

8/27/25



BABICH, Matijan Mato

Matijan Mato Babich, passed away peacefully on August 14, 2025 at the age of 96. Mato immigrated to Canada from his hometown village of Zrin, Croatia. HR

Mato was a soldier of war, serving in the army from 1943-1945 when communist rule took over after WWII. Mato, as a young soldier was a survivor of the repatriation death marches and tragedy of Bleiburg.

During the 1960's Mato immigrated to Canada, living in Vancouver, BC and enjoyed a successful career as a mechanic and long-haul driver. He met Lucy in the early 90's where they enjoyed travel, young grandchildren, playing music and his favourite pastime of film making. Mateo loved to cook and also enjoyed getting the family together often at the Croatian picnic. There were many social events that kept Lucy and Mateo busy, he was fond of the young grandchildren and often had the nickname of Potato. Mateo and Lucy loved music and dancing, at Christmas playing their accordions and spending Sunday mornings making Palezonky. Mato leaves behind his sister Kata and a loving extended family of many generations of nieces and nephews in the old country.

He is survived by his wife, Lucy Babich, Paul, Chris, Jennifer (Steve), Carla, Celia (Bill) - grandchildren Jeremiah, Zosha, Wyatt, Cairo.

Brother Mijo, Sister Kata, Nephews Edward, Mirko (Sandra), Matthew, Owen and Niece Stephanie. As well as a very large extended family in Europe.

At Mato's request, please make donations to Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Parish in lieu of flowers.

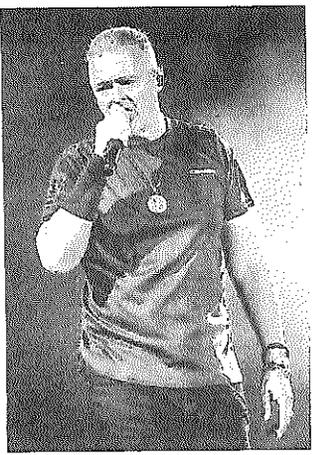
Service is held on August 26, 11:30 a.m. at Immaculate Heart of Mary Croatian Parish, 3105 East 1st Avenue, Vancouver, BC.

Committal Service to follow commencing at 1:30 p.m. at Ocean View Burial Park; Section- Garden of Peace, 4000 Imperial Street, Burnaby, BC.

8/25/25

With a Fascist-Era Salute, a Singer Appeals to Nationalist Sentiment in Croatia

By JOE OROVIC



ZVONIMIR BARISIN/SIPA, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marko Perkovic, who performs as Thompson, in Sinj, Croatia, this month. His show in July in Zagreb, the capital, right, drew 500,000, organizers said. He says the salute commemorates the 1990s independence fight.



DAMIR SENCAR/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

SINJ, Croatia — Hundreds of drones lit up the night sky in the shape of the Virgin Mary, angels and a cross as the singer Marko Perkovic romped across the stage. Pyrotechnics sent flames and fireworks into the air. Then the distortion-heavy intro of his most famous song began its crescendo.

The huge crowd roared; flares went off. The singer, known as Thompson (after the gun), led his fans in the call-and-response war salute of Croatia's fascist government during World War II, a regime so brutal that it shocked even its Nazi allies.

"For the homeland!" he cried. "Ready!" the crowd responded. For three decades, Thompson, 58, a hard-rock singer and songwriter who is a veteran of the Balkan wars of the 1990s, has used nationalist rhetoric in his songs to cast himself and fans as unapologetic guardians of Croatian heritage.

He is now attracting the largest crowds of his career, recently performing before what organizers said was a crowd of 500,000 on July 5 in Croatia's capital, Zagreb.

At that show and at another a month later in Sinj, in the southeast, many of Mr. Perkovic's fans wore black berets and shirts that resembled the paramilitary uniforms of the Ustashe, the fascist group that led the Independent State of Croatia, a puppet state of Germany formed during World War II. Some shirts were emblazoned with the words of the Ustashe war salute.

The Ustashe regime's brutality was so extreme that the Nazis' top-ranking military commander in Croatia said it had "gone raging mad" as he witnessed scenes of mass murder, rape and torture. Historians estimate the Ustashe killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, mainly Serbs, as well as Jews, Roma and political opponents.

After Mr. Perkovic's performance in Zagreb, the European Commission issued a statement

condemning "every expression of fascism that reminds us of the darkest periods of European history." President Alexander Vucic of Serbia denounced the concert for promoting "neo-Nazi values."

Many of Mr. Perkovic's fans appear to have latched on to an idealized vision of Croatia that he expresses in his songs as a counterweight to the simmering discontent that is common in the country, especially among the young.

Young people have been leaving Croatia in large numbers since the country joined the European Union in 2013. From 2011 to 2021, the population dropped 10 percent as people sought higher wages elsewhere, escaping a country many see as politically dysfunctional and corrupt, researchers say.

Hrvoje Klasic, a history professor at the University of Zagreb, said there was also an element of "forbidden fruit" in Mr. Perkovic's image that attracted fans.

"For decades, Thompson has been a very controversial figure,

and as it usually goes — especially among young people, but not only them — what is forbidden becomes especially intriguing and interesting," he said.

At the concert this month in Sinj, where, according to organizers, 150,000 people turned up, Mr. Perkovic used the language of victimhood to perpetuate a career-long narrative that portrays him and his fans as combatants against censors trying to ban expressions of national pride.

After the fascist state collapsed and its territory became part of Yugoslavia, all symbols, slogans and songs of the Ustashe era were banned. Violators faced arrest or imprisonment. Many Croatians, including Mr. Perkovic, feel those restrictions also served to suppress their identity.

"We've been attacked, persecuted, and others have tried to impose something on us that we are not," Mr. Perkovic said from the stage.

While he has been popular for decades, his appeal has grown in recent years. His songs have be-

come mainstays at patriotic events and celebrations in Croatia, most notably at celebrations of Croatia's second-place finish in the World Cup in 2018. (Mr. Perkovic performed at the team's homecoming celebration.)

To fans, Mr. Perkovic is a heroic symbol of Croatian identity.

"He's the only one who stays true to the homeland," said Marin Bilandzija, who was watching the concert in Sinj with his wife and two of his three children.

To critics, Mr. Perkovic is a provocateur and nationalist who sells records by sanitizing the iconography of Croatia's fascist past and by using Catholic imagery that many Croatians see as a key part of their identity. They also worry that his popularity is a sign of a rightward shift in Croatia, where many young people feel disenchanting with mainstream politics.

But mainstream Croatian politicians have seized on Thompson's popularity, too. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and his children were photographed with

Mr. Perkovic before the Zagreb concert. The defense minister, Ivan Anusic, acknowledged taking part in the war salute at the same show.

Mr. Perkovic, whose representatives did not respond to requests for an interview, rose to fame in 1991 with "Bojna Cavoglave," written when he was a soldier fighting for the independence of Croatia during the breakup of Yugoslavia. He usually starts the song with the call and response he used at the Sinj concert — the Ustashe war salute.

The song lauds a battle in 1991 between Serb rebels and villagers in his hometown, Cavoglave. Mr. Perkovic, who fought in the battle, assumed a nom de guerre taken from the antiquated submachine gun he used in it. The song's popularity transformed Thompson the soldier into Thompson the singer.

The song, which lionizes the poorly armed frontline Croat troops, became a nationalist paean for Croats as they fought for independence and, later, after the country was recognized as an in-

dependent state in 1992.

The singer has defended his use of the salute that opens the song, citing a Croatian court ruling that it did not constitute hate speech if it was being used to commemorate the war of the 1990s, as he says it is. He has instead framed the debate as a defense of free expression.

"This is freedom," Mr. Perkovic said from the stage in Sinj about the controversy. "Freedom where we can express our stances and thoughts. Freedom for which our veterans died. Those who live in our homeland must respect Croatia's veterans and their symbols."

Two of his other biggest hits commemorate a 1995 military operation that swept Serb forces from the territory of what is now Croatia, with a population of 3.8 million.

Croatia this summer celebrated the 30th anniversary of that operation, which is seen by Croatians as a show of their military ingenuity and bravery but by human rights groups and Serbia as an act of ethnic cleansing.

Two of the three generals who planned the operation were convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, only for the decisions to be reversed.

Many fans say they do not see what all the fuss is about over Mr. Perkovic.

"Croatia loves everyone. We love Serbs. We love Bosnians," said Davor Perkovic, a veteran of the war who watched the Sinj concert.

He rejected the idea that the allusions and symbols that Mr. Perkovic used in his songs were fascist, saying that their meanings had changed in the 1990s, when he fought "barehanded" against Serb forces. "Today's children won't have to fight anymore," he said. "We took care of that."

Thompson's music speaks to that duality in Croatians' nature, he added. "We're like hedgehogs," he said. "Look us in the face and you'll melt, but attack us and you'll discover we have sharp spines."



Bleiburg repatriations

The **Bleiburg repatriations** (see terminology) were a series of forced repatriations from Allied-occupied Austria of Axis-affiliated individuals to Yugoslavia in May 1945 after the end of World War II in Europe. During World War II, Yugoslav territory was either annexed or occupied by Axis forces, and as the war came to end, thousands of Axis soldiers and civilian collaborators fled Yugoslavia for Austria as the Yugoslav Army (JA) gradually retook control. When they reached Austria, in accordance with Allied policy, British forces refused to take them into custody and directed them to surrender to the JA instead. The JA subsequently subjected them to death marches back to Yugoslavia, where those who survived were either subject to summary executions or interned in labor camps, where many died due to harsh conditions. The repatriations are named for the Carinthian town of Bleiburg, where the initial British refusal to accept the surrenders occurred, and from which some repatriations were carried out.

On 3 May 1945, the government of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a fascist puppet state established in German-occupied Yugoslavia which had undertaken genocidal campaigns against its minority populations, reducing their numbers by the hundreds of thousands, decided to flee to Austria. They initiated the evacuation by ordering the Croatian Armed Forces (HOS) to move there as soon as possible, in order to surrender to British forces. The Axis-aligned Slovene leadership issued similar orders to the Slovene Home Guard on the same day. These forces, accompanied by civilians, joined the German Army Group E and other Axis units in withdrawal; the latter included the XV SS Cossack Cavalry Corps and the remnants of the Montenegrin Chetniks organized in the HOS-commanded Montenegrin National Army.

In the week after the German Instrument of Surrender, which marked the formal end of World War II in Europe, collaborationist forces in Yugoslavia continued to battle the Partisans to avoid encirclement and keep escape routes open. The Slovene-led columns

Bleiburg repatriations

Part of the aftermath of World War II in Yugoslavia



World War Two prisoners of war at Bleiburg, Austria (1945)

Date	May 1945
Location	March to Austrian border and back through Yugoslavia
Type	Military operations
Motive	Revenge for atrocities, collaboration and occupation
Target	Mainly Croatian Ustaše, Slovene Home Guard, remnants of pro-Axis Chetniks, Serbian Volunteer Corps, and German prisoners of war and Croat, Serb, Bosniak, and Slovene civilians accused of association with atrocities and collaboration
Participants	British Army (repatriations) Yugoslav Partisans (executions)
Outcome	Summary executions, massacres, death marches
Deaths	30,000–100,000
Litigation	None, officially suppressed

fought their way to the Austrian border near Klagenfurt on 14 May. Their surrender was accepted by the British and they were interned in the nearby Viktring camp. When one of the columns of fleeing HOS troops, who were intermingled with civilians, approached the town of Bleiburg on 15 May, the British refused to accept their surrender. They directed them to surrender to the Partisans, which the HOS leadership did after short negotiations. Other Axis prisoners in British captivity were repatriated to Yugoslavia in the following weeks. The repatriations were canceled by the British on 31 May, following reports of massacres in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav authorities moved the prisoners on death marches throughout the country to internment and labor camps. Mass executions were carried out, the largest of which were in Tezno (estimated at 15,000 Croatian prisoners of war),^[1] Kočevski Rog, Huda Jama and Macelj. In the ensuing Communist rule in Yugoslavia, these massacres and other abuses after the repatriations were a taboo topic and information about the events was suppressed. Public and official commemoration of the victims, which included civilians, did not begin until several decades later.

Historians have been unable to accurately ascertain the number of casualties during and after the repatriations; exact numbers have been the subject of much debate, and assessments are typically in the ranges of tens of thousands. Historians and investigations in Slovenia and Croatia indicate that most of the victims were members of Croatian, Slovene, Montenegrin and Serb collaborationist armed forces.^{[2][3][4]} Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, an annual commemoration for the victims has been held in Bleiburg, but has drawn considerable controversy due to Ustaše symbols at the event. Croatian authorities have variously either endorsed that commemoration or initiated other commemorations in Slovenia, while the Austrian authorities have increasingly made moves to prevent it from further happening.

Terminology

In Croatia simply *Bleiburg* is the most commonly used term for the events, followed by *Bleiburg Tragedy*, *Bleiburg massacre*, *Bleiburg crime* and *Bleiburg case*.^{[5][6][7]} The term 'tragedy' has also been used in English-language works of authors of Croatian origin.^{[8][9][10]} The term *Way of the Cross* (Croatian: *Križni put*), which equates the events with Jesus' crucifixion, is a common subjective term, used mostly by Croatians, regarding the events after the repatriations.^[11] The latter have been described as "death marches".^{[12][13]} The term death marches, unlike many others, is used by international literature on the topic, and Croatian historian Martina Grahek Ravančić discusses the topic of "Bleiburg and the Death Marches".^[14]

In Slovenia, the term *Bleiburg Tragedy* (*Pliberška tragedija*) is the most commonly used, while *Bleiburg Massacre* (Slovene: *Pliberški pokol*) and *Viktring tragedy* (*Vetrinjska tragedija*) are less employed.^[15] Viktring was a British camp where the largest number of Slovene prisoners were interned before repatriations took place.^[16]

Background

When World War II broke out in 1939, the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia declared its neutrality.^[17] By the beginning of 1941, most of its neighbors joined the Tripartite Pact.^[18] Yugoslavia came under strong pressure to join the Axis and the Yugoslav government signed the Pact on 25 March 1941, the year that Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. But demonstrations broke out in Belgrade

against the decision, and on 27 March, the opposition overthrew the government in a coup d'état. The new Yugoslav government refused to ratify the signing of the Tripartite Pact, though it did not rule it out. Adolf Hitler reacted by launching the invasion of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, allied with forces of Italy and Hungary.^[19]

On 10 April, German troops entered Zagreb and on the same day, the German-Italian puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia (Croatian: *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH), was installed. The Ustaše were put in power by Hitler who appointed Ante Pavelić as the leader (Poglavnik) of the NDH.^[20] Yugoslavia capitulated to the Axis powers on 17 April.^[21] The Ustaše, a fringe movement in pre-war Croatia,^[22] attempted to garner support among ordinary Croats and Bosnian Muslims,^[23] but never attracted significant support among the populace.^[24] The ceding of territory to Italy was a particular blow to their popularity.^[25] Special status was given to the German minority, whose members served in the NDH military forces (Einsatzstaffel), and were organized as an autonomous body.^[26] From 1942, German minority members were enlisted in the SS Prinz Eugen division.^[27]

Following the occupation and division of Yugoslavia, German and other occupation forces introduced anti-semitic laws in accordance with the Nazi Final Solution plan.^[28] In the NDH, the Ustaše enacted their own Race Laws,^[29] and embarked on a campaign of genocide against Serbs, who were Orthodox Christian, as well as the Jewish and Roma populations throughout the country.^{[29][30]} It established a concentration camp system, the largest of which was Jasenovac,^[31] where 77,000–100,000 people were murdered, the majority women and children, primarily Serbs, Jews and Roma, but also anti-Fascist Croats and Bosniaks.^{[32][33]} Around 29–31,000 Jews, or 79% of their pre-war population in the NDH, were exterminated during the Holocaust, mostly by the Ustaše.^[34] The Ustaše also murdered nearly the entire Roma population of around 25,000.^[35]

The number of Serbs killed by the Ustaše is difficult to determine.^[36] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum estimates that the Ustaše killed between 320,000 and 340,000 Serbs.^[37] Croatian demographer Vladimir Žerjavić calculated the population losses of Yugoslavia, and estimated the total number of Serb civilian and combatant deaths in the NDH at 322,000. Of the civilian casualties, he estimated that



Occupation and partition of Yugoslavia 1941



The Independent State of Croatia conducted a systematic campaign of mass murder and extermination of Serbs, Jews and Roma. This picture shows prisoners arriving at the Jasenovac concentration camp.



Slovene Home Guard commander Leon Rupnik, Bishop Gregorij Rožman and SS-General Erwin Rösener review Home Guard troops, after the second oath of allegiance, January 30, 1945.

the Ustaše killed 78,000 Serb civilians, in

direct terror and in concentration camps, and the rest died at the hands of the German and Italian forces, and of other causes.^[12] The Ustaše ethnically cleansed Serbs, killed 154 Orthodox priests, plus 3 bishops,^[38] expelled most other Orthodox priests, force-converted 240,000 Serbs to Catholicism by May 1943,^[39] slaughtering many Serbs even after conversion.^[40] A series of armed Serb revolts against the NDH began in the summer of 1941. Wehrmacht General Edmund Glaise-Horstenau blamed the Ustaše crimes for the uprisings and criticized the government of the NDH.^[41] The rebel forces were initially a mixture of Communists and Serb nationalist groups, but rifts and fighting between Partisans and Chetniks soon broke out.^[42] Partisans advocated unity among all ethnic groups, and opposed Chetnik killing and ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Croats.^[43] In early 1942, NDH Chetniks killed many Partisan commanders in Bosnia, and signed alliances with the Ustaše, to jointly fight the Partisans.^[44]

Germany, Italy, and Hungary carved up Slovenia, and set out to entirely wipe out Slovenes as an ethnic group, through mass expulsions and forced assimilation,^{[45][46]} which the Slovenian historian Božo Repe describes as ethnocide.^[47] Nazi Germany planned to expel 260,000 (a third of) Slovenes from areas they occupied, but expelled around 80,000.^[48] The bishop of Ljubljana and leading Slovene politicians welcomed Mussolini's annexation of Ljubljana Province,^[49] while conversely, Axis oppression soon led to armed resistance.^[50] The Communist-led resistance began in July 1941.^[51] Axis authorities sponsored local collaborationist, anti-communist units, which drew most of their members and were supported by the Catholic Slovene People's Party. In 1943, these units were united into the Slovene Home Guard, under the command of SS General Erwin Rösener, who reported directly to Himmler.^[52] The Home Guard took an oath to fight with the SS, under the leadership of the Führer, against the Communist guerrillas and their Soviet and Western Allies.^[53] Italy set up concentration camps in occupied territory, the largest of which was the Rab concentration camp. An estimated 40,000 Slovenes went through those camps, of whom 7,000 died.^[54] During the course of the war in Slovene territory, mutual terror was practiced by both the Communist-led units and the collaborating forces.^[55] In total, around 83–84,000 people lost their lives by the formal end of the war in Slovene territory, the vast majority killed by the occupation forces. Around 13,200 military and civilian deaths were the result of an inter-Slovene conflict, with collaborators responsible for around 6,000 and Partisans 6,700. Among nearly 30,000 Slovene civilians killed, Partisans were responsible for 4,233 civilian deaths, while the Slovene anti-Partisan, in independent actions or in collaboration with Axis forces, caused the deaths of 1,236 civilians. The latter number does not include civilians that Slovene collaborators turned over to the Axis and were killed or died in Axis concentration camps.^[56] (e.g. Slovene collaborators put together lists of Slovene political prisoners and assisted in their deportation to Nazi concentration camps).^[57]

Serbia was invaded and partitioned by Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the NDH. Rump Serbian territory was placed under German military administration, with the help of a civil puppet government led by Milan Nedić.^[58] In response to a large, Communist-led uprising in Serbia, the German military in just two months executed 30,000 Serb civilians and Jews.^[59] Remnants of the Royal Yugoslav Army organized the Serbian monarchist Chetniks were the first resistance movement. The Chetniks were led by Draža Mihailović and were recognized by the Yugoslav government-in-exile.^[60] While it was anti-Axis in its long-term goals and engaged in marginal resistance activities for limited periods, the Chetniks also engaged in collaboration with the occupying forces for almost all of the war.^[61] The Chetniks were partners in the terror and counter-terror that occurred in Yugoslavia during WWII. The terror tactics against the communist Partisans and their supporters was ideologically driven.^[62] The Chetniks sought the creation of a Greater Serbia by cleansing non-Serbs, mainly Muslims and Croats, from territories that

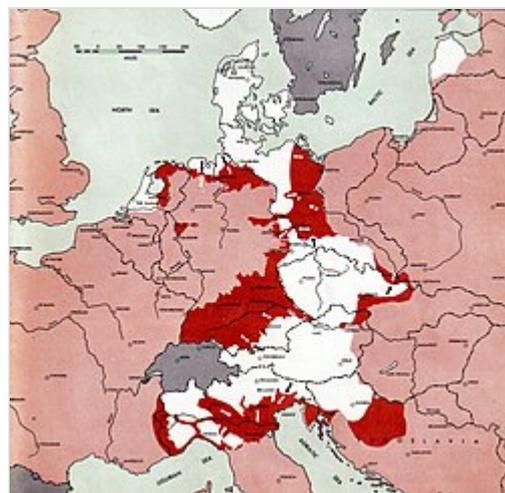
would be incorporated into their post-war state,^[63] and carried out genocide against Muslims and Croats during this period.^{[64][65][66]} An estimated 18,000–32,000 Croats and 29,000–33,000 Muslims were killed by the Chetniks.^[67]

