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Six women warriors in Serbian Army history in 1914 and 1915

Original scientific paper

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This paper analyzes the role of women on the front lines in Serbia during the Great War. Inspired by a letter from a 20th century French writer, which prompted the surveying of regiments to collect data, we highlighted the participation of women fighters in 1914 and 1915. The aim of this paper is to show the involvement of several women in Serbian history, who showed their potential, abilities, and as female fighters stood side by side with men at the front, with a rifle in hand. A review of literary and archival data will provide an insight into the participation of women at the front.

Key words:
Serbia, female soldiers, the Great War, front

Šest žena ratnica u istoriji srpske vojske 1914. i 1915. godine

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U ovom radu analizirana je uloga pojedinih žena na prvim linijama fronta u Srbiji tokom Velikog rata. Inspirisani pismom francuskog pisca iz 20. veka, koje je podstaklo anketiranje pukova za prikupljanje podataka, prikazali smo učešće žena boraca 1914. i 1915. godine. Cilj ovog rada je da prikaže umešanost nekoliko žena u srpsku istoriju, koje su pokazale svoj potencijal, sposobnosti, i kao borce stajale rame uz rame sa muškarcima na frontu, sa puškom u ruci. Pregledom literarnih i arhivskih podataka daće se uvid u učešće žena na frontu.

Ključne reči:
Srbija, žene vojnici, Veliki rat, front

Introduction

According to the provisions of the Civil Code (1844), which determined the position of women, in addition to the patriarchal environment, women could not dispose of money, had a tutor and could not be responsible for children either in the Principality/Royal Serbia. The first social changes for women occurred in education in 1882, when male and female children were allowed to be educated together. Education also made it possible to gain economic independence for female teachers. With the opening of the Women's Higher School in Belgrade (1863), questions about the establishment of women's societies, the right to vote and the formation of the future female elite of Serbian society for the emancipation of women will be raised. The fate of future humanitarian workers was established within the Women's Higher School. Humanitarian work contributed to women entering public life and starting the fight for emancipation and a more equal position for women. It was the period of the appearance of the first female intellectuals in Serbia: Maga Magazinović (1882–1968), the first female journalist in Serbia, Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981), the first female doctor of science in Yugoslavia and the first assistant professor at the University of Belgrade, as well as Draga Ljočić (1855–1926) the first female doctor in Serbia.[1]

The 20th century, managed to give birth to women fighters, who left indelible traces in military, social and medical history with their participation and contribution in the war, and pointed out the values, abilities and possibilities of the female gender. However, a detailed analysis of the literature shows that previous research did not comprehensively look at the participation of women in the war (Ostojić-Fejić, 1998; Bjelajac, 2003, pp. 9–22). Of great importance are the records of participants in the war (Subotić, 1919; Ćurčin, pp. 477–485; Lazarević, 1929; Gavrilović, 1976; Krippner, 1980; Offen, 2015) is of great importance for feminist history.

Dr. Božica Mladenović paved the way with her studies and set the starting point for further study of the role and place of women in the period of the Great War. Through a detailed analysis, we can see that she made a comparison of women in Serbian society in peacetime conditions and wartime conditions by researching the fate and role of women in wartime circumstances (Mladenović, 2006). Emphasizing the unequal position of a woman with the man and her subordination to him, as well as the understanding that the man's duty is to provide for the existence of the family and the woman's to take care of the household, historian Mladenović pointed out that the weaknesses of Serbian society, in terms of social mobility, have become neglected for the time of the World War, when women experienced transformation and became participants in historical events. The active participation of women in the whirlwind of war irreversibly transformed Serbian society. " Although there was an unwritten rule that men fought, during the Balkan and World Wars there were more women in the Serbian army who fought against the enemy. True, they

[1] In more details about female emancipation in Serbia see: Vuković et al. (2021).

were dressed and disguised as men and their names were Milunka Savić, Živana Terzić, Natalija Bjelajac..." (Mladenović, 2012). The study *Women in the Toplica Uprising of 1917* (Mladenović, 1996) shed light on the participation of women in the uprising and their role in the courier, hospital, and intelligence services. The role of Jelena Loret (Mladenović, 2012, p. 1371–1378), a member of the women's organization in Prokuplje for the fight against the occupiers, showed the help of women in acquiring all the necessary things for the Ibar-Kopaonik Chetnik detachment. One very important question, which Dr. Božica Mladenović asked while analyzing the existing knowledge about the woman fighter Milunka Savić, is: how much is there myth and how much is reality in the research so far? (Mladenović, 2015, pp. 667–672). The public was informed about the extensive mobilization of women, which was reflected in the provision of medical aid and direct participation at the front, as well as with women in the role of war victims during the Great War, through the article Mladenović, 2014-10-08.).

