

SECTION IV. STUDIES AND MATERIALS

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The Spanish Female Volunteers from Yugoslavia as Example of Solidarity in a Transnational Context

Abstract: The paper examines the historical legacy of volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, with a special emphasis on the biographical portraits of female volunteers. This segment of transnational solidarity in the Spanish Civil War has not yet been submitted to an appropriate socio-historical review, although it could, according to both authors, considerably influence the contemporary discourse on global (cosmopolitan) solidarity, especially in the branch of cosmofeminist theory, which emphasises the politics of compassion and empathy. The essence of the movement of Spanish volunteers, in other words, surpassed the issue of identification with the suffering of others, although this also represented an important element of mobilisation. Nevertheless, identification was not only generally humanistic, but was political and ideational more than anything else, the evidence of which manifested itself in sacrificing one's life for the sake of others. This perspective throws light on contemporary post-humanistic humanitarian solidarity and enables us to critically evaluate its contribution to global justice.

Introduction

In this article,¹ we examine the historical legacy of the Spanish Civil War and its contribution to the democratic concept of transnational solidarity. Our goal is to look back at the chapter of the international, as well as transcontinental, mobilisation of volunteers during the Spanish Civil War, which was executed with the intention to aid the forces representing the ideas of justice and the democratic popular republican idea of Spain. If the conservative forces (aristocracy, Falangists, monarchists, Carlists, Catholic church, etc.) were backed by German Nazism and Italian Fascism, the democratic global public actively supported the defence of the Spanish Republic led by the legally elected coalition of the Popular Front (socialists, republicans, communists, anarchists, anarchosindicalists, etc.).² While the *Non-Intervention Committee* (founded in 1936 as a guarantee for 'neutrality') was caught in

¹ This study was written within the project "The Role of Migration and Female Migrants in the Construction of Slovene National Identity from the National to the Post-National Era". A longer version of this paper was originally published as "Female Volunteers in Spain: A Historio-Sociological Case Study of Solidarity in a Transnational Context". See Ksenija Vidmar Horvat (ed.): *Women Away, Women on the Way: Female Migrants in the Slovene National Imagination*, Ljubljana, ZZFF, 2014, pp. 227-274.

² Avgust Lešnik: "Nuestros Españoles". Donesek k vlogi jugoslovanskih/slovenskih prostovoljcev v španski državljanski vojni 1936-1939 ["Nuestros Españoles". Contribution on the role of Yugoslav/Slovenian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939]. In: *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino / Contributions to the Contemporary History* 50 (2010), 2, pp. 88-89.

diplomatic games, conspiracies, and cross-interests (of Western democracies on one side, Nazi-Fascist forces on another, and Moscow on yet another), the world progressive public rose up in defence of the Republic and offered moral and material support to the Spanish people from the very beginning, soon after followed by the participation of volunteers.³

1927 individuals, 16 of them women, from the area of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, joined the volunteers. This number of women may seem small, but only if we fall into the trap of quantifying help as an estimation of forces, failing to take into consideration individual contributions. As soon as we take a closer look at the biographical narratives of the individuals through the fates of female volunteers, it becomes obvious to just what *extent*, via humanitarian, ideational, and moral decision-making, and risk-taking, the individuals of both genders responded to the distress of Spanish people; also, how, in the case of women from Yugoslavia, the risk was especially tightly interrelated with the mission of one's professional, emotional, and loyalty ties of family and marriage. By mobilising the international solidarity movement and the direct support of a foreign people facing the threat of Nazi-Fascism, the Spanish Civil War sheds light on the drastically different relations of equality and loyalty between genders when it comes to justice and solidarity, and thoroughly deconstructs the modern national mythology⁴ that postulates the sexual, familial, and matrimonial constitution of a romantic couple⁵ as the only functional microcosm capable of reproducing European nations.

The contribution of the marital biographies and the biographies of Yugoslav female volunteers in the Spanish Civil War to deciphering the broader social ethos of transnational solidarity can be outlined, but, however, definitely not thoroughly examined here. The aim of the article does not lie in reconstructing the past fight and its gender dimensions. Instead, we wish to bring closer the idea of transnational memory, i.e., memory of the past, which binds different nations and their plural democratic forces and diverse emphatic communities into a supranational memory collective. We maintain that the memory of the Spanish Civil War contains the potential to become an important element of the late modern and post-national mobilisation of the model of European solidarity, which represents an alternative to the ruling ideology of the post-humanitarian society of consumer egoism by bringing to the fore the emancipatory and freedom-loving ideational formations of international popular alliance.⁶ The memory of the female volunteers is an integral part of such alternative commemorative mobilisation.

The Transformation of the Concept of Solidarity

To understand the context in which memory can play a role in articulating solidarity in the present, we first have to shed some light on the transformations of solidarity moving from the modern to the post-modern age. Despite the hint of universalism and timelessness (e.g. in the quintessential sense of an ethical relation to another), the notion (and practice) of solidarity does not have a unified meaning or practical functioning instructions, whereas the subject that is being acted upon is also not a universal *individuum* that would always respond

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Nira Yuval-Davis: *Gender and Nation*, London, Sage, 1997.

⁵ For an alternative early modern conception of the romantic relationship, see Natalie Zemon Davis: *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983.

⁶ See Hauke Brunkhorst: *Solidarität. Von der Bürgerfreundschaft zur globalen Rechtsgenossenschaft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2002; Lilie Chouliaraki: *Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.

to the calls for solidarity with the same typology of social legitimation and/or psychological motive.