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) remained largely inactive while the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was in effect.^[68] During this period, the Soviet Union pursued friendly relations with Germany and considered recognizing the NDH.^[69] Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Communist-led Yugoslav Partisans issued a call for an uprising.^[68] Josip Broz Tito was the supreme commander of the Partisan forces.^[70] The Communist leadership saw the war as an opportunity for a revolution and an establishment of a Soviet-style totalitarian regime.^[71] Until the 1st half of 1942, during a period described as "red terror", their units were engaged in the mass killing of perceived class enemies, a policy that threatened their popular support. The leadership then changed this approach and focused less on class warfare, until the postwar period.^[72]

The Chetniks and the Partisans, the two main guerrilla resistance units, initially cooperated against the Axis, but their cooperation soon fell apart, and they turned against each other. Due to the Chetniks' collaboration with the Axis, Allied support shifted to the Partisan side.^{[73][74]} In 1943, the Allies officially recognized the Partisans as an Allied fighting force.^[75] Winston Churchill highlighted the strength and importance of the Partisans and advised the Yugoslav government to reach an agreement with Tito,^[76] whose forces generated an appeal among all ethnic groups.^[77]

End of the war

The arrival of Soviet ground troops in the Belgrade Offensive and Allied logistical support enabled the Partisans to increase their offensive actions. By the end of 1944, with the help of the Red Army, they established control in Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Dalmatia.^[78] German forces retreated from Serbia, together with Nedić's forces.^[79] The Wehrmacht and the HOS established a front in Syrmia to secure the retreat of the German Army Group E from the Balkans.^[80] The Partisans conducted mass killings of POWs and ethnic Germans after securing control of Serbia.^[81] The Communist leadership adopted a political decision on the expulsion of the German national minority, whom they held collectively responsible for Nazi crimes, and the confiscation of their property.^[82] Germany attempted to evacuate the entire German population from Yugoslavia to the Reich, but in late 1944 there were still around 150,000 Germans in Partisan-controlled Vojvodina. By May 1945, most were interned in over 40 concentration camps in the region, in which around 46,000 died.^[83]



Front lines in Europe on 1 May 1945

In May 1944, Tito founded an intelligence service known as the Department for People's Protection (OZNA), modeled after the Soviet NKVD. It represented a military intelligence service and a political secret police of the Communist Party.^[84] In August 1944, he founded an army unit called the People's Defence Corps of Yugoslavia (Korpus narodne odbrane Jugoslavije, KNOJ), whose explicit assignment was to "liquidate Chetnik, Ustaša, White Guard and other anti-people gangs".^[85]

With the growth of the Partisans, who provided Croats an alternative that appeared more in Croatia's national interest, and the general dissatisfaction with the Ustaše and Nazi German authorities, the NDH had serious difficulties in mobilizing new troops.^[86] When in August 1944, a coup d'état against Ante Pavelić, known as the Lorković–Vokić plot, failed, its conspirators were arrested or executed. The main plotters wanted to align NDH with the Allies. The outcome of the plot caused further demoralization. As the war progressed, the desertion rate in the NDH armed force increased,^[87] especially among the Croatian Home Guard, the regular army.^[88] The Chetniks showed similar signs of desertion.^[74]

On 30 August 1944, Tito offered amnesty to Croatian Home Guards, Slovene Home Guards, and Chetniks if they chose to defect to the Partisan side by 15 September. After 15 September, all who had not defected were to be brought to "people's courts". Similar calls were repeated several times after the deadline. In some cases, Croatian Home Guards were killed despite defecting to the Partisans.^[89] On the day when the amnesty expired, Tito instructed his subordinates to continue accepting late defectors.^[90] A day earlier, King Peter II issued a call to the Chetniks to put themselves under the command of the Partisans. Large-scale defections of Chetniks to the Partisans followed.^[91]

The Armed Forces of the Independent State of Croatia (HOS) were reorganized in November 1944 to combine the units of the Ustaše and Croatian Home Guard.^[92] Throughout the war, the treatment of Croatian Home Guard prisoners was relatively benign – Partisans would ridicule the captured *domobran* soldiers and send them home if they did not want to join the uprising. But, on 13 January 1945, Pavelić ordered the *domobrani* to merge with the Ustaša military, creating a force estimated at 280,000.^[93]

Some Chetniks, such as those of Momčilo Đujić's Dinara Division, continued collaborating with the Axis.^[94] Đujić's forces fought alongside the Germans and HOS in late 1944 in the battle of Knin against the Partisan 8th Dalmatian Corps. The battle ended in Partisan victory, and the Dinara Division began withdrawing to Slovenia.^[95] Pavelić issued an order to provide safe passage to Đujić's troops,^[96] and gave them directions of movement. As the path led to Partisan-held territory, and Đujić did not trust Pavelić due to earlier examples of the Ustaše killing Chetniks passing through the NDH, he took an alternate route in agreement with the local Wehrmacht commanders.^[97]

After the surrender of Italy in 1943, the Germans sought to reestablish a Slovenian anti-Partisan collaborationist militia, on the basis of a previously Italian backed unit. It was hoped such a force would help the German occupation combat the growing Partisan resistance movement in Ljubljana Province. This led to the founding of the Slovene Home Guard, staffed largely by supporters of an assortment of anti-Communist Slovene political movements, particularly the Slovene People's Party. While they eventually hoped to win the support of the Allies, these anti-Communists were more concerned by the threat of a post-war Communist government in Yugoslavia.^[98] Their collaboration with the German occupiers made any future compromise with the Allies untenable, which would have significant repercussions when Slovene Home Guard fighters tried to surrender to the British in May 1945.

In September 1944, at the urging of Western Allies, Slovene members of the Yugoslav government-in-exile in London, called on the Slovene Home Guard to transfer its allegiance to the Partisans.^[99] Despite this and Partisan amnesty offers, most Home Guards continued fighting on the German side.^[100] In March 1945, Slovene collaborationist leaders, Leon Rupnik and Bishop Rožman, proposed a military-political alliance to the Ustaše leader Ante Pavelić and the Chetniks, to continue fighting the Partisans.^[101]

By 1945, the Yugoslav Partisans were known as the Yugoslav People's Army, and numbered more than 800,000 men organized into five field armies. They pursued the remnant of the defeated German and NDH forces.^{[102][103]}

In March 1945, the 4th Yugoslav Army advanced through Lika, Croatian Littoral and Kvarner Gulf. Most of Bosnia and Herzegovina was in Partisan hands by the end of April. On 12 April, the Sarmian Front was broken and the 1st and 3rd Armies advanced west through Slavonia. Only the northwestern part of NDH, with Zagreb as its center, remained under control of NDH authorities.^[104] Numerous refugees had gathered there from other parts of NDH. The Partisans carried out reprisals against captured soldiers of the HOS, as well as thousands of suspected civilian political opponents.^[105]

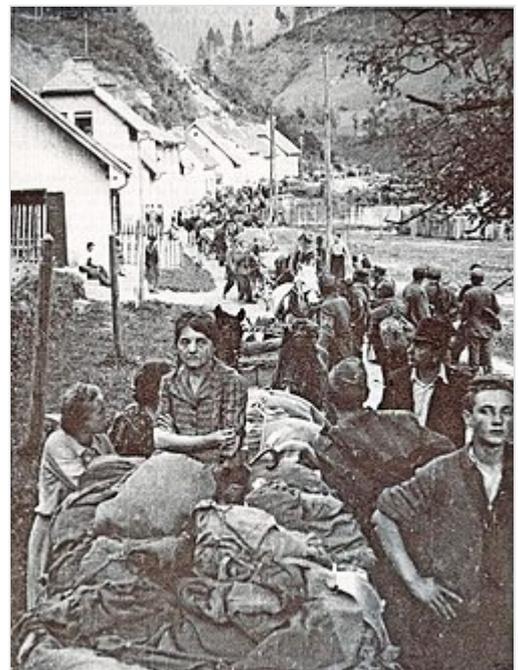
Axis retreat

The collapse of the Sarmian front in April 1945 accelerated the withdrawal of German forces, which had been retreating from the Balkans since October 1944.^[80] Like other Axis troops, forces of the NDH did not want to surrender to the Red Army or the Yugoslav Partisans. They retreated through Slovenia trying to reach the Yugoslav-Austrian border, in order to surrender to the British forces advancing north from Italy.^[106] A large-scale exodus of people was planned and organized by the authorities of the NDH although there was no strategic benefit to it: there was no viable destination for all the population.^[107] The NDH government's decision to organize a retreat was reached on 3 May.^[108] On the same day, the Slovene National Council, established by anti-Partisan forces in October 1944, convened a parliament in Ljubljana and proclaimed a Slovene state within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Slovene Home Guard and other anti-communist forces were joined into the Slovene National Army, as part of Mihailović's Chetniks. The parliament called on Partisans and all Slovenes to cease hostilities, and appealed to the Western Allies for aid. The parliament ordered a retreat to Austria, where they hoped to be accepted by the British as prisoners or as allies in the fight against the Soviets and the Partisans.^[109]

Some in the NDH and Slovene political and military leadership believed that the Western Allies would use them as anti-Communist forces and support them in returning to Yugoslavia and regaining power. Slovenian Bishop Gregorij Rožman appealed to the Allies to occupy Slovenia and prevent the Communists from taking power.^[106] The NDH leadership abolished racial laws and sent a request for collaboration with the Allies on 6 May,^[110] but all of these efforts failed.^[106] While the NDH leadership may have organized a civilian retreat to bolster their claims



Slovene Home Guards and Germans retreating through the town of Tržič



Slovene Home Guards and civilians on the Tržič-Ljubelj road near Austria

that the Yugoslav Communists were after innocent civilian victims, the sheer number of civilians slowed down the retreat, and made surrender to the Allies unfeasible. There is a distinct possibility that the Ustaše leadership was using the civilians as a human shield in order to protect themselves.^[111] The majority of the civilian refugees reportedly held anti-Communist views or feared reprisals.^[112]



Slovene refugees heading to Austria

Divisions of three Yugoslav armies were pursuing the Axis forces.^[80] Some units of the Yugoslav 4th Army managed to reach Carinthia before or at the same time as the retreating columns. Additional divisions of the 3rd and 4th Armies were sent to the area in order to capture southern Carinthia and prevent the Axis retreat. The 1st and 2nd Armies were halted near Celje, while the 3rd Army advanced further in pursuit of the retreating columns.^[113]

On 6 May 1945, the government of the NDH fled Zagreb and reached a site near Klagenfurt, Austria on 7 May.^[114] Pavelić and the military leadership left Zaprešić on the evening of 7 May, intending to join the rest of the NDH regime in Austria.^[115] The bulk of the NDH leadership, including Pavelić, escaped in early May, fleeing to Western Europe and Latin America. Partisans captured only a small number of senior military NDH officers.^[111]

Zagreb was defended by parts of the 1st Division of the Army of NDH and the 41st and 181st German Divisions, deployed along the unfinished fortified "Zvonimir line" between Sveti Ivan Žabno and Ivanić-Grad. The fierce battle with the Yugoslav 1st Army lasted from 5–8 May. The single bloodiest day in the 1,240-day long history of the 1st Proletarian Brigade was 7 May, with 158 killed and 358 wounded in the fighting for Vrbovec.^[116]

Besides the HOS, Slovene Home Guard and the German Army Group E, other military units were retreating.^[117] The remnants of the Serbian State Guard, two regiments of the Serbian Volunteer Corps, and a group of Chetniks surrendered to the British near the Italian-Yugoslav border on 5 May. These units were not repatriated to Yugoslavia.^[118] The Montenegrin National Army, formed in April 1945 by Sekula Drljević with the support of the NDH government, to gather Montenegrins from NDH in the unit, were retreating together with Croatian forces.^[119] Thousands of Russian Cossacks of the XVth SS Cossack Cavalry Corps, stationed in Yugoslavia since 1943, were also retreating to Austria.^[120]

On 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allied powers, marking the practical end of World War II in Europe.^[108] The German Instrument of Surrender applied to German Wehrmacht forces in Yugoslavia, as well as to other armed forces under German control, such as the Croatian Armed Forces. Ordinarily this would have meant that they, too, had to cease their activities on 8 May and stay where they found themselves. The military of NDH, however, came under the command of Pavelić.^[121] As the Germans were about to surrender, General Alexander Löhr, Commander-in-Chief of Army Group E, handed command of the Croatian forces to Pavelić on 8 May.^[111] Pavelić issued an order from Rogaška Slatina for his troops not to surrender to the Partisans, but to escape to Austria, to implement the NDH government's decision of 3 May to flee to Austria.^[111] Following the capitulation of Germany, Tito issued an address via Radio Belgrade on 9 May calling upon all armed collaborators to surrender, threatening "merciless response" from the people and the army should they refuse to do so.^[122]

Most of the German and HOS troops had withdrawn from Zagreb by 8 May, when units of the Partisan 1st and 2nd Armies took control of it. There were relatively few skirmishes and casualties in the city. The 1st Army reported to the General Staff that 10,901 enemy soldiers had been killed and 15,892 captured in taking Zagreb, without specifying battles in which these casualties occurred.^[120] That same day, the headquarters of the 51st Vojvodina Division of the Yugoslav 3rd Army issued a dispatch ordering its units to consider all enemy forces who continued resistance after midnight that day, and who were not part of units who had an organized surrender, as persons who did not have the status of prisoners of war, and to treat them as "bandits". The German surrender obstructed the progress of the columns fleeing Croatia northward. By 9 May, Partisan forces had moved into Maribor, which eliminated that escape route. They also took control of Celje on 10 May, but with a force insufficient to halt the columns that were escaping towards Dravograd.^[122]

Escape route to Klagenfurt-Viktring

The Slovene Home Guard and Slovene civilians primarily used the route across the Loibl Pass.^[106] Around 30,000 soldiers, including 10,000 to 12,000 Slovene Home Guards, 10,000 Germans, 4,000 Serbs, 4,000 members of the Russian Corps, and 6,000 Slovene civilians, were withdrawing to Austria.^[123] The road to Loibl (*Ljubelj*) was congested with loaded cars, trucks, wagons, and horse carts. Battles with the Partisans also slowed the retreat.^[113]

After passing the Loibl Pass, the columns were headed to the Drava Bridge at Hollenburg. The British were located north of the bridge. The bridge was guarded by German soldiers and was attacked by the Partisans on 7 May. Partisan reinforcements arrived on the following day and set a barrier between Ferlach and Hollenburg, while units of the 4th Motorized Division and the 26th Division of the 4th Army were approaching Ferlach from the west. The Axis troops and civilians were surrounded and tried to fight their way through the blockades. Some German troops surrendered to the Partisans in the Rosental Valley, in accordance with the German instrument of surrender.^[124]

On 10 May, the main breakthrough attempt took place. The assault was carried out by the Slovene Home Guard, led by Major Vuk Rupnik, and the 7th SS Division "Prinz Eugen" and SS police units.^[125] A radio contact was established with the British, who were ready to accept them if they crossed the Drava. The British refrained from engaging the Axis units fighting the Partisans.^[126] On 11 May, the Slovene Home Guard and SS troops launched an infantry attack on the town of Ferlach and took control of it on the evening. The Partisans reported 180 casualties.^[127] The remaining Partisan units in the vicinity were repelled, and the column of troops and refugees began crossing the Drava River. They were taken by the British to the Viktring camp near Klagenfurt. By 14 May, all units of the Slovene Home Guard surrendered to the British.^[126]

Escape route to Bleiburg

Croat troops and civilians mostly used escape routes toward Mežica and Bleiburg, and across the Kamnik Alps toward the Jaun Valley in Austria.^[106] The main Croatian column moved through the towns of Zidani Most, Celje, Šoštanj, and Slovenj Gradec. On 11 May, the vanguard of the column reached Dravograd. The bridges across the Drava River were barricaded by Bulgarian units that had reached the area on 9 May.^[128]

On 11–12 May, generals Vjekoslav Servatzy and Vladimir Metikoš entered discussions with Bulgarian generals to allow the Croatian column to pass into Austria.^[129] The discussions were inconclusive, but the Bulgarians suggested they head in the direction of Prevalje and Bleiburg, which the column did.^[130] Bleiburg was located some four kilometres northwest of the border of Austria and Yugoslavia. Parts of the columns that had weak or no protection were attacked by the Partisans - on 12 May, Politika carried Yugoslav Army reports of 15,700 prisoners of war in Maribor, Zidani Most, Bled, Jesenice and elsewhere. On 13 May, they reported over 40,000 prisoners taken near Rogaška Slatina, Celje, Velenje, Šoštanj, Dravograd, and elsewhere.^[131]



A column of refugees near the city of Celje

The main column was encircled in the Dravograd pocket. The Croatian Armed Forces had artillery positions in a five kilometers linear distance from Dravograd to the south and used howitzers to fire on positions of the Yugoslav Army. On the night of 13 May, the elite HOS infantry units, commanded by General Rafael Boban, managed to break through the Partisan blockade and the column moved west through Ravne na Koroškem and Poljana towards Bleiburg.^{[132][133]} A large number of Croat soldiers and civilians reached the field at Bleiburg on 14 May.^[134] The headquarters of the British 38th (Irish) Brigade were set up in Bleiburg,^[135] having occupied the town on 12 May,^[134] while the rest of the V Corps was stationed in Klagenfurt.^[135]

Surrender at Bleiburg

The main group of HOS troops and Croat civilians reached the Bleiburg field on 15 May. They were the head of the 45-65 kilometres-long columns, numbering around 25,000 to 30,000 people.^{[136][117]} The group included various branches of the NDH army, including the Air Force, HOS, and civilian refugees. Most of them camped near the local railroad embankment. The Montenegrin National Army was placed east of the embankment.^[137] Around 175,000 people were still on Yugoslav territory and moving towards Bleiburg.^[136] Negotiations between representatives of the HOS, the Yugoslav Army and the British were held on the same day in the Bleiburg Castle.^[138] The British negotiator was Brigadier Thomas Scott of the 38th (Irish) Brigade.^[139] Ustaša infantry general Ivo Herenčić of the V Ustaša Corps, and a translator, Colonel Danijel Crljen, were involved in the surrender negotiations.^{[140][141]}



The retreating column of the Croatian Armed Forces approaching the town of Bleiburg in May 1945

In the afternoon of the same day, the Croatian forces started raising white flags in surrender.^[142] The Partisan representatives included Major-General Milan Basta, the political commissar of the 51st Vojvodina Division, and Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Kovačić Efenka of the 14th Attack Division.^{[130][140]} NDH military representatives attempted to negotiate a surrender to the British, but were directed to surrender to the Yugoslav military.^[140] The Independent State of Croatia had joined the Geneva Convention on 20 January 1943, and was recognised by it as a "belligerent".^[143]

The Partisan forces of the 51st Vojvodina Division of the Yugoslav 3rd Army and the 14th Slovenian Division had established tactical control over the field of Bleiburg.^[135] Milan Basta set an ultimatum to the NDH negotiators - unconditional surrender within one hour, or else they would attack them and not uphold the norms of the international conventions of the Red Cross.^{[140][144]} Basta's ultimatum was extended for another fifteen minutes, after which point a general surrender started.^[140] Basta gave Scott assurances that the prisoners would be treated humanely and that only "political criminals" would be tried by courts.^[145]



NDH POWs at Bleiburg on 15 May 1945, after the surrender

The exact events after the expiry of the ultimatum are the source of the original controversy regarding the repatriations. Teodor Pavić, described as a NDH "courier", wrote that the Partisan forces began strafing the crowd in the Bleiburg field with machine guns and shooting them individually.^[144] Petar Brajović, a Yugoslav officer, described a fifteen- to twenty-minute machine gun and mortar fire on the column.^[146] Strle wrote that the 3rd Battalion of the 11th "Zidanšek" Brigade and the 3rd Battalion of the 1st "Tomšič" Brigade were involved in the fire, and their records noted at least 16 deaths, mainly from the machine gun fire.^[146] A Croatian soldier who survived, Zvonimir Zorić, wrote of a massacre at Bleiburg.^[146]

The notion of a massacre at the Bleiburg field was promoted by the remnants of the Ustaša in exile.^[147] Croatian-American historian Jozo Tomasevich notes that it would have been physically impossible to assemble all the Croatian refugees in Bleiburg itself, so German and Croatian troops who are said to have surrendered "in Bleiburg" must have done so in various localities, including Bleiburg, and certainly not all in Bleiburg itself. He considers it impossible to establish the exact number of troops and civilians who tried to flee to Austria and were forced to surrender to the Partisans, and stresses that the number of victims has been inflated by pro-Ustaša sources for propaganda purposes, while communist sources have been diminishing it for similar reasons.^[98] Croatian historian Martina Grahek Ravančić^[148] wrote that the complete extent of the casualties sustained by the NDH column at Bleiburg on the day of the surrender was not described in any available sources. She described a short Yugoslav Army attack on the column as a certainty, likewise that there were casualties, but the number is unknown.^[149]



Schematic representation of the situation on the Bleiburg field in May 1945

Strle and Milan Basta claimed that as Ustaša forces tried to make a breakthrough at the north side of the valley, three British tanks moved to stop them, reportedly resulting in several casualties. However, only three Croatians provided testimony which supported the notion that there were British tanks in the proximity of the column, but with no mention of such an incident.^[146] Tomasevich writes that these kinds of unconfirmed reports of British military involvement, coupled with the legitimate acts of repatriation,

were subsequently exaggerated by Ustaša supporters, particularly in the Croatian diaspora. They published biased works that falsely accused the British of "turning a blind eye" to the actions of the Partisans.^[147]

