

## Yugoslav Communism: Gender and Power Discourses in the Constituent Republics (From Communism to Feminism: What Does It Take?)

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**Abstract:** The mass participation of women in the communist-led Yugoslav Partisan resistance is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the Second World War, which unprecedented and elsewhere unrivaled female military involvement of more than two million women joining the Partisan movement has inflicted change in the gender norms and values installing the Yugoslav Communism. The female transition from the medical corps to the Partisan forefront combats, not only created the new model of warfare, but also laid the foundations of the gender (semi)inclusive communist leadership of the Partisan State, where though the Women’s Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia, the political, economic and social realms, have become the new battlefields for equality between the genders.

Although constitutionally defined as a “*Federal Republic of equal nations and nationalities freely united in achieving specific and common interests, where all social actors, each according to ability and needs, are contributing to the realization of the human rights and freedoms with respect to human dignity*” (as stated in the *Constituent Acts of Yugoslavia and Constitution of SFRY, 1974*), women in the Yugoslav system were well represented in comparison with the representation of women in other communist or noncommunist countries at the time (prior to the first-wave of the feminist movement), but yet, underrepresented in comparison with their participation in the National Liberation Movement. Instead of being celebrated, the merit of women in all aspects of the anti-fascist resistance, after winning the battlefield of the Second World War was disregarded, which has put them in another battlefield for equality between the genders. Considering the extent of the struggle, conclusions can be drawn that the fight against the fascist aggressor was easier than the fight against the patriarchal one. In that regard, through an analytical, qualitative, quantitative and comparative approach, this article aspires to answer the question of *if and how the Yugoslav Communism has affected the gender and power discourses in the former Communist Federal and today’s Democratic Sovereign Republics*.

**Keywords:** communism, Yugoslavia, power, gender discourse.



### **Introduction: How it all started?**

Unlike the Western model of balancing women's rights with the men's primarily utilizing the means of campaigns for reforms on political, economic and social issues, the Yugoslav model of attaining female representation in the political, economic and social realm grounds its foundation on women's participation and merit in the Yugoslav communist-led Partisan movement liberating the South Slav State from the Fascist invader in the time of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Analogously, while in the Western world women were fighting against the patriarchal antagonist trying to preserve male supremacy and subordination of women, in the Yugoslav case women were fighting against the fascist aggressor in joint force with their male combatants, which constitutes a distinct approach to the final aspiration of gender balanced societies, reflected over the arrangement of countries and their perception of women's role. Whereas in the Western case, the status of women from an already secondary deployment was subdivided along the racial and social class bases, branching the feminist movement on three different waves for suffrage and political rights of the upper and middle-class white women (first wave feminism), socio-cultural rights of women regardless of their race and class (second wave feminism) and equal representation and value of labor between the genders in all spheres of life (third and still ongoing wave of feminism);<sup>2</sup> in the South Slav case, the seriousness and urgency of the wartime left no room for any sort of ethnic or social class subdivision of the status of women, whose unity and solidarity led to the collective treatment of the question of women's rights in the later stage of their political, economic and social partake in the Federal Yugoslav Republic. Either in the Western or Yugoslav post-war model of struggle for equality between the genders, the patriarchal oppression did not lag behind in no time or occasion, in which fight back, the greater solidarity and unity of the South Slav women regardless of ethnicity and social class, managed to introduce women's rights in the Yugoslav Constitution of 1946, and subsequently prioritize them in the fourth and final constitutional drawing of 1974.<sup>3</sup>

In times of the most devastating and downturn developments, popular unrests and humanitarian crises ever witnessed in human history, the only bright side in the darkness of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jelena Batinic, *Gender, revolution, and war: The Mobilization of Women in the Yugoslav Partisan Resistance during World War II*, (Stanford University 2009), Pages: 2-13.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Thomas Cook and Michael Ryan, *Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies* (Wiley Blackwell 2016), Pages: 290-293.

<sup>3</sup> Chiara Bonfiglioli, *The Dangerous Women Project: Partizanke*, (University of Edinburg, 2016) Pages:1-3.

