership of the Party.”¹³³

When the male leadership of the Party changed and Stalin took power, the position of women within Soviet society also changed. Under Stalin, the family unit was no longer seen as something necessary to change, but instead the family became treated “as a pivotal social institution performing vital functions.”¹³⁴ Lapidus ties the new positioning of the family within society with a desire to establish social order with a “stable and monogamous partnership” as well as concerns with the declining birthrate.¹³⁵ New Soviet legislation was implemented, including the abolition of legal abortion in 1936 as well as a “massive press campaign” which sought to link “the joys motherhood with the benefits of Soviet power.”¹³⁶ Stalin’s conservative views on the family and role of women continued into the postwar period as Soviet leadership sought to establish marital stability and recover from the population losses resulting from the war.¹³⁷

¹³¹Ibid, 82.

¹³²Ibid, 84.

¹³³Ibid, 94.

¹³⁴Ibid, 112.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid, 117.

Stalin's conservative position on women, not only influenced the Soviet Union, but also infiltrated the rest of the Communist Bloc. When discussing women and the family in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, historian Donna Harsch writes "after 1945, leading German communists, like their East European comrades, reflexively adopted the staid, even conservative, Stalinist understanding of the family."¹³⁸ While Yugoslavia was not under the same tight control by the USSR as were countries that had been occupied, like the GDR, it is believable that Stalin's conservative values in regards to women and the family would have influenced the communist leaders of Yugoslavia. Coupled with the need to repopulate and provide stability after a chaotic and brutal war, the emphasis on motherhood in the state-building project from both the KPJ and AFŽ took place within the international emphasis on reasserting the role of women in the home and as mothers both in the Communist Bloc and throughout Europe.

Beyond Motherhood: Economic Mobilization Outside of the Home

While the KPJ and AFŽ both focused on the importance of motherhood in women's positioning in the state-building project of Yugoslavia, the women of the AFŽ also looked to push beyond traditional gender roles, breaking away from the domesticity desired by states in Western and Eastern Europe. Tomšić's perspective on women in the new Yugoslavia was exemplified by her quote in reference to building children's homes, writing that the construction of these buildings, "will enable our mothers to be both mothers and builders in our reconstruction at the same time."¹³⁹ Tomšić's positioning of women both challenged traditional gender norms

¹³⁸Donna Harsch, "Women, Family, and "Postwar": The Gendering of the GDR's Welfare Dictatorship" in *Gender and the Long Postwar: the United States and the two Germanys, 1945-1989*, eds. Karen Hagemann and Sonya Michel (Washington D.C: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2014), 260.

¹³⁹Vida Tomšić, "Socijalno Staranje Kao Jedan od Najvažnijih Zadataka Anti-Fašističkog Front Žena u Obnovi Zemlje," 130.

around construction as a male occupation and highlighted the importance of motherhood in the building of the new Yugoslavia.

While Tito neglected to mention the specific labors which women could do in order to help reconstruct the country, the reports of the AFŽ detail the physical labor women engaged in during reconstruction. AFŽ leader Vanda Novosel's report to the Second Congress of the AFŽ, mentioned that many women participated in construction works in the capital city of Belgrade.¹⁴⁰ Novosel listed several construction projects that women supported, including the building of apartments and a factory.¹⁴¹ Notably, Novosel wrote that in Zagreb, there was massive participation in constructing the "Brotherhood and Unity" Highway which Novosel remarks was "the largest action of the Popular Front" on which women worked a collective 1,204,597 hours on the project.¹⁴²

The women's work on the "Brotherhood and Unity" Highway took place in a larger context of the mobilization of workers for the symbolic and physical importance of the highway. According to scholar Michael Charokopos, the highway was not just a "pragmatic political" move to unify the country and repair the damage to the transportation networks done by the war, but also held "major symbolic connotation" as it sought to link the country together.¹⁴³ The name of the highway, using the slogan of unification, connected to the physical links that were to be established through the highway's infrastructure. The communist regime sought to mobilize multiple sectors of the population to build the highway, such as the Youth Labor Action (Omladinske Radne Akcije), a voluntary youth labor organization.¹⁴⁴ Charokopos argues that the

¹⁴⁰Vanda Novosel, "Referat Vande Novosel." [Report of Vanda Novosel] *II Kongres AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 712.

¹⁴¹Ibid, 713.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Michael Charokopos, "Networks as Political Tools in the Western Balkans: From the 'Brotherhood and Unity' Highway to the Transport Community" *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no 8 (2022): 1489.