In short, we owe the modern notion of democratic solidarity to the concept of brotherhood of the Jacobin Revolution. It contains the preceding legacy of the Christian brotherhood (*fraternitas*) and love of one's neighbour (*caritas*), and the pagan-republican idea of harmony (Greek *harmonia*; Lat. *Concordia*) and citizen friendship (Greek *philia*; Lat. *amicitia*). The constitutional revolutions of the 18th century transformed the late medieval conception of solidarity grounded in class hierarchies into an egalitarian-democratic form bound to the "national community". The national principle of solidarity persevered until the end of the 20th century, when the appearance of globalisation and cosmopolitisation reintroduced Kantian universalism and the transnational principle of civilisation bonds in the global community of strangers.⁷ The idea of 'strangerhood' becomes the *leitmotif* of the progressive philosophical advocacy of "nations without nationalism"⁸ and the cosmopolitan and cosmofeminist ethic of compassion for another.⁹

The Modern Tradition

The modern definition of solidarity originates from the concept of identifying with others. With the emergence of the romantic culture of sentiment and feeling, as Lynn Hunt has demonstrated in her historical study entitled *Inventing Human Rights* (2007), identification ceases to represent only a direct form of association with the suffering of others who are close to us. The 18th century 'invents' the human ability to identify with the suffering of others who are either far removed from and unknown to us or even imagined and nonexistent, as, for example, a fictional hero of a novel or a play.

In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith explains the change from immediate into imaginative by means of the following argumentation: although he is our brother, we cannot experience the suffering of one being tortured in an immediate way, but we can identify with his suffering. Our imaginative capacity enables us to 'enter his body'. The observer who identifies with the one being tortured becomes a moral person who is aware that he or she can also become an object of such imaginative identification. He or she recognises him- or herself as an object upon which the feelings of another are projected, thus becoming an unbiased observer. An unbiased observer is autonomous, acquiring the latter through preceding identification with others.¹⁰

The modern autonomous subject is a moral subject that gains its autonomy from the ability to experience simultaneous identification with another and to auto-objectify itself in the suffering body. It is from this moral competency that the political competency – the ability to form a social solidarity – originates. The revolutionary constitution from 1793 builds on the Roman concept of civil law, combining it with the republican concept of public life. The Roman legal concept of solidarity represents an obligation for the whole community: shared responsibility

⁷ See Craig Calhoun: *Belonging in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary*. In: *Ethnicities* 3 (2003), 4, pp. 531-568; Vince P. Marotta: *The Cosmopolitan Stranger*. In: Stan van Hooft, and Wim Vandekerckhove (eds.): *Questioning Cosmopolitanism*, Dordrecht/New York, Springer, 2010, pp. 105-120; Ksenija Vidmar Horvat: *Kozmopolitski patriotizem [The Cosmopolitan Patriotism]*, Ljubljana, ZZFF, 2012.

⁸ See Julija Kristeva: *Nations without Nationalism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993.

⁹ See Margaret U. Walker: *Moral Understandings. A Feminist Study in Ethics*, London, Routledge, 1998; Amy M. Pason: *Towards a Feminist Cosmopolitan Theory. A Corrective to Nationalism, Fear, and War*. In: *San Diego, CA Online* <PDF>, accessed on June 7, 2011; http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p255532_index.html.

¹⁰ In Lynn Hunt: *Inventing Human Rights. A History*. London/New York, Norton, 2007, pp. 65–66.

and shared debt. "Everyone assumes the responsibility for everyone who is not able to repay their debts, thus making them also responsible for everyone else. Consequently the *obligatio in solidum* in the medium of abstract law binds strangers and heterogeneous interests".¹¹ The republican idea combines responsibility with citizenship and the fight against oppression, and the relevant passage reads as follows in *The Social Contract* of J. J. Rousseau: "when a society is under attack, this is an attack against every individual".¹² The background of the idea can be found in the Christian hope that "the last shall be first and we will all be equal in a democratic popular community". With Marx and the working class movement, the 19th century transforms the idea of brotherhood into the 'working-class brotherhood' and 'international solidarity'. The 20th century then merges solidarity with the idea of emancipation and equality.¹³

Modern solidarity originates in the moral discourse on the inherent goodness of a human being and his ability to treat a stranger respectfully and not as an enemy. Modern history gave birth to two alternative forms of solidarity: revolutionary solidarity, which pursues social change and strives to do away with the conditions of injustice, and the charitable solidarity (*salvation*), which tries to reduce suffering.¹⁴ Both examples represent a corrective of political economy, which creates inequality in the first place and subsequently also lives on the same. It was Adam Smith who had already pointed out that charitableness and goodwill in relationship with each other correct the invisible arm of the market economy. The discrepancy between universal morality and the amorality of the market represents the core of capitalist order and colonial expansionism.¹⁵ Currently, this historical fact of modern ethics is being projected onto the map of global capitalist order, with the difference of the balance between both alternatives shifting almost entirely in favour of charity.

Solidarity as the Collateral Damage of Historical Revisionism

It could be maintained that the modern idea of revolutionary solidarity, which became a subject of intensive appropriation of the market, politics, and media in the 20th century, has in the present lost the fight against the idea of humanitarian solidarity. The cultural industrialisation of the memory of the 20th century,¹⁶ which has retroactively paved the way to a selection between both forms of solidarity, has greatly influenced this. The historiography that resorted to historical revisionism instead of critical confrontation also played a role here.¹⁷ Selective recollection has also received substantial support from the political intervention of European and national elites that saw revisionism as an opportunity to remake their own dubious political biographies. A common denominator of all these efforts is the understanding of the past according to current ideological conflicts, the result being a textbook version of the past that represents history as a struggle between nations and ideologies, while remaining silent about popular movements and transnational forms of solidarity.

¹¹ See Brunkhorst: *Solidarität*.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Chouliarakis: *Ironic Spectator*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Compare Norman Finkelstein: *The Holocaust Industry. Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, London, Verso, 2003.

¹⁷ See Todor Kuljić: *Kultura spominjanja. Teoretske razlage uporabe preteklosti [Memory Culture. Theoretical Explanations of the Use of the Past]*, Ljubljana, ZZFF, 2012.