World Wars was their impact in the elevation of women's rights in society. In the case of the South Slav State, the mobilization of male soldiers during the First World War with its gender exclusive model of warfare, evidently led to opening of many employing vacancies for the women. In the state of emergency, women came across the opportunity for their self-actualization and financial independence, that with the rise of the Second World War and women's participation in battle ranks of the Partisan resistance implied the inclusive and up until then, unseen concept of warfare.<sup>4</sup> Thus, women have clearly testified their ability to deal with weapons, as well as they were dealing with the household prior to their military involvement. Colorblind to the colorful abilities of women to fit in the palette of societal roles and engagements, men did not admit, and even less allow an equal footing of women, that in contrast to women's expectations to be awarded for their merit either in the economic viability (World War I) or military auxiliary (World War II), often ended up disregarded and even disputed with measures back-setting their rights and freedoms to the place they were before. Despite the record of 100,000 women fighting as Partisans, 2 million participating in support of the National Liberation Movement, 25,000 women's lives lost in the battlefields, 40,000 wounded and 92 designated as national heroes,<sup>5</sup> as the wartimes were coming to an end and men started returning from the warfronts, the unchanged laws regulating the status of women, inflamed suspicion for intended setback of women's positioning as the most disenfranchised citizen of the country.<sup>6</sup> The inertness of the communist and male-dominated leadership in initiating and proceeding lawful equality between the genders, made it clear that after winning over the fascist aggressor, the patriarchal antagonist was on the way to become the new rival of women in the battle for their rights and freedoms.

The post-war broken promises and dreams for society, in which one's competence rather than gender decides about the role played or status enjoyed, didn't deter the women in their intentions, but only strengthened their aspirations for political, economic and social partake of the Yugoslav Federation, that conveyed through the Antifascist Women's Front as the unity of female Partisans and Communist Party members from families with traditionally leftist engagement,<sup>7</sup> set the new dimension of gender rights and freedoms in the South Slav State. In times of predominant

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Jancar Webster, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941–1945* (Arden Press 1990) Page: 1.

<sup>5</sup> Chiara Bonfiglioli, *The Dangerous Women Project: Partizanke*, (University of Edinburg, 2016) Pages: 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Kovacevic, Dusanka. *Women of Yugoslavia in the National Liberation War* (Jugoslovenski Pregled 1977) Pages: 6-20.

<sup>7</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Successor States* (Penn State Press 2010), Pages: 67-88.

patriarchal rhetoric, the formation and operation of such Antifascist Women's Front retitled as Women's Society of Yugoslavia following its abolition in 1953,<sup>8</sup> would undoubtedly become a matter of immediate discord and extermination, that due to the Front's initial and men's approved role in the mobilization of women joining the National Liberation Movement against the fascist invader, its existence even in transition from the anti-fascist to the pro-feminist role, were spared from the consequences it would eventually encounter as if the Front was operating in another country at the time. As a matter of fact, the wartimes not only provided the women with the opportunity to exercise financial independence (resulting from men leaving to the military and women taking over jobs during the First World War) and demonstrated their resistant capability (appearing with the women's involvement in the battlefields of the Second World War), but also provided the women with the opportunity to mobilize themselves in causes that imply improvement of their status in the society. The only advantage of the most disadvantageous era in the world's history, indescribable to many societies at the given time, led to the consideration of women's requirements in the installment of the regime arranging the Yugoslav Federation, in which communist leadership, women with names worth being mentioned, were found in the forefront lines as well. Given that Latinka Perovic held the position of Chief Secretary of the Communist Party (1968 – 1972), Savka Dabcevic Kucar executed the role of Prime Minister of the Communist Party (1967 – 1969), and, most notably, Milka Planinc carried the position of State Prime Minister (1982 – 1986),<sup>9</sup> a conclusion can be drawn that in communist times it was possible for women to reach the high social strata, but yet, the evidence of their unequal representation (compared to men) and dismissal due to their "too liberal" convictions, creates the impression of an obnoxious attitude towards female emancipation and equality between genders, prevailing over the assumption of women being treated the same as their male colleagues and fellow compatriots. In their weakness to confront women's military engagement, oftentimes, the female Partisans have been portrayed as ugly, dirty and promiscuous in the Fascist propaganda that perceived women's participation in the liberation struggle as an abnormality to the natural gender order.<sup>10</sup> Not much different from the Fascist attempt to demoralize and uglify the women holding artillery instead of

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<sup>8</sup> Andrea Jovanovic, *Antifascist Front of Women within Social Reconstruction of Yugoslav Society* (Mayday School Ljubljana 2014) Pages: 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> Dino Murtic, *Post Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining* (University of South Australia, 2015) Page: 88-89.