¹⁴⁴Ibid, 1490.

contributions of the ORA were both practical, as their voluntary labor was economically important to the construction of the highway, and symbolic, as the youth participation symbolically reflected the construction of the new country.¹⁴⁵ Charokopos further argues that the work of the ORA was “seen by the new regime as a way to develop patriotic consciousness through socially beneficial work.”¹⁴⁶ While Charokopos does not mention the contributions of AFŽ to the project, we can extend his arguments on the participation of the ORA to the participation of the brigades of women from the AFŽ. Their work on such a structural and symbolically important project was both beneficial to the Communist Party in terms of lowered costs, since the labor was unpaid, as well as the political and economic mobilization of these women.

While Novosel’s and Charokopos’ analyses did not mention the ground-level realities of construction sites, we can look to a book produced by the Central Committee of the AFŽ to imagine how these construction sites looked, and how they were portrayed to the larger Yugoslav and international public. In 1948, the Central Committee of AFŽ produced a French language book, “The Women of Yugoslavia in the Construction of Socialism.”¹⁴⁷ The book featured several photos of Yugoslav women working at construction sites, allowing us to glean what such physical work may have looked like for these women. In these photos the women are pictured both working with other women, as well as with other men and youth, working in conjunction to rebuilding of the country.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front, “Les Femmes Yougoslaves dans la Construction du Socialisme” [The Women of Yugoslavia in the Construction of Socialism] (Arhiv AFŽ BiH-A, 1948), <https://afzarhiv.org/items/show/81>



Figure 3. Source: <https://afzarhiv.org/items/show/212>.¹⁴⁸



Figure 4. Source: <https://afzarhiv.org/items/show/201>.

¹⁴⁸For clarity, the women in this photo are most likely not wearing the Islamic veil, but rather a typical head covering worn across religions in Yugoslavia, particularly among peasant women, likely protecting themselves from sun on the construction site.



Figure 5. Source: <https://afzarhiv.org/items/show/202>.

In Figures 3, 4, and 5, women appear to be doing physical work in the presence of men. In Figure 3, the women appear to be working together to carry heavy loads, while in Figure 4, a woman (front), who appears to be the subject of the photograph, carries a large and heavy object along with what seem to be youths. Figure 5 features a large number of women in what appears to be a construction site, along with men, forming an assembly line.

While it may seem telling that these photos feature men and women working together, we must be cautious about drawing strong conclusions about gender relations on construction sites. In the photos provided by the AFŽ, construction sites were not segregated by gender, leaving questions as to how the men and youth of Yugoslavia perceived the physical exertion of women in construction. While we may not have the reactions of the men active on these sites, looking at Lydia Sklevicky's analysis of Partisan men fighters' reactions to their armed female colleagues

might enlighten how men and women in Yugoslavia worked together. Sklevicky discusses the hesitation that male fighters had towards female fighters, seeing them not as equals but rather as “substitutes.”¹⁴⁹ According to AFŽ documents cited by Sklevicky, women fighters were met with dislike and concerns about “sexuality morality” alluding to potential sexual freedom practiced by the women.¹⁵⁰ Sklevicky argues that this discomfort stemmed from the perception of warfare as masculine and the idea that women being involved in armed conflict removed them from their natural position.¹⁵¹ The documents that Sklevicky analyzes date only five to six years before the report by Vanda Novosel. It is likely that the same prejudices that led to discomfort due to women taking on more masculine roles and subverting typically expectations of sexuality during the war continued in the postwar period, when women once again took on more masculine roles in construction work.

Given that the photos were specifically selected by the AFŽ Central Committee, it is possible that their emphasis on the involvement of women in construction was exaggerated. The book claimed that women formed more than 50 percent of the effective brigades of the NF.¹⁵² While the photos may not have provided the most accurate depiction of women’s participation on construction sites, what remains clear is that the AFŽ sought to portray women as strong and capable, especially in the presence of men. This book is interesting because it was published in French, meaning that it was intended for international audiences, possibly the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an international women’s organization, first organized around anti-fascist resistance in December 1945.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, Žene, Ratovi*, 39.

¹⁵⁰Ibid, 40.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front, “Les Femmes Yougoslaves dans la Construction du Socialisme,” 30.

¹⁵³Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Revolutionary Networks. Women’s Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957),” 118-119.