Later the same day, NDH generals Slavko Štancer, Vjekoslav Servatzy, and Vladimir Metikoš oversaw the surrender to the Partisans.^[149] British army reports say Štancer had previously been captured by the Partisans when they strayed from the column, seeking the British.^[140] The surrender continued for several days and at various locations; it took until 21 May for Tito to order the Partisans to withdraw from Carinthia.^[150]

Other Carinthian repatriations

Several other repatriations took place elsewhere in Carinthia during May 1945. Yugoslav intelligence officer Simo Dubajić negotiated with British forces about the organization of surrender and repatriation elsewhere along the Yugoslav-Austrian border.^[151] The extradition of Croat internees of the Viktring and Krumpendorf prisoner-of-war camps, located north of the Drava River, began on 18 May. The prisoners were assured that they were being transported to Italy. The repatriation took place in the village of Rosenbach and the town of Eberndorf. The transports continued on 19 May when



Rosenbach and Lavamünd, northeast of Bleiburg, were used as extradition places, while some were transported to Bleiburg. Internees of the Grafenstein camp were also transported. Thousands more were handed over in the following days, mostly in Rosenbach and the Bleiburg railway station. The last transport was on 23 May when 800 Croat prisoners from Grafenstein were taken by rail to Bleiburg. British war diary records note that the extraditions of Croats ended on 24 May.^[152]

The transports of Serbs and Montenegrins followed on 24 May, with three regiments of the Serbian Volunteer Corps. The first repatriation of larger groups of Slovene prisoners took place on 27 May, together with the remaining Serbs and Montenegrins. The repatriation of Slovenes also took place in Rosenbach or Bleiburg, except for the severely wounded that were accommodated in a hospital in Klagenfurt.^[153] The Slovenes were also told by the British that they will be transported to camps in Italy.^[136] The last Slovene group was handed over on 31 May. The following day, 2,700 Slovene civilians were scheduled to be transported to the border, but the transport was stopped by the British due to reports of massacres in Yugoslavia. All repatriations were canceled and a decision was made that only those who wanted to return to Yugoslavia would be transported.^[154] According to an estimate of the British V Corps, a total of 26,339 people were extradited from the camps by 30 May, including 12,196 Croats, 8,263 Slovenes, 5,480 Serbs, and 400 Montenegrins.^{[153][155]}

On the evening of 20 May, a group of NDH troops appeared near Ferlach, located approximately 40 km (25 mi) west of Bleiburg, and attempted to set terms for their passage west. "As the Ustaše did not want to surrender" reads the operational diary of the 2nd Battalion of the Partisan 11th Dalmatian Assault Brigade, "we attacked them at 21:00 hrs. On this occasion we took 24 Ustaše soldiers and one officer".^[156] British forces repatriated around 40,000 Cossacks to the Soviet Union's SMERSH, near Graz.^[157] The repatriation of Cossacks to the Soviet Union from camps near Lienz began on 28 May.^[158]

Allied stance

At the Yalta Conference on 11 February 1945, an agreement was reached on the repatriation of citizens from the signatory states, the US, the UK, and the USSR, to their country of origin. As Yugoslavia was not a signatory, the repatriation of Yugoslav citizens was not mentioned in the agreement. At the time of the Axis retreat from occupied Yugoslavia, the British V Corps of the Eighth Army was stationed in southern Austria, which was within the area of authority of Field Marshal Harold Alexander.^[159] The Yugoslav Army reached southern Carinthia in early May and declared it a part of Yugoslavia. This caused strained relations with the British, who supported an independent Austria in prewar borders.^{[159][160]} Due to Yugoslav refusal to withdraw from Austrian Carinthia, as well as from the Italian city of Trieste, the possibility of an armed conflict between the British forces and the Partisans emerged.^[161]

The Western Allies did not expect the movement of a large number of people in the V Corps area.^[162] The retreat of larger groups of "anti-Tito forces" was reported by Ralph Stevenson, the British ambassador in Belgrade, on 27 April.^[163] There was no consensus among British authorities on how to deal with them. Stevenson recommended their internment in camps rather than repatriation.^[161] British Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed with Stevenson's suggestion as "the only possible solution".^[164] The 8th Army issued an order on 3 May that Axis forces from Yugoslavia "will be regarded as surrendered personnel and will be treated accordingly. The ultimate disposal of these personnel will be decided on Government levels".^[165] Until 14 May, the British accepted the surrender of thousands of retreating troops and civilians.^[166]

A report to the V Corps from 13 May noted the movement of hundreds of thousands of people towards Austria. On the following day, the V Corps estimated that once the columns arrived, the food situation would become critical, and cited an insufficient number of guards to manage the people.^[167] Harold Macmillan, the British Minister Resident in the Mediterranean, recommended the immediate transfer of Cossacks to the Soviet Union. Regarding the column that was approaching Bleiburg, the brigade stationed in the town was instructed to "keep it south of the Drava".^[168] Brian Robertson, Alexander's Chief Administrative Officer, issued an order to the 8th British Army on 14 May to hand over all surrendered Axis personnel of Yugoslav nationality to the Yugoslav Army.^[169] The order excluded Chetniks, who were to be transferred to Italy. The repatriations were opposed by Alexander Kirk, American political advisor to the Supreme Headquarters (SHAEF), who asked the US State Department for advice. Joseph Grew, the US Under Secretary of State, agreed with Kirk and instructed him to inform the Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) of "violation of the agreed Anglo-American policy".^[170]

The AFHQ contacted the Yugoslav authorities on 15 May regarding the repatriation of "Yugoslavs".^[161] In line with the orders received by 15 May, the V Corps rejected the surrender of the column at Bleiburg. At the same time, the V Corps entered negotiations with Yugoslav representatives regarding the repatriation of other POWs and the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army from Carinthia. An agreement was reached for the Yugoslav withdrawal on 21 May.^[171] The repatriations began earlier, on 18 May.^[172]

A November 1945 report from the British Foreign Office noted that it had not yet been decided on a high level whether the prisoners should be transferred to Yugoslavia.^[173] Local British commanders were given imprecise and contradictory orders. On 17 May, Brigadier Toby Low, Chief of Staff of the V Corps, ordered that "all Yugoslav nationals at present in Corps area will be handed over to Tito forces as soon as possible. These forces will be disarmed immediately but will NOT be told of their destination".^[174]

Several hours later, an order arrived from Alexander to evacuate all Yugoslav prisoners to northern Italy.^[174] On the same day, Alexander sent a telegram to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, in which he wrote that to return the prisoners to their country of origin "might be fatal to their health".^[175]

Instructions and provisions made by the Allies in the following days frequently conflicted.^[176] Two conflicting instructions from the AFHQ arrived on 23 May: the first was to return the Yugoslav citizens from the 8th Army area to Yugoslavia unless it involved the use of force. The second instruction was that Yugoslav citizens should not be returned to Yugoslavia against their will, and that they should be "moved to suitable concentration area and screened".^[177] The confusion in the line of command led to a series of meetings between the AFHQ representatives and the 8th Army. The conclusion of the meetings on 27 May was an implicit support to the policy of not telling the prisoners their destination, the non-use of force, and that "it was unwise to make any further interpretation".^{[178][179]} The repatriations continued until 31 May, when they were canceled following the appeal of the head of the Viktring camp and the local British Red Cross.^[180] The repatriations were the topic of much subsequent debate.^{[181][182][183]}

March back

Representatives of the HOS of NDH accepted the surrender on 15 May at 16:00 hours. After the immediate repatriation of the soldiers at Bleiburg was complete, the Yugoslav forces began disarming them and started preparations for transporting the prisoners back.^[185] A large number of columns of prisoners were formed in rows of four that were sent on a forced march through Slovenia. Due to the presence of the British Army, the initial treatment of prisoners was correct.^[186] However, it got worse as the columns moved away from the border. The prisoners were given no food or water and were looted of valuables. Those who lagged behind were shot.^[187] Individual killings and executions of smaller groups of men soon began. The columns were in Dravograd directed to Maribor or Slovenj Gradec and Celje.^[188] On 17 May, the British started the repatriation of Croat internees of the Viktring camp, mostly members of the HOS.^[189]

The columns marching towards Maribor, where transit camps were set, were moving along the Drava River.^[187] During the march, bodies could be seen floating in the Drava and on the banks of the river.^[190] The first prisoners arrived in Maribor on 17 May and were placed in transit camps. Other larger columns arrived in the following two days. At the camps, prisoners were sorted based on their unit and year of enlistment.^[191] A part of the prisoners were sent on further marches or transported with trains to Celje and Zagreb. The rest were brought by trucks to anti-tank trenches in Tezno near Maribor, with their hands tied with wire, where they were lined up and killed. The killings lasted for several days until the trenches were filled



POWs in Maribor on a forced march



1,416 POWs of the Croatian Armed Forces and the Slovene Home Guard were executed in the Barbara Pit massacre

with dead bodies.^[187] A total of 1,179 bodies were recovered, with estimates that 15,000 people may have been killed in the Tezno massacre,^{[1][192][193]} largely members of the HOS. Among them were also some members of the Montenegrin National Army and POWs of other units.^[194]

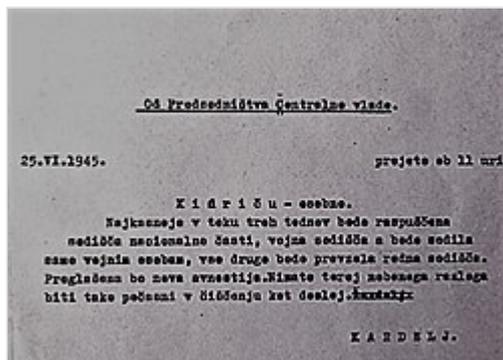
Prisoners directed from Bleiburg to the town of Slovenj Gradec were joined by a large number of refugees that were stuck on the Dravograd-Slovenj Gradec road. Several transit camps were set in the town where prisoners were placed and sorted. Around 1,500 were killed in the nearby village of Žančani. The prisoners were only briefly held in Slovenj Gradec, mostly a day, before they continued their way to Celje. Anyone who stepped out of the column to take a rest or drink water was shot. Those that were too exhausted to continue the march were also shot. In Celje, most of the prisoners were placed in a football yard on the outskirts of the city. The command of the 11th Krajina Division of the 1st Army reported on 17 May that they received 30,000 prisoners. Anti-tank trenches near the Sava River and in the area of Bukovžlak were used for executions.^[195] Prisoners were killed in various ways; on one occasion around 100-200 were locked in an enclosed water reservoir. Water was then slowly released until all of them drowned.^{[196][197]}

A column of 40,000 people, consisting primarily of Croat soldiers, moved from Celje to Zidani Most on 18 May. A part of the captives were separated there, and led to the nearby forests and killed.^[198] The column reached Samobor on 20 May.^[199] They were not given food during the trip, but locals left them food and water by the road. Prisoners were placed in several smaller camps and prisons in the town, where selections were made again. Most of the prisoners were from Samobor sent to Zagreb and led through the city by foot. Trains with prisoners from other locations, mostly from Maribor, were also coming to Zagreb. The city's transit camps were not suitable for the accommodation of a large number of people, so many prisoners were placed in yards. The camps were surrounded with wire fences, behind which citizens gathered, bringing food or seeking relatives and friends.^[200] One of the largest camps in the area was in Prečko. Prisoners were given food there, albeit not regularly. Around 50 died of hunger and illness.^[201] Aleksandar Ranković, the chief of the intelligence service, was dissatisfied with the pace of executions in Zagreb and sent a letter to the Croatian branch of the OZNA, demanding greater resoluteness.^[202] An increased number of arrests of Zagreb's citizens followed during June and July 1945.^[199]

The repatriation of Slovene and Serb internees from Viktring began on 24 May.^[203] The transports of around 11,000 Slovene Home Guards and 600 Slovene civilians were done in two directions: from Rosenbach in Austria to Jesenice, who were then imprisoned in internment camps in Kranj, Škofja Loka or Šentvid, and from Bleiburg to Celje, where the Teharje camp was located. The prisoners were beaten and many were killed on the way. The transport and liquidations were carried out by the Corps of



Thousands of prisoners were thrown into caves and pits in the Kočevski Rog massacre



Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia Edvard Kardelj's dispatch to Boris Kidrič in June 1945: "A new amnesty will be announced. So you have no reason to conduct the cleansing as slowly as you currently do."^[184]

People's Defence of Yugoslavia (KNOJ) and the Department for People's Protection (OZNA).^[204] Internees of the Šentvid camp were taken to the Kočevje region, where thousands were killed and disposed of in caves, pits and ravines in the Kočevski Rog massacre. Internees of the Teharje camp were killed in its vicinity and in the surrounding caves and mines, including the Barbara Pit coal mine.^[205] Out of 5,000 Slovene Home Guards brought to Teharje, almost all were dead by August 1945.^[206] A total of 800 Slovene Home Guards and civilians were executed at Podutik near Ljubljana.^[207] The decomposing bodies at the location contaminated Ljubljana's water supply, so a group of German POWs were ordered to relocate the bodies to a new mass grave.^[208]

The OZNA reported that the main movement of columns of prisoners from Slovenia and the Austrian border was carried out by 8 June. Most of the columns reached their destination where permanent camps were located, 12 of which were in Croatia and 11 in Vojvodina. According to the report, there were a total of 175,922 prisoners.^[209] On 25 June, Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia Edvard Kardelj sent a dispatch to Slovenian Prime Minister Boris Kidrič, requesting him to speed up the liquidations as a general amnesty will soon be passed.^[210] The decree "on general amnesty and pardon" for Chetniks, the Serbian State Guard, Croatian and Slovene Home Guard, and Albanian and Muslim militia, was adopted on 3 August.^[211] According to a report from February 1946, 41,320 prisoners were granted amnesty based on this decision.^[212] All those who had been discharged from camps had to contact their local authorities. Some faced trials and sentences to prison or forced labor. Others were under surveillance of the KNOJ and the secret police. On 2 March 1946, the Supreme Command of the Yugoslav Army ordered the release of "all Yugoslav nationalities - members of enemy military formations, except those against whom criminal proceedings have been initiated."^[213] Internment and labor camps continued to operate in the following years.^[214] The purges that started at the end of the war continued until the early 1950s.^[81]

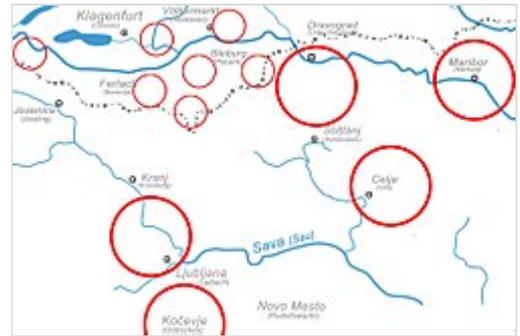
Coverage and aftermath

The events in the aftermath of the war were censored in Yugoslavia. Mass graves were concealed or destroyed, in accordance with an order by the Federal Ministry of Interior Affairs from 18 May 1945.^[215] Relatives of the victims faced persecution and were treated as second class groups.^[216] Until the 1950s, there were strict border controls in Yugoslavia, but tens of thousands of people emigrated illegally.^[217]

It was not possible to visit the graves located in Yugoslavia, so Bleiburg in Austria became the main location where political emigrants, survivors, or families of the victims could gather and hold a commemoration.^[218] The first commemoration on the fields of Bleiburg was in 1952 on All Saints' Day. Since then, the Bleiburg Honorary Guard (*Počasni bleiburški vod*), an association founded by former members of the Ustaše,^[219] organized an annual commemorative event, together with the Catholic Church in Carinthia. The Yugoslav consulate in Klagenfurt sent diplomatic protests to the Austrian government, but the commemorations were never banned by Austria.^{[220][221]} The commemoration was seen as a provocation by Yugoslavia. Prohibited Croatian symbols were openly displayed and it drew attention to postwar killings which the Yugoslav authorities denied.^[222] The Bleiburg events were also used as a tool for historical revisionism and the focus of collective resentment by the remainder of the Ustaše and their supporters. The number of victims was artificially inflated.^[223]



The Yugoslav State Security Administration (UDBA) monitored the activities of the participants of the commemorative event and conducted a series of attacks on its organizers. During the ceremony in 1966, a bomb exploded in a country inn in Loibach, but none of the attendants was injured. Nikica Martinović, the chairman of the Bleiburg Honorary Guard, was assassinated by the UDBA in Klagenfurt in 1975. The following year a bomb was found in front of the tavern of Mirko Karačić, also a member of the Bleiburg Honorary Guard. In spite of the threats and attacks, the commemoration continued to be held annually until the breakup of Yugoslavia.^[224]



Places in Austria and Slovenia, one of the May and June 1945 mass killings

Gatherings and commemorations were also held in other countries. In 1960, on the 15th anniversary commemoration held in Cleveland, the Bleiburg Tragedy Research Committee was founded by Croatian emigrants.^[225] In 1961, the commemoration in Cleveland was attended by US Congressman Michael A. Feighan. The Yugoslav consul in Pittsburgh, Ivan Mirošević, protested against it and requested the gathering to be banned. Feighan criticized the consul and Josip Broz Tito during his speech at the commemoration. Mirošević was expelled from the US for his comments.^[226] In 1965, commemorating the 20th anniversary, US Senator Frank Lausche condemned the post-war killings in Yugoslavia.^[227] Organizations of Croatian emigrants in Germany and USA requested a Red Cross investigation of mass grave sites, which was rejected by Yugoslavia.^[228]

In 1976, a marble monument was erected in the Unter-Loibach cemetery and in 1987, a monument was erected on the Bleiburg field with the inscription "In Honor and Glory of the Fallen Croatian Army, May 1945" in Croatian and German language. The monument had the Croatian coat of arms and the Islamic star and crescent engraved.^[220]

Investigations of mass graves

Discussions about the post-war massacres were forbidden in Yugoslavia, so the investigations of mass grave locations began only in the 1990s, after the fall of communism.^[229] In 1992, 1,163 bodies were excavated from 23 mass graves in the forests of Macelj, leaving around 130 possible mass grave locations unexplored.^[230] In 2002, the Slovenian government established the Governmental Committee for Settlement of Questions on Secret Mass Graves, with the assignment of "recording of data about the number and locations of mass graves" after the end of World War II.^[229]



Interior of the Barbara Pit near Huda Jama, Slovenia, reached in March 2009

The Tezno mass graves near Maribor were discovered in 1999 during the construction of a motorway. 1,179 corpses were excavated from a 70 meter long part of the trench. In 2007, the Commission on Concealed Mass Graves in Slovenia, founded in 2005, analyzed the entire Tezno trench and found human remains at a length of 940 metres, estimated to contain the remains of around 15,000 victims.^[192] In 2009, the Barbara Pit near Huda Jama in Slovenia was uncovered, and

726 human remains were exhumed by December 2009.^[231] The same year, more pits were uncovered on two locations near the Croatian-Slovenian border, one near the village of Harmica and the other near Gornji Hraščan, estimated to hold, together, around 4,500 bodies.^[232]

By mid 2008, 581 concealed grave sites were registered by the Slovenian Commission on Concealed Mass Graves. The number rose to more than 600 grave sites in 2010. The commission estimates that there are around 100,000 victims in those graves in Slovenia alone.^[233] Unlike in Slovenia, there was no serious research of mass graves in Croatia by the Croatian government.^[234] In 1991, the Croatian Parliament established the Commission for Determination of War and Post-war Victims. The commission began its work in 1994, but was abolished in 2002, with no significant contribution to the research.^[235]

Number of victims

The exact number of deaths on death marches and in labor camps after the end of the war is difficult to determine.^[236] Geiger writes that number of Bleiburg-related casualties, provided in the literature mostly ranges from 50,000 to 200–250,000.^[237] Other historians also cite estimates of 20,000 to 40,000, while noting that pro-Ustaše writers inflate Croat casualties,^{[238][98]} and that many estimates are not based on individual victim lists, thus making them unreliable.^[239]

Estimates on the number of casualties were first provided in emigrant literature, much ranging from 100,000 to 600,000 deaths, mostly on the basis of eyewitness accounts.^[240] Yugoslav dissident Milovan Đilas wrote in 1977 that the figure is higher than 20,000, but did not exceed 30,000.^[241] In 1989, the historian Franjo Tuđman, who at the time of Bleiburg was a Croatian representative at the Supreme Headquarters of the Yugoslav Army,^[242] and later became Croatia's first president, estimated the number of Bleiburg-related victims at 35,000 to 40,000,^[243] and wrote of the "Bleiburg myth", stating that estimates of hundreds of thousands of victims were greatly exaggerated.^[244] Tuđman cited Allied reports that by June 1, 1945, a total of 26,399 members of "Yugoslav quisling forces" had been turned over from Bleiburg and other parts of Austria to the new authorities (later a total of 29,792 prisoners), of whom 12,196 were Croats, 5,480 Serbs, 8,263 Slovenes, and 400 Montenegrins.^[245] The events were also discussed in November 1945, when Stalin mentioned in a conversation with Polish Communist leader Władysław Gomułka that the Yugoslav partisans had shot 14,000 of some 34,000 of "Pavelic's captives".^[246]

Tomasevich writes that for propaganda purposes, Ustaše and pro-Ustaše writers sought to maximize the number of Croat Bleiburg victims, while minimizing Jewish, Serb, Roma and antifascist Croat victims of the Ustaše.^[98] He states that many collaborationists perished in the final intense battles, when they refused to surrender, even after the surrender of Germany. He notes that Ustaše sources could not have known the number of forces fleeing, the number that died in final battles, the number captured, etc., and they provide no such detail, not even the units involved. Thus, their Bleiburg victim estimates are subject to wide error.^[247] Macdonald also cites the efforts of radical Croat writers to inflate the number of Croat Bleiburg victims to hundreds of thousands, similar to how nationalist Serbs writers inflate the number Jasenovac victims.^[238]

In the 1990s, Croatian demographer Vladimir Žerjavić conducted the first systematic research, based on demographic estimates.^[248] Thus, Žerjavić wrote that extreme Croatian emigre estimates of 300,000 Croat Bleiburg victims were clearly exaggerated, since his demographic data shows a total of 192,000 Croat WWII victims, on all sides.^[249] Žerjavić writes that, unlike for Jasenovac, no victim lists were

available for collaborationists at the time. Thus, he guessed 99,000 total Croat and Bosniak NDH armed forces victims, then noted "it is very difficult to evaluate what percentage of them died during the war, but if we estimate 50%, that means [Croat and Bosniak] losses related to Bleiburg could amount to about 50,000."^[249] He noted that the great majority of captured civilians were released, thus Bleiburg victims were mainly members of NDH armed forces.^[249] Of the estimated 45,000 Croat victims, Žerjavić states 11,600 of those lost their lives in the final battles before surrender, and 33,300 after surrender.^[250] In a 1992 work, Žerjavić estimated 57,000 to 65,000 total victims of all nationalities,^{[13][251]} including 45,000 to 55,000 Croats and Bosniaks, 8,000 to 10,000 Slovenes, and 2,000 Serbs and Montenegrins.^[237] In 1995, he segmented the Croat-Bosniak losses to 45,000 Croats and 4,000 Bosniaks, and a further 4,000 Croats and 2,000 Bosniaks in "individual cleansings" from 1945 to 1947.^[252]

Geiger notes there are researchers who insist victim numbers can only be determined via individual names, and have thus raised serious objections to Žerjavić's statistical estimates, stating these are insufficient and unreliable in determining the number of fatalities.^[239] Žerjavić writes that he had data from the 1964 Yugoslav census of individual victims of occupiers and collaborators, thus his estimates of these victims are largely confirmed by individual names.^[253] However, he had no victim lists on the collaborationist side,^[249] just as he had no individual victim lists for the 1990s war in Bosnia, when he estimated 215,000 total victims, including 30,000 Croats.^[254] Later the Sarajevo-based Research and Documentation Center built a database of 101,040 individual victims, including 8,403 Croats.^[255] These numbers are now widely accepted as the most authoritative,^[256] indicating that without individual victim data, which were also lacking for Bleiburg, Žerjavić greatly overestimated Bosnian War victims, with the largest overestimate for Croat victims.