<sup>10</sup> Chiara Bonfiglioli, *The Dangerous Women Project: Partizanke*, (University of Edinburg, 2016) Pages: 1-3.

cleaning equipment and diving their hands in blood rather than dust, the post-war patriarchal propaganda placed its accent on the glorification of women's roles as a mother and a caring housewife, overshadowing the image of a powerful political, economic and social individual, and somehow managed to penetrate into the depth of women's psychology and convince them they were "naturally predetermined" for these roles. Given that the participation of the "ugly, dirty and promiscuous" women in the Partisan ranks as self-mobilized through the Antifascist Women's Front has carved the new subjectivities of the South Slav women, whose rights were initially recognized in the Yugoslav Constitution of 1946 and advanced in the fourth and final Constitution of 1974 as the Front transformed itself into a Women's Society of Yugoslavia,<sup>11</sup> yet in practice, the admiration of the mother and housewife images counterweighted by the business-woman disfiguring attitude of men, has manipulated women's elevation in the upper political, social and economic echelons of the country. The constitutional provision of rights coupled with the propagandistic seizure of the rights provided, coinciding with the principle of reverse psychology in the effect over the rightful beneficiaries, once again made it clear that the constitutional upholding of women's status, by no means, prevents or extracts their discrimination and ambiguous manipulation.<sup>12</sup> While the conviction that women's contribution to the country's economy and resistance are predetermined to expiry date approximating with the end of the war, let the less educated women return to their traditional maternal and spousal roles as soon as the fascist occupier withdrew from the South Slav territory and men regained their political, economic and social positioning; the better educated and established feminists of the society ascribed to the Communist mantra with unwavering endeavors to change the practice, that instead of being regulated by the gender-respective Constitution, deviated from the acts prescribed therein. Indicator of how the Constitutional provision failed to secure an equal representation of the genders in the political, economic and social realm, is the quota system that besides its "generosity", hardly managed to obtain a critical mass of 30% female representation,<sup>13</sup> as a consequence of the propaganda nurturing the stereotype that the role of women at the workplace, is not as "sexy" as the one maintained at home. As an easy prey of the propaganda, the submissiveness of the less

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<sup>11</sup> Chiara Bonfiglioli, *The Dangerous Women Project: Partizanke*, (University of Edinburg, 2016) Pages: 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 22-41.

<sup>13</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 16-17.

educated women under the stigma of “naturally predetermined roles” of the genders, undoubtedly has disintegrated women’s unity as it was noted in the Front’s deeds fighting against the Fascist regime, whose internal bisection on prejudice-affected (less educated) and prejudice-immune (better emancipated) women, evidently led to loss of power in the fight for equality with men. Thus by multiplying the time needed to the single victory over men’s supremacy, guides to the estimation that the battle against the fascist aggressor was easier to win than the battle against the patriarchal one.

### **The new “She”: What South Slav feminism owes to Yugoslav communism?**

Although oftentimes confronted by the male and supreme authorities, the South Slav women have contributed to the process of postwar reconstruction and development of Federative Yugoslavia, from its creation up until its breakup on six Democratic Sovereign Republics (Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina). As once constituent and Continental Law provided the Republics with rights and freedoms regulated under the same constitutional provision, it is believed that even three-decades after the fall of the Federation, the present gender discourse in any of the successor countries, grounds its foundation on the burden of the heritage of four main events. Besides the First World War’s provision of financial independence and the Second World War’s endowment of military, political, economic and social rights to women (singled through the Antifascist Women’s Front and Women’s Society of Yugoslavia as aforementioned), the third event that greatly shaped the gender discourse either in the Federative Communist or Sovereign Democratic times of the Republics, is the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979 and ratified in 1982, followed by the fourth event of Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact succeeding their segregation.<sup>14</sup>

