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Where Does it Start and When Did it End: Women's Role and the Feminist Movements of
Yugoslavia in the 20th century.

"The 'woman question' (if any!) was going to be solved one day, that's for certain.

Women just had to be patient, had to understand the vision of great revolutionary plan, a vision in which their needs-what with ideology, politics and economics-were nowhere near the top," hypothetical response of a Yugoslav politician, after being prodded about the 'woman question,' as told by writer, Slavenka Drakulic.¹ Partisans campaigned on gender equality and providing an answer to the woman question. Women rose to the challenge of their cause and fought life and death for an answer. Little did they know that many areas of society wouldn't ever answer a woman's question.

When first starting my research, I was intending to look at women's role in the revolution, and then under a communist regime, hoping to find a rise in a feminist identity. This however was not the case, or at least to the extent that I had expected/hoped for, especially when early 1900s Yugoslavia was so promising with the rise of so many early feminist groups. As this paper will later discuss, women indeed had a large role in the Partisan cause, and did see a measurable increase in equality established by the government, however, there was little change regarding women's experience in society. This lack of understanding resulted in little movement for feminism until the late 1970s and early 1980s. This allowed me to expand the thought as to what caused this lack of movement in Yugoslav women. There are multiple reasons for this, the

¹ Drakulic, Slavenka. *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*. (Harper Collins 1992) pg. 46.

most important and over encompassing reasons being lack of understanding and education on what feminism is. The interesting thing is that when feminism did begin to emerge in Yugoslavia it was not suppressed by the government which shows how important this lack of understanding and education was on the movement, when there had not been a larger suppressor present.

Other research done on this topic talks about women's role in the context of war and nationalism. Ana Devic took on gender and nationalism in *Redefining the Public-Private Boundary: Nationalism and Women's Activism in Former Yugoslavia* talks about the three stages of women's activism and how it coincides with the different national movements.² Sonja Licht and Slobodan Drakulic looked at gender in the context of war in Yugoslavia, finding that Yugoslavia was a unique experience for women, compared to the other countries surrounding it.³ Somewhat similarly, Vlasta Jalusic makes the claim feminism's dependence on the state, how, without the state, feminism is impossible to articulate.⁴ Julie Mertus wrote on the human rights of women in Central and Eastern Europe and whether formal equality was real, or even beneficial.⁵

² Devic, Ana "Redefining the Public-Private Boundary: Nationalism and Women's Activism in Former Yugoslavia." *Anthology of East Europe Review*. (1997); 45-61. The three stages of women's activism are 1. "Modernist" where the public sphere has priority over the private. 2. 'Reactive' where there is a divide on perspectives regarding public and private lives, with the ethno-nationalists emphasising private roles of women, for the betterment of the collective well-being. 3. 'New Activism' with the rebuilding of the public sphere in an attempt to dismantle the roles placed onto women by the ethno-nationalists.

³ Licht, Sonja and Slobodan Drakulic, "When the Word for Peacemaker was a Woman: War and Gender in the Former Yugoslavia." *Research on Russia and Eastern Europe 2* (1996): 111-139. There was a strong sense of patriarchy in Yugoslavia, which had an impact on any feminist movement, by making it a "dirty word," however, feminism was able to gain more ground in the country for two relevant, socio-political reasons: women were fairly equal to men socially and importantly in the university; those who declared themselves feminist were highly respected publicly and were seen as people with legitimacy. There is another condition that women had more to lose with the breakup of the country, which is more relevant to why they were so imperative in the antiwar movements of the later 20th century.

⁴ Jalusic, Vlasta, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*. Edited by Sabrina Ramet. (Pennsylvania State University Press 1999) pg. 51-66. Jalusic makes the connection that the modern state allows for a concept of citizenship and equal political status, which feminism would not be possible without the expectation of these ideals.