In 1991, the Croatian government created the Commission for Determining Wartime and Postwar Victims of the Republic of Croatia, led by Vice Vukojević, a member of the Bleiburg Honor Guard, who claimed Jews ran the Ustaše Jasenovac death camp.^[257] The Commission selectively focused on documenting Croat victims on the NDH side, since they were not registered in previous Yugoslav victim censuses.^[258] In 1999, the commission published data listing 13,300 mostly Croats from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, who lost their lives related to Bleiburg.^[259] 83% of these were members of NDH armed forces, including 5,503 Ustaše, 3,101 Croatian Home Guards and 2,492 unclassified members of the Croatian Armed Forces. The remaining 2,204 were listed as "other or unidentified". The data for persons "killed outside of combat" is not categorized by year of death.^[4] The commission cited that, according to Slovenian estimates, there were around 190,000 victims in the graves in Slovenia alone (Mitja Ferenc, in charge of uncovering postwar graves in Slovenia, later stated that the number of victims is fewer than 100,000, in the tens of thousands).^{[260][3]} The commission was dissolved in 2002, and no further governmental research was conducted.^[258]

Ivo Goldstein notes the Croatian Commission's detailed Bleiburg data were never published, neither was promised data on Croat victims from similar projects by the Croatian Institute of History, the Catholic Church and others.^[261] Thus none can be verified, in contrast to the Jasenovac victim list, published online.^[262] While victim lists have been published for some sub-areas, these contain many errors, including listing as Croat WWII victims people who died naturally decades later. The lists also show that nearly all Croat Bleiburg victims were members of armed forces, with no children and only one woman (for aiding postwar Ustaše guerillas), thus contradicting Croatian rightists, who claim civilians, women and children were targeted.^[261] This differs from Jasenovac, where the majority of 83,145 named victims

are women and children.^[223] Goldstein states that in view of 13,300 listed Bleiburg victims (some no doubt killed in battles before surrender), it may be time to revise downward Žerjavić's estimate of 45,000 to 55,000 Croat and Bosniak Bleiburg victims.^[262]

In 2005, the Slovenian government established the Commission on Concealed Mass Graves in Slovenia.^[234] The commission estimated that there are around 100,000 victims of all nationalities in the graves in Slovenia.^[233] Mitja Ferenc, in charge of uncovering postwar graves in Slovenia, later stated that the number of victims is fewer than 100,000, in the tens of thousands.^{[260][3]} The Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana launched a research project to establish the number of casualties during and after the Second World War in Slovenia. As of 2008, their data shows that 14,274 Slovenians were killed in "post-war violence in Slovenia", which includes non-Bleiburg victims. The number includes 12,431 Slovene Home Guards and 1,076 civilians.^[263] According to data published by Slovenian historian Vida Deželak Barič in 2014, there were a total of 14,999 Slovenian victims of post-war killings, including 12,101 Slovene collaborationist POWs, 2,199 civilians, and 547 with an unknown status. This includes victims unrelated to Bleiburg. Deželak Barič listed among the civilian casualties all 529 victims from the German minority, who she notes played a prominent role in Nazi forced Germanization and other repressive acts against Slovenes.^[264]

In April 2008, the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union organized the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes, and the resulting document included various research including that of Mitja Ferenc, noting official data on 3,986 known wartime graves and mass graves in Slovenia from World War II,^[166] Milko Mikola, indicating that the victims were executed en masse without a trial,^[265] and Jerca Vodušek Starič who wrote about purported mass killings following liberation of Slovenia and Croatia in May 1945: "It is impossible to find out the exact number of those liquidated. Today the number reaches 14,531 Slovenes and an estimate [of] 65,000 to 100,000 Croats. Among them were also civilians."^[266] In 2011, Mitja Ferenc, in charge of uncovering post-war graves in Slovenia, stated that "regarding the victims there is only an estimate, I myself think that it is fewer [than 100,000], how many I don't know. Certainly some tens of thousands" and that "from the end of the war to January 1946 about 14,000 Slovenians were murdered. Among them were about 1,100 civilians; the remainder were mostly members of the Slovene Home Guard forces and a smaller number of Chetniks."^[3]

Where estimates could later be verified, they showed large overestimates. Thus, after an initial 700 victims were recovered from Barbar Pit (Huda Jama), the President of the Slovene Commission on Concealed Mass Graves, Jože Dežman, claimed that more than 5,000 victims were buried there.^[267] In the end a total of 1,416 casualties were recovered.^[268] Goldstein notes that Mitja Ferenc similarly overestimated remaining victims at Barbara Pit by a factor of 3 times, and he questions Ferenc's Tezno estimates, since Ferenc used the same methodology to estimate 15,000 victims at Tezno, based on a total of 1,179 recovered corpses.^[269]

Grahek Ravančič states that Žerjavić's research is accepted in most related literature.^[270] Conversely, Geiger notes that researchers have raised serious objections to Žerjavić's statistical methods, stating that all such estimates which are not based on individual victim lists, are unreliable.^[239] Ewa Tabeau also criticized Žerjavić's methodology when he estimated 215,000 Bosnian War victims, compared to later estimates of around 100,000, a figure now widely accepted.^{[271][256]} Jozo Tomasevich used Žerjavić's estimates of 70,000 killed, connected with Bleiburg and Viktring.^[13] Croatian historian Slavko Goldstein cited the losses of 50,000 Croats and 20,000 Serbs, Slovenes, and others.^[272] Croatian historian Martina

Grahek Ravančić considers the total number of victims at around 80,000, since the Slovenian research showed a higher number of Slovene deaths than Žerjavić's research.^[273] On the other hand, Goldstein notes that the 1990s Croatian Commission found only 13,300 Croat Bleiburg victims, versus Žerjavić's estimate of 45,000 Croat victims, and states that Žerjavić's Croat victim estimates should be revised downward.^[261] Vladimir Geiger, who states that statistical estimates are unreliable, writes that based on such statistical estimates, a minimum of 70,000 to 80,000 people were killed.^[237] Swiss historian Michael Portmann compared the estimates, calculations and lists of human losses. His appraisal of the death toll is 80,000, "60,000 under the keyword "Bleiburg" and 20,000 under the keyword "Viktring" and "Kočevje"", from May to August 1945.^[274] For Croatian losses, Portmann cites Žerjavić's estimate of 45,000 victims, while for losses among the German minority in Slovenia he claims 2,000 victims in just one camp,{{sfn|Portmann|2004|p=72}} compared to a total of 111 such victims in all Slovene camps, as determined by Slovene researchers.^[264]

Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein, in his book *Croatia 1918-2008*, has posited that contemporary documentation supports the existence of up to 116,000 NDH soldiers and up to 60,000 Croatian civilians in the main columns through Slovenia. In addition, on a separate route there were around 17,000 members of the Slovene Home Guard, the Serbian Volunteer Corps, Chetniks and some smaller NDH army units, together with around 10,000 Slovenian civilians.^[275] Croatian historian Zdravko Dizdar analyzed the published victim lists and materials collected by the 1992 Croatian Commission. According to him, the data shows that 62,000 Croat post-war victims are personally identified.^[240] Geiger says of Dizdar's numbers that "although statistically possible, these are obviously rough estimates, for [Dizdar] did not indicate which victim lists and publications were consulted, how many fatalities were specified in individual lists and how the verification of data was done".^[259] Grahek Ravančić says that more than 5,000 named individuals are listed in known Croatian victim lists related to Bleiburg. She notes that some victim lists are "subjective", and some include all casualties during the war without a specific year and place of death, so "it's difficult to determine the number of victims from these lists that were killed as part of Bleiburg".^[276] A number of authors cite tens of thousands of killed. In Croatian emigrant literature, the prevailing number is 200,000 killed Croats.^[277]

Legacy

For decades after the killings, the government of Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito put forward a sanitized version of the repatriations that glorified the communist cause.^[278] Other communist governments and historians echoed these narratives, with only the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe finally bringing a fuller picture of the events.

Commemorations

With the transition to democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, the interest in revealing information about the Bleiburg repatriations grew.^{[279][280]} In May 1994, an International Symposium for Investigation of the Bleiburg Tragedy was held in both Zagreb and Bleiburg, where several authors discussed the deaths at Bleiburg and estimated them to be in the tens of thousands. This was later published by Školska knjiga as *Od Bleiburga do naših dana*.^[6]

The Republic of Croatia, by an act of the Croatian Parliament in 1995, started to officially commemorate the victims at Bleiburg,^[281] at a time when Franjo Tuđman and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) were in power. Supporting commemorative events at Bleiburg was seen as a concession to radical nationalists, who would previously prefer that location as it was out of reach of former Yugoslav authorities. More recently, the commemorations became less of a political event, as the radicals were largely marginalized and the focus of the events turned to the actual victims of the repatriations.^[280] Many top-ranking politicians and Catholic and Muslim clerics visit the Bleiburg site annually. Prime Minister Ivica Račan visited the site in 2002.^[282] Prime Minister Ivo Sanader visited the site in 2004.^[283] For the 60th anniversary commemorations in 2005 a large crowd was in attendance, with speeches by Croatian parliamentary speaker Vladimir Šeks and head of the Muslim Community of Croatia, Mufti Ševko Omerbašić.^[284] In 2007, a new altar was installed at the site and was inaugurated by Cardinal Josip Bozanić before some 10,000 people.^{[285][286]}



Josip Leko, then-Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, lays a wreath at the Tezno Memorial in May 2015

In 2004, a memorial park was built in Teharje, Slovenia, where an annual ceremony in remembrance of post-World War II victims is held.^[287] In 2007, Slovenia's government announced plans to make the Tezno trench a memorial park and cemetery.^[288] In 2008, the Croatian and Slovenian governments reached an agreement of cooperation on organizing military cemeteries, similar to earlier agreements which Slovenia reached with Italy and Germany.^[289] Croatia's Prime Minister, Zoran Milanović, visited Bleiburg in September 2008. He stated that all victims had the right to a fair trial, and that his motive was not political.^[290]

Controversy

In 2009, Croatian President Stjepan Mesić criticized the Parliament's representatives who did not react to people in the crowd displaying Ustaše iconography at the commemoration, which is ostensibly illegal in Croatia, at a state-sponsored event.^[291] In 2010, Croatian president Ivo Josipović said he would not attend the year's May Bleiburg commemoration as long as Ustaše iconography was present,^[292] although he did make a separate visit to the Bleiburg memorial in June in addition to his visit to the Tezno memorial.^[293] In 2012, Croatia's parliament decided to revoke funding for the annual Bleiburg commemoration.^[294] The reason given by Milanović was that the government would not fund what had become a politically partisan event concentrating on the NDH, rather than mourning the victims.^[295] In 2012, the Croatian leadership laid wreaths only at the monument in Tezno.^[296]

As Croatian academician Vjeran Pavlaković, an assistant professor in the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Rijeka, writes in *Deifying the Defeated Commemorating Bleiburg since 1990*,

"The blurring of the past and the present is an integral part of the Bleiburg commemorations; not only do the participants dress in Ustasa uniforms, display Ustasa insignia and iconography, and sell paraphernalia associated with the NDH and its leaders, but there is an active discourse about the Croatian War of Independence accompanied by images of heroes (as well as individuals guilty of war crimes) from the conflict in the 1990s."

Pavlaković concludes that

"[T]he effectiveness of Bleiburg to act as a site of memory can be attributed to the fact that it represents both a traumatic past, as well as a moment of rupture, or historical discontinuity. Both of these factors give the commemorations at Bleiburg emotional weight and political significance, especially at a point when Croatia was going through another historical transition in the 1990s. It also meant that the Bleiburg myth was easily manipulated; the victims of the Bleiburg tragedy were actively invoked not only to distort the Ustaša past, but to justify the resurgence of extreme nationalist political options. The Bleiburg myth became one of many historical moments that symbolized Croatian martyrdom, due to the prevailing narrative of victimization by Greater Serbian aggression during the 1990s. The martyrdom myth is one of the most common archetypes in the taxonomy of myths... The danger of presenting the victims of Bleiburg exclusively as martyrs for the Croatian state, however, is that the reality of the NDH regime and the crimes it committed are ignored in the new, revised narrative of World War Two."^[297]

The 2015 commemoration was the largest on record, with more than 20,000 people attending. In 2016, the Croatian parliament reintroduced sponsorship of the event in order to show reverence for the victims of Communist-totalitarianism after the Second World War.^[298]

In 2018, Austrian courts convicted five Croats of performing Nazi salutes or shouting Ustaše slogans at the commemoration. The convicts all received suspended sentences.^[299]

On 8 March 2019 the Catholic Church in Carinthia in Austria prohibited priests from performing mass at Bleiburg commemorations. E. Guggenberger, interim administrator of the Diocese of Gurk-Klagenfurt, wrote, "the mass in the field near Bleiburg has become part of a manifestation that is politically instrumentalised and is part of a political-nationalistic ritual that serves a selective experience and interpretation of history." The letter claims the event undermines the Catholic Church's reputation.^[300] Three Austrian EU parliamentarians criticized the Bleiburg commemorations as "the largest fascist gathering in Europe",^[301] and largely as a result of the display of fascist symbols during Bleiburg commemorations, the Austrian government in 2019 passed a law forbidding the display of Ustaše symbols, along with previously prohibited Nazi, ISIS and other symbols.^[302] Austrian courts have sentenced Croatian participants at the Bleiburg commemorations for fascist salutes and displaying fascist symbols.^[303] The World Jewish Congress and the Wiesenthal Center joined in condemning the Bleiburg commemoration, with the World Jewish Congress stating the event has been "used to glorify individuals who supported or were actively involved in the activities of a regime which had executed hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children only because of their ethnic or religious identity".^{[304][305][306][307]}

In 2020, Catholic Mass sponsored by the Croatian Parliament^[308] was held in Sacred Heart Cathedral in Sarajevo as replacement for an annual gathering usually held in Bleiburg, Austria, which was canceled due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.^[309] At the same time thousands of protesters marched through Marshal Tito street to commemorate victims of the Ustaša regime, and gathered at Eternal flame. Most of Bosnian politicians criticized the Mass held by head of Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vinko Puljić. Previously, it was condemned by Bosnia's Serbian Orthodox Church, the Jewish and Muslim communities and several antifascist organizations.^[310]

In July 2020, the lower house of the Austrian Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the Ministry of the Interior to consider banning the commemoration in Bleiburg, because of the display of Ustaše symbols.^[311] The ban, however, did not occur,^[312] and the 2021 commemorative event was held under COVID restrictions, without large gatherings.^[313]

In November 2021, Karl Nehammer, then the Austrian Interior Minister recommended that the Bleiburg commemoration in its present form be banned, because "In Austria, glorifying the terror regime is unacceptable. We will prevent any attempt to spread right-wing extremist and revisionist worldviews at rallies".^[314] Subsequently, Austria formally banned the Bleiburg commemoration, and also banned, as a fascist symbol, the coat of arms of the NDH state which was the Croatian checkerboard with the first white square, and removed it from the memorial at Bleiburg.^{[315][316]}

Historiography

Unlike many other operations of the Partisans, which have been described in detail, little has been written on operations in Slovenia near the Austrian border during the week of 7–15 May 1945.^[13] Postwar Yugoslav literature ascribed all human losses in May and June 1945 as military casualties in the final operations of the war.^[317] All opposing armies and political opponents were characterized by the Yugoslav historiography as traitors and collaborators.^[318] The events at Bleiburg were known as "final encirclement battles", "final military operations", and the "grand finale in Carinthia".^[319] The Bleiburg repatriations and their aftermath were first discussed in emigrant literature by anti-communists that managed to leave the country. One of the first book dealing with the subject was *La Tragedia de Bleiburg*, published by Croatian emigrants in Buenos Aires in 1963.^[225]

The Minister and the Massacres, a 1986 book by Nikolai Tolstoy,^[320] further publicized the issue, but it made various dubious claims about the repatriations that were roundly criticized by various historians and authors,^{[321][322][323][324]} although it brought attention, more generally, to the persistent distortion of the story,^[323] and to the issue of historians trusting contemporary records and purported eyewitness.^{[325][326]}

Croatian-American historian Jozo Tomasevich described the events: "The annihilation of most quisling troops captured at the end of the war – which is a fact – was an act of mass terror and brutal political surgery, similar to that practiced by the Ustašas and the Chetniks earlier in the war."^[327] Regarding Partisan treatment of Ustaše prisoners, Tomasevich notes: "We must now ask the really fundamental question, namely who was responsible for Bleiburg...The problem of Bleiburg obviously cannot be discussed in isolation, as Ustasha and pro-Ustasha writers regularly do. It is intimately related to the establishment and general policies of the NDH, to the Ustasha reign of terror against the Serbian population, to the Croatian state's determined alliance with Nazi Germany and with the Ustasha's final efforts to escape and ally with the West against the Communists. So we must conclude that the responsibility for Bleiburg was the collective responsibility of Pavelić and the Ustasha regime".^[328]

British political scientist David Bruce MacDonald criticized the exaggeration of the number of victims:^[329] "Inflating the numbers of dead at Bleiburg had several layers of significance. Firstly, it gave the Croats their own massacre at the hands of Serbs and/or Communists, which allowed them to counter the Serbs' Jasenovac genocide with one of their own. Secondly, it allowed Croats to distance themselves from the Serbs and the Communist regime that had carried out the massacres. They could portray Croatia as an unwilling participant in the SFRY, more a prisoner than a constituent nation. Thirdly, by suffering such a massacre, the Croats underwent their own 'way of Cross', as dubbed by most Croats."

Responding to those who in Croatia seek to equate Bleiburg with Jasenovac, historians Ivo and Slavko Goldstein wrote: "Jasenovac...was primarily a genocidal crime of mass murder of civilians for the sin of their birth in another religion or nationality". By contrast, "Bleiburg was a crime of mass killing of disarmed prisoners of defeated enemy troops who had been waging war for four years on the side of the evil". They also note, "in Jasenovac, besides working age men; women, children and older people were also massively murdered. As part of Bleiburg, those killed were almost exclusively disarmed soldiers, combat-capable men"^[2]

Regarding Tito's responsibility for the actions of the Partisans at the end of the war, Croatian lawyer Dominik Vuletić wrote: "...it should be mentioned that at the time of the Bleiburg events and the death marches that followed, he was the Prime Minister (DFJ), Minister of Defence, General Secretary of the Communist Party and the Supreme Commander of all Yugoslav Armed Forces, so de facto and de iure he had control over all the forces and was the most responsible individual in the country. The Yugoslav forces that participated in the Bleiburg events acted according to Tito's instructions and were under his control. [...] So, there can be no doubt that Josip Broz Tito had full effective control over the units involved in the crimes."^[85] On 13 May, Tito dispatched a handwritten telegram to the supreme headquarters of the Slovene Partisan Army that arrived on 14 May, prohibiting "in the sternest language" the execution of prisoners of war and commanding the transfer of possible suspects to a military court.^[330] The authenticity of this telegram is disputed as it was not published in any collection of documents of the Yugoslav Army and did not have Tito's signature. Historian Nikolai Tolstoy called it "a clear forgery".^[331]

British historian Keith Lowe dealt with the end of the war in his book *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II*, where he wrote: "For countless millions of people throughout the eastern half of the continent, therefore, the end of the war did not signal 'liberation' at all, it merely heralded a new era of state repression. The Nazi terror was over: the Communist terror was about to begin".^[332]

Swiss historian Michael Portmann writes, "The responsibility for "Bleiburg" to a vast extent rests with Pavelić and the Ustaša regime itself: The bloody terror of ustaše against the Serbian population (coercive conversions, expellings and mass killings), the Croatian state's determined alliance with Nazi Germany and - last but not least – the order by Pavelić not to surrender but to withdraw under battle to the Austrian border have to be stated as reasons for the indeed brutal Partisan retaliation".