The aspirations for revisionist relativism, as expressed in their most consistent form in the resolution *European Conscience and Totalitarianism* (2009),¹⁸ have contributed greatly to suppressing key distinctions between movements that developed into totalitarian forms of rule in the 20th century. Furthermore, today, the history of totalitarianisms is ideologically represented in many parts of (predominantly) Eastern Europe as a conflict between democracy and communism, while in Western Europe one often encounters the positivistic excuse of objectivity, which is supposedly impossible to completely attain via historical methods, as an explanation for the incapacity to universally condemn Nazism and Fascism. In the battle between ideology and methodology, the trace of moral and ethical principles that urged concrete people (and not only states)¹⁹ to act is being lost; the same also applies to the ideal of solidarity, which originated in the ideological common fight for the democratic future of Europe and the world.

The European solidarity collaboration with the Spanish people against Franco's supporters during the time of the Spanish Civil War is a historical document of a different 20th century, undermining the validity of both the official historical revisionism and the relativism of historiography on the dubious quests for historical truth. Between the years 1936 and 1938, 40,000 volunteers – antifascists from 54 European, American, Asian, and Maghreb countries – arrived in Spain. Volunteering was an expression of international solidarity with the Spanish people. In the context of the progressive European public of the day, expressions of solidarity included slogans like the following: "actions of solidarity with the fight of the Spanish people", "Working class of the Yugoslav nations joins the international solidarity action of the proletariat and friends of freedom from around the world with the intention to help your fight", "international proletarian solidarity", and "solidarity with the antifascist Spain". The fight of the Spanish people was seen as a struggle of all progressive humanity against Fascism and Fascist military campaigns, therefore, the solidarity was not only humanitarian, but also revolutionary. Official memory will still have acknowledged and consequently opened a space for collective commemoration and for citizens' education on the emancipatory revolutionary spirit in the 21st century.

Research Methodology

The focus in this paper is not on official memory, but rather on the revival of the alternative memory of the past, which functions as a counterbalance to the collective commemoration of modern European solidarity. In place of ideological guidelines for analysis, emphasis is placed on the biographical approach, while instead of methodological nationalism, the transnational and cross-border collaboration of generations of the critical public and researchers of contemporary Europe, held together by a common past regarding the Spanish Civil War, is foregrounded. This requires the formation of alternative memory paths and networks of collective memory, which will challenge the official normalisation and relativisation of struggles and ideological conflicts witnessed in examples of equilibristic condemnations of European totalitarianisms. In the next paragraph, the first methodological step in this direction is presented.

Before proceeding to the biographical portraits of the female volunteers in Spain, it is necessary to unfold the chronology of research, which will outline the specifics of the international historiography on the Spanish Civil War and its anti-hegemonistic orientation in relation to official history, as displayed in three dimensions: firstly, solidarity and the

¹⁸ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090401IPR53245+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

¹⁹ "Countries declare war, people are dying!", says Amy Pason (2008).

interconnectedness of the research community, secondly, solidarity in the scientific approach to the issue of the common past, and lastly, the solidarity of intergenerational memory regarding the fighters and their descendants.

1. Research on the Spanish Civil War²⁰ has brought together a number of researchers from the areas of former Yugoslavia, Spain, France, and other countries that were involved in the events of 1936-1939. Common research interests have created a transnational research community which, instead of focusing on the nationalised contributions of individual nations to the struggle of the Spanish people, creates a critical intellectual discourse that commemorates the cross-border ideational histories and democratic movements in Europe before the Second World War. This has contributed to the forming of a common obligation to the project which, as was later demonstrated, created a solidarity bond among researchers, both regarding access to national sources (for example, complete permission to access the archives in Belgrade) and in relation to the transnational obligation to uncover the facts of the solidarity movement.²¹ The latest results of the latter are summarised in the joint research project *Preispitivanje prošlosti i istorijski revizionizam (Re-examining the Past and Historical Revisionism)* and an edited volume of the same name (2014).²² Here one should also be reminded of the pioneering work by the University of Lausanne, at which organisers presented the international colloquium “*Les Brigades internationales. Entre solidarité révolutionnaire et politique du Komintern*” (Lausanne, 18.–20. XII. 1997); the contributions were published in a special collection.²³

2. The examination of the role of Yugoslav female volunteers in the Spanish Civil War – using the new biographical approach and the method of counter-memory – overlaps with the critical interdisciplinary research of European memory. Alongside projects that have been emerging in the areas of former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe, for example, *Renaming Machine* (ed. Suzana Milevska, 2010) and *Common Ground* (Kristina Norman, 2013), which are grounded in radical criticism of official memory, censured commemoration, and a re-working of the past, socially-critical initiatives that re-examine the politics of memory in the EU today have also been forming in the Western intellectual and cultural space. One of the projects emerging in this context is the *European Observatory on Memory* of the Solidarity Foundation of the University of Barcelona, which also represents a reply to the founding of the House of European History in Brussels and the debate revolving around the European Parliament resolution “P6_TA(2008)0439” on the European Day of Remembrance for Victims

²⁰ Avgust Lešnik: Jugoslawen in Spanischen Bürgerkrieg. In: *JahrBuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 5 (2006), 1, pp. 37-51; Id.: Le Parti communiste yougoslave et la Guerre civile espagnole (1936-1939). In: *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies Online* 13 (2007), 20, pp. 48-88: http://newsletter.icsap.de/home/data/pdf/INCS_20_ONLINE.pdf; Id.: Les volontaires yougoslaves dans la guerre civile espagnole. In: Stéfanie Prezioso, Jean Batou, Jean and Ami-Jacques Rapin (eds.): *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle. Volontaires internationaux contre Franco*, Paris: Syllepse, 2008, pp. 373-388; Id.: La Guerra civile spagnola (1936-1939) nella storiografia jugoslava/slovena. *Qualestoria* 39 (2011), 1, pp. 29-54; Id.: Uloga KPJ u regrutovanju jugoslovenskih interbrigadista za republikansku Španiju. In: Milo Petrović (ed.): *Preispitivanje prošlosti i istorijski revizionizam. (Zlo)upotrebe istorije Španskog građanskog rata i Drugog svetskog rata na prostoru Jugoslavije*, Beograd, Udruženje Španski borci, 2014, pp. 231-249.