Dr. Jasmina Milanović wrote several articles about humanitarian societies and their role in the war (Milovanović, 2014, pp. 163–176; Milovanović, 2015, pp. 295–304. Milovanović, 2014, pp. 9–26). The same historian published the *Memoirs* of Delfa Ivanić (Milovanović, 2012), a great humanitarian worker of the Serbian people, especially during the Balkan wars and the First World War. According to the research of Dr. Jasmina Milanović, women within social humanitarian organizations in the period from 1912 to 1918 formed the Army of Mercy, a group of nurses prepared to provide help to the most vulnerable categories of the population.

Dr. Ana Stolić's monograph *Serbian Sisters: emergence of the movement for the emancipation of women and feminism in the Kingdom of Serbia* (Stolić, 2015) points out the similarities and differences within the European context through the analysis of phenomena and processes, and helps us to understand the initiation of feminism as an important social topic in the Kingdom of Serbia, as well as the movement for the emancipation of women. Also, the aforementioned historian introduced us to the phenomena that determined the place of women in Serbia during the 19th century using only one type of historical sources - memoirs (Stolić, 1999, pp. 9–18). The memoirs of Savka Subotić, the first president of the Society of Serbian Sisters, became available to a wider readership thanks to the manuscript *Memoirs / Savka Subotić /* (Stolić, 2001), edited by the aforementioned author. The memoirs show the social and political life of the 19th century as seen and recorded by the wife of the politician and writer Dr. Jovan Subotić.

1. The Role of Women in Serbian Society

The First World War represents the largest armed conflict at the beginning of the 20th century. Besides men, the war also engaged women, as was the case in the Balkan Wars, marking a turning point in history. Women, traditionally considered the gentler sex, were always viewed as unfit for performing men's tasks. The notion that women are, by nature, completely equal to men in spiritual, ethical,

and social terms was not understood by men who were firmly conservative. The image of women being only capable of being housewives and mothers was deeply rooted in society and depicted in the writings of memoirists (Stolić, 1999). Living by established norms and principles, women accepted subordination to the family and submission to their husbands as natural norms. Society held the entrenched belief that women were on a lower level of development and condemned to obedience to their masters (Damjanović & Ivković, 2002). After the era of matriarchy, there were various epochs where women were in a subordinate position: in the ownership of their fathers, husbands, or those to whom they belonged by some other basis. Despite being necessary for the family and the state, their equality with men was not recognized for a long time (Bok, 2005, p. 16; Turen, 2011). The change happened during the mid-19th century when women started working in civil service (as teachers at first and then as telegraphy clerks, postal servicewomen, etc., although in an unequal position compared to men. They were active in charities (upper classes), they were attending schools, etc.

1. 1. The Role of Women in Serbian Society Before the First World War

In Serbian history, according to traditional views, men were consistently aligned with the military vocation (Šaranović, 2007). According to 19th century beliefs, women were assigned a biological role that they were expected to fulfill consistently, while their working role was implied and followed throughout their lives, not just during certain years, as is the case with childbirth. Focused on the family and subordinated to their husbands and other family members, women followed the natural societal demand and performed two functions: reproductive and labor. Girls were not asked before marriage whom they wanted or loved; the choice of groom was the decision of their fathers and brothers. Upon marrying, the young woman was subordinate to her husband, father-in-law, and mother-in-law. In the family, as well as in the field, she performed all tasks. She was not spared these obligations even during pregnancy, and it was not uncommon for childbirth to occur in the fields. Her social role, position, and status were particularly significant from a historical perspective (Vuletić, 2002; Mladenović, 2006).

Women have been deprived of rights, subordinated to their biological roles, subjected to conquerors, and obedient in every respect throughout all epochs. Despite being the cornerstone and foundation of the household, dedicated to family and children, women throughout the 19th century were marginalized from any other activity. Subjugated to the times and circumstances, they were housewives, cleaners, maids, and laundresses. In short, benefactors to everyone but themselves. Her marginalization in society was also noticeable through her absence and isolation from the outside world and inability to inherit their husband's property. Naturally, although rare, there were some who participated in battles and skirmishes with the Turks. One of them, noted in historical sources, was Čučuk Stana, the wife of Hajduk Veljko Petrović, who wielded a rifle and aimed like the best marksman at the beginning of the 19th century (Žikić, 2017, p. 32).