In popular culture

The first film that mentioned the Bleiburg events was *Sokol Did Not Love Him* (*Sokol ga nije volio*), directed by Branko Schmidt and released in 1988.^[333] The surrender at Bleiburg was the subject of a 1999 Croatian film, *Četverored*, directed by Jakov Sedlar. It is based on the 1997 novel of the same name by Ivan Aralica. A 2004 Croatian film, *Long Dark Night* (*Duga mračna noć*), directed by Antun Vrdoljak, covers the wartime in a Slavonian village from 1941 to 1945 and post-war events in Slovenia. A longer version of the movie aired on the Croatian Radiotelevision as a TV series in 13 episodes.^[334] *The Miner* (*Rudar*), a 2017 Slovenian film directed by Hanna Slak, is based on the discovery of the Barbara Pit massacre in 2009.^[335]

Croatian-Australian painter Charles Billich painted a series of works on the event.^[336]

Memorial sites



Memorial in Bleiburg, Austria



Memorial in Zagreb's Mirogoj Cemetery, Croatia



A plaque in Bistrica ob Sotli, Slovenia

See also

- 1975 Zaliv Scandal
- Allied war crimes during World War II
- List of massacres in Slovenia
- Mass killings under communist regimes
- Operation Keelhaul

Notes

1. Kurapovna 2010, p. 244.
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3. "Mitja Ferenc: Sprave ne bo nadomestil domovinski spomenik sredi Ljubljane" (<http://www.delo.si/zgodbe/sobotnapriloga/mitja-ferenc-sprave-ne-bo-nadomestil-domovinski-spomenik-sredi-ljubljane.html>). *Delo* (in Slovenian). 6 November 2011. Retrieved 5 January 2014. "... o žrtvah obstaja le ocena, sam menim, da je manjša, kolikšna, ne vem. Gotovo pa nekaj deset tisoč. ... od konca vojne pa do januarja 1946 pomorjenih okrog 14.000 Slovencev. Med njimi je bilo okrog 1100 civilistov, preostali so v glavnem pripadniki slovenskega domobranstva in maloštevilni četniki."
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16. Rulitz 2015, p. 1.
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**PAVING THE ROAD TO THE HOLOCAUST IN THE NDH:
ANTISEMITISM IN THE USTAŠA MOVEMENT, 1930-1945**

Lovro Kralj

A DISSERTATION

in

History

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Supervisor of Dissertation:

Professor Constantin Iordachi

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Abstract

This dissertation provides a reinterpretation of the importance of antisemitism in the Croatian fascist Ustaša movement. The historiography has often treated the Ustaša antisemitism as a peripheral ideological concept, giving it disproportionately little attention. Due to such approaches, the importance of antisemitism has been downplayed and reduced to pure imitation of German Nazism without real roots in the Ustaša movement. Such interpretations ultimately fail to explain the causes of the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia.

This dissertation analyzes the evolution of Ustaša antisemitism from its earliest adoption in its movement phase during the interwar period to the regime phase when its policies aimed to destroy the Jewish community in the Independent State of Croatia. One of the central arguments in this study is that the Ustaša adopted antisemitism as one of the most important means in the fascistization of the movement on the organizational and ideological levels. Moving beyond the history of ideas, this project also examines how antisemitism influenced the multiethnic communities, communication among various fascist movements and finally how it impacted the persecution of other persecuted groups in the Independent State of Croatia. To answer these questions, we turn to the comparative analysis of the Holocaust in three different cities in World War II Croatia: Križevci, Osijek and Sarajevo. Each case presents us with a particular challenge, as well as insights which force us to rethink the history of antisemitism, fascism, and the Holocaust in Croatian, as well as European history.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Illustrations	viii
Abbreviations	x
Introduction.....	1
The Structure and the Aims of the Dissertation.....	3
Historiography	14
Regional History of the Holocaust.....	25
Fascism Studies and the Ustaša Movement	28
Studies of Antisemitism and the Ustaša Movement	42
1. The Evolution of Ustaša Antisemitism	47
Introduction.....	47
1.1. The Birth of the Ustaša Movement and its Early Ideology (1929-1934)	49
1.1.1. The Core of the Ustaša Ideology	52
1.1.2. Xenophobia and Minorities in the Early Ustaša Propaganda	58
1.2. Fascistization and antisemitization of the Ustaša Movement (1934-1938).....	65
1.3. The Consolidation of the Ustaša Ideology (1938-1941).....	71
1.3.1. Radical Catholicism	72
1.3.2. Croatian National Socialists.....	83
1.3.3. Nationalist Students	89
1.4. The Ustaša Ascent to Power	97
Conclusion	111
2. The Antisemitic Avant-Grade: The Town of Križevci	113
Introduction.....	113
2.1. The Establishment of the Ustaša Elite	116
2.2. First Measures Against the Jews and the Ustaša Terror	119
2.3. Orders from Above and Actions from Below	126
2.4. Deportations of Jews from Križevci	133
2.5. Genocidal Entanglements	140
Conclusion	150
3. The Radicalizer(s): The Holocaust in the City of Sarajevo	152
Introduction.....	152
3.1. The Establishment of the Ustaša Elite and the “Yerushalayim Chico”	155
3.2. Orders From Above and Actions from Below: Genocidal Decision Making in Sarajevo.....	172

3.3. Radicalization of Antisemitic Persecution in Sarajevo.....	184
Conclusion	193
4. Negotiating Genocide in the Microcosmos of Fascism: The Holocaust in the City of Osijek	197
Introduction.....	197
4.1. The Establishment of the Ustaša Elite in the Microcosmos of Fascism	199
4.2. First Measures Against the Jews and the Beginning of the Inter-Ethnic Friction .	206
4.3. Orders from Above and Pressures from Below: The First Deportations	213
4.4. Between Transnational Fascism and Competitive Nation-Building.....	222
4.5. From Ghettoization to Deportation	235
4.6. Fears and Fantasies of Mutual Annihilation	246
Conclusion	250
Conclusion	252
Bibliography	259

List of Tables

Table 1 – The Analysis of the Early Ustaša Newspapers 1932-1934.	59
Table 2 – The Number of Antisemitic Articles in the Ustaša Novi List Newspaper from 1941-1945.....	100
Table 3 – The Number of Antisemitic Articles in the Ustaša Novi List Newspaper from April – September 1941.	101
Table 4 – Religious Composition of the Population of Križevci in 1931.....	114
Table 5 – Religious Composition of Sarajevo according to the 1931 census.....	153
Table 6 – Victims of fascist terror in Sarajevo 1941-1945.....	193
Table 7 – Major deportations of Jews from the city of Osijek	246

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1 – An antisemitic caricature depicting a Jew displaying the symbols of communism and Freemasonry on each of his shoulders. The inscription under the caricature states: “This is how Freemasons and communists would like to devour cultured nations.” Source: “Fronta svjetskog satanizma,” <i>Mlada Hrvatska</i> , Year I, No. 10, 17 November 1936, p. 1.	80
Illustration 2 – An antisemitic caricature depicting Jews as capitalists, communists and Freemasons. Source: “Zločini i grozote krvoločnih komunista: ovako je izgledala Rusija 1917. godine za vrijeme revolucije,” <i>Mlada Hrvatska</i> , Year III, no. 13-14, p. 5.	80
Illustration 3 – An antisemitic caricature depicting an idealized Croat revealing the alleged Jewish conspiracy. The text below the image states: “‘There you are communists! You are conspiring in secrecy to destroy nations. We will deal with you the same way we dealt with Tatars and Turks!’ – this is what the young Croatian roars while he reveals the work of communists who want to destroy the Croatian nation.” <i>Source: “Generacija interesa je izdala,” Mlada Hrvatska</i> , Year II, No. 6, 14 February 1937, p. 1.	81
Illustration 4 – Propaganda photograph showing Jewish women performing forced labor in Osijek during summer 1941.	216
Illustration 5 – Propaganda photographs depicting antisemitic demonstrations in the city of Osijek during the summer of 1941. The placard on the picture on the left states: “We demand forced labor for the guilty ones – the Jews,” while the placard on the image on the right states: “Jews, Communists, and Masons must be hanged!”	218
Illustration 6 – Propaganda photographs of antisemitic protest sin Osijek during the summer of 1941. School children can be seen holding an antisemitic caricature.	219
Illustration 7 – Members of the Arrow Cross marching through the streets of Osijek in 1941.	223

Illustration 8 – Members of the Arrow Cross visiting the “anti-masonic” exhibition in Osijek in 1942.224

Illustration 9 – Propaganda photograph showing the transfer of Jews from Osijek to the Tenje transit camp, July 1942.241

Illustration 10 – Propaganda photograph showing the looting of Jewish property in Osijek, August 1942.....243

Abbreviations

ABiH	Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine [The Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina]
AVNOJ	Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Jugoslavije [The Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia]
DAOS	Državni Arhiv u Osijeku [The State Archives in Osijek]
HDA	Hrvatski Državni Arhiv [The Croatian State Archives]
HSP	Hrvatska Stranka Prava [The Croatian Party of Rights]
HSS	Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka [The Croatian Peasant Party]
JMO	Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija [Yugoslav Muslim Organization]
MO HSS	Muslimanska Organizacija Hrvatske Seljačke Stranke [The Muslim Organization of the Croatian Peasant Party]
MOSK	Moderna Socijalna Knjižnica/Kronika [Modern Social Library/Chronicle]
MUP	Ministarstvo Unutarnjih Poslova [The Ministry of Interior]
NDH	Nezavisna Država Hrvatska [The Independent State of Croatia]
RAVSIGUR	Ravnateljstvo za Javni Red i Sigurnost [Directorate for the Public Order and Security/Main Security Office]
SDS	Služba Državne Sigurnosti [State Security Service]
UNS	Ustaška Nadzorna Služba [The Ustaša Secret Service]
UNWCC	United Nations War Crimes Commission
ZKRZ	Zemaljska Komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača [The State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators]

Introduction

Historians dealing with the Holocaust¹ still overwhelmingly focus on the causal relation between Nazism and the “Final Solution.” As a result, other fascist movements and regimes considered peripheral by comparison have been given relatively little attention. It is, therefore, still a little-known fact that the Croatian Ustaša was one of the first fascist² movements which started to carry out the systematic extermination of Jewish citizens of their own country. Coming to power in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) in April 1941, the Ustašas immediately implemented antisemitic³ policies. Out of approximately 40,000 Jews in the NDH, only one in four survived the war either by joining the Partisans, emigrating to Italy, or by hiding. However, most Holocaust victims in the NDH died at the hands of the Ustaša perpetrators, who murdered them in a web of local camps operated separately and independently from the SS or any other German institution. Less than 25% of all Jewish victims from NDH were deported to the German-run concentration camps.⁴

This dissertation is primarily concerned with questions of causality and decision-making behind the Holocaust in the NDH. The postwar Yugoslav historiography considered

¹ The term Holocaust is derived from the Greek words holos (whole) and kaustos (burnt) and denotes a religious sacrifice or offering. During the 1950s the term started to be extensively used with reference to the persecution of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. The term Holocaust is often used interchangeably with the Hebrew word (Ha)Shoah which means catastrophe or disaster. In Israel the term Hurban or Churban (Yiddish pronunciation of the same word) meaning destruction. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defined the Holocaust as “the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators.” <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/holocaust>

For a short overview of different terms used for the Holocaust, as well as various pitfalls in the attempts to define the term see: Dan Michman, “‘The Holocaust’ – Do We Agree What We Are Talking About?,” *Holocaust Studies* 20, no. 1–2 (June 2014): 117–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2014.11439098>.

² In order to differentiate between Italian Fascism, which is spelled with a capital ‘F,’ I use fascism with a small ‘f’ for the idea of generic fascism. For a brief elaboration of the issue of generic fascism see Constantin Iordachi, ed., *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, Rewriting Histories (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).

³ For the purpose of this dissertation antisemitism is defined as “discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).” “Definition,” The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org>

⁴ Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 561.

the Ustaša movement as a mere puppet of “Nazi-Fascism.” As a result, the Holocaust in NDH was primarily treated as the Ustaša execution of the “occupiers” plan. Such an approach downplays the Ustaša regime’s agency and minimizes the authenticity of Ustaša antisemitism as well as its agency in the decision-making and planning of the persecution of Jews in the NDH. This interpretation of Ustaša antisemitism partially stems from the fact that the movement did not have a strong anti-Jewish agenda when it was formed but gradually adopted antisemitism towards the end of the 1930s. In this sense, antisemitism in the Ustaša movement is comparable to its role in Italian Fascism. In both cases, antisemitism started to play a more prominent role only years after the movements’ foundation. However, while the Ustašas started to persecute Jews immediately after they came to power, the Italian Fascists were hesitant to participate in the Holocaust until the German occupation in 1943.⁵ This brief comparison between the Italian Fascists and the Ustašas captures the kind of puzzling questions that emerge when considering the relationship between the European fascist movements and antisemitism: For example, why is it that two movements that had, at least initially, similar attitudes towards Jews end up producing radically different outcomes? This dissertation aims to analyze how and why the Ustaša movement adopted antisemitism and which factors led to its radicalization, ultimately resulting in the death of tens of thousands of Croatian Jews.

⁵ For a brief overview of the complex relationship between Italian Fascism and antisemitism see Michael Ledeen, “The Evolution of Italian Fascist Antisemitism,” *Jewish Social Studies* 37, no. 1 (1975): 3–17. See also Gene Bernardini, “The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 49, no. 3 (1977): 431–53.

The Structure and the Aims of the Dissertation

Chapter I is mainly concerned with the interwar evolution of the Ustaša ideology.⁶ I argue that the process of fascistization and the adoption of antisemitism within the context of the Ustaša movement are two interdependent processes. Antisemitism in the Ustaša ideology was of immense functional importance due to the way it was interconnected with other political concepts and woven together into a coherent, logical construction. The ideas that were rapidly adopted through the process of fascistization – such as anti-communism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-capitalism, racism, and several others – were so closely tied to the concept of antisemitism that they would lose their appeal significantly if antisemitism was not used as the ideological glue that gave them more prominence within the ideological structure. This deep embeddedness of antisemitism within the negative pole of fascist ideology makes it essentially different, by virtue of its functionality, from any other “anti-ethnic” component (such as anti-Serbian or anti-Roma in the case of the Ustaša movement). The relationship between these concepts will be analyzed by combining Michael Freeden’s theoretical framework for the analysis of ideology with the quantitative tools for the study of antisemitism. Quantitative research on antisemitism, as implemented by scholars such as William Brustein,⁷ Daniel Tilles,⁸ and Michala Lônčíková⁹

⁶ For the purpose of this dissertation, we will use Michael Freeden’s definition of ideology which is defined as “a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions, and values that (1) exhibit a recurring pattern, (2) are held by significant groups, (3) compete over providing and controlling plans for public policy, (4) do so with the aim of justifying, contesting or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community.” Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32.

⁷ William Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁸ Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015).

⁹ Michala Lônčíková, “Was the Antisemitic Propaganda a Catalyst for Tensions in the Slovak-Jewish Relations?,” *Holocaust Studies*, July 27, 2016, 1–23.

has shown that despite various pitfalls of such an approach, it can shed new light on aspects of antisemitism and propaganda, which are often indiscernible in purely qualitative studies.

Approaches which focus exclusively on the history of ideas when it comes to antisemitism suffer from limitations in determining its impact on mass violence and decision-making. The transition from ideas to action is neither straightforward nor self-explanatory. Aiming to examine the multifaceted nature of antisemitism and the different ways it was transferred into praxis on the ground, we turn to a comparative meso-historical approach. Since recently, historians of the Holocaust have increasingly turned their attention to microhistory to test and bring more nuance to the “grand theories,” by focusing on the practices and experiences on a more calibrated level.¹⁰

While there is no single agreed upon definition of microhistory, explanations of its methodology range from a rigorous emphasis on studies of individuals or small groups to a simple analytical “reduction of scale.”¹¹ For the purpose of this dissertation, a distinction is made between the varying levels of analysis. The macro-level is broadly conceived of as placing the state and interstate relations at the center of analysis and incorporating an emphasis on the actions of the state-level elites. The meso level takes the community at a local level, such as a town or a city, and places the local elites at the center of the analysis. The micro-level takes the individual or small group scale as its core.¹²

The distinction between various analytical levels is particularly important with regards to the process of decision-making in the Holocaust. Seeking to determine how the ideological aims determined at the macro level were translated into actions on the ground, we divide the

¹⁰ Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, eds., *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2016), 2.

¹¹ Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel and Valeria Galimi, “Microcosms of the Holocaust: Exploring New Venues into Small-Scale Research of the Holocaust,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 336.

¹² Laia Balcells and Patricia Justino, “Bridging Micro and Macro Approaches on Civil Wars and Political Violence: Issues, Challenges, and the Way Forward,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 8 (December 2014): 3.

perpetrators into three analytical levels: architects who operate on the macro-level and occupy the highest offices within the state and political movements; organizers of genocide, such as regional governors, mayors, chiefs of police, etc. who operate on the mid-level, and finally the killers who operate on the bottom-level.¹³ While in certain cases there might be an overlap between these categories, since an organizer can be a killer as well, these categories are used to identify the perpetrator's position within the hierarchy as well as the power and agency they held within the decision-making apparatus.

While authors working in the fields of Holocaust, genocide, and political violence often focus on the leaders and their ideology, the meso and micro levels are often overlooked.¹⁴ Exclusive focus on the macro level can often have a blinding effect as it neglects the importance of autonomy and agency on the middle level of decision-making. With a few notable exceptions, it is the meso level which has been “largely neglected” so far in both the Holocaust and genocide studies.¹⁵ Thus, the meso-level is taken as a central level of analysis in this dissertation as it is the interaction between the architects and the organizers, the rulers, and the elites, which is one of the most important parts of the puzzle in explaining the translation of ideological aims to concrete destruction on the ground.

The interaction between the architects and organizers of the Holocaust will be examined in three cities of the NDH chosen according to criteria accounting for differences in geographical locations, sizes, and, most importantly, ethnic compositions. Choosing our case studies in different geographic locations accounts for major discrepancies such as the security situation since the uprising against the NDH led either by the communist Partisans or Serbian

¹³ Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Perpetration as a Process: A Historical-Sociological Model,” in *Perpetrators of International Crimes*, eds. Alette Smeulers, Maartje Weerdesteijn and Barbora Barborová Holá (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 117.

¹⁴ Rui J.P. de Figueirido and Barry R. Weingast, “The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict,” in *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, eds. Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 261.

¹⁵ Ümit Üngör, “Perpetration as a Process,” 124.

nationalist Chetniks was more intense in certain areas than in others. Different regions will also display different levels of economic development, which can play a role in how the Holocaust was implemented. Furthermore, accounting for geographic variation between case studies helps explain differences in cities located closer to the “heartland” and those located in strategically important “borderlands.” The size of the city is also a factor which can play a significant role in how antisemitic measures were implemented since they account for different structures of power, communal relations, as well as different logistical issues such as organizing the mass arrests and deportations. Finally, we seek to identify three case studies with different ethnic compositions in order to analyze the impact of antisemitism on interethnic relations and examine the involvement of both the elites and ordinary citizens from various ethnic groups in the implementation of the Holocaust.

Going beyond the mere hierarchical interaction between the officials within the state and party apparatus, we also turn to the horizontal comparison between perpetrators coming from various ethnic or religious groups in the NDH. By choosing Osijek and Sarajevo, two cities with profoundly multiethnic compositions, we focus the analysis on how antisemitism influences the dynamics between different ethnic groups and how this, in turn, affects the decision-making behind the persecution of Jews in the NDH. This dissertation hypothesizes that the elevation of antisemitism to the level of state-sponsored ideology and the implementation of mass violence and genocide are a massive disruption of communal life that impacts the entire society far beyond the perpetrator–victim dichotomy.

Due to the often participatory nature of mass violence, the persecution of Jews creates a set of processes and dynamics at the local level which were often unplanned by the architects of genocide at the macro level. This is especially noticeable in deeply multi-ethnic communities where the breakdown of the legal order, the introduction of fascist morality, and the disappearance of checks and balances related to the violence generated conflicts between

various communities and facilitated conflict over the Jewish property as part of competitive nation and elite building. Some of the new dynamics engendered by the antisemitic measures remained invisible to or irrelevant from the perspective of central authorities at the macro level because they were deemed of lesser importance in comparison to the ultimate aim of creating a society free of Jews. Yet, events at the local level proved to be of central significance for various agents on the ground, including the emerging perpetrator elites, masses of beneficiaries, and Jewish victims. In order to examine a wide array of different measures taken against Jews in NDH and different perpetrator dynamics, three cities are selected as case studies: Križevci, Sarajevo, and Osijek. Each one presents a particular kind of challenge to the top-down interpretations of the Holocaust in NDH.