The AFŽ not only played an important role in the creation of the Yugoslav-state on the federal level, but also had a global political presence and sought to present certain ideas about the role of women in the construction of Yugoslav socialism on an international level. According to Bonfiglioli, the women of the AFŽ played a prominent role in the WIDF's founding.¹⁵⁴ However, once Yugoslavia was expelled from Cominform during the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, the WIDF responded with similar measures. The Soviet government had strong influence over the WIDF, given that it was both a major source of funding and that Soviet women played a major role in running the organization.¹⁵⁵ Yugoslav delegates were first isolated within the WIDF as soon as the Cominform expulsion happened in 1948, and relations between all WIDF organizations and the AFŽ were severed in September 1949.¹⁵⁶

While there is no date attached to the book containing the images of women working, the book mentions the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party which was held during the week of July 21, 1948, therefore likely placing the publishing of the book after Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform.¹⁵⁷ The publishing of such a document in French, reflecting the strength of Yugoslav women, could have been an attempt for the AFŽ to preserve their image internationally within the increasing isolation of Yugoslavia both in the WIDF and global sphere.

Novosel's discussion of the labor of Yugoslav women along with Charokopos' arguments about the "Brotherhood and Unity" Highway reflect how women were mobilized for the physical reconstruction of Yugoslavia in the immediate postwar period. Challenging traditional gender roles about femininity and physical work, as well as moving the labor of women outside of the

¹⁵⁴Ibid, 155.

¹⁵⁵Melaine Ilic, "Soviet women, cultural exchange and the Women's International Democratic Federation" in *Reassessing the Cold War*, 160.

¹⁵⁶Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Revolutionary Networks. Women's Political and Social Activism in Cold War Italy and Yugoslavia (1945-1957)," 158, 165.

¹⁵⁷Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front, "Les Femmes Yougoslaves dans la Construction du Socialisme," 32.

household, Yugoslav women during this period sought to move outside the typical confines of domesticity placed on women. Looking at the photos produced by the AFŽ, we can see how it portrayed the Yugoslav women as physical workers contributing to the reconstruction of the country and as active participants of socialism. However, this challenge to gender norms and movement of women out of the domestic sphere still corresponded to the desires of the KPJ and likely still faced social hostility and disapproval. Both the participation of women in the physical reconstruction of the country as well as the production of the AFŽ's book were beneficial to the regime in terms of economic and political mobilization as well as international standing in a time of global political turmoil.

Beyond Motherhood: Expansion of Political Rights

Outside of the physical labor which took place, there was an emphasis in the leadership of the AFŽ on the political education of women in order to prepare them for life in the new Yugoslavia. Mitrović-Đilas writes in her report, "And we must raise all women politically so that they know everything - and answer it well - that we are aware of what is not yet in our country, that we are also aware of the difficulties that still await us, but we also know that we are now healing the wounds that inflicted on us by fascism with a four-year occupation..."¹⁵⁸

Mitrović-Đilas' call to educate women about the political goals and challenges facing the AFŽ and KPJ, is aligned with other calls for the political education of women by both the AFŽ and KPJ. In a reflective report from 1948, "The Work of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front in the Renewal and Construction of Yugoslavia," on the AFŽ's role in the restoration and reconstruction of the country, the entrance of women into the social, economic, and political life in the country is often discussed. Specifically, the report argues that thanks to the AFŽ, the women of Yugoslavia had successfully integrated into the social and political life of the

¹⁵⁸Ibid, 132.

country.¹⁵⁹ The report credits the AFŽ as having “sharpened their political consciousnesses of the goals of the people’s liberation struggle – they made it easier – almost we say – they enabled women’s attendance and massive participation in the general movement.”¹⁶⁰

In particular, the report highlighted one key instance of Yugoslav women using their newly granted political rights in the 1945 Constituent Assembly elections. The report remarked that the participation of women in the election deviated only “a little” from the overall total of participation of both genders, cited as 88.66 percent.¹⁶¹ The report went on to note that “there were many regions where women voted 100%...” and points out that women delegates were elected in the 1946 election.¹⁶² Twenty-one women deputies were elected to the bicameral federal body known as the Constituent Assembly, which was composed of the Federal Council, with one deputy for every 50,000 citizens, and the Council of Nationalities, which had 216 deputies.¹⁶³ In the six federal assemblies, there were a total of 46 women elected.¹⁶⁴ The election of 67 women deputies certainly marked improvement for the AFŽ from the prewar system, but was still far from the achievement of women’s equal political participation. In terms of the AFŽ’s actions in achieving this newfound political participation, the report writes that the AFŽ’s committees “organized specific meetings and conferences which explained the meaning of the elections to women.”¹⁶⁵

In particular, the report was concerned with the political participation of Muslim women. In the discussion of political participation, the report wrote, “awakened political interest is the

¹⁵⁹Anti-Fascist Women’s Front, “Rad Antifašističkog Front Žena u Obnovi i Izgradnji Nove Jugoslavija.” [Work of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front in the Renewal and Construction of Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 5.