⁵ Mertus, Julie, "Human Rights of Women in Central and Eastern Europe." *Journal of Gender & the Law*. (Spring 1998); 369-484. A country by country analysis looking at formal equality, especially in the workplace, women's quality of life under the transitioning economies from communism to a free market, and lastly comparative research of the region in the biggest problem areas facing women at the time,

My research will be split up into three parts consisting of a background on women's status before the revolution and how they assisted the Partisan cause, women's role during Tito's regime, specifically how they were represented in the government, and finally, the feminist movement that arose in the late 1970s. By splitting the content up as such, I hope to give the reader a broader understanding of the importance of women during this period and how they fared in the context of socialism.

Rise of Women's Organizations

Within the region of Central and Eastern Europe, women were primarily mothers. Being a mother was a woman's road to legitimate status in society, especially through giving birth to sons, which is her outlet for influencing society. Rearing sons is important for many reasons, one being that typically a son will live with his parents throughout his life and his wife and children will also move into the family home. This means that if parents have a daughter, it's almost as if they only have her before she is married off into another family. Because of these living arrangements, mothers often find themselves heavily attached to their sons, using them as a source of love and as a way to exert their power onto the outside world.⁶ This makes for a unique living situation, and causes women to remain in the mother role the majority of their life, unable to really grow into themselves. Luckily women do eventually receive more of their authority later in life, when their husbands are in decline and their mother-in-laws are dead, leaving them to more freedom and individuality.⁷

such as economic conditions and employment discrimination; domestic violence, rape and other violent acts against women; and the low participation rate of women in politics. Only the first 2 sections were relevant to this paper, as the last part was unfortunately out of my time frame.

⁶ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 92.

⁷ Simic, Andre, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*. Edited by Sabrina Ramet. (Pennsylvania State University Press 1999) pg.

I have to think that this new found freedom after a lifetime of suppression is one of the major causes of the first women's groups. The firsts of these groups began in Serbia in 1864, while it was still a part of Hungary, with the formation of a woman's organization in Novi Sad. In 1875 Serbia saw the formation of *žensko društvo*, (the Woman's Society) in the city of Belgrade. *Kolo svipskin sestara* (Circle of Serbian Sisters) formed in 1903 and was the largest of the women's organizations.⁸ In 1906, *srpski zenski savez* (Serbian Women's Alliance) was formed in Serbia to create a national women's organization and unite all of the the organizations currently existing. In 1914 there were a total of thirty-two organizations in the alliance,⁹ showing how rapidly feminism was spreading. Just a few years prior, in 1901, Slovene women formed *splosno zensko drustvo*, which called for a national program to educate and unite women, with the larger goal of putting equal citizenship and suffrage on the political agenda. Slovenia saw an eventual rise in women's groups after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire, giving rise to a more socially conscious woman.¹⁰

Women in Belgrade, Serbia would form another feminist group in 1919, *drustvo za prosvjecivanje zene i zastitu njenih prava* (Society for the Enlightenment of Women and the Defense of her Rights), which would become one of the most important and influential of the feminist groups.¹¹ One of the reasons of their importance was the journal they published, *zenski pokret*, which worked under the goal of enlightening society on the struggles women were

11-32. In his chapter, Simic summarizes the traditional Yugoslav family, and the role of women within that.

⁸ Emmert, Thomas. *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*. Edited by Sabrina Ramet. (Pennsylvania State University Press 1999) pg. 33-50, 35. This chapter focused on the feminist movement of 1920s Serbia.

⁹ Thomas, *Gender Politics*, pg. 35.

¹⁰ Jalusic, *Gender Politics*, pg. 53-55. Jalusic's chapter focused on Slovene women during interwar Yugoslavia.