²¹ Personal correspondence of A. L. with: *The Archives of Serbia and Montenegro* (October 13, 2008) and *Spanish Volunteers Association 1936-1939* (May 5, 2014).

²² The research papers published in the volume have been presented at the symposium “Preispitivanje prošlosti i istorijski revizionizam” (October 12 and 13, 2012), organised by the association *Španski borci 1936–1939*, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe.

²³ Stéfanie Prezioso, Jean Batou and Ami-Jacques Rapin (eds.): *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle. Volontaires internationaux contre Franco*, Paris, Syllepse, 2008.

of Stalinism and Nazism.²⁴ Another work that falls into this context is *After the Civil War* by Michael Richards.²⁵

3. For the occasion of the symposium *Preispitivanje prošlosti i istorijski revizionizam (Re-examining the Past and Historical Revisionism)* in Belgrade (October 12 and 13, 2012), the general secretary of the Archives of War in Exile (*Archivo Guerra y Exilio-AGE*) from Madrid sent the following message to the organisers:

On this occasion, I would like to join you in paying tribute to the international volunteers from all over the world and especially to our Yugoslav brigade members who left us with the inheritance of the ideas of freedom, solidarity, and brotherhood, the value of which has not been diminished by time. Let us protect and preserve the torch of collective memory which has been passed to us. With warmest republican regards!

To this she added an appeal for help with the “action for the defence/preservation of the rights of the children of war, today in their nineties, in order to prevent their deportation from Moscow’s Spanish Centre. Our brotherly association from Moscow demands/expects of us this gesture of solidarity”. Along with this call for international solidarity with the ‘children of war’, she reminded the participants of the intergenerational bond: “We can pass our knowledge to the youth, but not by lecturing, because this [present] crisis is a result of our mistakes. Insofar as a solution exists, it would have to come from their consciousness, from education for freedom and democratic culture.”²⁶

On February 22, 2006, a researcher received the following letter from a veteran of the feminist movement in the USA and a descendant of a Spanish Civil War fighter, sociologist Lise Vogel:²⁷

I should probably explain my interest in the life of Lisa Gavrić. I have to admit it is both personal and historical; it is an unusual romantic story. A year and a half ago, I discovered that she was the woman with whom my father had an affair during the Spanish Civil War. I knew that this relationship existed, but I was not familiar with the identity of the woman; what is more, I definitely did not expect to find this out through such a source (She writes about my father over the course of ten pages in the chapter “Sydney” in the book *Strasse der Wirklichkeit*). It was unusual, but I immediately felt a closeness to her, almost as if I had found a sister or another mother, or even my father – a lost, but dear relative. I was greatly reassured when I found out that she had survived the war, although at the same time also disappointed that I had not been able to meet her.

The reply and the search for a trace of common memory in this example also represent an intergenerational solidarity commitment. Considering the political and academic path of Lise Vogel towards feminism,²⁸ as well as the involvement of the feminist movement and feminists in the Spanish Civil War (see below), this commitment also includes the intellectual, ideational, and ethical formulation of contemporary feminist studies – not only in the post-

²⁴ Personal correspondence of K. V. H.

²⁵ Michael Richards: *After the Civil War. Making Memory and Re-Making Spain Since 1936*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²⁶ <http://www.e-novine.com/mobile/drustvo/73024-Preispitivanje-prolosti-primeru-panije.html> (accessed on June 18, 2014).

²⁷ Lise Vogel is today a retired professor of sociology at Rider University.

²⁸ Lise Vogel is the author of the renowned *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism* (1995); a paperback copy of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (2014) was published this year; it is available online at <http://ludmilap.wordpress.com/2011/04/02/lise-vogel-on-gender-and-social-reproduction-from-marxism-and-the-oppression-of-women/>.

humanist cosmopolitan, but also in the transnational memory context. This is a task that is still remains to be mastered.

The Spanish Female Volunteers from Yugoslavia: The Narratology of Biographical Portraits

The 'Yugoslav'²⁹ volunteers included 16 women (three doctors, two nurses, six workers, two students, one clerk, and two women without professional titles): Anamarija Basch (Baš), Adela dr. Bohunicki (Anka Poca), Nada dr. Dimitrijević Nešković, Olga Dragić Belović (Milica Milić Živković), Liza Gavrić (Elizabeta Bechmann), Marija Glavaš (Peči), Marija-Maja Habulin, Lea Kraus, Tereza Kučera, Dobrila dr. Mezić Šiljak, Lujza Pihler (Borka Demić), Ottilia Reschitz Zaroni, Ana Seles Brozović, Kornelija-Neli Sende Popović, Eugenia Simonetti, and Marija Šneeman. Five came from Yugoslavia, five from France, two from Czechoslovakia, and one each from Algeria, Belgium, Spain, and Uruguay (making eleven immigrants all together). The 'Yugoslavians' were incorporated into the medical service of the international brigades as doctors, nurses, and care assistants; the majority worked at hospitals in the rear and not on the front lines, with the exception of Eugenia Simonetti. These volunteers' biographies are reconstructed from the sources presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Baš (Basch), Anamarija, born in 1893 in Felsőszentiván near Baja (Hungary). Already as a child she moved to Bajmok (Vojvodina). She finished secondary school in Budapest, where she also remained, staying with her uncle, a progressive solicitor, until her marriage with the engineer Andrej Baš. At first, she was a member of the feminist movement, but this ultimately failed to satisfy her progressive views, and she became affiliated with the independent labour unions and joined the communist party (CPY) through her husband. Under threat of arrest, she left Subotica for Brussels in 1928 (with her husband and son Janoš, born in 1916), where her husband André (Andres) became the secretary of Yugoslav emigration. On October 27, 1936, all three illegally entered Spain and joined the fight of the international brigades; Anamarija worked as a nurse in the division hospital. After the retreat of the International Brigades from Spain, Anamarija survived all of the horrors of the concentration camps in France and Germany, returning to Budapest after the war. As a member of the "Dombrovski" brigade she was awarded a high Polish state award in 1968.³⁰