While two of the pillars bearing the load of the gender imperative (referring to the World Wars) are considered as external phenomena of the time, the Convention constituting the third pillar supporting the further construction and upgrade of the gender rights is recognized as a benefit of Yugoslav Communism that hardly fits within the matrix of other co-occurring Communist regimes. Known as an International Bill of Women’s Rights that each successor State inherited

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<sup>14</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 24-39.

from the Yugoslav times, with its sixteen acts accordingly treating the non-discrimination and sex stereotypes (article 1-6), women’s public-sphere rights (part 7-9), women’s economic and social rights (part 10-14), and women’s right to equality in family and marriage (part 15-16),<sup>15</sup> it is believed that the Convention laid the groundwork of modern-day gender discourse of the descendants that once were united under the Constitutional drawing of “*Federative Republic of equal nations and nationalities, freely united in achieving specific and common interests, where all social actors, each according to ability and needs, are contributing to the realization of the human rights and freedoms with respect to human dignity*”.<sup>16</sup> Even though the constitutional setting and conventional norm accordingly monitored by the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women were working in favor of the equality between the genders, the concentration of power solely in hands of the Communist Party using the Parliament and other elective bodies as its façade,<sup>17</sup> made it clear that women could prosper and fulfill the rights prescribed to them, only through joining the Party. Knowing that there is no “highway” to gender equality but only “stairway” to the world of equal opportunities, more and more women constituted the Party’s membership, and thus, through its channels, climbed into the higher layers of society. The change in the composition of the workforce inevitably brought on the table the question of motherhood, in whose response the infrastructure was accordingly adjusted to facilitate the industrialized childcare.<sup>18</sup> Since women’s housework implied much more than reproductive and offspring-supportive services, following the industrialization of childcare, marketization of the other “housewife” duties and responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking and home care,<sup>19</sup> inaugurated the Yugoslav economy by also shifting the discourse of labor. Thus, the elimination of the income-making and house-keeping division of roles between the genders, led to a shift of the home-made goods and services to ready-to-purchase ones, and in this transition, the demand was met by the market and state apparatus respectively. Either through the marketization or state intervention converting the housewife amenities into transactional or public goods and services,

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<sup>15</sup> UN Women, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Archive of Yugoslavia, Constituent Acts of Yugoslavia and Constitution of SFRY (1974).

<sup>17</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> Cheri Kamarae and Dale Spender, Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women’s Issues and Knowledge (Routledge, 2000) Pages: 1068-1073.

from a “prosumer”, the concept of the family has evolved into a producer and consumer entity,<sup>20</sup> with earning and purchasing power distributed between the genders acting as spouses in the matrimonial relationship.

On top of the convenience to maintain the role of a mother and a working woman, with the aim to stimulate and encourage participation of women in public spheres of Yugoslav society, the system of women’s quota was introduced. To some, this was understood as a double burden that had little to do (or nothing at all) with women’s emancipation.<sup>21</sup> Unlike women’s political, economic and social step-in either through the Front’s or Society’s spiral “drilling” the communist ground as laid on the leftist ideology, for the first time after the World Wars, with the ratification of the Convention, right-wing attitudes spreading a rightist ideology claiming that professional activity was not a choice that women made but a quota-pushed necessity imposed on them, affected the region. Instead of a measure intended to provide equal opportunities to an underrepresented group (in this particular case, women), ideas such as quotas in politics were moreover perceived as a limitation of electoral freedom and reinforcement of the stereotype that women needed “special help” to occupy positions that otherwise they may not have been qualified for.<sup>22</sup> The discriminatory or rivers-discriminatory legislative (lawful) and soft (unwritten but verbally agreed) quotas intended to ensure an equal electoral opportunity for men and women, evidently attained a critical mass (estimated to 30%) of female representation in the political sphere of the South Slav Republics nowadays.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, as much as appreciated, the quota system can be accused of withholding a greater equality between the genders, due to the “insulting” treatment towards women. Although general comparisons point to an upward trend in women’s participation in parliamentary and governmental structures of the once constituent Republics, the 23<sup>th</sup> positioning of Serbia, 25<sup>th</sup> of Slovenia, 29<sup>th</sup> of Macedonia, 50<sup>th</sup> of Croatia, 62<sup>nd</sup> of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 102<sup>nd</sup> of Montenegro on the world’s scale of female involvement in politics,<sup>24</sup> indicate a dissatisfying level of equality between the genders and failure of the quotas to secure any better