¹¹ Emmert, *Gender Politics* pg. 36-37.

facing. They aimed to change the view many men held that women were the weaker sex, arguing that men and women's differences completed each other and that everyone benefits when both can leave their mark on society.¹² These goals are especially important because Serbia of the 1920s still functioned under a civil code from 1844 with specific laws pertaining to the status of women: married woman had no right to govern her own property, a woman could not be sole guardian of her own property, could not undertake legal matter regarding her inheritance without the consent of her husband, and would inherit nothing if spouse was the legal heir.¹³

Zenski proket would retain influence throughout the century, through controversy and changing focus' to the current needs of the country. One of the assets of *zenski proket* is that they led people to think about new forms of feminist ideas and goals. A specific case was when they shifted focus to prostitution and society's double standards that came into view after the suicide of one of their own founding members, Ruza Stojanono. She had become pregnant by Mladen Beric and when he refused to accept the paternity, it left her to be blamed by society and lose her reputation.¹⁴ Contributor Sima Marovic wrote in response to this, asking "How is it that a man is allowed to be a cad, a good for nothing, a criminal with a woman, and suffer no ill from it?"¹⁵

Similarly, in regards to prostitution, *zenski proket* wrote in response to Belgrade newspapers being quick to blame victims of prostitution and their families, while failing to recognize the role of the perpetrator. Vasa Knezevic recognized that "Something is wrong in society when somehow a child of nine or fourteen years old is responsible for the evil and not the forty-year-old perpetrator of the crime."¹⁶ The result of asking these sort of tough questions

¹² Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 39.

¹³ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 37.

¹⁴ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 46.

¹⁵ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 46.

¹⁶ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 47.

forced Yugoslavs to ask their own questions and consider new solutions for answers. Success came for *zenski proket* with the support of social projects in literacy and domestic courses, orphanages and maternity centers, an employment bureau for women, providing various forms of lectures and entertainment and crusades for the victims in society.¹⁷

Through a collective feminist conscious, the women of these regions would come in 1919 to create The National Women's Alliance of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This alliance would represent the smaller organizations at an international level at conferences and domestic forums. The goal of this alliance was national unity, equality of men and women in public and private law, equal pay for equal work, protection of children and youth, equal education opportunities at home and in school, a single moral code for men and women, and a war against prostitution and alcohol.¹⁸

In 1923 Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Poland created *Mala Zenska Atlanta* (Women's Little Entente).¹⁹ This allowed the women of these countries to continue down a path of "the mutual connection and close collaboration between countries related by common interest and the work of strengthening the influence of the International Feminist Organization."²⁰ They shared in the common goal of women's suffrage throughout their countries, as well as peace within their countries, but disbanded in 1938.²¹ The creation of this entente showcases one of the compliments of the Yugoslav feminist movement on its ability to

¹⁷ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 48.

¹⁸ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 36.

¹⁹ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 48.

²⁰ Vučetić, Radina. *The Emancipation of Women in Interwar Belgrade and the "Cvijeta Zuzorić" Society*. pg. 7.

²¹ Stojakovic, Dr. Gordana. *Zenski mirovni aktivizam u Jugoslaviji (1900-1941)*. (October 9th, 2014). The translation of this title is *Women's peace activism in Yugoslavia (1900-1941)*.

work across the political, social, as well as class divides for the progress of legislation while being more organized than the male legislators who would look at it.²²

Another reason for this rise in feminist groups was the transition of women from the private sphere to the public sphere, allowing them to become more politicized and in contact with other women, of similar experience. Zorka Kashar-Karadzic says of this time that “conditions for feminism present themselves when a country becomes conscious of the fact that it is of value to the land when women no longer live in ignorance and darkness and when their energy is not wasted.”²³ Unfortunately, these feminist organizations will become overshadowed with the rise of communism and Tito’s Partisans and their creation of communist affiliated women’s organizations that infiltrated the women’s movement. Unfortunately, the success that these pre-Partisan groups were seeing, will be stunted until the later 1970s.

Women’s Role in the Partisan’s Revolution

Female members of the communist party had the purpose of mobilizing other women for the Partisan cause, the party legitimized and commissioned this effort in 1941.²⁴ These first members created networks of underground reading and training of younger women to join the National Liberation Front, allowing the Partisans to reap the benefits of their work.²⁵ In 1942, a new women’s organization was created, the Women’s Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia (AFZ) at a conference in Bosnia, with 166 members. The AFZ called for promise to assist the army, which meant participating in the war, and sabotaging the enemy, with “long live the unity of the women

²² Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg. 41.