1.2. The Role of Women in the First World War

Over time, wartime circumstances enabled women to become support pillars for their families, the military, the state, and the nation. Their role in the war acquired multiple functions. Women served not only as nurses, medical assistants, doctors, and helpers in social humanitarian organizations but also as ambulance drivers. Exceptions in male uniform, not typical..Serbian victories in the wars between 1912 and 1918 saw significant contributions from women such as Natalija Bjelajac (Antonija Javornik)[2], Vasilija Vukotić,[3] Milunka Savić, Sofija Jovanović, Živana Terzić, and Flora Sandes (Žikić, 2019, p. 29-30).

The role of women changed significantly during the wars at the beginning of the 20th century. Drawn into the whirlwind of war, they demonstrated they could be just as successful as men, serving as heads of medical services, hospital administrators, or presidents of women's organizations. All of this led to changes in gender roles and the emancipation of women (Stolić, 2013, p. 386). The wartime period undoubtedly "challenged male hegemony (Ofen, 2015)" and allowed women to showcase their capabilities beyond the family. Wartime circumstances shaped a different image of women (Šaranović, 2007, p. 27–40.). New conditions led to Serbian society becoming "female," due to the larger number of women compared to men (Žikić, 2016, p. 65–82). In this way, women became the backbone, support, encouragement, and pillar of their families. It is important to emphasize that women did not only provide help as nurses and drivers; they also fought on the front lines. They were true soldiers who did not lag behind men. Milunka Savić, Sofija Jovanović, and Živana Terzić, who was driven to war by love, are just some

[2] Antonija Javornik was born in the Javornik family on May 13, 1893, in Maribor. After completing eight years of school, she moved to Kragujevac, where her uncle Martin served in the eleventh infantry regiment "Karađorđe", as a captain of the Serbian army. (Đurić, 2014, pp. 25–40.)

[3] Born in Montenegro in the Vukotić family as the daughter of Milica and Janko Vukotić. After finishing elementary school in Cetinje, she continued education at the Russian Institute in Cetinje, where over a hundred girls were educated in Russian, French, and Serbian. At the beginning of the First Balkan War, she worked as a volunteer nurse in the hospital in Cetinje, which was opened by her mother, Milica. During the First World War, she helped her father defend the positions of the Serbian army when passing through Montenegro and was accompanied by her father, Janko Vukotić. She coded and deciphered dispatches about the movement of Serbian troops and handed them over to whomever was needed. She became the commanding officer of the Sandžak Army. She participated in the Battle of Mojkovac (January 6-7, 1916), in which the Sandžak Army of the Kingdom of Montenegro successfully stopped the Austro-Hungarian offensive, which enabled the withdrawal of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbia across parts of the Kingdom of Montenegro to the Adriatic Sea. The army of the Kingdom of Montenegro was commanded by Serdar Janko Vukotić. In an interview with Dobrila Glavinić about the Battle of Mojkovac, she stated, "At dawn we arrived at a position called Donji Prepran." The Tara river separated us from the battlefield where the enemy was. The fight was great and bitter on both sides. I always stood by my father and watched the fight together with him. When the wounded returned from the battlefield, I replaced the used bandage on their wounds with the clean ones. After a bitter fight, the enemy retreated over the hill. Serdar Janko and Petar Martinović, as commanders, were satisfied with this victory." After the victory, there was the battle of Berane. For the great successes of the Sandžak army at Mojkovac and around Beran, several telegraphic praises came from the Montenegrin Supreme Command to the Commander of the Sandžak army, Serdar Janko Vukotić. (IAB-F.1119-K.50 3.2.7.).

examples of fearless women. The participation of the British Flora Sandes in the Serbian army showed how self-sacrificing, determined, and combative women could be and that they could achieve the rank of officer.

At the beginning of 1913, the newspaper *Pravda* published an article about Women and War, which dedicated a few sentences to Serbian women: "[...] Those who are even slightly acquainted with Serbian women could not have been surprised to see how they accepted the war, without a moment's thought of lamentation. [...] The declaration of hostilities provided them with an opportunity to prove their worth and apply the power of discreet self-sacrifice, which is a fine and innate trait in every noble female character. [...] With women like these, the men of Serbia can go to the battlefield with a light heart. They have something worth defending." (Pravda, 1913, p. 1).

The First World War, which followed a year later, confirmed the description of the Serbian woman published in the newspaper Pravda. In mid-1915, before the sources) showed interest in Serbian women in occupation of Serbian territory, a French writer (whose name is not mentioned in historical the war. She wanted to document the engagement of female fighters on the front lines, intending to publish a book about the role of Serbian women during the Great War at the front. On this occasion, she addressed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a request to provide information about the women who participated in the fighting, the battles they took part in, and the honors they received. Additionally, she requested photographs that depict/confirm the participation of women in the war (VA, P-9, K. 45, F. 2, D. 42.). The regiments forwarded their responses in July 1915.