Bohunicki, dr. Adela (Anka Poca), born on May 20, 1905 in Slavonski Brod (Croatia). As a secondary school student, she established contact with the activists of the working class movement. While studying medicine, she was among the most active members of the Club of Marxist Students; in 1925, she was admitted to Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Because of her political activities, she was forced to leave Zagreb and to finish her study of medicine and specialisation in paediatrics in Graz and Munich. Instructed by the CPY, she moved to Prague, where she received Czechoslovakian citizenship. At the outbreak of the civil war, she went to Spain, where she worked as a doctor in the medical service of the International

²⁹ When we speak of our (Yugoslav/Slovene) volunteers in Spain, we have to emphasise that these people were not coming only from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but also from other countries. Focusing on Slovenes, we can see that they were primarily young people from the ranks of the Slovenian national minority in Italy of that time, Croatian Istria, Trieste, and the maritime regions of Slovenia. Also prominent were young people from the ranks of our economic migration of the time, miners from Trbovlje, Hrastnik, Zagorje, and their sons, who lived and worked in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, followed by (our) forestry and other workers from Canada, the United States of America, Argentina etc. Regarding the issue of methodology in examining the records of volunteers, see Lešnik, "Nuestros Españoles", pp. 86-89.

³⁰ Čedo Kapor (ed.): Španija 1936-1939. Zbornik sjećanja jugoslavenskih dobrovoljaca u španskom ratu [Spain 1936-1939. Collection of Memories of Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War], vol. 5, Beograd, Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971, p. 154.

Brigades (January 7, 1937 – February 6, 1939); she was active at the Murcia and Albacete hospitals. After the retreat of the International Brigades from Spain to France, she was taken to an internment camp in Perpignan, from which she escaped to Paris in May 1939 and then returned to Yugoslavia. She was soon arrested and (as a Czechoslovakian citizen) exiled first to Hungary and later to Slovakia. Here she was politically active and collaborated with Slovak partisans, while also working as a paediatrician. She returned to Yugoslavia in 1945 and, after breaking up with the party at the time of the *Informbiro* conflict (she was taken to the *Goli otok* concentration camp), dedicated herself exclusively to paediatrics. She died in Zagreb on September 10, 1978.³¹

Dimitrijević Nešković, dr. Nada, born on August 14, 1907 in Sarajevo (Bosnia). She actively participated in the progressive student movement; she was a member of Communist Party of Yugoslavia from 1936. She finished her studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade. Together with her husband, the doctor Blagoje Nešković, she left for Spain in the beginning of November 1937. In the ranks of the republican army (from November 15, 1937 – March, 1939), she worked as a doctor in the Albacete and Vichu hospitals and organised medical and sanitary service. After the defeat of the Spanish Republic, she was interned in a concentration camp in France. In November 1940, she returned to her homeland, where she participated in the actions of CPY in defending the native country, principally by running emergency aid courses. She died in the German air raid of Belgrade on April 6, 1941.³²

Dragić Belović, Olga (Milica Milić Živković), born in 1914 in Vienna. She was a student of the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade, later emigrating to Prague, the city from which she travelled to Spain via Paris (February 17, 1937). She worked for the republican side as a nurse in the hospitals of Murcia. After the Second World War, she finished studying medicine.³³ She died on April 25, 1998 in Belgrade.

Gavrić, Liza (Elizabeta Bechmann), born in 1907 in Vienna, a worker. An active communist in Yugoslavia, she later emigrated to Paris, which she left for Spain (April 1937). On the republican side, she worked as a nurse in the hospitals of Murcia. After the Second World War, she lived in Belgrade.³⁴ She died in 1974 in Dubna near Moscow.

Glavaš, Marija (Peči), born in 1902 in Našice (Croatia), was a worker; as a political emigrant, she lived in Moscow. By order of the Central Committee of CPY, she was sent to Paris at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. After passing the first aid course for nurses, she arrived in Spain (May 1, 1937). She was active in the hospitals of Murcia and Albacete, where she held the position of head nurse. Following the decision of the Yugoslav party group in Paris, she returned there in December of 1937 and assumed party assignments.³⁵ She died on May 6, 1988 in Zagreb.

Habulin, Marija-Maja (Ilze, Ivona), was born in 1912 in Poznanovac (Croatia). By profession, she was a clerk, and was also a member of CPY. She was an emigrant living in Paris, where she worked as a secretary of the illegal *Centralna tehnika* of the Central Committee of CPY (a co-worker of Josip Broz Tito). She left France for Spain (September 21, 1937), where she worked for the republican side as a nurse. After the defeat of the

³¹ Hrvatski biografski leksikon: <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=2281> (access 18.6.2014).

³² Bosa Cvetić (ed.): *Žene Srbije u NOB-u*, Beograd, Nolit, 1975.