²³ Emmert, *Gender Politics*, pg 35.

²⁴ Jancar-Webster, Barbara. *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*. Edited by Sabrina Ramet. (Pennsylvania State University Press 1999) pg. 67-88, 74.

²⁵ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 75.

of Yugoslavia. Long live the Soviet Union. Long live our National Liberation Army. Death to fascism, freedom to the people,”²⁶ as their battle cry.

In her chapter on “Women in the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement,” Jancar-Webster proposes that the Partisans were able to create these self-sustaining women’s movements because women’s liberation is at the heart of communist ideology which agreed well with the previous movements previously mentioned, and communists needed the public’s support to win, with women being a majority of the population.²⁷ With these factors, women and Partisans embarked on a symbiotic like relationship where one could not work without the other. Especially with Chetniks on the other side sabotaging any hope for women to join their cause, with propaganda portraying those Partisan women giving up “home, family and God to fight like men alongside men,” thus making them immoral.²⁸ This did not sit well, and the Chetniks were ultimately unable to create a self-sustaining women’s movement.

In the end, 2 million women will participate in the National Liberation Front, out of a total of 5.7 million people. Of those 2 million, 100,000 fought as soldiers, 25,000 dying, and wounding 40,000, with 2,000 achieving rank of officer. 282,000 of the remaining were believed to have died in concentration camps.²⁹ A large makeup of these women were young, visionary peasants from the countryside, who had seen their homes destroyed by war. Although a majority of women did not officially join the front, others would help by feeding, sheltering and clothing those actively fighting and injured.³⁰

²⁶ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg 79.

²⁷ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 69.

²⁸ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 69.

²⁹ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 70.

³⁰ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 71.

For those that did decide to join, they were handed a gun with little training (although no specific military training for women, and the only women specific training was for nursing to help the wounded), and joined the village Partisan unit. Another purpose female members had was entertaining the forces, work in propaganda, transporting mail or recruiting more members,³¹ Rural women were a huge contribution to the effort as Yugoslavia was eventually divided into liberated and occupied zones. The Partisans had wanted these female support systems in the regions going back and forth between powers.³²

In the end, 92 of these women would be deemed national heroes, many of whom were workers, housewives and students.³³ Jancar-Webster, in 1985, interviewed 6 national heroes and 10 leading female Partisans about their experience and reasons for joining the cause. Interestingly, only one of these factors directly related, specifically, to the woman's cause. Their reasons consisted of: Tito's promotion of Southern Slavs gaining liberation and in Tito's Yugoslavia each nationality would be somewhat independent with its own republic and ability to live out its culture; equal rights for women, with one of the first acts gaining the right to vote, and lastly a desire to alleviate the mass suffering of their people. These women were staunch Tito supporters and believed in him and the fundamentals of communism to right the wrongs they had been fighting for. This is echoed in communist activist Dusanka Kovacevic's response to these women's groups, "The women's groups were not setup to deal exclusively with women's problems, but rather to serve the movement of women ready and willing to take part in

³¹ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 72-73.

³² Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 75.

³³ Jancar-Webster, Barbara, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945*. (Arden Press 1990). Pg. 1-245.

the war and revolution and thereby make their contribution to military and political victory.”³⁴

National hero Sasa Bozovic had also said this of the communist party:

When asked what encouraged her to finally join, she said she discovered during the war that the communists stood for everything she stood for (she was a strict orthodox Christian). They were not intolerant or cruel as they had been described. On the contrary, they represented the highest kind of humanism.³⁵

The unfortunate thing for communism is that in theory and in paper, it works. It is when it is put forth in reality when it does not work. The AFL was eventually abolished in 1953, with the government seeing the possibility of a party agency promoting gender equality better, especially one that was not just women.³⁶ These women won the right to vote and the right to election of administrative posts and functions, but any real equality would have to threaten the current societal hierarchy. With men at the top, this meant the eventual loss of male support, meaning women can only win truly equal status with equal representation, which should be possible through Tito. Right?