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<sup>20</sup> Cheri Kamarae and Dale Spender, *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women’s Issues and Knowledge* (Routledge, 2000) Page: 1069.

<sup>21</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 40-41.

<sup>22</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Page: 22.

<sup>23</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Page: 22-23.

<sup>24</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 11-12.



positioning of the countries. While the proportion of women in parliamentary and governmental compositions of the successor countries failed to reach even 40%, the situation greatly contrasts from women's involvement in the judiciary system where their presence varies from 60 – 70% according to the UNECE statistics. Just the way women dominate in the medical field as nurses due to their supposed “natural propensity” to thoroughness, the strong positioning of women in the judiciary system of the successor countries is considered a legacy of the communist era, in which women were favored by the sector due to their “natural tendency” to righteousness, that lately led to a feminization of the sector. Yet, this never involved the Supreme Courts and Constitutional Tribunals as men still dominated these.<sup>25</sup>

However, even when proportionally equal within a particular sector, the different positioning of genders in the hierarchy of the very same sector has reflected on the status of ownership of real estate and other registered properties between men and women. Since women were predominantly in the lower and rarely in the middle layers of the political, economic and social compositions of the South Slav Countries, right below the upper positioning of men in the very same structures, without further analysis, a conclusion can be drawn that the earning and purchasing power between the genders was far from equal as well. In that respect, while only 7.8% of the women owned a car, 8.7% were actual home owners, 7% disposed of agricultural soil or weekend houses, 2% owned private businesses and only 2% acquired savings, on the other side of the coin, 42% of the men owned vehicles, 32% were home owners, 21% disposed of agricultural soil or weekend houses, 6% owned private businesses and 4% acquired savings.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the communist regime that minimized individual ownership and maximized common proprietorship, objective statistics and ratio between the genders, have confirmed the subjective feeling of inequality. Although women constituted the South Slav popular majority of 52%, in regard to their representation of only 17% in the parliamentary and 24.4% in the provincial assemblies,<sup>27</sup> women have also turned into a minority in the political elite, even despite the Convention and gender quotas brought to power.

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<sup>25</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 18-20.

<sup>26</sup> Milka Puzigaca, Status and Gender Equality in Yugoslavia: The Position of Women in Yugoslavia. (Agency for Research and Development, 2002) Page: 1.

<sup>27</sup> Milka Puzigaca, Status and Gender Equality in Yugoslavia: The Position of Women in Yugoslavia. (Agency for Research and Development, 2002) Page: 2.

Not only did the negative or direct discrimination against women contribute to the gender inequality at the time, but also the positive or indirect discrimination arising with women's right to maternity leave, offspring rearing leave and sick child care leave, portrayed the women as "risky" and "demanding" labor due to the rights granted to them by law.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the evolution of rights prescribed to women opened room for another form of discrimination that from "dangerous" and "rebellious" (referring to the times of female involvement in the Anti-Fascist and Partisan combats), categorized the women in the group of "delicate" and even "hazardous" labor to the employers interested in production generating profits, rather than equality and justice between the genders. The conspiracy of positive discrimination against women at the workplace came to the fore with almost even statistics and somehow balanced the ratio of highly educated men and women in the South Slav State. That discredited even the smallest possibility of accusing women's professional incompetence, when it comes to their wide-spread unemployment. Women represent 60% of the total number of highly educated 'cadres' (university or college degree holders), 45% of the overall quantity of post-graduates and 37% of the PhD academics in the Yugoslav knowledge society,<sup>29</sup> which makes it clear that even though qualified not only for the executive but also for managerial professional engagements in the political, economic and social realm, women are not equal to men when it comes to their employment and career prospects.

