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**SONGS AND MELODIES IN THE NATIONAL LIBERATION
WAR IN SERBIA¹**

Abstract: The subject of this paper are the songs written and sung in Serbia during the National Liberation War fought on our territory during World War II. The focus is on Partisan song variants, among them the song “Krajinski smo mladi partizani” [We Are the Young Partisans of Krajina] from the Zaječar region particularly stood out and became a well-distinguished one. Having become quite popular, this song used to be sung during the National Liberation War in the Partisan troops, on marches, at performances organized by the Liberation War supporters, and after the Liberation, throughout Yugoslavia. The paper mainly features its numerous variants.

Key words: Partisan songs, song variants, “pattern song”, “Krajinski smo mladi partizani”, National Liberation War in Yugoslavia

The National Liberation War in Serbia was fought from 1941 to 1945, and after it was over, a great effort was made to record the songs coined and sung during the war. At that time, National Liberation War music – as a specific kind of musical creative work of national folklore – became an interesting subject for members of the Union of Folklorists of Yugoslavia and of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, that is, its institutes – particularly the Institute of Musicology, and also the Belgrade University departments, such as the Ethnology Department. The Faculty of Music also had an interest in this national musical creative work, with its students majoring in ethnomusicology and musicology sitting in on lectures

¹ Sound examples are available online at the official New Sound YouTube channel. Please find the playlist here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZt_2SKutBY&list=PLNFG-wrMs0-Xzo9GYGsuBaxxOc6704_IUJ

about National Liberation War folklore music within their curriculum, and using the relevant reference sources.²

In early 1941, the first songs appeared with a new content and fresh ideas, possessing the features of the region they originated from. When passed on, they were adapted to the battlefield environment, as evidenced by the song variants among which the song “Krajinski smo mladi partizani” [We Are the Young Partisans of Krajina] from the Zaječar region particularly stood out and became a well-distinguished one (example 1).³ Having become quite popular, this song was soon accepted and used to be sung during the National Liberation War by the Partisan troops, on marches, at the performances organized by the Liberation War supporters, and after the Liberation, throughout Yugoslavia.

Example 1

*Krajinski smo mladi partizani,
Mi volimo svoj rodni kraj,
Hajduk Veljka mi smo potomci.
Za slobodu naroda bijemo boj...⁴*

At one point Đurđica Petrović says: “The Krajina troop commander, engineer Jelenković, wrote the first four verses. The song’s melody was taken from the theatre play ‘Street Musicians’ by Pavel Šurek, performed on the eve of the war in Belgrade.”

As the National Liberation War spread during those four years, military units larger than Partisan detachments were formed. First, they were brigades which were assimilated into divisions. This is how Pavel Šurek’s melody came to be and remained a “pattern song.” The practice of changing the verses, rather than the melody, is familiar to ethnomusicologists. As the liberation battles of

² Editors: Study Group Nikola Hercigonja, Đorđe Karaklajić, Dragoslav Dević, *Zbornik partizanskih narodnih napeva* [Collection of Partisan Folk Chants], Nolit, Beograd, 1962. Preface, VII–XXVII. Index by collectors. Table of Contents: *Ustanak* [Uprising] (60), *Partija* [Party] (67–70), *Partizani* [Partisans] (73–111), *Tito* [Tito] (115–139), *Heroji* [Heroes] (143–181), *Omladina* [Youth] (185–201), *Izdaja* [Treason] (205–216), *Kozaračko kolo* [The Kozara Kolo] (219–249).

³ Đurđica Petrović, “Put pesme krajinske čete: Krajinski smo mladi partizani” [The Path of the Krajina Troop Song: We are the Young Partisans of Krajina], Publication of *VIII Congress of the Union of Folklorists of Yugoslavia, held in Titovo Užice*, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the National Revolution, Belgrade, 1961, 221–224.