Female Representation and Policy in a Socialist State

It was this relationship between political authority and the trivia of daily living, this view from below, that interested me most. And who should I find down there, most removed from the seats of political power, but women. The biggest burden of everyday life was carried by them. Even if they fully participated in revolutionary events, they were less active and less visible in the aftermath of those events.³⁷

This is the perspective of Slavenka Drakulic, a journalist from Yugoslavia, who wrote on the daily lives of women in Yugoslavia. The new constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia proclaimed that “everyone shall be equal before the law,” and “each person shall be duty bound

³⁴ Jancar-Webster, *Gender Politics*, pg. 79.

³⁵ Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, pg. 69.

³⁶ Ramet, Sabrina, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Successor States*. (Pennsylvania State University Press 1999) pg. 89-105, 94.

³⁷ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. xv

to respect the rights and freedoms of others and shall be held responsible for it.”³⁸ Women finally received the legal equality they had been fighting for. Women would also soon find that having legal equality did not change their status in, and the mindset of, society overnight. They also soon found that the “women question” was to be swept under the rug, and that the government they had fought for quickly forgot about them. The party and congress changed the “women question” into a class struggle, and a question of class, not a question in its own right, this active forgetfulness allowed it to be easily ignored.³⁹

It was also easily ignored because of the lack of women in congress. In 1948, only 9.7% of the 5th congress delegated were women and there were only three (4.8% of the total members) women in the central committee. In 1952, the number of women in the central committee of the 6th congress doubled to six-however this was still only 18%. Somehow, representation in local administration fell from 19% in 1948 to 13% in 1952. Representation would stay very low through the 11th, Tito’s last, congress.⁴⁰ Even with Tito’s apparent appall with these numbers, having warned congress that the “underrepresentation of women in political life was contrary to our principles concerning the equality of women,”⁴¹ this continued to happen. This, and the apparent significance of gender equality in his ideal socialist program makes one think about the other factors obstructing equal representation.

Eventually in May 1962, Milka Planinc was elected Prime Minister, becoming the first, and only, woman to hold such a position. Planinc was previously head of Communist Party in Croatia for 11 years and had been a member of the communist party since 1944. Her goals were

³⁸ Mertus, *Human Rights*, pg. 397.

³⁹ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 103.

⁴⁰ Ramet. *Gender Politics*, pg. 99. This footnote includes all of the statistics on female representation in the paragraph.

⁴¹ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 100.

to overcome economic problems and strengthen unity and equality throughout Yugoslavia. At the time she was the only women in government, with 14 ministers and 14 other members.⁴² Even with a female as head of the government, there was still limited representation of women throughout parliament.

Women had won the right to vote in August 1945 to vote in the upcoming election, where the communist party ran unopposed; nonetheless, women finally had a voice.⁴³ In 1950, 90% of women voted and although Yugoslavia was communist, people could be elected to local, political posts where 80% of women voted in 1952 and made up 52.8% of registered voters.⁴⁴ This shows that women were consistently voting for and participating in a government and society that underrepresented them.

Women were promised on paper guaranteed equal pay for equal work, maternity hospitals and day nurseries, right to paid leave before and after childbirth, and participation in social and political life.⁴⁵ Specific legislation in the 1974 constitution required paid maternity leave 28 days before the expected delivery and for at least 105 days after, and by 1990 some republics required a year after the birth of the baby, minimum.⁴⁶ Women had also won reproductive rights over her body, in 1951 while abortion was illegal, the physician providing the operation was prosecuted, not the woman. Shortly after, in 1952 abortion was legalized for medical, legal, social and related reasons. In 1978, Croatia passed a law allowing more

⁴² Yugoslav Parliament Elects a Woman as Prime Minister, *New York Times*, 17 May 1982. It is interesting to note the title of the article, which shows how rare this is. If a man is elected to any role with high standing, he would be referred to with his name. When women are elected to any role with high standing, they are referred to as their gender.