¹⁶⁰Ibid, 1.

¹⁶¹Ibid, 4.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid; John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a country*, 234.

¹⁶⁴Anti-Fascist Women’s Front, “Rad Antifašističkog Front Žena u Obnovi i Izgradnji Nove Jugoslavija,” 4.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

result of long and persistent work of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front among women in general, and specifically Muslim women." As argued by Hadžiristić, Muslim women's bodies in Yugoslavia became a "crucial marker of society's progress toward socialist goals, state consolidation, and the enforcement of state policies of secularism and multiethnic unity."¹⁶⁶ The AFŽ looked to use the transformation of Muslim women both physically in terms of the removal of the veil, as well as politically and economically, to prove that they had made measurable progress in establishing a new socialist, emancipated woman.¹⁶⁷ It is clear from the rhetoric of the AFŽ, that Muslim women were perceived to be the furthest from the ideal of the 'socialist women.' In a report from the Second Plenum in 1948, on illiteracy and veil removal, author Ljubomirka Tomić writes, "Is there a greater backwardness, passiveness, and darkness of that in which Muslim women live?"¹⁶⁸

Within the AFŽ's desire for the transformation of the most "backward" of women lies a clear contradiction. "The Work of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front in the Renewal and Construction of Yugoslavia," a 1948 report, remarked that the women of Yugoslavia successfully entered the political and social life of the country. However, in a separate report from 1948 on the structural organization of the AFŽ mentioned in the first chapter, the author concluded that the AFŽ has failed to "penetrate into the most backward women."¹⁶⁹ The constant language of "backwardness" indicates an excessively paternalistic approach within the AFŽ's outreach. As the activist elite women, who spearheaded the organization, sought to politically mobilize whom they believed to be the "most backward women," they also failed to engage with these women on

¹⁶⁶Tea Hadžiristić, "Unveiling Muslim Women in Socialist Yugoslavia: The Body between Socialism, Secularism, and Colonialism," 185.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Ljubomirka Tomić, "O Radu i Zadacima Naše Organizacije u Pitanju Suzbijanja Nepismenost i Skidanju Feredže." [On the Work and Tasks of Our Organization on the Issue of Repression of Illiteracy and Removal of the Veil] *II Plenum AFŽ*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1948), 326.

¹⁶⁹Anti-Fascist Women's Front, "Predlog po Nekim Organizacionim Pitanje AFŽ," 56.

the latter's terms. While one report from the AFŽ claimed that they had successfully mobilized women, another pointed out the failure to do so. A further contradiction is apparent in the fact that the AFŽ sought to politically mobilize women, but only within a specific political context, which was in support of the KPJ and its one-party state.

The AFŽ's approach to Muslim women in their political and educational mobilization in many ways parallels the Communist Party's approach to the AFŽ. The KPJ's perception of the AFŽ as an organization which could be harnessed to achieve KPJ's goals while relegating the AFŽ to the sidelines of the broader Communist Party system is similar to the approach the AFŽ took to Muslim women. In both situations, a paternalistic perspective dominates, as there was a lack of inclusion and representation of marginalized groups within the larger systems which claimed to help them. Both the AFŽ and Muslim women were looked down upon by higher ranking organizations in the Yugoslav state, which saw their transformation necessary in order to engender the desired political and economic change.

The AFŽ saw the political transformation of the women whom they perceived to be backward as vital to their role in the state-building project. The women of the AFŽ focused in particular on the women they believed to be the most marginalized in the socialist polity, specifically Muslim women. In mobilizing women for greater political participation, the AFŽ did seek to transform the status of women, but only under complete control of the Communist Party. The very election which saw such high numbers of the political participation of women, was the election in which there were only two options for voters, either the NF or a blank space.