⁴ *We are the young Partisans of Krajina,
We love our homeland,
We are descendants of Hajduk Veljko.
We are fighting the battle for the freedom of our people...*

Partisan brigades and divisions were advancing to more and more regions and towns, each new verse of the pattern song expressed something new, close to the heart of each soldier. In late May of 1943, the Krajina troops left Krajina and moved on to meet the Timok battalion. Since the Krajina soldiers thus became part of the Timok battalion, the first verse of the song was changed into “We are the young Partisans of Timok.” From the Timok Krajina, the song was passed on to Rasina in early July, with the first verse reading “We are the young Partisans of Rasina,” and the third one “We are descendants of Hajduk Veljko.” On August 7th, the Jastrebac troops crossed the South Morava river, bringing with them the song “We are the young Partisans of Toplica/We are descendants of Toplica Milan.” It is exactly from this battle zone in Serbia and through the South Morava troops that this song made its way towards the south, north and west of our country in 1943, moving away from the place where it originated. Ever since then, it became common property. It originated in one particular place and yet referred to the troops in each region that it reached. In the summer of 1943, when the Kosovo battalion was formed in the Jablanica region, the song of the South Morava Partisans was changed into “We are the young Partisans of Kosovo.” In the autumn of 1943, the song was accepted by the groups of the former Nišava troops and adopted as “We are the young Partisans of the Nišava/We are descendants of Stevan Sindelić.” The song spread further to the Kosmaj and Šumadija troops and was sung as “We are the young Partisans of Kosmaj,” or “We are the young Partisans of Šumadija.” In late 1943 and early 1944, it was also accepted by the Vojvodina troops who adapted it according to their own needs. The newly-formed Mačva troops sang it with the initial verse saying “We are the young Partisans of Srem.” Owing to the troops of Srem, the song was sung in Banat and Bačka as well, while undergoing further changes in western Serbia. It was sung on Zlatibor and in Užice during the autumn and winter of 1944/45 as “We are the young Partisans of Užice”, and in the Čačak area as “... Partisans of Čačak.” The song continued to spread across the country from liberated Belgrade, through the Srem Front and thanks to the further penetration of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army forces.

In 1945, during final operations, the Second Yugoslav Army made it popular in the garrisons of Styria, Lower Carniola and Inner Carniola, where it was sung as “We are the young Partisans of Styria” (Lower Carniola, Inner Carniola)...

In addition to our territory, this song was sung in the convalescent homes and hospitals in Italy where Yugoslav Partisans were sent. Its popularity was also reflected in its serving as a basis for new songs with merry or derisive lyrics.

As established by Đurdica Petrović,⁵ while spreading all across the country from May 1st 1943 to May 1944, thirty-one variants of the Krajina troop song

⁵ Ibid.

were coined. With this in mind, it is a recognized fact that the famous melody with its adaptable lyrics did rouse the fighting spirit during the National Liberation War, and as such, led to new soldiers joining the Yugoslav National Liberation Army, who came from all classes of society, to whom this type of song became quite familiar thanks to its unpretentious melody and content. Having successfully completed the research on this “pattern song,” in addition to establishing the origin of the melody, ethnologist Đurđica Petrović also discovered the authors who coined the first verses of the song together in the battle. They were: Janko Simeonović, Vojislav Jelenović and Ljubiša Veselinović.⁶

Another quite popular “pattern song” had a similar path:

*Sa Ovčara i Kablara
Čobanica progovara...⁷*

It became known as early as the 19th century, when the Serbian prince, Milan Obrenović, ‘was added in’ the song in 1885; it was sung by the volunteers of Vojvodina:

*Sa Ovčara i Kablara
čobanica progovara:
Srpski knjaže, primi naske
U redove srbijanske.⁸*

During World War I, General Aračić ‘was added in’ the song:

*Sa Ovčara i Kablara
čobanica progovara:
Aračiću, đenerale,
ćeraj Švabe i Madžare.⁹*

⁶ Vladislav Hiršl, *Mi smo mlada vojska Titova* [We are Tito’s Young Army]. Collection of Partisan songs originating in eastern Serbia. Published in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the uprising and revolution. Published by I-O Knjaževac, 1982. V. Hiršl says: “In addition to the song ‘We Are Young Partisans of Krajina’, other melodies were also sung: ‘Oj, Moravo, reko naša’ [Hey, Morava, Our River], ‘Omladina cele zemlje’ [Youth of the Whole Country], ‘Brda stenju, gora ječi’ [Hills Are Groaning, the Mountain Is Moaning], etc.”