An internal study going deeper into the matter of discrimination against women indicates that even when highly educated and professionally well positioned, women enjoyed lower support and understanding from their families, spouses and affiliated institutions compared to men,<sup>30</sup> mostly due to the traditional values transmitted from the past, sacred (mis)interpretations (present although silenced by the communist ideology) and financial limits where the priority was given to education and capacity building of the male offspring(s) in the family, and if anything was left, then resources were allocated for the emancipation of female.

Regarding the consideration that the knowledgeable women, even in spite of their competence and fulfillment of the prerequisite to bear equal responsibility and decision-making power with men, according to the Bureau of Statistic Data still comprised the majority of the

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<sup>28</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Page: 21.

<sup>29</sup> Milka Puzigaca, Status and Gender Equality in Yugoslavia: The Position of Women in Yugoslavia. (Agency for Research and Development, 2002) Page: 4.

<sup>30</sup> Milka Puzigaca, Status and Gender Equality in Yugoslavia: The Position of Women in Yugoslavia. (Agency for Research and Development, 2002) Page: 4.

Yugoslav unemployment rate,<sup>31</sup> it is assumed that male supremacy oppressed the women and even traded the Country's progress for regress, by not entirely utilizing women's potential and capacity in causes of national competitive advantage. Instead of objectively being judged on their qualification and competencies, analyses show that employers significantly more often question women than men about their marital status (40% of women and 23% of men), about the number and age of their children (27% of women and 14% of men), about their dressing habits (6% of women and 1% of men), and about possible complains of their spouses concerning overtime work and business trips (3% of women and 1% of men).<sup>32</sup> That clearly indicates a discriminating attitude towards women regardless of their professional distinction and working abilities.

While the quotas have been created precisely to prevent and deal with the phenomenon of discrimination against women, with the collapse of the communist regime and failure of its ideology to provide equality among the genders and social classes, considerable distrust towards the measure of quotas affected the popular masses that used to believe the system they live in was built on true partnership between the sexes. Exactly in the clash between the quota supporting and opposing arguments, regardless of the effort invested in implementing the solution that supposed to secure a "critical mass" of at least 30% women's participation in the political, economic and social spheres, the observance of the quota instrument varied from mandatory where the electoral lists and human-resource compositions were not approved if they failed to meet the criteria, to tolerable where the same were considered as a recommendation rather than a must in the political, economic and social functioning.<sup>33</sup>

As the trend of legislative (mandatory) and soft (tolerable) quotas walked out of fashion due to its inefficiency either to secure equal representation of the genders or stimulate female participation in "men's businesses", following the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation, the solution to post-conflict reconciliation and equality between men and women, was found in the Stability Pact and the Gender Task Force for South Eastern Europe. Not much different from the World Wars dramaturgy in which women played a pivotal role in the liberating and post-war reconstruction movement, following the Yugoslav break-up, women have repeatedly become the

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<sup>31</sup> Milka Puzigaca, Status and Gender Equality in Yugoslavia: The Position of Women in Yugoslavia. (Agency for Research and Development, 2002) Page: 5.

<sup>32</sup> Milka Puzigaca, Status and Gender Equality in Yugoslavia: The Position of Women in Yugoslavia. (Agency for Research and Development, 2002) Page: 7.

<sup>33</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 22-23.