⁴³ Crampton, R.J. *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After*. (1994) pg. 216.

⁴⁴ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 99.

⁴⁵ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 94.

⁴⁶ Curtis, Glenn. Yugoslavia-The Contemporary Health and Welfare Systems. *Yugoslavia, a Country Study*. (Library of Congress December 1990).

availability of contraception and permanent sterilization and legal abortion if the health of the woman was in jeopardy.⁴⁷

This bizarre status of women shows that although women were legally supported, there was something fundamentally wrong in the basic understanding of equality. This can be summarized in the words of Ramet, “In other words, Socialism’s failure-unlike the failure of capitalism-is singularly instructive, in that with its failure, there can be, or so it seems to me, no question by that the achievement of gender equality requires a frontal assault on the cultural, psychological, religious, social, economic bastions of patriarchy.”⁴⁸ Basically, the patriarchy needed to be dismantled at the core for true equality to arise.

A way for this to be done is through education. In 1931 54.4% of women over 10 were illiterate, while 32.2% of men over 10 were. That number decreased to 28.8% of women over 10 being illiterate in 1961, with 75% of them being women over 35. By 1974, 40% of students in higher education were women.⁴⁹ One has to think that with the dates coinciding, there is a correlation between education and feminism.

Although women were physically represented in education, they were not represented in the instruction itself. This was especially the case in schoolbooks. In a study done by Rajka and Milan Polic in 1979, in third grade textbooks 68% of the main characters were male, while 32% were women. These numbers were worse in literary schoolbooks where 73% of the characters were males. Throughout these books, the few women present were portrayed as maternal, beautiful, indecisive and the weak objects of male conquest, while men were portrayed as strong,

⁴⁷ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 96-97. This includes all of the laws following the previous footnote.

⁴⁸ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 104-105.

⁴⁹ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 96.

courageous, warrior-like with little to say about fatherhood or their looks.⁵⁰ This form of education strengthened a sense of patriarchy and a lack of education on strong, legitimate feminism is seen as the base for the lack of feminist movement until the 1970s and why when they resurfaced, they emphasised a change in education.⁵¹

The Feminist Movement and Lack Thereof

After the epoch of feminist organizations in the early-mid 1900s, Yugoslavia did not see another (non-communist affiliated) one until the 1970s. Feminism was treated as another ‘-ism’ led by the West with the intent to oppress those in Central and Eastern Europe.⁵² Of the six women Jancar-Webster had interviewed, most claimed that they were not feminists and that they did not want ‘women against men,’ but to be equal and feel equal.⁵³ Which I found interesting because it sounds like what they wanted is the legitimate intent of feminism, but misunderstood it as a ‘man-haters-club.’ This misunderstanding of feminism had negative repercussions on feminists as well, reflected by Drakulic who wrote they were “unprepared, confused without organization or movement yet. Perhaps we are even afraid to call ourselves feminist. Many women here see the movement as a “world without men,” a world of lesbians,” that they don’t understand and cannot accept.”⁵⁴

An important perspective that Drakulic shares in her book was the absence of femininity and its unforeseen effects on feminism. This perspective reminds us of the real experience of women under socialism, that would eventually result in a new feminist consciousness. Drakulic recognized that “In the five year central plans made by men, of course there was no place for

⁵⁰ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 104.

⁵¹ Ramet, *Gender Politics*, pg. 95.

⁵² Mertus, *Human Rights*, pg. 385.

⁵³ Jancar-Webster, *Women and Revolution*, pg. 70.