The commander of the Morava Division First Call responded that "there were no female fighters during the operations in this war (VA. P-6, K. 506. F. 1. D. 2/1.)." The Cavalry Regiment of the Morava Division First Call reported that "there were no women in this regiment who participated in this war. (VA. P-6, K. 506. F. 1. D. 2/1.)" The Timok Division First Call Command was also forwarded the request to collect data. The command forwarded it to all the regiments of the Timok Division, indicating that the data should be collected by July 10, 1915, "otherwise, report that there are none. (VA, P-6, K. 206, F. 3, D. 19-1.)" Accordingly, the responses from the Timok Division regiments contained the prefix "no" in the report. The Engineering Command of the Timok Division First Call reported, "the command has not collected data on the participation of women in the fighting in this war. (VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.) " The Cavalry Regiment of the Timok Division First Call reported, "there is no data in this regiment as per the aforementioned request (VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.)." The Artillery Regiment of the Timok Division First Call of the People's Army responded, "there is no known case in this regiment of women participating in any battle (VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.)." The Drina Division also confirmed the statements of the previous regiments. The commander of the Drina Division Second Call reported, "the department has no data in the requested case. (VA, P-9, K. 114, F.4, D. 66.)" The commander of the Drina Division Third Call

sent a similar response, "I have the honor to report that in my regiment to date, there has been no woman who participated in the fighting. (VA, P-9, K. 114, F.4, D. 66.)" The Thirteenth Infantry Regiment First Call "Hajduk Veljko" reported to the commander of the Timok Division First Call, "that no woman has participated in the fighting with the regiment. (VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.)" The response from the Fourteenth Infantry Regiment First Call was, "this regiment did not have any woman participating as a fighter, nor otherwise, in this war.(VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.)" The Fifteenth Infantry Regiment "Stefan Sinđelić" confirmed in its response "that there was no woman in this regiment who participated as a fighter in this war during the operations.(VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.)" The Twentieth Infantry Regiment First Call denied the participation of women in the regiment: "no woman participated in this war - as a fighter or otherwise. (VA, P-6, K. 206. F. 3. D. 19-2.)"

We can conclude that all the regiments of the Timok, Drina, and Morava Divisions sent the same response that no woman participated in the fighting in the regiments of the mentioned divisions, that is, there were no female fighters.

Thus, all statements indicate that by July 1915, there were no female fighters in the ranks of the Serbian army. However, if one takes an analytical approach, it can be observed that there were female fighters in the Second Infantry Regiment First Call "Prince Mihailo," which was part of the Morava Division First Call. These were Milunka Savić, Živana Terzić, and Flora Sandes. The first two mentioned also participated in the Balkan Wars.

2. Women on the Front Lines

2.1. Milunka Savić

Despite women being exempt from military service according to existing military regulations at that time, Milunka Savić[4] responded to King Petar's call[5] in 1912, when the First Balkan War began. She cut her hair short, put on men's clothes, donned a military cap, named herself Milun, and went to war (Đurić, 2014, p.

[4] Based on the copy of the extract from the birth registration book, we learn that she was born on June 28, 1892, in the town of Kovači as the first child of Radenko and Danica Savić, farmers from Kovači (Raška region). Apart from Milunka, Radenko and Danica had three more children: son Milan and two daughters, Miona and Slavka. Hard times and poverty marked Milunka's childhood and early youth. Self-taught and without school, she was a "shepherd in the Lilac Valley on the Ibar" (Vlahović, 1989, p. 39). In the personal file of Milunka Savić in the Archive of Yugoslavia, Koprivnica near Jošanička spa is also mentioned as the place of birth of Milunka Savić, where the family house of the Savić family is located, which was renovated in 2015. (AJ-125, f-4, personnel). It should be noted that the town of Kovači, as well as Korivnica, are located in the Raška region.

[5] The conquering and intolerant Ottoman rule has been exterminating these brothers of ours for centuries. From the Berlin Congress until now, killing, taking to Asia and until the last days, forced displacement, Turkification of women and men, non-recognition of our religion, language, Serbian name, were the basis of the Turkish administration. [...] Therefore, in the name of God, I ordered My heroic army to go into a holy battle for the freedom of our brothers, for a better life and for the progress of the Kingdom of Serbia. [...] I invite you, dear brothers, wholeheartedly help my brave army to create this, and put all your strength into it." (Politika,1912, p. 2).