The emphasis on the political mobilization of women, falls in line with both the AFŽ's organization and structure as well as the KPJ's goals for the organization. Given that the AFŽ was a mass organization, it looked to encompass as many members as possible in order to bring

them into the wider Communist Party System. By becoming a member of the AFŽ, women were automatically enrolled with the People's Front and by extension, became connected to the Communist Party. The more women the AFŽ was able to mobilize, the more women would be enveloped into the Communist Party's system. The leaders of the AFŽ were looking to draw in as many Yugoslav women as possible into the organization, as membership was open to all women, and the writings of the organization often emphasized the duty of women to participate in the reconstruction.

The AFŽ's Vision

The AFŽ's actions in the state-building project after the Second World War both assumed and challenged traditional gender roles. Given the close relationship of the AFŽ and KPJ, as well as the strict control the KPJ exercised over the organization, it is not surprising that the self-perception of the AFŽ was closely aligned with the ideas put forth by Tito and the Party. Falling in line with the rhetoric of Tito, the women of Yugoslavia's placement within the domestic sphere allowed them to take special roles in the state-building project, primarily educating youth and providing social services. Under the new socialist system, women mobilize economically as well, breaking out from traditional gender roles by taking part in very physical, traditionally masculine work. The AFŽ also claimed that women demonstrated greater political engagement, although there were some contradictions in their claims and paternalistic motivations seemed to surround their actions for increasing political engagement. The changes in the perception of women's roles in society, politics, and the economy occurred under the AFŽ and marked both traditional ideas and important departures. Ultimately, the changes that took place were implemented in order to achieve the goals of the Communist Party.

Conclusion: The AFŽ in the State-Building Project

The political and economic mobilization of women as main goals of the AFŽ diverged from traditional gender roles in Yugoslavia, pushing women into new activities of politics and industrial labor. Even with the organization's emphasis on a more traditional perception of womanhood, the AFŽ still challenged and moved away from the position of women within prewar Yugoslav society. However, this challenging of traditional gender roles that happened within the larger structure of the Communist Party, and in the immediate postwar period, was beneficial to the larger goals of and determined by the KPJ. After the devastation of the Second World War, women were needed to help the massive reconstruction of the infrastructure in the country. As the KPJ established itself as the new leader of Yugoslavia, it sought to consolidate wide political support, and women were an essential component.

Even as the leaders of the AFŽ sought to assert their ambitious program, they were still beholden to the Communist Party, partly due to structural influences, but also due to their personal alignments to the leadership with the Communist Party. Furthermore, the elitist and paternalistic structure of the AFŽ, led by communist activists, resulted in the exclusion of the very women, primarily Muslim women, the AFŽ sought to mobilize. As a result, the organization was dominated by women, like Tomšić, who were guided by the belief that gender equality was an inevitability of the communist revolution. The KPJ was not motivated to support the AFŽ out of a desire to achieve gender equality and the liberation of women, but rather was driven to gain more popular support for the Party. When the KPJ lost interest in the AFŽ as a political and economic mobilizer, as a result of having consolidated its power, the organization was disbanded and the supposed mission for women's equality abandoned.

The end of the AFŽ was not an immediate, but rather a slow and drawn out process. In 1950 at the Third Congress of the AFŽ, the organization was absorbed into the NF as the “Women’s Section” completely eradicating any illusion of independence for the organization.¹⁷⁰ Finally in 1953, the organization was formally dissolved and the Fourth Congress of the AFŽ voted to create a new women’s organization.¹⁷¹ The official explanation of the dissolution of the AFŽ was that “the basic sources of women's legal and political subjugation had by then been removed” and that with the further socialist development of the country, the remaining inequalities of women would be resolved.¹⁷² Evidently, the idea that the continuous communist revolution would liberate Yugoslav women persisted among AFŽ elites, as Tomšić continued to promote this view almost 30 years after the organization’s dissolution.

However, the eventual disintegration of the AFŽ should not mean the dismissal of the achievements of the organization and of its self-perception. The recent attention devoted to the AFŽ within former Yugoslavia, both by local organizations like CRVENA and scholars, highlights the lasting legacy of the organization. The creation of an online archive devoted to the organization, alone reflects the desire to remember the women of the AFŽ and the legacy they left behind, asserting the importance of the organization even after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. While the importance of the AFŽ may have been short lived in the eyes of the Communist Party, it nonetheless showed that women were central to the Yugoslav state-building project and their contributions continue to be remembered today.

¹⁷⁰Barbara Jančar-Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 165.

¹⁷¹Ibid, 166.

¹⁷²Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, 219.

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