

Ivana Pantelić, *Uspon i pad „prve drugarice“ Jugoslavije: Jovanka Broz i srpska javnost 1952–2013*. [The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia’s “First Female Comrade”: Jovanka Broz and the Serbian Public, 1952–2013]. Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2018, 337 pp.

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Born in 1924 to an ethnic Serbian family of today’s Croatia, Jovanka Budisavljević was 15 when WWII broke out in 1939. Forced to flee the Ustasha regime, which eventually burned down her family house, with 17 she took the gun in her hand and fled to the woods to join the Yugoslav Partisans and to fight the Fascists. With 21, she got two medals for courage, later met Marshal Josip Broz Tito, and became part of his administration, marrying the 32 years older soon-to-be president of Yugoslavia Tito in a secret wedding ceremony, in 1952. She became the First Lady of socialist Yugoslavia a year later, a position which she kept until Tito’s death, in 1980, even if during the last three years of their married life they did not see or talk to each other. After Tito’s death, Jovanka Broz lived for more than a quarter of a century in (self)isolation, without an ID or social insurance, confined to an imposing, but decrepit Belgrade residence, which she seldom left. She died in 2013 and was buried next to her husband’s grave in the Belgrade mausoleum House of Flowers, escorted to her resting place with the Italian anthem of the anti-fascist resistance, *Bella ciao*.

A direct witness to a most turbulent era in the history of the Balkans, Jovanka Broz was subject to huge regional and international media interest. However, from before she became “the first female comrade of Yugoslavia” until the day thousands of Yugonostalgics came to Belgrade to pay their last homages to “the last Yugoslav icon”, she has been surrounded by mystery: it is not clear when and under what circumstances she met Marshal Tito, rumours about their wedding ceremony place it in different years and locations, the reasons for the public disassociation of the President from her remain unclear, the existence of her memoirs has been for decades a debated issue – even if we know today that there are none. Jovanka, as she was affectionately called by Yugoslavs, did not do much to dissipate the mystery, and her obstinate silence, interrupted in the last years of her life by only a handful of interviews, gave rise to an abundance of texts, most of them of journalistic character and sensationalist nature.

Yet, in spite of being a fascinating topic, a relevant biography of Jovanka Broz, which will stand the test of time, is still missing. Historians seem strangely reluctant when it comes to this subject, which is why there are hardly any longer studies published about Jovanka Broz. Ivana Pantelić’s book *The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia’s “First Female Comrade”: Jovanka Broz and the Serbian Public, 1952–2013* is one of the very few enterprises of this type, following naturally the author’s interest in women’s history and previous book about Yugoslav Female Partisans. Since the archival material related to Jovanka Broz in the ex-Yugoslav space is not yet fully accessible,

the author focuses on the analysis of Serbian public discourse to reconstruct Jovanka's role in the Serbian society of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. The book is a thorough scrutiny of the transformation of Mrs Broz's image in the Serbian public sphere: from Communist Cinderella during the first years of marriage, to glamorous First Lady of Socialist Yugoslavia and complete symbiosis of the couple in the media, to their final disjunction. Analysing the attitude of the Yugoslav and Serbian public towards Jovanka Broz, the book examines six decades of Serbian history, based on a variety of sources, which precisely contextualize the topic of research: printed media (magazines and daily newspapers), popular books, photo albums, theatre plays, archival documents etc. By exploring this diverse material, the author reconstructs the dominating attitudes towards Jovanka Broz and points to relevant changes in the public discourse, following the chronological fate and dissolution of the socialist federation.

The book is divided into the two main periods of her unusual life: the first, from her marriage to Tito, in 1952, until his death, in 1980, and the second, from 1980 until her death, in 2013. Emblematic for the first period is the fact that Jovanka is only visually present in the media. Though always in the background, her large smile, impressive bun, impeccable clothing and strong charisma made her a striking figure on every photo, which became the pattern for the couple's representation in the media throughout Tito's rule. A convenient, mute addition to Broz's authoritarian personality, Jovanka's voice was first heard after 20 years in her marriage, when her first interviews were published in women's magazines – sterile and sanitized.

Jovanka Broz was not part of the party apparatus, and did not have any official functions, unlike her counterparts from the communist world – Nadezhda Krupska in the USSR, Nexhmije Hoxha in Albania, Elena Ceaușescu in Romania or Jiang Qing in Mao's China. However, during her long marital life and public appearances next to Tito, she gained so much importance that in the 1970s it was speculated that Yugoslavia had established a so-called double dynasty. Part of the mystery surrounding her stems from rumours about her real political influence and connections to the West, Mrs Broz being investigated, in the late 1970s, for alleged political intrigue and suspicion she planned to topple the President.

As shown in the book, Jovanka Broz came to be perceived as an individual personality only after Tito's death. After the dissolution of the federation and her relative oblivion in the 1990s, she became the object of growing public interest, a compulsory topic of newspapers and popular books in the 2000s. Journalists now perceived her as a mixture of national heroine, former First Lady, war veteran and star of Yugoslav soap opera. Her silence, normal within a patriarchal society and authoritarian regime, but rather awkward in the beginning of the 21st century, stirred the imagination and raised many questions. Her persistent, somewhat paranoid and, for the wide public, dignified silence may have been a principal reason for her becoming so popular. Another was certainly a seemingly intact past and glamour, which neither Milošević nor others offered.

The book shows how, during her sixty-one year of presence in the Serbian public sphere, Jovanka Broz underwent an astonishing transformation: from passive object – a mere appendage of the elderly president and a glamorous image of socialist Yugoslavia and her young generation, to active subject – victim of the elderly, sclerotic and oligarchized Broz's regime in the 1980s; from a glamorous life and huge popularity, to misery, isolation and oblivion. After intermittent recollections in the 1990s, she enjoyed a renewed popularity during the decade of her public rehabilitation, 2003 to 2013, when she became a vibrant icon of Yugonostalgics throughout the countries of the former Federation.

An inspiring read, *The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia's "First Female Comrade"* ... is not in the first place a book about Jovanka Broz. It is a book about the mirror in which she saw her reflection for more than half a century: the Serbian public space. A keen analysis of the numerous, complex and radical changes Yugoslav, and later Serbian, public discourse has undergone during the last 60 years. A sharp scrutiny of the way in which the Serbs managed to deal with their communist past, after 1990, when the former First Lady of Yugoslavia came to represent a last link between the two worlds.

Yet, Jovanka Broz is present in every line of the book. "The first female comrade of Yugoslavia", "the last Yugoslav icon", "the widow of communism", "the socialist empress", "the bun of the epoch", "the Balkan Jacqueline Kenedy", "our Lady Di" – all these are labels stuck to her at different times. What Ivana Pantelić does is un-sticking them and letting the readers see what hides behind. The mostly sensationalistic texts are browsed through with the vigilant eye of the historian, offering the audience insight into the political context and helping them better understand Mrs Broz's position and role at different points during the six turbulent decades of Serbian history. The sharp, though unobtrusive observations of the author are the red thread which guides the readers through this dense, though alert read. Undoubtedly, this book will represent an important reference point for future research into this generous topic, which is still far from being exhausted.

Annemarie Sorescu Marinković