Chapter II, titled “The Ustaša’s Antisemitic Avant-Garde: The City of Križevci,” focuses on a small city in northern Croatia. Križevci had a population of around 7,000 residents. In contrast to Sarajevo and Osijek, the city was nearly monoethnic as Croats amounted to more than 90% of the population. Jews and Serbs constituted small minorities, each accounting for 2% of the population.¹⁶ What sets the case of Križevci apart was that the persecution of Jews began even before the central NDH institutions in Zagreb were established. Another idiosyncrasy was that virtually all measures taken against Jews throughout the history of the NDH were implemented in this locality before being introduced at the macro, state level. Without waiting for any instructions related to the persecution of Jews, the local Ustašas in Križevci formed a local decision-making committee, which consisted of the city elites, including judges, lawyers, merchants, police officials, and others. In just a few days after the

¹⁶ According to the 1931 census there were 7,035 residents in Križevci. Broken down by religion, there were 6,683 Catholics, 126 Jews, 133 Orthodox Christians, 9 Evangelicals and 6 Muslims. According to language, 6,794 spoke Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue, 132 Slovene, 24 Hungarian, 33 German. Since there was no category of ethnicity within the census, the number Croats can only be determined roughly by reducing the number of non-Catholic and non-Serbo-Croatian speaking population from the total number of residents. This method cannot be considered as precise due to the inability of the language and religious criterion to capture ethnic identity. Moreover, ethnic and religious identities were fluid.

proclamation of the NDH, starting on 11th of April 1941, the Ustašas in Križevci introduced a series of sweeping anti-Jewish measures such as the confiscation of Jewish property, mass arrests, the introduction of forced labor as well as the “contribution” – a ransom which had to be paid by the entire Jewish community to release the imprisoned Jews.¹⁷

The antisemitic measures in Križevci were introduced before the leader of the Ustaša movement – Ante Pavelić – even reached Zagreb and formed his first government. They were also enacted before a single anti-Jewish law was put into place on the state level. The case of Križevci, therefore, undermines the notion that the antisemitic persecution was primarily implemented top- down and demonstrated how much power local agents had in the implementation of anti-Jewish measures. The rapid introduction of antisemitic measures and persecution in the city also documents that antisemitism was far more widespread among the Ustaša members and sympathizers than is often acknowledged by the existing historiography. The case of Križevci was so puzzling to the postwar Yugoslav War Crimes Commission (Zemaljska Komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača), that it concluded that the local Ustašas must have received detailed orders before the war on how to implement antisemitic measures. According to this interpretation, the Holocaust in Križevci, as well as in the NDH, was planned prior to the Ustaša taking power. At a more general level, such an interpretation later came to be known as intentionalism, a position according to which the Holocaust was planned at the earliest convenience by the perpetrators. This chapter scrutinizes the intentionalist argument by examining the local dynamics of genocidal decision-making and by juxtaposing them with the same process on the state-level. Did the local Ustašas from Križevci receive their orders from the top, or was the mass violence caused by the local

¹⁷ HR-HDA-1561 (Hrvatski Državni Arhiv [Croatian State Archives]), SDS (Služba Državne Sigurnosti [State Security Service]), RSUP (Republički Sekretarijat za Unutrašnje Poslove [Republican Secretariat for Internal Affairs]) SRH (Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske [Socialist Republic of Croatia]), 013.0.49. 013.0.65. (Progon Židova [The Persecution of Jews]), 223.

decision-making? How did the persecution of Jews develop in comparison to two other persecuted group such as Serbs and Roma?

Chapter III, titled “The Radicalizers: The City of Sarajevo,” focuses on the second-largest city in NDH, with a population of around 80,000 Catholic Croats were in the minority, constituting approximately 26% of the population. The relative majority was held by Muslims who comprised 38% of the city’s population. The Muslims in the NDH were not subjected to persecution. Instead, the Ustaša tried to assimilate them into the Croatian nationhood in line with the racial interpretation that they were descendants of Croatian medieval nobility, who converted to Islam to keep their noble privileges. The city also hosted 24% Serbs and had a Jewish population of around 10% in 1931. Before the war, the Jewish population grew to approximately 10,500 residents, constituting about 12% of the city population.¹⁸ The Ustašas were slow to establish effective governance in the city and first officially incorporated it into the NDH on 24 April 1941.

The city of Sarajevo presents us with a case where antisemitism was instrumentalized by the Ustaša elite in Zagreb as a potentially effective tool of nation and state-building through which the Croatization of the Muslims could be accelerated. In the Ustaše’ attempt to redefine Croatian identity, the antisemitic construct of “the Jew” played an important role by creating the Other whom Muslims and Catholics were supposed to unite against. However, instead of bringing them closer together, the Ustaša antisemitic campaign provoked unintended

¹⁸ According to the 1931 census, the total population was estimated at 78,173 residents. There were 29,649 Muslims, 21,372 Catholics, 18,630 Christian Orthodox, 534 Protestants and 7,988 of those who were classified as others – majority of whom were Jewish. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga I: Prisutno stanovništvo, broj kuća i domaćinastava*, vol. 1 (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1937), XIV. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, *Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga II: Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti*, vol. 2 (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1938), 41. By 1941 the population was estimated to grow to 85,000 residents, and the Jewish population was estimated between 10-12,000 due to increased urbanization. Thus, Jews constituted around 12% of the entire population of Sarajevo in 1941. Francine Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread: The Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 382.

consequences and exacerbated competition between the Muslims and the Catholic religious communities in Sarajevo.

We hypothesize that this was the consequence of the Ustaša campaign of ethnic cleansing, which disrupted the status quo. At the core of the issue was the question of which religious community would dominate the future political landscape of Sarajevo. If Serbs and Jews were to disappear from NDH as was intended by the Ustaša elite's ideologues at the macro level, then the only remaining communities in Sarajevo would be Muslims and Catholics. Aiming to strengthen their numbers and securing their religious community's dominance, some members of both the Islamic and Catholic clergy immediately started to convert Jews to their respective religions.¹⁹ While both religious communities utilized antisemitism in their newspapers, they seemingly rejected the notion of racial antisemitism initially. Thus, allowing for the conversions to proceed. However, the launching of ethnic cleansing campaign by the Ustaša regime exacerbated the political insecurity among many Muslims in Sarajevo, who feared that they too might become victims of the Ustaša campaign of national homogenization after all the Serbs, Jews, and Roma were eliminated. There were widespread rumors that the Catholicization of all Muslims in NDH would be imminent after the Serbian and Jewish question were solved in the NDH.²⁰

Such concerns within the Muslim community gave birth to the instrumentalization of antisemitism as an expression of competitive nation and state-building. Fearing their fate in the hands of the Ustaša regime, some Muslims wrote a letter to Hitler in 1942 demanding that Bosnia and Herzegovina secede from the NDH and made a German protectorate. In justifying the need for such a course, they accused the Ustašas of not being antisemitic enough, thereby ignoring the fact that virtually the entire Jewish population of Sarajevo had been deported to

¹⁹ Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2011), 94–95.

²⁰ Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, eds., *Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941-1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990), 38–39.

Ustaša- operated death camps by that time. However, they realized that antisemitism as a political language could be used as a communicative vessel in which one could wrap their original political agenda.

In terms of decision-making and interaction between the center and periphery, Sarajevo had exceptional importance for the course of anti-Jewish deportations across the NDH. Initially, the mass deportations of Jews from Sarajevo lagged behind many other cities and towns across the NDH. This was the result of several unique developments related to decision-making at the local level, including a different interpretation of various orders issued from the top. Dissatisfied with the lack of progress regarding the deportations of Jews from Sarajevo, the Ustaša leadership in Zagreb decided to intervene on the local level. They forced the previous chief of police in Sarajevo to resign and sent Ivan Tolj, an “outsider,” with the mission to “Croatize,” the multiethnic city of Sarajevo. By deporting up to 7,000 Sarajevan Jews in little over two months, Tolj demonstrated that even with limited resources at his disposal and despite severe logistical limitations, he could efficiently “cleanse” entire regions of Jews, thus setting the example which was to be followed and replicated elsewhere.

Finally, chapter IV of this dissertation, titled “Negotiating Genocide: The City of Osijek,” focuses on the multiethnic city located in the northeast of NDH, which had a total population of 40,337 in 1931. Croats formed roughly half of the population, and the remaining population consisted of Germans, Serbs, Hungarians, and Jews.²¹ After learning about the

²¹ According to the 1931 census the total population of the city of Osijek amounted to 40,337. The census divided the population according to religion which included 30,330 Roman Catholics, followed by 5,884 Orthodox Christians, 2,445 Jews and 1,049 Protestants. According to language 26,382 opted for Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue, followed by 9,731 who spoke German and 2,839 of Hungarian speaking population. We arrive at the approximation of the ethnic population through an unprecise method of considering all Orthodox Christians as Serbs. We arrive at the approximation of the percentage of Croats by deducing the Hungarian and German speakers, and the number of Serbs as well as Jews from the total number of the population. *Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od marta 1931 godine* (Beograd: Državna Štamparija, 1938), X. According to Pavle Vinski who made an extensive report about the persecution of Jews in Osijek the number of Germans just before the war was 18,000 out of the entire city population of 42,000. This would set the percentage of Germans at almost 43%. Even though it is quite possible that there were more people who identified themselves as ethnic Germans than was captured by the census of 1931 because it only took notice of which language the individual considered as his or her mother tongue, I find Vinski’s number too inflated for the interwar period. However, it is possible that

experiences of persecuted Jews in Europe after the Second World War, Holocaust survivors from Osijek concluded that they lived in “exceptional circumstances.” Indeed, Osijek was one of the unique places in Europe during the Second World War where the Jewish minority faced three fascist movements which coexisted simultaneously in a single location – the German Nazis, Croatian Ustašas, and the Hungarian Arrow Cross. Thus, the city became a laboratory of transnational fascist experimentation.

Though united in their radical antisemitism, the perpetrators in Osijek were paradoxically among the last in NDH to launch the total deportations of Jews from their city. Much like in other parts of NDH, the first deportations from Osijek took place in the beginning of August 1941 and included around 250 Jews (or roughly 10% of the city’s total Jewish population). However, no deportations followed for the next twelve months until the central agencies in Zagreb intervened and organized the deportations of the remaining Jewish population of the city in August 1942. Considering that many Jewish communities across the NDH were deported in their entirety to the Ustaša-controlled concentration camps during 1941 and early 1942, Osijek arguably presents a case of “delayed deportations” in World War II Croatia.

I argue that the long period of quiescence in the deportations was a result of a dynamic interaction between the three fascist movements, which struggled for power and dominance. Unlike in other parts of the NDH where the Holocaust was implemented more rapidly, the genocide against Serbs, Jews, and Roma was subjected to a complex and long-drawn “negotiation” between the elites of these movements on a vertical level, between the local and central Ustaša agencies on the horizontal level, as well as between various fascist elites on the local level. As a result, the Jewish minority in Osijek became a tool in the power struggle,

Vinski used this number to refer to 1941 when a significant number of Serbs and Croats decided to declare themselves as ethnic Germans in order to reap the benefits offered by being a member of the German National Community – a political organization. See HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, p. 187.

especially between the local Volksdeutsche and the Ustašas. Both wanted to control and determine the pace of persecution and requisition of property to serve their needs at the expense of the other fascist movements.

How representative are these three cities for the developments related to the Holocaust across the NDH? The combined Jewish population of Sarajevo, Osijek and Križevci amounts to approximately one third of the 40,000 Jews inhabiting the NDH. Nonetheless, it is important not to overgeneralize the findings from either of these cases and automatically apply them to other locations without further scrutiny. Historians dealing with single case studies risk overlooking similarities and differences with other cases. Thus, the analysis of three case studies in this dissertation is useful as a self-corrective mechanism, which helps to avoid the trap of overgeneralization on the one hand, or parochialism on the other.

The selection of these three case studies helps us understand the regional history of the Holocaust and account for its variation in different localities. Scholars studying Holocaust and other genocides recognize that mass violence is often launched with more intensity in one region with other regions either following on their own accord or as a consequence of orders from the top. Thus, we can classify perpetrators on the regional level as either being genocidal overperformers, that is those who spearhead the persecution of targeted minorities before the others, or as genocidal underperformers who are falling behind.²² In order to explain the different intensities of violence and deportations of Jews in the NDH, we will apply this categorization to our three cases. Moreover, we shall examine the transfers of expertise among perpetrators on the meso level, as well as their interaction with the genocidal architects on the macro level.

²² Ümit Üngör, “Perpetration as a Process,” 126.

Historiography

In 2020 historian Jan Grabowski wrote a controversial article which started a debate about the approaches to collaboration and perpetration in contemporary Holocaust studies. Grabowski argued that the “exclusive focus on how the Holocaust was solely and uniquely perpetrated by Germany is now in danger of leading to the distortion, even falsification, of the history of the Holocaust.” He invited scholars to include perpetrators from other European nations into mainstream Holocaust scholarship.²³ Grabowski’s criticism hints at the desire in some quarters of Holocaust studies to reverse the Germanocentric focus and shift towards a more inclusive pan-European perspectives of Holocaust perpetration.²⁴ For example, one of the leading scholars in Holocaust studies, Wendy Lower, concluded that the lack of inclusive transnational and comparative research in Holocaust studies resulted in the fact that “a European history of the Holocaust has not yet been written.”²⁵

According to current estimates, between five and ten percent of all Holocaust victims were killed by a perpetrator who did not come from the ranks of the Third Reich.²⁶ Next to Germany, only two countries developed their own autonomous, systematic, and state-organized, mass murder campaigns directed against Jews *on* the territories they controlled –the Independent State of Croatia and Romania. Even though in terms of absolute numbers Romania had the most murderous antisemitic campaign after Nazi Germany, in relative terms the Croatian chapter of the Holocaust was deadlier.²⁷ Despite the importance of Romania and

²³ Jan Grabowski, “Germany Is Fueling a False History of the Holocaust Across Europe,” *Haaretz*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/.premium-germany-is-fueling-a-false-history-of-the-holocaust-across-europe-1.8938137>.

²⁴ Götz Aly, *Europe against the Jews: 1880-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2020); Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁵ Wendy Lower, “Holocaust Studies: The Spatial Turn,” in *A Companion to Nazi Germany*, eds. Shelley Baranowski, Armin Nolzen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 568.

²⁶ Dieter Pohl, “Right-Wing Politics and Antisemitism in Europe, 1935-1940: A Survey,” in *Right-Wing Politics and the Rise of Antisemitism in Europe 1935-1941*, eds. Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2019), 19–20.

²⁷ Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews*, 372. For the overview of the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust in Romania see Raul Cârstocea, “The Path to the Holocaust: Fascism and Antisemitism in Interwar

Croatia as two case studies essential for probing the validity of existing theories and approaches in Holocaust studies, there is surprisingly little comparative research that includes them in the English speaking academia.²⁸ Thus, some scholars of the Holocaust, such as Christian Gerlach invite researchers to intensify the examination of countries which are traditionally considered peripheral, including Croatia.²⁹

Narratives about the Holocaust that center almost exclusively on Germany were established during and immediately after the Second World War. The international justice system represented by the Nuremberg tribunal was mainly concerned with persecuting the Nazi leadership and Hitler's inner circle. Perpetrators from other countries were to be dealt with by the national courts. The Nuremberg trial legitimized and affirmed the scholarly interpretation which would later be known as the intentionalist approach in the Holocaust studies.³⁰

Intentionalism, as the term implies, focused on the premeditated *intent* to murder all European Jews among the Nazis in general, and Hitler in particular. While there are different interpretations of when exactly, intentionalists posit that Hitler had planned to murder the Jews before the Second World War, which merely presented an opportune moment to carry out this plan. Holocaust was thus seen as a linear progression of violence – a straight road which led from the Nazi takeover of power to the mass murder of Jews. The intentionalist interpretation

Romania” *S:I.M.O.N. - Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation 1* (2014): 43-53. Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000). Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2011). Grant T. Harward, *Romania's Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2021).

²⁸ For examples of comparative approaches to the history of the Ustaša and Romanian Iron Guard see Radu Harald Dinu. *Faschismus, Religion und Gewalt in Südosteuropa: Die Legion Erzengel Michael und die Ustaša im Historischen Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013). See also Constantin Iordachi. “5. Fascism in Southeastern Europe: A Comparison between Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael and Croatia's Ustaša.” In *Entangled Histories of the Balkans - Volume Two*, eds Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013): 355–468.

²⁹ Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews*, 384–85.

³⁰ Donald Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial: War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 204; Kim Christian Priemel, “War Crimes Trials, the Holocaust, and Historiography, 1943–2011,” in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, eds. Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl, (Wiley, 2020), 177, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118970492.ch9>.

of the Holocaust remained dominant until the 1970s and 1980s when it was intensely revised due to the emergence of new documentary evidence and the increasing pressure from the rival interpretation known as functionalism (or sometimes referred to as structuralism).³¹

Functionalist historians argued that there was no ready-made plan for the Holocaust. Contrasting the intentionalists, they argued that the road leading to the mass murder of Jews was “twisted.” The antisemitic policies of the Nazi regime were riddled with improvisation and zigzagging before the Nazis eventually decided to carry out the “Final Solution,” through mass murder. In other words, there was a consensus among the Nazis that the Jews had to be eliminated from German territories, but there was no agreement about the methods through which this was to be accomplished.³² Functionalism stresses the dynamics of the system, rather than the central role of the leader. They see the Holocaust as the outcome of specific bureaucratic, political, military, and logistical *structures*. Thus, functionalism is sometimes referred to as structuralism because it emphasizes the role of institutions in a polycratic power dynamics of the Third Reich.³³ Contrary to the often-held view, the essence of the dispute between intentionalism and functionalism was not about antisemitism since functionalists did not deny the idea of antisemitism as an important factor leading to the Holocaust. Functionalist

³¹ For the summary of the intentionalist and functionalism positions and debates see Tim Mason, “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism,” in *The “Final Solution”: The Implementation of Mass Murder*, ed. Michael Robert Marrus (London: K.G. Saur, 1989), 3–20. Nicholas Berg, *The Invention of “Functionalism”: Josef Wulf, Martin Broszat, and the Institute for Contemporary History (Munich) in the 1960s* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2003). A. D. Moses, “Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics,” *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (May 1998): 194–219, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0018-2656.00049>. Saul Friedländer, “From Anti-Semitism to Extermination: A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies Toward the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation,” in *The “Final Solution”: The Implementation of Mass Murder*, ed. Michael Robert Marrus (London: K.G. Saur, 1989), 316, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110970487-014>. Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7,67-111.

³² Karl Schleuneus, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews 1933-1939* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

³³ Omer Bartov, *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 4. Devin O. Pendas, “‘Final Solution,’ Holocaust, Shoah, or Genocide? From Separate to Integrated Histories,” in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, eds. Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020), 31, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118970492.ch1>.

interpretations, however, argue that while antisemitism is a necessary condition for the Holocaust, it is not the sole cause of it.³⁴

As in other countries, research about the persecution of Jews in Croatia already begun during the Second World War. As the Yugoslav Partisans increasingly strengthened their numbers and gained ground during the war, they were confronted with numerous witnesses to the mass violence exercised by the Axis forces. To document these crimes, in November 1943, the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia decided to form the State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators (*Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, ZKRZ*).³⁵

The most important function of the Commission was to gather evidence and identify Axis war criminals, including the Ustašas, and bring them to justice. The materials gathered by the Commission were supposed to be used as evidence for the trials against the perpetrators after the war. However, the Commission was also supposed to preserve the historical record of various crimes so they would not be forgotten after the war. Thus, it had a historiographic and commemorative task as well. By collecting various accounts of victims who survived Ustaša massacres and of the civilians who witnessed them, the Commission also offered a platform in which they could communicate their traumatic experiences.

From its inception, the Commission operated under a particular ideological framework which was reproduced in its activities. In the end of 1942, Josip Broz Tito proclaimed that the Ustašas represent “nothing else than simple agents of the occupiers in enslaved Croatia.”³⁶ Similar interpretations regarding the Ustašas were codified in the founding documents of the

³⁴ Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial*, 205.

³⁵ Martina Grahek-Ravančić, “Ustrojavanje organa nove vlasti: Državna/Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača – organizacija, ustroj, djelovanje,” *Historijski zbornik* 66, no. 1 (2013): 150.

³⁶ Josip Broz Tito. “Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji u svjetlosti narodno-oslobodilačke borbe,” [The National Question in Yugoslavia in the Light of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia] December 1942. In: *Jugoslavenski federalizam: ideje i stvarnost. Tematska zbirka dokumenata.*, Vol. 1., eds. Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević (Beograd: Prosveta, 1987), 745.

Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia according to which “the domestic traitors such as Pavelić, Nedić and the like, place themselves in the service of the occupiers, against their own nations and they also shed the blood of their nations. They serve the occupiers as their bloody executioners.”³⁷ The Ustašas were thus seen as proxies of “Nazi-Fascism,” without much agency of their own or an authentic ideology.

This interpretation had a particular political aim which would mark the entire Yugoslav historiography and influence the interpretations of the Holocaust, genocide, and mass violence to this very day. The Second World War in Yugoslavia was interpreted through the paradigm of “brotherhood and unity,” which was guided by the idea that the “progressive” people(s) of Yugoslavia were united in their joint struggle against the pathological, alien Ustašas that served the Italian and German fascist elites.³⁸ According to historian Tea Sindbæk Andersen, the cornerstones of this policy was that “the guilt of war crimes was not to be ascribed to any of the Yugoslav national parties.”³⁹

In line with the exhortation to de-ethnicize the crimes, the Commission instructed its employees to avoid the use of ethnic and national identification of perpetrators in their reports and documents. They argued that:

“The deeds of the Ustašas and Chetniks exclude them from the ranks of Croats and Serbs. Their deeds demonstrate that they are unnational, therefore it is incorrect to give them a characteristic they do not possess. Through their crimes the Ustašas showed they have nothing to do with the Croatian nation. Chetniks also showed through their misdeeds that they are not Serbs. Therefore, they should not be named in such as way...”⁴⁰

³⁷ The Resolution about the foundation of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, 27 November 1942. Petranović and Zečević, 1:726.