17). She became a soldier in the Drina Division and participated in the Battle of Skadar (Mladenović, 2015). In the First Balkan War, she "gained fame as a bomber. (Đurić, 2014, p. 17)"

In the Second Balkan War, she participated in the key battle at the Bregalnica River and was wounded in the chest on the last day of the battle, revealing her secret about her gender.[6] For her demonstrated wartime achievements and excellent bombing skills, she was awarded the Gold Medal for Courage.[7]

The outbreak of the First World War compelled Milunka to join the fight to defend her homeland. Since no one remembered her and she did not receive a wartime assignment, Milunka took matters into her own hands and obtained a wartime assignment thanks to Major Vojislav Tankosić,[8] who was familiar with her exploits from the Balkan Wars. She was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Regiment "Prince Mihailo" – the "Iron Regiment," which was part of the Morava Division First Call (Bjalajac, 2012, p. 20–21).

In the famous battles of the Drina and Kolubara, where the Iron Regiment faced the heaviest blows, Milunka was in the front lines as a bomber. The Morava Division I Call was the strike division in the Battle of Cer, overcoming the resistance of Austro-Hungarian forces on the Cer and Iverak ridges (Mišić, 1990). Milunka's abilities were particularly evident on the Drina battlefield when the Iron Regiment defeated the 79th Austrian Regiment, with Milunka capturing part of the soldiers. In 1914, she also participated in the Battle of Kolubara, where the regiment's numbers fell from 4,356 to 1,354 fighters. As the commander of the assault bomber unit, she successfully pushed the Austro-Hungarian army back across the Drina and met them head-on (Đurić, 2014, p. 19).

In March 1915, the "Prince Mihailo" Regiment was sent to Macedonia to assist the Bregalnica Division, and Milunka continued her participation in the war with a rifle in hand.[9] It is worth noting that Milunka Savić was the only woman awarded the French War Cross with a golden palm. Also, at the moment of receiving the medal, she was honored as no Serbian army officer had been (Mladenović, 2015). When Milunka Savić's remains were transferred to the Avenue of the Greats at the New Cemetery in Belgrade, seven decorations she had earned in the liberation

[6] "What I feared the most happened [...] God, when I think about it: the paramedic, an elderly man, hurriedly took off my mask to see where I was wounded. He backed away and stopped as if struck by lightning [...] I can't hide anymore: I'm not Milun, but Milunka." (Đurić, 2014, p. 17).

[7] Four years later (1917), in the proposal for commendation of sergeant-volunteer Milunka Savić, the following was written: Golden medal for courage. Military Archives (hereinafter: VA), Fund of the Army of the Principality/Kingdom of Serbia, 1847–1920, list 3, box 273, folder 7, document number 5/14.

[8] Vojislav Voja Tankosić, known as Duke Tankosić, was a major of the Serbian royal army, a Chetnik duke, one of the founders of the Black Hand and a participant in the most important historical events in Serbia, from the May Uprising in 1903 to the Sarajevo assassination. During the retreat of the Serbian army in 1915, as a battalion commander, he was mortally wounded in Igrište near Veliki Popović on October 31, 1915. As a result of his injuries, he died on November 2, 1915.

[9] In the paper, the dates are listed according to the old Julian calendar, which was in use until 1919.

wars stood before the coffin.[10]

Based on the presented facts, we can conclude that at the time of sending the responses, Milunka Savić was already a celebrated bomber, a seasoned warrior from the Balkan Wars, who continued to fight in the same spirit during the First World War.

2. 2. Živana Terzić

Živana Terzić[11] was not falling behind Milunka Savić. For her participation in the Chetnik detachments in Southern Serbia at the beginning of the twentieth century, she was trained in Macedonia (Sveti Naum and Skopje) and in the company of Vojvoda Đorđe Ristić Skopljanče. She joined the Chetnik ranks with short hair, wearing Chetnik attire, with a carbine on her shoulder and a bandolier across her chest. Among the Chetniks, she received the pseudonym Žika and managed to skillfully conceal her gender, always being the first in every action. She always spoke in the masculine form: "Being a nimble person, my comrades always lowered me first with a rope into walled enemy courtyards. With great risk, I would unlock the heavy gates from the inside" (Vreme, 1938). During the Balkan Wars, she worked as a volunteer nurse in a field hospital in Ristovac. She greeted the Great War in the role of a fighter. Motivated by the death of her brother at Gučevo, during the most difficult battles, she joined the Iron Regiment of the Morava Division. She addressed the commander of the said regiment, Gvozden Ristanović, with the words: "Colonel, I am a former Chetnik. I want to die on the battlefield, to avenge my fallen brother. I claim to be more combative than many soldiers" (Vreme, 1938, p. 17). She was assigned to the second platoon of the second company of the second battalion. The platoon was led by reserve Lieutenant Dimitrije Barburović. In the first battles near the Drina River, at the Battle of Kurjačica, she received the rank of corporal. Following the Iron Regiment, she participated in the heavy battles at Cer, Mačkov Kamen, and Rudnik, proving to be a true fighter. By the end of the war, she was awarded the Miloš Obilić medal for bravery, as well as the rank of sergeant, eventually leading her own platoon.[12] Therefore, Milunka Savić and