³³ Kapor: *Španija 1936-1939*, vol. 5, p. 448.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 323-337.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

Spanish Republic, she managed to return to France and then back to her home country. In 1941, she was arrested as a communist and shot by the *Ustaschas*.³⁶

Kraus, Lea, born in 1914 in Gradačac (Bosnia); originated from a Jewish family. She was studying to become a head nurse in Zagreb, where she was arrested for communist activity in 1935 and sentenced to a year in prison. After her release, she left for Spain, where she worked as a nurse for the republican army (from August 3, 1937). After the defeat of the Spanish Republic, she returned to her home country. From 1941, she participated in the National Liberation Struggle (as a nurse in the sanitary detachment of the High Command). After the war, she lived in Zagreb.³⁷

Kučera, Tereza, born in Bačka Topola (Serbia), was a worker and an emigrant in Uruguay, which she left for Spain (April 21, 1938). Active as a nurse on the republican side.³⁸

Mezić Šiljak, dr. Dobrila, born in 1909 in Plevlje (Montenegro), a doctor. She arrived in Spain from Belgrade via Paris (August, 1937) and worked on the republican side as a doctor in the hospital in Murcia; additionally, she systematically ran trainings for mid- and low level medical personnel. After the retreat of the international brigades from Spain to France, she initially ended up in an internment camp, which she escaped, and collaborated with the French Partisans in the vicinity of Marseille. After the liberation of France, she managed to return to Belgrade via Bari and join the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. After the war, she worked at the Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases; she died in 1953 in Belgrade.³⁹

Pihler, Lujza (Borka Demić), born on July 3, 1903 in Prijedor (Bosnia), was a student of medicine in Belgrade and later in Prague (as an emigrant), where she was active in the group of progressive and active students involved with the newspaper *Matija Gubec*. She was exiled from the Czechoslovak Republic (together with her husband Miron Demić) for organising demonstrations in 1932. By the decision of the party, she travelled to Paris via Germany and was later politically active among the Yugoslav emigrants. She arrived in Spain on November 11, 1936 (one day after the death of her husband Miron, who died on the Madrid front) and worked on the republican side as nurse in the hospitals of Murcia. After the fall of the republic, she initially stayed in France, but later returned to Yugoslavia. As an instrumentalist, she was placed into the surgical team of the First Proletarian Brigade of the People's Liberation Army.⁴⁰ She died on February 28, 1989 in Belgrade.

Reschitz Zanoni, Ottilia, born on February 24, 1903 in Pula (Croatia); her parents were Nicolò and Giovanna Reschitz (*née* Stachul). Her father, Nicolò Reschitz, was a socialist and union fighter and one of the founders of the working movement in Trieste. After the Fascists rose to power, Ottilia Reschitz emigrated to Buenos Aires, where she married Arturo Zanoni, an emigrant from Verona, on June 26, 1924; after that, they were also held together by their shared antifascist ideals. Arturo was a member of the Communist Party of Argentina and the secretary of the international Red Cross; in 1933, he was arrested by the Argentinean police under suspicion of participating in the insurrection movement and was later exiled. Together

³⁶ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 525.

³⁷ <http://elmundosefarad.wikidot.com/jevreji-spanski-borci>;
<https://www.facebook.com/HeroinePokretaOtpora> (access 18. 6. 2014).

³⁸ Kapor: Španija 1936-1939, vol. 5, p. 538.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 546.

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 325-326.

with his spouse Ottilia and his daughter Sonja, he found refuge in Spain (Vigo, Madrid), where he became involved in political and union activities again.

After the military coup in July 1936, the Zanonis sided with the Republic. Ottilia was active in the reserve (collecting and distributing aid), while Arturo left for the Aragon front, where he was named the commander of the 12th International Brigade (Garibaldi), which participated in the battles on the east front and in the operations at Ebro. After the order of retreat for the international brigades, Ottilia, her husband and daughter went to France; they were interned in Privas. After the German occupation of France, Arturo was taken to the concentration camp in Dachau, while Ottilia and her two daughters managed to retreat to Toulouse. After the war, the Zanoni family returned to Italy. Ottilia Reschitz-Zanoni died on March 26, 1975.⁴¹

Seles Brozović, Ana, born on November 13, 1894 in Ogulin (Croatia), came from a poor farmer's family of Brozović with nineteen children. After the death of the father (in the year 1900), all of the children except for three died of poverty, hunger, and disease. Already as a young woman, Ana thus had to work on the estates of affluent farmers, which prevented her from going to primary school. In 1921, she married Anton Seles, a political emigrant from the Slovenian maritime region (born in Prem near Ilirska Bistrica, Slovenia), who worked for a baker in Ogulin at that time. Ana stayed at home as a housewife (also after their move to Rijeka in 1927). In 1930, her husband, who was a notable antifascist, escaped to Algeria; later, Ana also joined him, travelling through France. Ten days after the military coup in Spanish Morocco, Anton travelled to Spain (July 27), while Ana joined him on August 23. Of all the Yugoslav women who fought on the side of the international brigades in the defence of the Spanish Republic, Ana arrived there first and stayed there the longest – 862 days (out of 986 days that the Spanish Civil War lasted); most of the time she worked as a nurse and translator (in addition to her mother tongue, she also spoke Italian, French, and Spanish) in various military hospitals, spending the most time in Lérida. In February 1939, she left for France with other members of the international brigades, and, after a short time in a concentration camp, settled in the town of Tulle de Corrèze; there she was forcefully employed (as a woman without children) in an ammunition factory, but released in 1942. After that she lived in Bourgeat (Corrèze), where she worked on the estates of affluent farmers with her husband until the liberation of France (1944). She actively participated in the French resistance movement, the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslav people in France, and the Yugoslav Association in France, founded in 1945. At the end of 1946, she and her husband Anton returned to Yugoslavia and settled permanently in Rijeka. On the account of the injuries she received in Spain, she retired as a wounded veteran. She was awarded the Order of merits for the people for her activities, and died in Rijeka (Croatia) on February 14, 1981.⁴²

Sende Popović, Kornelija-Neli, born on August 29, 1911 in Bácsalmás (south Hungary); originated from a Jewish family, her parents were Ferdinand and Zelma Senda (*née* Kraus), which moved to Apatin (Vojvodina) after the First World War. In 1932, she enrolled in the School of Medicine in Zagreb and continued her studies (from 1934) in Belgrade. At the University of Belgrade, she joined the revolutionary student movement; she was admitted as a member of the then illegal CPY in 1937.