key factor to post-conflict rapprochement and transition in the Balkan region.<sup>34</sup> Created at the initiative of the European Union and with a helping hand of the international community, the Stability Pact and the Gender Task Force or else known as “the sandwich strategy” due to the two-sided pressure over the authorities from the international (or external) organizations such as the UN, OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe and the European Commission on the one hand, and the national (or internal) actors for democratic change on the other hand,<sup>35</sup> aimed at bridging the gap of unequal opportunities between the genders as left from the communist and quota systems. With a vision to empower the women through the three-pillared mission of 1) increased public awareness for female participation not only in the middle but also in the upper strata of the society, 2) reformed electoral systems and 3) established governmental mechanisms that promote gender equality along the quota method,<sup>36</sup> an impression is created that the Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact did not take over the quota instrument, but only complemented the notion in the part where “positive discrimination” has counterweighted the desired equality between the sexes. The hybrid combination of gender quotas with facilitation mechanisms as “sandwiched” between the national and international human rights agents, according to the statistical change and upward trend of women holding equal responsibility and decision-making power with men, has achieved great success compared to the previous gender and power-sharing discourse in the region, in which the (mis)use of women in politics as a tool generating political points in favor of the parties that not necessarily have granted them the power to govern but employed them as puppets in men’s hands, loaded new form of controversy in the South Slav state of affairs between the genders. Moreover, since the Pact’s and Force’s installed mechanisms in most of the cases were financed and managed by the state, analogously, their efficiency depended on the fact whether the party on power obeyed a rightist or leftist ideology.<sup>37</sup>

Besides implementing governmental mechanisms and the reformation of the electoral system, improving public awareness about the right to equal opportunities of men and women through the channels of media and education denoted another domain of intervention of the

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<sup>34</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Pages:39-40.

<sup>35</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Page: 39-40.

<sup>36</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Page: 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, *Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe* (OHCHR, 2012) Page: 29.

Stability Pact and the Gender Task Force that intended to balance the communist androcentric rhetoric with gynocentric oration. The lower promotion and shorter exposure of women in the visual, audio and written media (half of the time of men), where if involved in programs other than selling commercials (where they were expected to discuss topics of supposed interest to women rather than internal or foreign state affairs) are held responsible for the promotion of traditional roles between the genders and the propagation of discrimination against women, all in the service of the conservative and male supremacy at the time. The link of women's traditional role with the human nature of genders that propagated women as too gentle and sensitive for the dirty game of politics where one's assertiveness and pushiness determine the mastery of players,<sup>38</sup> as a message conveyed through the textbooks and conventional media, inevitably has singled the impact in the mindset of people during communist times and left traces even in the post-communist and transitional era of the segregated countries. Despite the visual, audio and written media's impact, as the Democratic Sovereign Republics were reinforcing their religious beliefs in the transition from the Federal Communist regime in the weakness of the church to secure a greater secularization from the state, the ecclesiastical lineup and priesthood have been used as another type of media, (mis)preaching about the division of societal roles between the genders. Hence, the close church-state relationship tended to limit the rights of women (including the right to abortion) and strengthen the right-wing discourse that emphasized the bisection of genders in their separate spheres, with women invariably placed in the private and household-related sphere.<sup>39</sup> Considering the findings of a Gallup Poll investigating the importance of religion in the segregated countries, where the religious prominence of 78.5% in Macedonia, 66.5% in Croatia, 66% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 50.5% in Serbia, 47% in Slovenia and 45.5% in Montenegro demonstrate strong attachment of the people to their religious system of beliefs, an assumed aftermath of limited opportunities to women in the public sphere comes to the forefront.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, taking into consideration that 500 years ago today, on the very same territory, the Church was still discussing whether the woman was indeed a human being and whether she had a soul, the modern-day attempt for the limitation of women's rights and accusation (usually supported by the political conservative

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<sup>38</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 30-31.

<sup>39</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 34-36.

<sup>40</sup> Malgorzata Fuszara, Discrimination against women in law and in practice in political and public life including during times of political transitions. Region: Eastern Europe (OHCHR, 2012) Pages: 36-37.

parties) that women are responsible for the death of the nation due to the right to decide on their reproductive role in the society, indicate progress in the gender and power discourses that repeatedly and partially finds its credit in the communist narrative.<sup>41</sup>