³⁸ Tomislav Dulić, “Forging Brotherhood and Unity: War Propaganda and Transitional Justice in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945.” in *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia*, ed. Rory Yeomans (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 251–52; Danijel Vojak, Filip Tomić, and Kovačev Neven, “Remembering the ‘Victims of Fascist Terror’ in Socialist Republic of Croatia, 1970-1990,” *History and Memory* 31, no. 1 (2019): 131.

³⁹ Tea Sindbæk Andersen, *Usable History? Representations of Yugoslavia’s Difficult Past from 1945 to 2002* (Aarhus: Aarhus Univ. Press, 2012), 81.

⁴⁰ Grahek-Ravančić, “Ustrojavanje organa nove vlasti: Državna/Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača – organizacija, ustroj, djelovanje,” 157.

The primary responsibility for war crimes, including the Holocaust, across Yugoslavia was projected onto exogenous factors, primarily Nazi Germany. This narrative performed a particular kind of function for the Yugoslav authorities. During the war, the various regions, nationalities, and ethnicities in Yugoslavia had diverse experiences, due to staggering differences in the occupation policies across the country. What unified these distinct experiences of occupation was the presence of German forces (at different periods) as well as the existence of Yugoslav Partisan resistance. Therefore, the narrative of the resistance of pure and progressive peoples of Yugoslavia against the foreign occupiers offered a simple yet effective narrative about the complex events during the Second World War.

While maintaining that all Yugoslav nationalities suffered during the Second World War, the Commission did give special attention to the persecution of Jews from an early stage. In July 1945, it decided to create separate reports dedicated to the persecution of Jews across Yugoslavia. The Commission emphasized that this was important because there is a need to

inform the international public which is especially interested in this question which according to its importance, transcends the borders of our country. As is well known, the occupiers committed countless crimes against Jews in all countries they have occupied during the war – therefore, this question is of European proportions and its correct and precise analysis has a particularly important political significance.⁴¹

This was a major undertaking that was supposed to be conducted by local authorities, which had to deliver the historical overview of the persecution of Jews in their locality, including the data on the number of pre-war Jewish population, main events, legal decrees, as well as to identify the main perpetrators. Members of the Commission, who usually were local

⁴¹ The State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators to all National and Regional Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators, 27 July 1945. Document number: 2056/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 39.

state and party officials, received instructions to include Holocaust survivors and to cooperate with the Jewish Religious Communities “because their cooperation would be of great value.”⁴²

The involvement of Holocaust survivors in the Commission’s work had a decisive impact on both the quality and quantity of materials collected by the local Commission offices. Holocaust survivors wrote various “elaborates” on the persecution in many localities. These reports often combined personal memoirs of Holocaust survivors with the materials and testimonies gathered by the Commission. The creation of the elaborates, some of them conceived as entire studies spanning hundreds of pages, marks the beginning of research on the Holocaust in the NDH.

The Commission stuck to the intentionalist interpretation of the Holocaust, which ascribed the main agency for the antisemitic persecution in Croatia to Germans. One of the Commission’s reports argued that “one of the first tasks which the occupiers placed in front of the quisling Ustaša government in Croatia was the ‘solution of the Jewish question.’ The Ustaša collaborators immediately took on this task with such radicalism that they even surpassed the anti-Jewish zeal of their masters.”⁴³ The Ustašas were depicted as “loyal servants of Hitlerian masters – who they tried to outpace, and we can say that they succeeded.”⁴⁴ In another elaborate the authors claimed that “There is no doubt that everything was organized and initiated by the German occupiers. However, they found good students among the Ustašas, who even surpassed their teachers in these measures.”⁴⁵

According to this interpretation, the main cause of the Holocaust in the NDH should be found in Germany, and not in Croatia. Since the Ustašas were merely following orders from

⁴² The State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators to all National and Regional Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators, 27 July 1945. Document number: 2056/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 39-41.

⁴³ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 140.

⁴⁴ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 145.

⁴⁵ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 460.

the outside, they were not seen as active agents, but as mere tools in the execution of the German plan. It is therefore no wonder that antisemitism was not seen as a significant factor in fomenting the anti-Jewish violence in the NDH. While it might be tempting to ascribe this interpretation to causes emanating exclusively from within the Yugoslav politics of memory, the documented exchanges between the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) and the Yugoslav Commission reveal how institutionally dominant this interpretation was at the time. In the undated document, which was classified as “secret” and sent by the UNWCC to their Yugoslav counterparts in the Commission, clearly stated that the “politics of the extermination of Jews in Europe that resulted in mass murder of enormous proportions was created by the Nazi Party, which has taken the first steps in this direction in 1920.” The UNWCC reiterated that the main culprits of the Holocaust in the “occupied states,” which also included Yugoslavia, were the “German chiefs of police, heads of central offices for Jews, and ‘racist’ organs of the SS.” When discussing the key agents in implementing the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, the UNWCC did not mention a single non-German perpetrator, focusing instead on the heads of SS in occupied Serbia and Slovenia without referring to the Holocaust in Croatia as a separate event.⁴⁶

The work of the State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators was inextricably connected to the emerging Yugoslav historiography on the topic. One of the first works of the Yugoslav historiography on the topic was written by the Holocaust survivor Zdenko Levental in 1952. The book was a result of the convergence between the Alliance of Jewish Communities of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Commission, which stopped working in 1948. The foreword of the book was written by Albert Vajs, a Jewish member of the Commission and the president of the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia. In their joint effort, Vajs and Levental openly spoke about the fact

⁴⁶ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 50-58.

that their book had one main aim, which was to bring to light the vast material gathered and organized by the Commission. However, since the Commission was shut down in 1948, they took it upon themselves to publish a summary of the Commission's investigations.⁴⁷

Levental explicitly abandoned the idea of a deeper analysis of perpetrator motivations and decision-making, arguing that “we started with the assumption that the general role of foreign and domestic fascist arch-criminals is known well enough, at least generally, through the materials which were made available in our country and internationally.” Thus, Levental concluded that “this book ignores the specific role of individual criminals.”⁴⁸ Relying on the dominant interpretations, Levental reproduced the narrative according to which the weight of the causality behind the Holocaust in the NDH should be found outside of Croatia. He argued that

The way the camps were organized, as well as the deportations of the ‘undesired’ into camps and the extermination of Jews according to the Nazi-racist criteria, the methods of torture and murder, to which the Ustašas also added their own ‘specialties’, all of this proves that the Ustaša camps in the NDH were created, and that the crimes inside them were executed according to the German recipes and order, and that in this regard the Ustašas were mere servants of the German occupiers.⁴⁹

The convergence between the Commission and the similar interpretations regarding the causality behind the Holocaust was later reproduced in most of the works of Yugoslav historiography. Since Yugoslav memory politics regarding the Second World War was based on both victimization and heroization, some Jewish authors tried to return the agency to the Yugoslav Jews by incorporating their contribution to the Partisan struggle. This was most evident in the case of Jaša Romano, another Holocaust survivor, whose work was influenced by his personal experience as a resistance fighter within the ranks of Partisans. He published his book in 1980 with an explicit aim to elucidate the agency of Jews during the Second World

⁴⁷ Zdenko Levental, *Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Savez jevrejskih opština FNR Jugoslavije, 1952), XIV-XV.

⁴⁸ Levental, XVII.

⁴⁹ Levental, 73.

War in Yugoslavia. Romano discusses the history of the “workers movement” and the Jewish history side by side, aiming to shed light on how Yugoslav Jews contributed to its development equally or even more than other Yugoslav nationalities.⁵⁰

Holocaust historiography in Yugoslavia largely falls into the matrix of communist Eastern European narratives, in which Holocaust remembrance “was exclusively produced through the framework of antifascism because the link established the communist regime with its own postwar identity and provided it with ongoing political legitimacy.”⁵¹ Even though the publications specifically dealing with the Holocaust were produced almost exclusively by the Jewish survivors, their narratives constituted “only a distinctive sub-narrative of the Yugoslav historiography.”⁵²

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, there was a new wave of research dedicated to the history of the Ustaša movement. Authors in this period aimed at getting rid of some of the dogmatic attitudes which were dominant in the Yugoslav period. Yet, although they wrote extensively about Ustaša terror, they often stuck to a rigid empiricist approach that perpetuated a chronological reconstruction of events without paying much attention to new analytical and interpretative models. In Croatia the most important contribution in the period after the turn of the millennium was conducted by Slavko Goldstein, a Holocaust survivor and a prominent author, and his son Ivo, a historian.⁵³ Even though the Goldsteins contributed a great deal to

⁵⁰ Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata* (Beograd: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1980).

⁵¹ Jelena Subotic, *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 19–20.

⁵² Jovan Ćulibrk, *Historiography of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: University of Belgrade, 2014), 21. Marija Vulesica, “Holocaust Research in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. An Inventory,” *Südosteuropa* 65, no. 2 (January 27, 2017): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2017-0018>.

⁵³ Ognjen Kraud, Ivo Goldstein, eds., *Antisemitizam, holokaust, antifašizam* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1996); Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu 1918-1941* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2005); Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2007); Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016; Ivo Goldstein, *Jasenovac* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018).

research of the Holocaust, their approach remained largely detached from the novel theoretical approaches and debates within the international historiography on the Holocaust.⁵⁴

Croatian historiography dealing with the Second World War has by and large remained closed within the boundaries of national historiography and has failed to assert its contribution or incorporate of methods and findings from European or global scholarship.⁵⁵ This is most clear from the absence of almost any comparative or transnational studies related to the Second World War in general, and the Holocaust in particular. The only advances in this regard have almost exclusively come from the scholars working outside Croatia, or foreigners who deal with the topic.⁵⁶ Historian Marija Vulesica thus concluded that “Holocaust studies as a branch of historical studies has not yet been established in Croatia.”⁵⁷

With a few exceptions, Croatian historiography has largely inherited the Yugoslav interpretation of the causality behind the Holocaust where Germans played a key role in the destruction of Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian Jews. Nationalist historians argued that the race laws, and the Holocaust by extension, were introduced because of the “immense pressure” of Nazi Germany, and that this was “a price which had to be paid for the Croatian statehood.”⁵⁸ Thus, historian Jelena Subotić concluded that Croatia is still involved in

⁵⁴ Lovro Kralj, “Rezension Zu: Bergholz, Max: Violence as a Generative Force. Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community. Ithaka 2016: ISBN 978-1-5017-0492-5, / Goldstein, Ivo; Goldstein, Slavko: The Holocaust in Croatia. . Pittsburgh 2016: ISBN 978-0-8229-4451-5,” *H-Soz-Kult*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.hsozkult.de/review/id/reb-25216>.

⁵⁵ Sabine Rutar, “The Second World War in Southeastern Europe. Historiographies and Debates,” *Südosteuropa* 65, no. 2 (January 27, 2017): 196–97, <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2017-0015>.

⁵⁶ For examples of comparative approaches to the Holocaust in the NDH see John A. Armstrong, “Collaborationism in World War II: The Integral Nationalist Variant in Eastern Europe,” *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 3 (September 1968): 396–410, <https://doi.org/10.1086/240210>; Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Historiography of Slovakian and Croatian Jewry,” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988); Yeshayahu Jelinek, “The Holocaust and the Internal Policies of the Nazi Satellites in Eastern Europe: A Comparative Study,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies Division B: The History of the Jewish People* (1981): 173–78; Martina Bitunjac, “Between Racial Politics and Political Calculation: The Annihilation of Jews in the Slovak State and the Independent State of Croatia,” in *Complicated Complicity: European Collaboration with Nazi Germany during World War II*, eds. Martina Bitunjac and Julius H. Schoeps (De Gruyter, 2021), 137–60, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110671186-008>.

⁵⁷ Vulesica, “Holocaust Research in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. An Inventory,” 268.

⁵⁸ Nevenko Bartulin, “‘Cigansko pitanje’: dokaz da NDH nije proglasila rasne zakone pod pritiskom Njemačkog Reicha,” Portal of the Croatian Historiography, *Historiografija.Hr* (blog), December 18, 2018, <https://historiografija.hr/?p=12906>.

decoupling the Holocaust from other genocidal crimes with the aim of making the Holocaust in the NDH

uniquely Nazi (that is, German) problem and absolve the local community from participating in it [...]. The implication of this narrative intervention is also that fascism, anti-Semitism, and racialized ideologies that justified violence against the Jews and other ‘undesirables’ are foreign imports with no indigenous roots.⁵⁹

Regional History of the Holocaust

During the 1990s the international historiography of the Holocaust started to turn towards regional and local history.⁶⁰ To a large extent, this development was prompted by the sudden accessibility of material in archives in the former Communist states, which previously were closed to Western historians. The vast amount of material about the German occupation apparatus in the eastern territories allowed in-depth examinations of local decision-making, showing the extent to which initiatives on the ground often acted as critical driven forces in radicalizing the violence. Another important impetus for the turn to local history was an increased focus on the perpetrators at the lower levels of the command chain, the hands-on “grassroot” perpetrators who carried out the actual killings. In particular, Christopher Browning’s seminal study of Reserve Police Battalion 101 and its subsequent criticism by Daniel Goldhagen stimulated an interest in the motivation and agency of lower-ranking perpetrators, which continues to shape the research agenda to this day.⁶¹

Jan T. Gross’s book *Neighbors* was another important achievement, not least because it directed attention to the involvement of non-German local actors in the Holocaust. Focusing on events in a single Polish village named Jedwabne, Gross demonstrated that ordinary Poles

⁵⁹ Subotic, *Yellow Star, Red Star*, 26.

⁶⁰ Peter Black, “Central Intent or Regional Inspiration?: Recent German Approaches to the Holocaust,” *Central European History* 33, no. 4 (December 2000): 535, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916100746455>.

⁶¹ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Soltuon in Poland* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Moses, “Structure and Agency in the Holocaust.”

were also active perpetrators during the Holocaust who killed their Jewish neighbors without the direct participation of Germans.⁶² On a national level, Gross's book stirred a major debate in Poland,⁶³ and internationally it led scholars to rethink the concept of collaboration and agency during the Second World War. Gross's work inspired many students of history to employ regional and local historical approaches with the aim of revising established historiographical narratives.

A wave of research on regional and local history followed soon thereafter, and as a result it affirmed the "spatial turn" in the Holocaust studied.⁶⁴ According to Wendy Lower, this was one "of the most important recent developments in the field" because it forced scholars of the Holocaust to employ stronger transnational and comparative methods.⁶⁵ This rather recent development has led to rethinking of the major interpretative paradigms because of the complexities of local history, which often challenged straightforward interpretations. The true value of local and regional history can only be unlocked when its case studies actively engage with and challenge established interpretations.⁶⁶

In Croatian historiography, most studies which focus on the macro level of the NDH very often decontextualize discrete cases of local mass violence and lump them together "without accounting for their temporal and geographical variation."⁶⁷ This ill usage of the deductive method reflected the pre-made assumptions that ideology and actions from the top

⁶² Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

⁶³ Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Raz Segal, *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914-1945*, Stanford Studies on Central and Eastern Europe (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

⁶⁵ Lower, "Holocaust Studies: The Spatial Turn," 567.

⁶⁶ Thomas Kühne and Tom Lawson, "The Holocaust and Local History – An Introduction," *Holocaust Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (June 2010): 2, 10., <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2010.11087253>.

⁶⁷ Max Bergholz, *Telling Histories of Violence without Borders*, Occasional Paper Series (University of Notre Dame: Nanovic Institute for European Studies, 2020), 7.

were simply implemented across various regions in the same manner and at the same time.

Thus, as historian Alexander Korb concluded

Even though the history of wartime Yugoslavia has been extensively researched, the number of useful case studies of Ustaša mass violence is very limited. Case studies within Yugoslav historiography generally tended to neglect regional specifics. Instead, they mostly applied a certain historiographical canon, which had been produced for the whole of Yugoslavia, to the regions under consideration.⁶⁸

While there are many studies of the local or regional level dating back to the Yugoslav historiography, some of them suffer from deficiencies such as laying out the empirical data in a chronological way without subjecting it to deeper analysis. The studies often fail to critically analyze the relationship between the macro and meso levels, thus completely abandoning the attempts to reconstruct the decision-making behind various acts of mass violence. As a result, the actions of perpetrators on the local or regional levels are too often taken as a straightforward implementation of the orders from the top without any considerations to local motivations and context. Perpetrators on the local and regional levels regularly remain nameless actors whose agency is downplayed at the expense of the Ustaša elites.

Recently, excellent studies of mass violence on the local and regional levels of the NDH have been conducted by Tomislav Dulić,⁶⁹ Emily Greble,⁷⁰ Max Bergholz⁷¹ and Daniela Simon.⁷² However, the Holocaust was not the main focus of their works. Historian Carl Bethke made a major contribution to the regional history of the Holocaust in the NDH by focusing on the *longue durée* history of the Jewish-German relations in the north-east region of Slavonia.⁷³

⁶⁸ Alexander Korb, “Integrated Warfare? The Germans and the Ustaša Massacres: Syrmia 1942,” in *War in a Twilight World: Partisans and Anti-Partisans Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939-45*, eds. Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 211.

⁶⁹ Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941 - 42* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2005).

⁷⁰ Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945*, 2011.

⁷¹ Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

⁷² Daniela Simon, *Religion und Gewalt: Ostkroatien Und Nordbosnien 1941-1945*, Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Donauschwäbische Geschichte Und Landeskunde, Band 23 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019).

⁷³ Carl Bethke, *(K)Eine Gemeinsame Sprache? Aspekte Deutsch-Jüdischer Beziehungsgeschichte in Slawonien, 1900-1945*, Studien zur Geschichte, Kultur und Gesellschaft Südosteuropas (Berlin: Lit, 2013).

While Bethke's innovative approach sheds light on many complexities of the Holocaust on a local level, his work does not contextualize the specificities or patterns of antisemitic violence regarding other localities of the NDH. He himself noted that the question of why the Jewish communities in Bosnia were deported in the autumn of 1941, while those from Slavonia were not deported *en masse* until 1942 remains "unknown."⁷⁴ Similarly, Marija Vulesica concluded that there are existing gaps particularly when it comes to Bosnia, where we see a notable absence of studies on the Holocaust.⁷⁵ However, it is not only in Bosnia that there is a historiographical lacuna. Besides the major urban centers such as Zagreb,⁷⁶ Rijeka⁷⁷ and Osijek,⁷⁸ the Holocaust in Croatia remains understudied particularly in rural areas. These gaps in local and regional history are among the factors that contribute to the remaining lack of single synthesis of the history of the Holocaust covering the entire territory of the NDH. Such a study will only be possible when more micro-historical or regional studies shed light on the history of the Holocaust in the NDH in all its complexity.

Fascism Studies and the Ustaša Movement

In comparison to the fields of Holocaust and antisemitism studies, scholars of fascism have gone furthest in the application of the comparative method, which has become one of the cornerstones of the field. This is the result of the long-standing efforts within the studies of fascism to "decenter" the field to arrive at a sounder explanation and definition of fascist ideology, movements, and regimes. There is a consensus in the field that the excessive focus on "Nazi-Fascist centrist" explanations leads to biased interpretations.⁷⁹ The case of the Ustaša

⁷⁴ Bethke, 316–17.

⁷⁵ Vulesica, "Holocaust Research in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. An Inventory," 274.

⁷⁶ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2001).

⁷⁷ Sanja Simper, *Židovi u Rijeci i liburnijskoj Istri u svjetlu fašističkog antisemitizma (1938-1943.)* (Zagreb: Židovska vjerska zajednica Bet Israel u Hrvatskoj, 2018).

⁷⁸ Zlata Živaković-Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja: holokaust u Osijeku i život koji se nastavlja* (Osijek: Hrvatski institut za povijest - Podružnica Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, Slavonski Brod; Židovska općina Osijek, 2006).

⁷⁹ Roger Griffin, "Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies," *Fascism* 4, no. 2 (2015): 113.

movement received prominent attention within the field of fascism studies. Scholars realize that next to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Croatia is the only European country which had a fully-fledged fascist regime during the Second World War.⁸⁰ What follows is a brief overview of fascism studies.

The emergence of fascism initially bewildered scholars, intellectuals and even their political opponents giving rise to a wide array of different interpretations of what fascism *is* and how to *explain* its emergence. This conflation between *explanation* of the causes of fascism and its *definition* complicated any attempts to arrive at a commonly shared interpretation. Thus, the early approaches to fascism remained highly heterogenous. Those taking a Europocentric, continent-wide perspective interpreted fascism as a symptom of a moral crisis in a European society. Others preferred to narrow down the issue to Italy and Germany, claiming that the roots of fascist movements are tied to a peculiar historical, economic, and political developments in these two countries, thus echoing what came to be known as the *Sonderweg* [Special Path] thesis. Certain Catholic and liberal interpretations employed the concept of totalitarianism to explain the unique divergences in fascism in comparison to other existing political ideologies. Perhaps the most coherent and enduring interpretation during the interwar period was given by Marxists who argued that fascism was the last stage in the development of a capitalist system in crisis.⁸¹

Intellectuals in interwar Yugoslavia were active agents in analyzing and theorizing about fascism from the early 1920s. For example, in 1923 an article in the newspapers *Borba* [The Struggle] – the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, stated that fascism “without any doubt represents the most powerful and fearful tool of the capitalism in its effort

⁸⁰ Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 5.