Together with her husband Vlade Popović Pinecki, also a student of medicine and other students of the University in Belgrade, she left for Spain in 1937. There she was active (from

⁴¹ Marino Budicin and Mihael Sobolevski (ed.): *Naši Španjolski dobrovoljci / I nostri volontari di Spagna / Naši španski prostovoljci*, Rijeka, Centar za historiju radničkog pokreta i NOR-a Istre, Hrvatskog primorja i Gorskog kotara & Rovigno, Centro di ricerche storiche, 1988, pp. 294-296.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 312-314.

November 30, 1937) as a nurse on the Republican Army side. After the fall of the Spanish Republic (in April 1939), she found herself in a concentration camp in France with hundreds of other fighters from the international brigades, from which she was released at the end of September on account of illness and returned to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Upon crossing the Yugoslav border, she was caught and taken to Belgrade, where she was incarcerated for a month. After being released, she continued with her party work. She was arrested twice in 1940: first in January (which resulted in two months of prison) and for the second time in July; in the latter case, she was also exposed to police torture (released in December 1940).

In the beginning of 1941, she was arrested again and was released only on March 27, after the military coup; she was exiled to Apatin. She illegally returned to occupied Belgrade, where she participated (as a secretary of one of the street party cells) in the preparation for armed uprising. She was captured in the middle of August 1941 by the special police and taken to the concentration camp *Banjica* near Belgrade as a notorious communist and Spanish fighter. She was shot as one of the first group of 20 women on the firing range in Jajnice near Belgrade (today a site of a memorial park) on September 19, 1941.⁴³

Simonetti, Eugenia, born on January 10, 1905 in Kaštelir (municipality of Poreč, Croatia) to father Giovanni and mother Elena Uglianich. As a kid her parents and she moved to Trieste. During her twenties she was active in anarchist organizations in Trieste, after which she emigrated to France and came into contact with the leading figures of the anarchist emigration from Italy and Venezia Giulia. She managed to break through to Spain upon the outbreak of the civil war in August 1936.

She participated on the republican side, being assigned to the *Ascaso* anarchist unit. She remained in Spain until the end of the war, after which she was interned in the French concentration camp of *Correzze*. After the end of the Second World War, she settled permanently in Marseille.⁴⁴

Šneeman, Marija, born in 1896 in Bačka Palanka (Serbia), was a worker. She arrived in Spain from Yugoslavia, and participated as a nurse on the republican side.⁴⁵

What do these biographical data tell us? Who were the female volunteers that left for Spain? What did their lives look like before their departures and what marks did the experience of fighting in the rear leave on them after returning from Spain?

The biographical data that are available tell a limited and, as is usual for this genre, purely factual story. However, the *narratology of biographies*, as the authors have named the method of reading the biographies as historical personal narratives, is nonetheless also expressive – if one reads the biographical, even if purely lexicographical, narratives from a comparative and complementary perspective. The overlap among individual narratives is unusually significant: the majority of female volunteers left for Spain together with their husbands (or followed shortly afterwards) or families, worked there in hospitals as nurses or doctors, and had obtained relevant medical education during their studies. They might have left without even the primary school education or as highly qualified doctors. Many left as

⁴³ http://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%B0:Kornelija_Sende-Popovic.jpg (access 18.6.2014).

⁴⁴ Budicin and Sobolevski: *Naši Španjolski dobrovoljci*, p. 316.

⁴⁵ Kapor: *Španija 1936-1939*, vol. 5, p. 567.

single women who were active in the communist or progressive student movements before that. After leaving Spain, many of these women were interned in concentration camps, imprisoned, and also killed. They would often continue with their activism in the context of communist movement and also join in the national liberation struggle. As most female volunteers in Spain returned to their home countries, these women shared the uncertain and dangerous fate of interrogation, prosecution, and forced emigration.⁴⁶

While the student environment and membership in the communist party represent important factors in the mobilisation of these volunteers, they pale in comparison to the humanitarian and the humanist solidarity commitment that the volunteers felt to the Spanish people in their fight with Franco's supporters. This is confirmed by the memory records collected by Čedo Kapor, among them also three by female volunteers: Marija Habulin, Olga Dragić Belović (Milica Milić Živković), and Borka Demić (Lujza Pihler).

Marija Habulin remembers the room in the refuge centre:

Forty small beds, forty bunks for the Spanish women and children, forty sad life stories – this is my hall. A torn out piece of a wonderful nation, to whose heroic fight for its home land, numerous generations shall pay homage... And now they are here, in this sad refuge home... Our feelings are shared, for we have lived with them for so long...⁴⁷

In a similar way, *Olga Dragić* describes the solidarity commitment and the brotherly bond with the Spanish people:

How can I make comprehensible the fact that we did not feel to be strangers there? That the people there did not see us as strangers, but as their loved ones?

How does one speak of the great love of a certain generation from around the world? Because that is what it was. It was love for peace, freedom, progressiveness, humanism, culture.

One cannot talk of this great love. It has to be experienced. I cannot talk of Spain.⁴⁸

The next memory tells us of *Borka Demić*:

The Yugoslav comrade Borka, a slim girl with a gentle, pleasant face... rarely smiled. Her friend Miron died in the front lines in Madrid. He left for Spain before her and when she arrived behind him – he was dead. She lost a person who was her first love, with whom she travelled from country to country and helped him with the party work. She was often strict, obstinate – but never with the wounded and Spanish women. In dealing with them, she possessed infinite patience, her voice was gentle and she would often even smile.⁴⁹

The memory of *Hanka*, a Polish woman, is somewhat similar. She was married to a German and took a nursing course in Paris so she could go to Spain with him:

Whenever she started talking of him and their love, her eyes immediately started to tear up. When she – always waiting to see him again – received news of his death, she grew dumb.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Milivoj Bešlin: Kraljevina Jugoslavija u borbi protiv antifašizma 1936-1939. In: Petrović (ed.): Preispitivanje prošlosti i istorijski revizionizam, pp. 206-209.