[10] These are the following decorations: two French Legions of Honor, Karađorđev Star with Swords, French War Cross, Miloš Obilić Gold Medal for Courage in 1913, Albanian Memorial and another foreign decoration that cannot be determined due to the poor representation in the picture. The last, posthumous award was given to her by Dobrica Erić with the song "Another Order for Milunka." The documentary song was created in December 2009.

[11] She was born in 1888 in the village of Varni in Pocera, in the family of Živan Milošević. Because of her fine constitution, her parents enrolled her in the Workers' School in Belgrade. In the capital, she met her future husband, Milan Tezić, from the village of Cikote in Jadra, who was serving his military service in the Royal Guard in Belgrade. Her love for Milan led her to the Chetnik detachments, where her beloved Milan also participated in war operations in Macedonia. (Mladenović, 2002, pp. 275–276.)

[12] She received the rank of sergeant in 1915 in the battle in Durrës against the Albanians. In the battle at elevation 1212 near Bitolj (1916), she led her fighters three times and received the rank of sergeant, as well as the Miloš Obilić decoration. She was seriously wounded in the battle at 1212 elevation. She was treated in Vertekop, and after 15 days she was sent to France for recovery.

Živana Terzić were women fighters well-known to the Morava Division, but their merits were kept silent.

2. 3. Antonija Javornik

Antonija Javorinik fought under the name Natalija Bjelajac, which she gave herself at the beginning of the First Balkan War, in which she participated as a volunteer. She was assigned to the regimental hospital of the Eleventh Infantry Regiment "Karađorđe" as a nurse. With this regiment, she participated in the liberation of Serbia from the Turks. In the Second Balkan War, she participated as a fighter. She distinguished herself in the battle near the village of Drenka and at code 550, near Kumanovo. For her bravery in fighting the Bulgarians, she was awarded the Miloš Obilić Medal for Courage. In the First World War, she fought in battles around Šabac and was awarded another Miloš Obilić Medal. She participated in the defense of Belgrade and retreated with the Serbian army across Albania. On the Salonika front, she participated in the Battle of Kajmakčalan and the liberation of Bitola. She participated in the breakthrough of the Salonika front and was awarded the Karađorđe Star with Swords. Natalija Bjelajac was decorated twelve times (Đurić, 2014, p. 25–40).

2. 4. Sofija Jovanović

Belgrade citizen Sofija Jovanović[13] first demonstrated her military prowess in the Balkan Wars (Žikić, 2019, p. 37–39). Sofija's participation in the First Balkan War was confirmed by three manuscripts: one by Swiss doctor Adolf Fischer[14], another by Dobrila Glavinić Knez Milojković, found in the VARIA collection in the Archives of Serbia (AV, V-3297), and the third in the Glavinić collection in the Historical Archives in Belgrade.[15] For her participation in the First Balkan War,

Despite the statement of Colonel Dr. Jordan Stajić that she is no longer fit to fight. She returned to the fighting ranks, participated in the liberation of Serbia and entered Belgrade. (Vreme, 1938, p. 17. The Amazon woman from the Drina retreated into solitude).

[13] Sofija Jovanović was born on January 26, 1892 in Belgrade. Her parents were Hristina and Antonije Jovanović. Her father was a well-known Belgrade butcher. Sofia was the eighth and youngest female child. With her birth, her father's wish to have a warrior was not fulfilled. When her father was dying, she remembered his words well that it was his greatest regret that he did not have a son, a hero, to defend the country from the Turks." (We determined the date of birth on the basis of the death certificate, which is in the possession of the Petrović family.)

[14] The Swiss doctor Adolf Fischer, who came to Serbia at the invitation of the Serbian Red Cross, upon hearing about the girl Comita Sofija Jovanović, recorded the following on that occasion: "The face, the gentle hands, which were constantly playing with the rifle, her entire appearance, without any doubt, they indicated her gender. She was wearing a Serbian costume made of thick, dark, rough cloth, she had military boots on her feet, and an ordinary military cap covered her short cropped hair. She proudly showed us the two bombs she wore on her belt" (Fisher, 2007, p. 44–45.