⁵⁴ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 132.

such trivia as cosmetics. Anyway, aesthetics were considered a superficial, “bourgeois” invention. Besides, women were equal under the law, why would they need to please men by using all these beauty aids and tricks?”.⁵⁵ This connects to a greater realization by women that legal equality had its downfalls as well, especially in that although things were not truly equal, they were not be given much space to comment, without their legal equality being thrown back at them. This ‘all-things-attractive attachment’ to the bourgeois even required members of the party to ask for official permission to marry a woman who looked like she may have been bourgeois.⁵⁶

Drakulic saw these “bourgeois” inventions as political tools that women used to separate themselves from other women and the conformity pushed onto them by communism.⁵⁷ Women’s fashion was created through this lack of individuality and limited choice, causing women to look to the black market and because of the trouble they went through, and by comparison, were always overdressed and easily visible.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, for women it seemed that the equality they received was the equal opportunity to live like men. Women “had to work like men, proving they were equal to men physically. They worked on construction sites, on highways, in mines, in fields and in factories. The communist ideal was a robust woman who didn’t look much different than a man.”⁵⁹ In a true socialist utopia, the ideal woman should be a woman that was a woman in her own right, without pressures to be beautiful, and if beautiful, without the pressure of being bourgeois. Basically, she could live freely without the comparison to men.

⁵⁵ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 23.

⁵⁶ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 23

⁵⁷ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*. Pg 27.

⁵⁸ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 26.

⁵⁹ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 23.

This never ending pressure came to surface in 1979 when women in Croatia (including Drakulic as a founding member) came together to form the first feminist organization after 1945 with Women and Society. Women and Society started as a branch of the Sociological Society of Croatia to gain legality and legitimacy, but by allowing any citizens to join, its members soon outnumbered the latter.⁶⁰ The inspiration for this organization came after Drakulic and seven friends returned from the first International Feminist Conference. After just a few articles were published, they started getting attacked for importing “foreign ideology.”⁶¹ They also received threats, divorce, spitting, pornographic stories written about them and were accused of being elitist. Drakulic would say of this time that they learned “that a feminist is not only a man-eater here, she is an enemy of the state.”⁶² Luckily, they persevered and the numbers kept growing, as did the number of feminist organizations. In 1980 the Women’s Lobby was founded in Belgrade as a response to Serbia’s proposal to ban abortions and with the call to establish a Ministry for Women, which would require their issues to be paid attention to. This was later rejected, but this push made other women aware of the struggles they were facing.⁶³

This level of consciousness was again stimulated in the later 1980s-90s with the rise of nationalism. There was a push to grow the ethnic populations-and number of future soldiers-and for women to return home to do so. Also, with the rise in unemployment, women were expected to return home to allow men to fill their vacancies.⁶⁴ This shows how women were essentially pawns of the communist party’s politics. They had needed women’s help during their rise to power and women saw a promised entry into the job field, independence and equality. Now that

⁶⁰ Licht and Drakulic, *Peacemakers*.

⁶¹ Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 128.

⁶² Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism*, pg. 129.

⁶³ Licht and Drakulic, *Peacemakers*.

⁶⁴ Licht and Drakulic, *Peacemakers*.

they needed soldiers and less unemployment, women were expected to, once again, meet these needs. This resulted in the creation of Women's Parliament in March 1991 as a way to represent women and their basic interests.⁶⁵

Unfortunately the answer to Yugoslavia's woman question was swept away with the demise of the country and the growth of politicized nationalism.

Where Does it Start and Where Did it End?

In summary, the status and role of Women in Yugoslavia during the 20th century is, to put it nicely, perplexing.* Women have been a staple in Yugoslav society through their role as a mother and eventually in the revolution that brought a government into power that promised them their equality. Women were pawns of the region's politics, with influence starting and ending when the government decided.

Although on paper they did receive their due rights and some promising laws, many women did not see this equality at the ground level. The success of feminism would have meant the disestablishment of the patriarchy. The people of Yugoslavia disestablished their government twice before they could disestablish the patriarchy.

⁶⁵ Licht and Drakulic, *Peacemakers*.

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