⁴⁷ Kapor: Španija 1936-1939, vol. 4, p. 266.

⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 448.

⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 325-326.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 326.

Conclusion: The Emotional Ethics of Solidarity and Post-Yugoslav Memory

“Spain remains an eternal message in history and collective memory, an undeletable example and inspiration to all who fight today, anywhere in the world, to maintain or acquire and advance freedom.”⁵¹ The biographies of Yugoslav female volunteers testify to a political and humanitarian ethics, which led the generation of Spanish fighters on the front, as well as those in the rear, to the decision to help the people and defend the idea that surpassed the civil conflict between the republican forces and Franco’s rise to power. The idealism inherent in the willingness to die for a foreign nation and the idea for which its progressive forces fight challenge the established claim that people are prepared to die for their own nations, but not for an idea. The nation personified in the Spanish progressive people was a cosmopolitan one, defined by humanism and the culture of freedom; it was in this context that this nation was able to inspire the compassion and solidarity, as well as the willingness of others to die for it. This was neither the humanitarian gesture of a distanced observation of others, nor the identification with the suffering body; it was about entering the body of the other with the intention to fight for its life even if it requires sacrificing one’s own.⁵²

The gender dimensions of volunteering are complex and have not adequately researched. As Magdalena Rosende points out, contemporary historiography on the Spanish fighters is full of gender stereotypes that place men on the front (*les hommes au front*) and therefore into the active fighter role, while women remain in the rear (*les femmes à l'arrière*) and in the role of caretakers. This asymmetry, though only partially correct, especially if one recalls some of the most notable female fighters who took up arms (e.g. Mika Etchebéhère, Clara Thalmann, the English painter, surrealist Mary Low, and philosopher Simone Weil); numerous feminists, Trotskyists, anarchists, and all other revolutionaries who came to the front, construes a gender-defined image of national heroism as related solely to the privileged stereotype of the male warrior. The “silence of history”⁵³ neglects to mention both the details of diverse roles and assignments that women had on the front – as nurses, journalists, secretaries, and translators – , and the extent of activities which women at the front and in the rear helped to organise. As pointed out by Rosende, until recently, work performed in the reserve has not been archived in historical memory as a contribution to the fight for democratic Spain – it was considered to be simultaneously self-evident and marginal, also true for women’s care work in general.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Petrović: Vreme revizionizma. In: Preispitivanje prošlosti i istorijski revizionizam, p. 11.

⁵² We do not wish to create a perception of idealization here. The only research on motives of female volunteers for coming to Spain included 36 volunteers from Switzerland; 13 left for war to join their husbands (including Mary Low, Mika Etchebéhère and the photographer Tina Modotti, at that time the partner of Vittorio Vidali); only in the case of Clara Thalmann the situation was reversed and it was the husband who followed her. Another important motive was the participation in the antifascist movement; possibly also a retreat from the repression of one’s own contry; while three of the volunteers saw war as an adventure and a romantic experience (Magdalena Rosende: L’engagement féminin international en Espagne. In: Prezioso, Batou and Rapin (eds.): Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle, pp. 414-415). Here we have to emphasise that, according to the testimonies of the Yugoslav female volunteers, the experience of volunteering transformed the abstract ideological foundation of solidarity into a concrete experience which increased the emotional connection to progressive Spain and their people.

⁵³ Rosende: L’engagement féminin international en Espagne, p. 401.

⁵⁴ Additionally, it has to be noted that a strong political campaign against the presence of women on the battlefield started in October 1936. It was based on the fear of decrease of discipline among men and spreading of sexually transmitted diseases. Women were often publically portrayed as harlots and adventuresses. For this reason Rosende considers The Spanish Civil War -- when it comes to gender relations - as a war that was simultaneously emancipatory and conservative (Rosende: L’engagement féminin international en Espagne, pp. 406-407).

By focusing on the Yugoslav female volunteers in the reserve, the authors do not wish to contribute to the reproduction of the militarised story of male heroism, but rather wish to bring attention to another dimension that requires a critical historio-sociological examination of migration and family life. The biographies of female volunteers in the reserve reveal the emotional dimension of the identification with struggles of others, which encompasses the national, collective, family, and romantic relationship perspectives. As Craig Calhoun writes: "We have to emphasise that groups rarely contain entireties of person or direct all of their affiliations – regardless of what nationalistic ideologists have to say, even the family and nation are often found to be in conflict."⁵⁵ Married couples and volunteer's families were in conflict with their own countries, for which they were punished by imprisonment and other forms of repression. The emotional bond originating from the moral and ideological loyalty between the partners of the married couple found its counterbalance in the transnational framework of a different homeland: the brotherly love mentioned in many of the testimonies and memories, and the love of Spain of which Olga Dragić writes, which have enhanced romantic love with the sense of a higher mission and transformed the rebellion against the national ideology of submission to authority into a value completely abandoned by contemporary individualism.

Memories of the past have become an important common transversal link when reconstructing national belonging and collective identification in the area of former Yugoslavia. The story of the female volunteers in Spain and their families represents an alternative insight into the sociology of family and family life, providing an examination of migration and an analysis of the relation between nationalism and gender. These three dimensions of a different view of the history of Europe are not only of historiographic consequence for the sociological disciplines touching upon the aforementioned fields. They also contain an ethical component of remembering, one that converts the past into a living legacy and a historical and utopian source for understanding the solidarity struggles of our time.

⁵⁵ Calhoun: *Belonging in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary*, p. 547.