[15] Writing about the involvement of the Circle of Serbian Sisters in opening hospitals during the Balkan wars, Dobrila Glavinić, in one paragraph, explicitly mentions the name of Sofija Jovanović: "The women from the organization of the Circle of Serbian Sisters stood out in providing Samaritan aid to the wounded." They founded the 4th reserve hospital in the premises of their Home in Belgrade during the Balkan War of 1912/13. year [...] Around 1000 wounded people

she was awarded the Commemorative Medal for the Liberation of Kosovo. In the Second Balkan War, she participated in the Battle of Bregalnica. She was awarded the Gold Medal for Courage Miloš Obilić, as well as the Commemorative Medal for the 1913 War.[16]

In the First World War, a year later, she participated in military operations, especially in the defense of Belgrade. She was a member of the Srem Volunteer Detachment, and by order of Ignjat Kirchner, she crossed to the left bank of the Sava and raised two Serbian flags at the Austrian guardhouse, cut telephone lines at the guardhouse, and took the rifles and ammunition of the Austro-Hungarian guards.[17] On August 25, Sofija Jovanović was wounded in the left leg and after the war was declared a war military invalid of the V group with 70% disability as a result of the presented action.[18]

She participated in the defense of Belgrade in 1915 with the Srem Volunteer Detachment. Unable to defend Belgrade, the Serbian army began to retreat (Bojić, 2008, p.74–84). Sofija Jovanović survived the exhausting trek across Albania and, along with some of her comrades, was sent to Bizerte[19] for recovery. For the retreat across Albania, she was awarded the Albanian Commemorative Medal.[20] These facts indicate that women were also in volunteer detachments, one of which was the Srem Detachment (Ekspres nedeljna revija, 1984). From 1912 to 1918, she was decorated ten times. It is worth mentioning that the Military Archive in France preserves several photographs of Sofija Jovanović from the front in its Photo Collection.[21]

2. 5. Mara Petrović

Mara Petrović is another Serbian heroine who contributed to the Balkan Wars and the Great War. She participated in the Battle of Kumanovo (1912), then fought at Gazibaba near Skopje, later near Prilep and at Crna Reka near Bitola, and was with the Drina Division. In the Second Balkan War, she participated in all the battles with the Bulgarians (Bat Mountain, Govedarnik, Ovče Polje, Kratovo, and Stracin) and received her first wound in the chest. In the Great War, together with the aforementioned Živana Terzić, she participated in the battle at Kurjačica near the Drina. There she performed a great feat that earned her a decoration. She was

passed through this hospital for treatment, of which 80 were officers and one female commander, Sofija Jovanović. The wounded were from Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Shkodër, and from Albania." Sofija Jovanović was treated for pneumonia. Historical Archive of Belgrade (hereinafter: IAB) F.1119-K.49 3.2.4.

[16] Ksenija Petrović owns the medal.

[17] Ksenija Petrović owns the medal.

[18] The decision of the Committee for the Disabled of the Ministry of National Defense is in the possession of the Petrović family.

[19] A town in Tunisia

[20] The award is in the possession of the Petrović family.

[21] Service historique de la Défance, Vincennes - Our colleague, Danilo Šarenac, gave us four photos that he took in the aforementioned archive in France.

tasked with swimming across the Drina to scout enemy positions. After successfully completing the task, she was awarded the Karađorđe Star with Swords. In the battle at Gučevo, she received seven wounds. She was treated in a hospital in Niš and after recovery, she joined the Morava Division and crossed Albania. On the Salonika front, Mara Petrović, now a non-commissioned officer, participated in many battles. She was tasked with crossing the enemy front and investigating the enemy Bulgarian army. This was her greatest feat, which earned her the rare recognition of an officer's rank. Furthermore, in the battles at Crna Reka, she was wounded a second time and treated in Voden, then in Bizerte, but despite all efforts, her leg was amputated in Salonika in 1917. For her unparalleled bravery in the war, Mara Petrović was decorated twelve times and held the rank of second lieutenant (Vreme, 1939).

2. 6. Flora Sandes

We shall also mention an English woman Flora Sandes to the list of the aforementioned women, who contributed significantly to medical missions, charity, and front, and became the first woman commissioned officer in Serbian army. A woman fighter who joined the military ranks a few months after the reports were submitted, on November 30, 1915, was the Briton Flora Sandes[22], so it is justified that she was not mentioned in the report due to her late entry and the fact that she was not Serbian (Personal file of members of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Carton of personal and official relations of officers (VA, K. 1566, no. 614). The date is given according to the old calendar.). The aforementioned Briton came to Serbia as a volunteer nurse. She set out for Serbia on August 12, 1914, from Charing Cross railway station with the Anglo-American unit, which gathered volunteer nurses and surgeons to aid Serbia (VA, K. 1566, no. 614). After the occupation of the Serbian state, Flora began working in the dressing station of the Second Regiment "Prince Mihailo."[23] She decided to retreat with the Serbian army through Babuna as a "military nurse". (Lazarević, 1929). On November 28, 1915, she became a soldier of the Second/Iron Regiment, "Prince Mihailo", and is remembered as the only woman recruited into the Serbian army during the First World War (Krippner, 1986, p. 197).