Although the mileage to attainment of fully righteous equality between the genders is still long to go, almost three decades after the fall of Yugoslavia and transition from Communist Federal to Democratic Sovereign governance, the South Slav women today happily (and yet tendentiously) enjoy the benefits of their heritage, such as the right to marry, divorce, co-habit or reproduce themselves, the right to choose their careers and manage their intellectual, human, financial and physical capital, alongside the right to compete with men in the political, economic and social spheres on matters they consider important. Hence, according to the latest overview of the status of female political leadership, out of twenty-two women found at the highest political functions around the world (President and Prime Minister terms only), even four have governed the Former Yugoslav and present Democratic Sovereign Republics at given interval of time. Figures such as the sitting Serbian Prime Minister - Ana Brnabic and Croatian President - Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic, accompanied with the legacies of the former Slovenian Prime Minister - Alenka Bratusek (2013-2014), former Croatian Prime Minister - Jadranka Kosor (2009-2011), former Macedonian (acting) Prime Minister - Radmila Sekerinska (2004), former President of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Borjana Kristo (2007-2011) and former (acting) President of Serbia - Natasha Micic (2002-2004),<sup>42</sup> as well as memories of Milka Planinc serving as the State Prime Minister (1982 – 1986), Latinka Perovic performing as the Chief Secretary (1968 – 1972) and Savka Dabcevic Kucar as the Prime Minister of the Yugoslav Communist Party (1967 – 1969),<sup>43</sup> testify that despite the successive communist and post-communist obstacles, South Slav women have fought for their presence (although proportionally not equal with men) in the political realm, trend which was also preserved in the economic and social spheres where according to the findings of the International Monetary Fund on Women’s Role in the Western Balkans, increasing female participation in the composition of labor and societal subdivisions is also in fashion.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Slavenka Drakulic, *How we Survived Communism and Didn’t Laugh* (Eurozone 2015) Page: 10.

<sup>42</sup> JJ McCullough, Female World Leaders, ([Rulers.org](http://Rulers.org) 2017) Table 1& 2

<sup>43</sup> Dino Murtic, *Post Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining* (University of South Australia, 2015) Pages: 88-89.

<sup>44</sup> Ruben Antoyan and Jesmin Rahman, IMF Working Paper: *Increasing Women’s Role in the Economy of the Western Balkans* (IMF, 2017) Page: 1.

**Conclusion: From Communism to Feminism. What does it take?**

Unlike the Western model of equality of women’s and men’s rights, primarily utilizing the means of campaign for reforms on political, economic and social issues, the South Slav model of attaining female equivalence in the political, economic, social and even military realm, grounds its foundation in the Communist ideology and cycle of four main events. While 1) the First World War has provided the women with the opportunity to exercise financial independence by taking over the vacancies opened with men’s military recruitment, 2) the Second World War’s female participation in the Partisan resistance through the Women’s Antifascist Front, later becoming Women’s Society of Yugoslavia at the end of the war, has loaded a new assortment of political, economic and social rights for women, that with 3) the Convention for Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and 4) the Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact, greater equality between the genders came to the fore in the once Communist Federal and nowadays Democratic Sovereign Republics.

Evidently, in time of the most devastating and downturn developments, popular unrests and humanitarian crises ever witnessed in the human history, the only bright side in the darkness of the World Wars, was their impact in the promotion of women’s rights in the South Slav society. Hence, from propagated as “ugly, dirty and promiscuous” by the fascist aggressor, as the political, economic and social spheres have turned into new battlefields for equality between the genders, women became the “demanding and hazardous” labor as propagated by the patriarchal one. Even though many different mechanisms such as committees and gender quotas were brought to power to balance the androcentric rhetoric, instead of awarded for their merit of economic viability (World War I), military auxiliary (World War II) or post-war reconstruction of the communist and post-communist society (the Convention and the Gender Task Force impact), the South Slav women have become matter of direct and indirect (positive) discrimination, manipulation, stereotyping and even (mis)use as a tool of generating political points in favor of the parties that not necessarily granted them the power to govern when elected for office, but played them as puppets in man’s hands, that all together extended the struggle for women’s rights up until present times.

A famous and generally accepted axiom referring to the gender discourse in the countries that once constituted the Yugoslav Federation used to say that “*women survived Communism and*

*even laughed, but stopped laughing many times since*”,<sup>45</sup> meaning that the South Slav Communism was quite beneficial for the women, whose status encountered a series of obstacles withholding its further development in the transition towards the Sovereign Democratic arrangement of the once Federative Communist Republics.

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<sup>45</sup> Slavenka Drakulic, *How we Survived Communism and Didn’t Laugh* (Eurozone 2015) Page: 2.



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