⁷ *From Ovčar and Kablar
A shepherd girl is saying...*

⁸ *From Ovčar and Kablar
A shepherd girl is saying:
Hey, Serbian prince, take us
Into Serbian ranks.*

⁹ *From Ovčar and Kablar
A shepherd girl is saying:
Hey, General Aračić,
Chase away the Germans and Hungarians.*

Young King Peter also found his place in this song:

*Kralju Pero, perje naše,
Daleko te očeraše,
Očeraše avionom,
Te se javljaš radionom.*¹⁰

Subsequently, the chetnik commander Raković and Josip Broz ‘were added’ in the song, but all of them were soon to ‘exit’ it with reason. This nice song became a kind of hymn of the Dragačevo Trumpet Festival.¹¹ To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Revolution, the Union of Folklorists of Yugoslavia organized a scientific gathering in Titovo Užice, on the occasion of which my article about national songs from the National Liberation War was published.¹²

An extensive melographic material related to singing in the National Liberation War was published in a separate collection of works comprising as many as 600 songs, with relevant analyses. These songs, including their variants, were melographed from 1943 to 1960. They were collected by musicians of various profiles: Miroslav Špiler, Nikola Hercigonja, Slavko Zlatić, Natko Devčić, Vinko Žganec, Živko Firfov, Cvjetko Rihtman, Vlado Milošević, Miodrag Vasiljević, Radoslav Hrovatin, Tone Ljubić, Julije Njikoš, Vasil Hadžimanov, Sava Vukosavljev, Đoko Radović, Dragoslav Dević, Oskar Danon and Jelena Dopuđa.¹³

While analyzing the songs from the National Liberation War, I used Béla Bartók’s methodology – a metrical analysis of lyrics, cadence, rhythm, and scale. Since many of these songs were based on tradition, it is worthwhile to remember

¹⁰ *King Peter, our feather,
You have been sent far away,
Sent away by plane,
So you’re calling over the radio.*

¹¹ Dragan Babić, *Priča o trubi* [A Tale of a Trumpet], Belgrade, Beogradska knjiga, 2004, 303–307.

¹² Dragoslav Dević, “Pesme u narodno-oslobodilačkom ratu u Srbiji” [Songs in the National Liberation War in Serbia], Publication of *VIII Congress...*, op. cit.

¹³ The Collection editor Dr. Dušan Nedeljković included a study titled “Prilog proučavanju zakonitosti našeg narodnog pevanja u periodu narodne revolucije, oslobodilačkog rata i izgradnje socijalizma Jugoslavije” [Appendix to A Study of Patterns in National Songs during the National Revolution, Liberation War and Development of Socialism in Yugoslavia]. *Zbornik radova SAN* [Collection of papers, Serbian Academy of Sciences], vol. LXVIII, no. 3, Belgrade, Etnografski institut, 1960. In this valuable book comprising 241 melodies (including variants), all melodies are classified into eight groups: *Ustanak* [Uprising] (60), *Partija* [Party] (67), *Partizani* [Partisans] (73), *Tito* [Tito] (115), *Heroji* [Heroes] (143), *Omladina* [Youth] (185), *Izdaja* [Treason] (205), *Kozaračko kolo* [The Kozara Kolo] (219) Cf. footnote no. 1.

Bartók's words describing the songs in the following manner: "Serbian national songs have been preserved thanks to the patriarchal lifestyle of the people from the mountainous regions of Serbia and Montenegro. These songs contain three tones at most, not only in Serbia but also in other Serbian regions."

Urban-style chants with six tones (hexachord) can be considered our autochthonous urban songs. However, the songs with a wide ambitus – of an octave and over – are mostly of foreign origin. They are also typical because of their tonality, and major and minor keys, which also classifies them as European. For a traditional song to be considered a folk song, it needs to have been passed on verbally for some time and thus altered during the process. This is exactly the basis for the creation of similar folk songs or variants. While discussing this, among other things, Bartók asks the question: "What characterizes a melody as a variant of another?" His reply follows: "Variants are melodies in which the pitch relation of the various principal tones to each other shows a certain similarity; or, in other words, in which the contour line is entirely or partly similar."

