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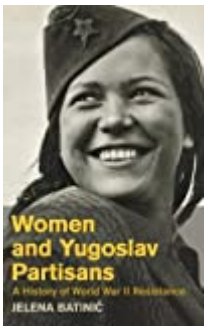

Jelena Batinić. *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. x + 287 pp. $99.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-09107-8.

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Jelena BatiniÄâs *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance* covers the role women played in the Communist-led Yugoslav Partisan resistance. It reveals how gender norms both aided and impeded the movement by investigating the *partizanka*, the female Partisan fighter. BatiniÄ shows that gender norms are entrenched and pervasive, and the question of womenâs role in wartime is not a recent phenomenon but a historic dilemma. A historian who specializes in Eastern Europe, World War II, and gender history, she has the pedigree to author the book. BatiniÄâs research is thorough and comprehensive, delving into archives and libraries in both the Balkans and the United States; she uses an extensive array of primary and secondary sources, including military records, media, illustrations, interviews, diaries, and cinematography. This book provides a unique perspective of gender norms, but should not be relegated to only those interested in gender studies. *Women and Yugoslav Partisans* will have a much wider audience, including scholars of World War II history, military history, Communism, cinematography, sociology, and anthropology.

BatiniÄ sets the stage for the book in the introduction, describing the historiographical contexts in the book, overview of the chapter content, and historical background. *Women and Yugoslav Partisans* is first and foremost an examination of the changes in gender norms in Yugoslavia during the war, the revolution, and the establishment of the Communist state. BatiniÄ analyzes this change at three levels: political rhetoric, institutions, and daily practice. She also examines these roles through several historiographical contexts: gender and war studies, women and Communism, comparative Communist studies, and the workings of the modern state. BatiniÄ designed the flow of the book thematically, the chapters aligning with the three levels of analysis. Next, she briefly outlines the content of each chapter, and shows how the chapters build on each other. BatiniÄ closes the introduction with a brief synopsis of the background of the region during World War II, the growth and success of the revolution, and the development of the Communist state of Yugoslavia. It is here that BatiniÄ states her thesis, âThe finalâcrucial but often over-lookedâfactor that distinguished the Partisans from all their opponents and contributed greatly to their success was their emphasis on womenâs mobilization and mass participation in the struggleâ (p. 25).

The central character of this book is the *partizanka.* The success of the Partisan Army, and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), depended heavily on the sub-

stantial participation of women in the revolution. Chapter 1 reveals how the CPY was able to recruit women, both in support of the war and on the frontline fight. Following the theme of political rhetoric, this chapter describes how the CPY used two motifs to mobilize women: the revolutionary promise of gender equality and heroic imagery found in epic folklore. BatiniÄ proposes that the second motif was the key to the mass participation of women in the CPY. The CPY needed to influence the populace, which consisted of a high percentage of peasants. The female peasantry was uneducated and illiterate, and initial recruitment by the CPY on the merits of Partisan goals was largely unsuccessful. However, when the CPY changed its tactics to invoke the heroic character from South Slavic epic poetry, the peasantry took notice. The folk heritage of the peasantry was manipulated into the Communist narrative and thus the CPY established cultural authority among the peasants. The Partisans invoked the heroines of epic poetryâthe patriotic mother and the female warriorâto recruit peasant women into the revolution. The mass mobilization of women into the Partisan movement was accomplished through the skillful weaving of traditional symbols and revolutionary ideas.

Chapter 2 describes the next level of review, the institution, and details the development and workings of the Antifascist Front of Women (AFW). The AFW, a party-controlled womenâs organization, was the Communist tool to recruit and utilize peasant women from the countryside. The AFW also found the advantage of linking the old with the new. They realized that using womenâs traditional responsibilities was the best way to mobilize women. The AFW was able to organize traditional gender roles and transform them into a rear reserve for the Partisan Army. The AFW grew to be a large and robust organization, holding conferences, publishing journals, and gaining a seat at party councils. Its growth and success as a womenâs organization drew the attention and concern from the CPY, fearful of the AFW becoming too feminist and independent, which led to its complete transformation and reorganization. Ultimately, the AFWâs success in utilizing women to create a strong rear support for the army also led to the continued institutionalization of gender roles and norms. The very success of the AFW was also its downfall.