[22] Flora Sandes was born on January 22, 1876, in the parish of Nether Poppleton, in the county of York, England. She came from a well-to-do clerical family in Cork. Her father, Samuel Dixon Sands, was a respected citizen of London. In 1885, the family moved to Marlesford, Suffolk, where Flora spent her childhood and youth. She was educated at a Swiss girls' school for two years, played the violin, read a lot, spoke French and German fluently and learned Serbian quite well.

[23] "It was my great luck that I was assigned to this regiment, which is recognized as the best regiment in the Serbian army," she wrote in her diary. Sandes, 1916. Flora Sands wrote a diary from November 1915 to March 1916, in which she recorded the story of the Serbs, the events at the front, especially the situation in the "Knjaz Mihailo" regiment. The diary was first printed in 1916, in the edition of the War Collection, and it was translated from English by Sergeant Sandes (1916, pp. 15–16).

In all battles, Flora Sands demonstrated true military bravery. She stoically endured all the conditions of war. Observing the Serbian soldier giving even his last ounces of strength for the country, she noted in her diary: "Discouraged soldiers dragged themselves along the road in the dim light of a winter morning, and we all watched the hopelessly exhausted army, turning our gazes towards the dark, terrifying chain of snow-covered mountains that separated their beloved Serbia from Albania. (Sandes, 1916, p. 71)"

On the path through Albania, the regiment engaged in sporadic battles (Bjelajac, 2003, p. 17). The Briton Sands particularly distinguished herself in the battles at Ćukus[24] and Darze. (Srpske novine, 1917, p. 3). Joining the fourth company of the first battalion of the Infantry Regiment "Prince Mihailo" on November 30, 1915 (VA, K.1566, br. 614.), under the command of Lieutenant Janaćko Jović[25], she displayed remarkable rifle handling skills. Her proficiency and combativeness made a strong impression on Lieutenant Jović, and she became part of his company that very evening. (Sandes, 1916, p. 86). By the end of the war, she was wounded multiple times and particularly stood out in her role as an ambassador of the Serbian state through propaganda activities (AS, MID, PO, roll 545, document VIII/717).

Conclusion

Based on all the presented information, we can conclude that the 20th century offers a completely different image of women. The century that began with the Balkan Wars and continued with the First World War, within the same decade, created the image of the woman as a fighter. A woman skilled with a rifle, the front lines, and the highest decorations. In this new century, filled with different roles and needs driven by years of war, a woman is not just a housewife and a shadow of the family but also an assistant to the state. War, that is, the needs of war, transform gender roles for the purpose of defending the state.

We can state that six women in the role of fighters were present on the front lines during the Great War. It is highly probable that due to the focus on organizing war operations, there was no time for a detailed analysis of the women present in the regiments. However, at the time of the French writer's request, there were no war operations until October 1915, when the occupation of the state and the retreat of the Serbian army and state apparatus towards Albania occurred. This naturally raises the question of whether it was difficult to acknowledge that women, through their actions, were paving the way to victory and making a significant contribution to it. We will not rely on assumptions, but we will note that the Second Infantry Regiment – the Iron Regiment, was known for its female fighters, alongside the

[24] A mountain peak, 1,790m high.

[25] A native of the village of Donja Rečica near Prokuplje. He had a very successful military career. Participated in the Balkan wars. After the First Balkan War, he became a sergeant. In the Second Balkan War, he was a reserve second lieutenant, and two years later, in the First World War, he advanced to the rank of lieutenant. His collection of decorations consists of several medals for bravery, as well as two Karađorđe stars with swords.

toughest battles it fought and in which it melted away. Additionally, the Srem Volunteer Detachment had a female fighter, Sofija Jovanović. Women were also present on the front lines in the Drina Division. All this indicates that objective truth requires time, which is not available in sufficient measure in the whirlwind of war. After a century, we have managed to reconstruct the truth and answer the French writer's question: Were there women on the front lines in the Great War? Yes, there were Serbian women who defended the Serbian state on the front lines as combatants. We also mentioned the case of the English woman Flora Sandes, the first female commissioned officer in Serbian army.

By analyzing the six female soldiers, we offered a comparative picture of different biographical data and military experiences that enrich the military and women's history in Serbia and the Kingdom.

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