In his research study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cvjetko Rihtman spent some time very close to the local people and noticed a lively practice among the folk "that our people tend to sing different lyrics to the same chants, and vice versa – that new lyrics are always based on some existing chant." He therefore concludes that "in certain regions, primarily those with a rural tradition, we find a certain number of chants serving for the improvisation of new lyrics, like patterns. The evolution of folk music is generally slow. Folk melody is remarkably resistant, tough and almost indestructible." This is, undoubtedly, supported by the musical creative work from the National Liberation War, and the research on the song in question, "We Are the Young Partisans of Krajina", sung by the Krajina troops.

The songs, singing and melodies from the National Liberation War period demonstrate a certain unity in their diversity. The songs were sung either on marches or in shows featuring *cultural teams* all across the liberated Yugoslavia.¹⁴ While the topic of the lyrics was ideologically and politically inspired, the melodies had established patterns – as was the case with the Krajina troop song sung to Pavel Šurek's melody. After all, this was confirmed by the on-site research in Bosnia and Herzegovina by ethnomusicologist Cvjetko Rihtman.¹⁵

¹⁴ Živomir Mladenović, "Pesma na priredbama kulturnih ekipa u NOB-u" [Songs in Cultural Team Shows in the National Liberation War], in: Publication of *VIII Congress...*, op. cit., 275–284. The quality of shows was increased after the establishment of Theaters of Yugoslavia. The first group of theatrical artists, which included Vjekoslav Afrić and Salko Repak, came to Kordun as early as April 1942.

¹⁵ Cvjetko Rihtman, "Narodna muzička tradicija istočne Hercegovine" [Folk Music Tradition in Eastern Herzegovina], Publication of *IX Congress of the Union of Folklorists, held in Mostar and Trebinje, 1962*, Sarajevo, 1963, 75.

* * *

Tonal Basis Analysis

The analysis includes six hundred and twenty-one songs, in all. As with traditional folk singing in general, the scale structures of Partisan music also have different tonal sequences of diatonic and chromatic character, containing in most cases trichords (example 2), tetrachords (examples 3 and 4), pentachords (example 5) and hexachords (example 6). Heptachord-type scales are a characteristic feature of town-style songs. The songs are mainly performed in two voices, “on bass”, with a rhyming couplet prevailing in their metric structure, and the most common are two-section marching songs.

Example 2

OUR COMBAT CALLS FOR
Our battle calls for
Singing while dying.

Written down by *Cvjetko Rihtman* (July 20, 1948). Sung by people on their way to Neum.

Example 3

THE KOZARA KOLO¹⁶
Solo Voice
Hey, Kozara, my thick forest,
Many Partisans are within you.
Hey, Kozara, spread out your branches
And accept young Partisans.
Hey, Kozara, spread your fir trees,
And save young proletarians. *
Widen the kolo, you jolly fellow of Kozara,
Widen even more, it goes round better.

* Also: “And accept young proletarians”
(or – your proletarians”)

Written down by *Dorđe Karaklajić*. Published in the collection “Sto narodnih pesama” [One Hundred Folk Songs], Belgrade, 1951

¹⁶ *Kolo* – a round dance

Example 4

COMRADE TITO, WE SWEAR TO YOU

Comrade Tito, we swear
We shall never depart from your path.

The young people from Zaton village
Are bound closely around Tito.

Written down by *Slavko Zlatić* (Zaton, near Šibenik, January 25, 1945).

Example 5

COMMUNIST PARTY, YOU FRAGRANT FLOWER

Moderato

Communist party, you fragrant flower,
Communist party, my treasure, fragrant flower.

The whole nation follows you,
The whole nation follows you.

Communist party, your hand is sacred,
You are the leader of the national movement.

Communists, long live your hand,
You have come to our people's rescue.

He who does not regret to shed young blood,
He is the closest to the Party.

Whatever task the Party assigns to its soldiers,
Each one of them is willing to accomplish it.

Communists set an example to everyone
How oppressors should be fought.

Written down by *Miroslav Špiler*.

Published in 1) collection of songs "Naše pjesme" [Our songs], book II 1945. Publication of the Department of Culture with the Croatian Ministry of Education, April 1945. Printed by the Regional National Liberation Committee of Dalmatia. Edited by N. Devčić and Vl. Popović. Cover page by Edo Murtić.