Chapter 3 focuses on the *partizanka* in combat units. Despite the Communist leadershipâs proclamations and directives to encourage and implement gender equality, the reality of life in the combat unit for women fell into traditional gender roles. The epic heroine rhetoric used to recruit and mobilize female masses to support the war was not as easily embraced by local-level combat-unit commanders. Indeed, it took time for the party to allow women fighters to join, with official guidance being issued in 1943. On the whole, the proportion of women in combat units averaged about 12 percent (p. 131). Once women recruits began showing up in mixed-gender units, most often they were appointed to the medical sector as nurses. It became the norm for the *partizanka* to be both solider and nurse. BatiniÄ groups the problems of integration of women into combat units into four general categories: womenâs military inexperience, persistence of old beliefs and hierarchies, perseverance of the customary sexual division of labor, and emergence of sexual tensions in the units. While reports reveal that the *partizankas* were brave and dedicated combatants, there was also a high casualty rate due to their lack of military training. Despite the party leadershipâs declarations, there continued to be disapproval against recruiting females into combat units, and discrimination inside the units persisted. *Partizankas* in combat units were often assigned to be nurses, a lesser status than a fighter. Even when allowed to be a fighter, *partizankas* were often assigned to, or expected to do, âwomenâs workâ (p. 148). *Partizankas* who were mothers faced the hardest sacrifices. Life in the army was brutal, and women with children, or who became pregnant, faced devastating losses of death, or had to choose between the fight or their child. Despite the hardships, prejudices, loss, and sacrifice, the large majority of *partizankas* look back at their service with fondness. It was a time of liberation, faith, commitment, and idealism. It afforded these women a sense of purpose and accomplishment, âthe best time of their livesâ (p. 167).

BatiniÄ explores the emergence of sexual tensions in the units, as well as the behavioral and sexual norms in the Partisan movement at the daily practice level in chapter 4. The party promoted self-discipline and sexual propriety as the values of all Partisans. The CPY monitored and policed the personal lives of members, including their romantic relationships and sexual behavior. Private life was subordinate to the party, and the CPY expected its members to put that life on hold during the revolution. Party members were expected to uphold standards of discipline, loyalty, and self-control, and were expected to perform âcriticism and self-criticismâ to assist in compliance. There were designated sessions where members were expected to confess their doubts and weaknesses to each other, as well as expose and condemn mistakes of others. The party also constructed a

database with detailed information on each party member, which included their personal life. The honor of the party and its army depended on the moral behavior of Partisan soldiers, and thus sexual behavior was regulated. Unfortunately, in practice, those regulations were enforced with a different standard for women than for men. If there were problems in the units related to sexual tensions, it was typically deemed that women were the source. Despite the partyâs official stance of abstinence in the units, the evidence shows a high incidence of abortions, reports of incidents of a sexual nature, and spread of venereal disease. BatiniÄ concludes that even though the party was committed to egalitarianism, a persistent sexual double standard remained.

Chapter 5 delves into the legacy of the *partizanka* in Yugoslavia. The legendary hero fighter was heavily linked with Communism and the Communist Party. Initially after the war, the *partizanka*âs sacrifice and heroism was lauded in the state-sponsored historical memory, as well as in literature and cinema. However, as the years passed, the gender specificity of the *partizanka* was attacked, being portrayed for her sexuality and womanhood. In the 1980s through the 1990s, the memory of the *partizanka* all but disappeared from the public eye. Having been linked so closely to the party, the *partizanka* experienced a downfall with the regime. The *partizanka* started as a revolutionary hero and ended in ignominy.

BatiniÄ has authored a compelling book that reveals the pervasiveness of gender norms and the power of traditional culture. The success of the Partisan Army relied heavily on the incorporation of gender norms and manipulation of local traditions into its ideology to achieve the mass mobilization of the peasants. However, even in the midst of a war for survival, with institutional support for gender equality, the daily practice of gender inequality continued to occur. BatiniÄ honors the memory and sacrifice of these brave women. Much can be learned through this study of the *partizanka*, from how and why she was created and empowered to how and why she was forgotten.

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