2) In the collection of songs "Naše pjesme" [Our songs] (Collection of Partisan songs), second edition, Zagreb 1945. Edited by N. Hercigonja, M. Špiler, N. Devčić. Third edition, Zagreb, 1946. Published by Nakladni zavod Hrvatske. Song No. 37 published under the title "Kompartiji" [To the Communist Party].

Elaboration on other verses according to the first one.

Example 6

BLOOM, ROSE, THE PEONIES HAVE ALREADY BLOOMED

Bloom, rose, the peonies have already blossomed.

Bloom, rose, the peonies have already blossomed.

Milosav, hurry up with your troop.

I have knitted new socks for you

None like them can be found in four villages.

Thin, blue, genuine Partisan socks,

Blue ones, to make you look nicer.

I have knitted them, no one can do better,

You will wear them once you've returned from the woods.

Written down by *Đorđe Karaklajić*, based on singing by *Rodo Andrić*, a Kosmaj troop soldier (Belgrade, 1961)

Rhythm

Partisan folk melodies do not only reflect the wealth of tones (diatonic, chromatic and untempered chromatic scales), but also a great diversity of rhythm. Approximately two-thirds of the melodies (268) are *isometric* and *heterometric*. The isometric ones feature the same number of syllables of text in each of their sections, while the heterometric melodies include sections with a varying number of syllables of text when viewed in relation to one another. The 2/4 rhythm prevails, as much in the Kozara kolo and various marches, as in other Partisan songs.

Conclusion

The melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and formal basis of Partisan music features recognizable characteristics of our vocal folk music culture both of rural and urban character, which is not surprising given the heterogeneous composition of the Partisan army. Since these songs used to be sung to highly versatile melodies traditionally taken from older ones, they formed the basis for composing new and more contemporary songs. Their purpose, as well as the purpose of the dance, was to generate enthusiasm in soldiers, encourage them and stir them to action, but above all, to promote their comradeship, which is best illustrated by the famous slogan “brotherhood and unity.”

The last text by Dr. Dragoslav Dević, written for the International Interdisciplinary Scientific Symposium: “Kultura v času Druge svetovne vojne 1939–1945” [Culture in World War II 1939–1945], Maribor 7–8. June 2012. Organizers: National Libera-

tion Museum Maribor, Institute for Music Information Sciences of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Studies at the University of Maribor

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Summary

This paper features the songs written and sung in Serbia during the National Liberation War fought on our territory during World War II. The research focused on Partisan song variants, among them the song “Krajinski smo mladi partizani” from the Zaječar region which became especially popular. Its melody originates from the theatre play ‘Street Musicians’ by Pavel Šurek, and was treated as a kind of a “pattern song”.

In addition to our territory, this song was sung in convalescent homes and hospitals in Italy where Yugoslav Partisans were sent. The scope of its popularity is reflected, among other things, in its being used as a basis for new songs with a different content.

There were thirty-one variants of the song, with their lyrics adapted accordingly. Yet, all of them had the sole purpose of rousing the fighting spirit during the National Liberation War and, as such, they caused new soldiers from all social classes to join in, and to whom this type of song became quite familiar thanks to its unpretentious melody and type of content.

Another quite popular “pattern song” – “Sa Ovčara i Kablara” – followed a similar path.

Well-known ever since the late 19th century, with its lyrics being adapted to the political circumstances, the song ultimately became a kind of hymn of the Dragačevo Trumpet Festival.

The process of passing these songs by singing and their undergoing alterations along the way, as was the case with many other examples of musical creative work from the National Liberation War, proves that they meet the basic criterion for becoming folk songs. Partisan folk melodies do not only reflect the wealth of tones (diatonic, chromatic and untempered chromatic scales), but also a great diversity of rhythm. Approximately two-thirds of the analyzed melodies (268) are *isometric* and *heterometric*, with the prevailing 2/4 rhythm.

The melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and formal basis of Partisan music features the recognizable characteristics of our vocal folk music culture both of rural and urban character, which is not surprising given the heterogeneous composition of the Partisan army. Since these songs used to be sung to highly versatile melodies traditionally taken from older ones, they formed the basis for composing new and more contemporary songs. Their purpose was to generate enthusiasm in the troops, encourage them and move them to action, but above all, to promote their comradeship, which is best illustrated in the famous slogan “brotherhood and unity.”

Translated by Aleksandra Čabraja and Stela Spasić