⁸¹ Constantin Iordachi, ed., *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives, Rewriting Histories* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

to prolong, expand and deepen its rule in order to sustain its social system.”⁸² Much like Marxist counterparts on the international level, the anonymous author from Yugoslavia argued that fascists did not have a genuine ideology and that they created only an “illusion of a fascist program.” It was denied that fascism had a real mass following. To accomplish support among masses, fascists allegedly had to rely on “demagoguery,” and “manipulation.”⁸³ These arguments constituted the core of the “agentic theory,” according to which fascism was nothing more than a proxy of capitalism which is used to suppress the proletariat.⁸⁴

One of the most important contributions of the Marxist interpretation of fascism was its insistence on seeing fascism as a “generic,” or “universal,” phenomenon unbounded to any specific culture, nation, or continent. Thus, the word fascism (written with *lowercase* “f”) changed its original meaning in reference to Fascism in Italy (written with *capitalized* “F”) and started to denote a phenomenon which could appear anywhere else. This idea was fully embraced by the Yugoslav Marxists. In 1934 Veselin Masleša analyzed Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany and reached the conclusion that despite the two countries’ different social and historical context, they “gave birth to the same movements with the same forms of counterrevolution.”⁸⁵ Another Yugoslav author noted in 1937 that the two movements “have the same base and joint theoretical baggage, which is, with insignificant variation, dominant in all national forms of fascism.”⁸⁶

The Marxists interpretation of fascism which created a close association between capitalism and counter-revolution, however, often led to conceptual stretching. The result was the application of the term fascist to a great variety of different political movements which the

⁸² V.I.S., “Fašizam i industrijski kapital,” in *Komunisti o fašizmu*, ed. Ivan Prpić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta grada Zagreba, 1976), 29.

⁸³ V.I.S., 32.

⁸⁴ Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*, 14.

⁸⁵ Veselin Masleša, “Socijalni i ekonomski uslovi njemačkog i talijanskog Fašizma,” in *Komunisti o fašizmu*, ed. Ivan Prpić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta grada Zagreba, 1976), 58.

⁸⁶ B. Progonski, “Zadaci fašističke ideologije,” in *Komunisti o fašizmu*, ed. Ivan Prpić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta grada Zagreba, 1976), 104.

Marxists saw as enabling the capitalist system. According to the official line established on the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1924, Grigory Zinoviev and Leon Trotsky argued that “Fascism and Social Democracy are two sides of the same instrument: capitalist dictatorship.”⁸⁷ Marxists in Yugoslavia echoed this argument in some of their texts as well, calling social democracy “social-fascism.”⁸⁸ Some Yugoslav authors stretched the concept so far that it started to encompass any democratic system. For example, an author in *Borba* wrote “We do not want to renew the bourgeois-democratic state, nor do we want to get back to the capitalist democracy. This would in essence be nothing else than the continuation of the fascist rule in a more secretive, disguised form.”⁸⁹

The case of the Ustaša movement did not capture the attention of major Yugoslav Marxist intellectuals in their texts about fascism. The Ustašas were a tiny political movement with a few hundred members for most of the interwar history. Thus, they remain on the periphery of political interest of Yugoslav intellectuals writing about fascism. Yugoslav Marxists intellectuals, however, applied the concept in order to describe the dictatorship of King Alexander Karađorđević as fascist because it was in the service of “international imperialism and Yugoslav big bourgeoisie.” They embraced and used the concept of “fascistization,” arguing that Yugoslav government is a “terrorist dictatorship of the big capital,” which is led by the “greater Serbian hegemony,” and is involved in the struggle against the proletariat and the “oppressed nations.”⁹⁰ The erasure of all differences between democracy, liberalism, social-democrats, authoritarian regimes, various far-right and extreme right movements and their subsummation under the single umbrella of fascism were an instrumentalization of the concept for political purposes. It had little sense other than describing

⁸⁷ Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*, 15.

⁸⁸“Vojnofašistička diktatura,” in *Komunisti o fašizmu*, ed. Ivan Prpić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta grada Zagreba, 1976), 36.

⁸⁹ V.I.S., “Fašizam i industrijski Kapital,” 45.

⁹⁰ Prpić, “Vojnofašistička diktatura,” 37–38.

all political options which the communists opposed. The result of such conceptual outstretching was that fascism as a concept was rendered useless since it ceased to perform any function in interpreting the political reality.

Through their emphasis on economy, Marxists made important contributions to the studies of fascism. They argued that the “petty bourgeoisie” and “middle classes” were the main source of fascist mobilization since these “classes” tried to either protect or regain their economic power by supporting fascism. Yugoslav Marxists, such as Edvard Kardelj,⁹¹ argued that the impoverished “petty bourgeoisie” and “peasant masses” were impoverished by capitalism and are then driven to fascism through “demagoguery” and “manipulation,” which promised them that fascism is anti-capitalist. However, according to Kardelj, this was all a sophisticated ploy planned out by the capitalists.⁹²

The class-based thesis which focused either on the “petty bourgeoisie” or “middle-classes,” remained dominant in the historiography up until 1980s.⁹³ However, it suffered from multiple flaws. First, as sociologist Michael Mann convincingly argues, class-based interpretations reduce the complexity of human identity to the position they occupy in an economic system. Second, these categories of classes, as applied in the analysis of fascism, are rather imprecise. Third, they disregard what fascist themselves thought about their ideas and actions – namely that they rejected materialism.⁹⁴ Finally, historian Detlef Mühlberger argued that class-based interpretations were divorced from empirical data and historical sources. They

⁹¹ Edvard Kardelj (1910-1979) was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and quickly climbed through the ranks of the communist party of Yugoslavia already during the interwar period. He was one of the leading intellectuals and theoreticians of Yugoslav communism. After the Second World War he held some of the highest offices in Socialist Yugoslavia.

⁹² Edvard Kardelj, “Fašizam,” in *Komunisti o fašizmu*, ed. Ivan Prpić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta grada Zagreba, 1976), 80. For similar class-based among Yugoslav Marxists see also: Božidar Adžija, “Hiterlova Njemačka,” in *Komunisti o fašizmu*, ed. Ivan Prpić (Zagreb: Centar za aktualni politički studij narodnog sveučilišta grada Zagreba, 1976), 49–50. As well as Masleša, “Socijalni i ekonomski uslovi nemačkog i italijanskog Fašizma,” 55–56.

⁹³ Detlef Mühlberger, *The Social Bases of Nazism, 1919-1933* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

⁹⁴ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20–21.

were based on “impressionistic assertions not found upon any meaningful evidence.” The emergence of new research on social background of Nazi supporters in the 1980s, for example, forced historians to increasingly abandon class-based interpretations since the “social bases of Nazism were very much broader” than any single-class and they “attracted support from all occupational and social groupings.”⁹⁵

While there are currently no detailed studies on the social background of the Ustaša members, incomplete and fragmented archival sources suggest that the interwar Ustaša members cannot be reduced to a single class. In 1934 the Security Service of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia compiled two reports about suspected Ustaša members and their sympathizers in the coastal region of Primorska Banovina. Combined, the two lists contained the basic information about 1019 individuals, 84% of whom were suspicious as sympathizers and 16% were Ustaša members. When it comes to occupational background, 37% (386 out of 1019) were classified as workers, 26% as agricultural laborers, for 21% the background was unknown, and 7% were classified as “other.” The rest were classified as students (16), sailors (14), merchants (14), peddlers (13), lawyers (4), mailmen (3) and priests (3) constituted 6% of all suspected members and sympathizers of the Ustaša movement.⁹⁶ Therefore, much like studies of Nazism and other fascist movements, the available evidence suggests that the Ustašas mobilized members with various social backgrounds, which undermine the class-based interpretations of fascism.

Besides the Marxist approach to fascism during the interwar period, Catholic intellectuals also made contributions to discussions about fascism in Yugoslavia. Hijacint (Ante) Bošković, a Croatian theologian, wrote in 1939 that fascism was a novel “totalitarian” movement which constituted itself as the “opposite extreme” of “liberalism.”⁹⁷ Like many other

⁹⁵ Mühlberger, *The Social Bases of Nazism, 1919-1933*, 2, 4, 7.

⁹⁶ HR-HDA-1354, Atentatori, teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije, box 7, file no. 382.

⁹⁷ Hijacint Bošković, *Filozofski izvori fašizma i nacionalnog socijalizma*, ed. Petar Strčić (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2000), 21.

radical Catholic intellectuals in the late 1930s, Bošković in fact welcomed the demise of liberalism, which he criticized for its “excessive individualism” and “rationalism,” which gave birth to “unhealthy democracy.”⁹⁸ Yet, he also opposed aspects of fascism which he felt threatened the position of Catholic religion. Bošković mainly focused his critique of fascism by focusing on Nazism in Germany. His critique included the fascist deification of the state, which he dubbed “irrational dynamism,” and the Nordic racism, which he described as the “abandonment of God.”⁹⁹ He sensed that fascist totalitarianism would replace the Catholic morality because with fascism the state becomes “the source of every right and all morals.” It was the totalitarian aspects, which we recognize as political religion combined with the charismatic leadership which Bošković described as the core of fascism:

the state completely absorbs the individual who cannot exist outside the state. The individual lives for the state and depends on the state. Individuality loses all sense outside the state. Thus, the individual is completely lost within the state which finds hypostasis in only one man [the leader]. He loses not only the political, but also individual freedom because he must think like the Leader. He must completely give himself to him, individual’s will must become the Leader’s.¹⁰⁰

During the 1960s studies of fascism were revitalized by the emergence of new interpretative framework directly rivaling the Marxist paradigm(s). This approach was pioneered by scholars such as George Mosse,¹⁰¹ Eugen Weber¹⁰² and Ernst Nolte.¹⁰³ These authors agreed that there was a genuine fascist ideology which garnered the mass appeal, and that it had to be explained through a new theoretical model that eschewed existing Marxist approaches through the extensive usage of the comparative method.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Bošković, 42.

⁹⁹ Bošković, 30–31, 38, 41–42, 44–45.

¹⁰⁰ Bošković, 47.

¹⁰¹ George Mosse, “Introduction: The Genesis of Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1 (1966): 14–26.

¹⁰² Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964).

¹⁰³ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Antion Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

¹⁰⁴ Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 2010, 8.

Representative of the new paradigm, George Mosse was highly critical of the Marxist “class-based” definitions of fascism, arguing that they failed to explain the essence of the phenomenon. He called for the abandonment of the “single key,” explanations and definitions of fascism.¹⁰⁵ Instead of “all-embracing” theories of fascism, the search for its “essence” was supposed to become the quest for identifying the “fascist minimum.” This was an attempt to find the “lowest common denominator of fascist movements expressed as a concise one-sentence definition.”¹⁰⁶ To accomplish this, scholars were instructed to rely on the comparative method. Mosse argued that “the pre-eminent position of Germany,” in the studies of fascism after the war “obscured” fascism’s “European-wide importance.” Thus, he cautioned scholars that “if we want to get closer to the essence of the fascist revolution we must analyze it on a European-wide scale.”¹⁰⁷

Non-Marxist approaches also emphasized the authentic nature of fascist ideology.¹⁰⁸ Fascist ideology was traditionally taken less seriously because it was a “late-comer” into the political space in comparison to the established modern ideologies such as liberalism, communism or conservatism. Unlike these ideologies, it lacked an intellectual tradition, commonly accepted intellectual fathers, and foundational texts, thus seemingly lacking a “systematic theory.”¹⁰⁹ Non-Marxist scholars thus focused on studying fascism “inside out,”¹¹⁰ to uncover the appeal of fascism which they considered to be genuine, unlike their Marxist counterparts who emphasized manipulation and demagoguery. Thus, non-Marxists focused on “positive aspects of fascist regimes that contributed to their stability and appeal,” which was

¹⁰⁵ George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1999), X–XI.

¹⁰⁶ Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 2010, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Mosse, “Introduction: The Genesis of Fascism,” 14.

¹⁰⁸ Mann, *Fascists*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Juan Linz, “Political Space and Fascism as a Late-Comer,” in *Who Were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism*, eds. Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet and Jan Petter Myklebust (Bergen, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1980), 154.

¹¹⁰ Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism*, X.

often obscured in the earlier approaches to fascism.¹¹¹ These methodological reorientations generated renewed interest and laid the foundations of contemporary fascism studies.

By the end of the 1990s the field of fascism studies had gone through a process of intellectual and methodological maturation, culminating in what some scholars refer to as the “new consensus,” which mainly revolved around the work of Roger Griffin.¹¹² Griffin argued that there was a need for a “new theory of fascist minimum,” which should avoid creating a long checklist of political concepts which define it and created a definition which would be “reduced the bare essentials.”¹¹³ He distanced himself from finding a one “true” definition which could capture all the complexities of fascism across the globe and focused on creating a definition which would be practical and “useful.” Hence, he utilized the Weberian “ideal type,” – an intellectual abstraction which connects various elements of a phenomena, but it is eventually “stripped of the heterogeneity and ‘messiness’ of real phenomenon.”¹¹⁴ In other words, these “idealized abstractions” could be understood as an X-ray which ignores the “surface features so vital to person’s physical individuality” and captures only the essentials we are interested in – the structure which form the (back)bone of fascism everywhere and anywhere.¹¹⁵ Griffin thus arrived at an ideal-typical definition according to which fascism should be understood as a “genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.”¹¹⁶

The field of fascism studies was also severely criticized from several academic quarters for profoundly different reasons. Scholars like Gilbert Allardyce completely rejected the notion that fascism can be defined, arguing that “there is no such thing,” since “only individual things

¹¹¹ Linz, “Political Space and Fascism as a Late-Comer,” 154.

¹¹² Roger Griffin, “Ghostbusting Fascism?: The Spectral Aspects of the Era of Fascism and Its Shape-Shifting Relationship to the Radical Right,” *Fascism* 11, no. 1 (May 13, 2022): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-bja10041>.

¹¹³ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 12–13.

¹¹⁴ Griffin, 10–11.

¹¹⁵ Griffin, 18.

¹¹⁶ Griffin, 26.

are real.” Thus, Allardyce concluded that any theories and generic concepts only “obscure” our understanding of “real” fascist movements and individuals.¹¹⁷ This (rather unoriginal) argument echoes the ancient philosophical Problem of Universals which for centuries pitted those who argue that only particular things exist (nominalism), and on the opposite side those who argue that there are universals – a set of abstract properties which explain the world around us (realism). If we accept nominalism, like the one which Allardyce propagates, we will have to abandon all other universals or “-isms” which we use to navigate the political space such as liberalism, nationalism, etc.

Further criticism of fascism studies which came both from outside and from within the field was that they were overly focused on “idealism,” in which “primacy is generally given to fascist ideas,” instead of practices.¹¹⁸ Focus on definitions, histories of ideas, and culture led to serious fragmentation most evident in the scholarship on National Socialism. According to historian Tim Mason, German historians were actively engaged in debates within fascism studies, but during the 1980s they started to increasingly abandon the field because “theorists of fascism failed to comprehend anti-Semitism.” Furthermore, historians of generic fascism failed to integrate and actively engage with the emerging fields of Holocaust and genocide studies.¹¹⁹

Coming from the field of Holocaust studies, in 1989 Saul Friedländer criticized fascism studies for a lack of engagement with the topic of antisemitism. He argued that scholars of fascism “solve the problem” of integrating antisemitism into their work by “avoiding it completely,” and “more or less avoid mentioning it (except for a few words, when necessary).”¹²⁰ Daniel Tilles, a historian working on the British Union of Fascists, similarly

¹¹⁷ Gilbert Allardyce, “What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept,” *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (April 1979): 368, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1855138>.

¹¹⁸ Mann, *Fascists*, 12.

¹¹⁹ Tim Mason, “Whatever Happened To Fascism?” *Radical History Review* 1991, no. 49 (January 1, 1991): 91, 93., <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1991-49-89>.

¹²⁰ Friedländer, “From Anti-Semitism to Extermination,” 307.

noted that despite the considerable growth of scholarship within antisemitism and fascism studies both quantitatively and qualitatively, “there remains significant gaps within, as well as between, these fields.”¹²¹ He concluded that:

Given popular misconceptions, it is somewhat surprising that the wealth of historical and theoretical work on fascism in recent decades has devoted scant attention to this issue [of antisemitism]. While there has been great debate over whether fascism was revolutionary or reactionary, modernizing or conservative, located on the left or the right of the political spectrum (or outside of it altogether), whether it should be defined by its ideology or practice, how wide or narrow any such definition should be and what components should comprise it, the position of antisemitism and racism within fascist thought has been little discussed.¹²²

In recent decades some progress was made in this regard mainly thanks to scholars such as Aristotle Kallis, who was one of very few scholars of fascism who actively sought to bridge the theoretical and methodological differences between the fields of fascism, antisemitism, Holocaust and genocide studies.¹²³ Nonetheless serious gaps in this regard persist. Kallis himself recently concluded that “the focus on the dynamics of diffusion of anti-Semitism in interwar and especially wartime Europe is perhaps the most challenging premise for a transnational perspective on fascism.”¹²⁴

As Constantin Iordachi notes, the “Western scholarship on fascism largely ignored the history of the Ustaša” in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.¹²⁵ In Yugoslavia, systematic research on the history of the Ustaša movement and the NDH first began during the 1960s and 1970s.¹²⁶ The historiography in Yugoslavia was dominated by the Marxist

¹²¹ Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1.

¹²² Tilles, 21.

¹²³ Aristotle Kallis, “Fascism and the Jews: From the Internationalisation of Fascism to a ‘Fascist Antisemitism,’” *Holocaust Studies* 15, no. 1–2 (June 2009): 15–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2009.11087228>; Aristotle A. Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe*, 1. issued in pbk, Routledge Studies in Modern History 6 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

¹²⁴ Aristotle Kallis, “Transnational Fascism: The Fascist New Order, Violence, and Creative Destruction,” in *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, eds. Arnd Bauerkämper and Gregorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), 42.

¹²⁵ Constantin Iordachi, “5. Fascism in Southeastern Europe: A Comparison between Romania’s Legion of the Archangel Michael and Croatia’s Ustaša,” 384.

¹²⁶ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, “Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti ustaša do 1941,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 1969, 55–91; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, “Noviji prilozi proučavanju ustaškog pokreta i ‘Nezavisne Države Hrvatske’ u razdoblju 1941-1945. u našoj historiografiji,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 2, no. 1 (1970): 195–200; Fikreta Jelić-Butić,

approach, which treated the Ustašas either as mere servants of the “Nazi-Fascism,” its pale imitation, or/and a counter-revolutionary force in the service of the big capital.¹²⁷ Gradually voices within the academic community started to plead for more nuanced approaches. In 1976, Yugoslav scholar Ivan Prpić wrote that “our social and political sciences are falling behind in research on fascism in comparison to the level which was achieved in the global scholarship.” He emphasized that the younger generations in Yugoslavia, which had not personally witnessed the Second World War, show “complete ignorance about fascism, and they fail to recognize and differentiate the fascist tendencies in contemporary world.” Thus, he invited a closer scrutiny of fascism within Yugoslav historiography.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, studies of fascism in Yugoslavia remained embedded within the national context without serious attempts to integrate new methodological and theoretical models of international historiography.

According to historian Rory Yeomans, the failure to apply new interpretative frameworks from fascism studies to the case of the Ustaša movement “meant that the understanding of its worldview, appeal, and mechanics of rule have been limited.” Similarly to the situation within the Holocaust studies, scholarly approaches to the Ustaša remained firmly confined within the boundaries of national historiography. The corollary was an absence of comparative studies that situated the Croatian case within a European context.¹²⁹ It is first in the last two decades that this situation has begun to change due to a renewed interest in the history of fascist movements in the past two decades.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, in Croatia studies of the Ustaša history in Croatia remain dominated by voluminous and empirically saturated accounts, which often focus on the military and political

Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska: 1941-1945. (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1977); Mladen Colić, *Takožvana NDH* (Beograd: Delta press, 1973).

¹²⁷ Iordachi, “5. Fascism in Southeastern Europe,” 373.

¹²⁸ Ivan Prpić, ed., *Komunisti o fašizmu* (Zagreb: Narodno sveučilište, 1976), 8.

¹²⁹ Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941-1945* (Pittsburgh University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 3.

¹³⁰ Iordachi, “5. Fascism in Southeastern Europe,” 394.

history without any deeper attempts to analyze the specifically fascist characteristics of the Ustašas' ideology, movement, or regime.¹³¹ Most often, the fascist nature of the Ustaša ideology is reduced to mere imitation of similar fascist movements elsewhere. For example, Ivo Goldstein, one of the most important Croatian historians dealing with the topic, argues that the “Ustaša ideology was a specific mixture of German Nazism and Italian Fascism adapted to the specific Croatian environment.”¹³²

Alternatively, Ustaša ideology has been described as a case of “clerical fascism,” which significantly overestimates the role of Catholicism and clergy in the movement’s history.¹³³ According to Mark Biondich, the “cleric-fascist” label was so widespread in the historiography that it reached the level of a “broad consensus.” However, Biondich convincingly argued that the Ustaša movement “was a secular, nationalist movement,” which “attempted to mobilize Catholic support for its own political purposes and very survival.”¹³⁴ Stanley Payne, one of the leading scholars of fascism, concurred, noting that the Ustaša relationship to the Catholic Church was “unexceptional,” in comparison to many other fascist movements across Europe. He concluded that the Ustaša regime “failed to achieve a genuine politico-religious symbiosis.”¹³⁵

In recent years, new international studies on Croatian fascism have moved away from interpretations of Ustaša ideology as “clerical-fascism.” while also rejecting the notion that it

¹³¹ Tomislav Dulić and Goran Miljan, “The Ustašas and Fascism: ‘Abolitionism,’ Revolution, and Ideology (1929–42),” *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 6, no. 1 (2020): 278.

¹³² Ivo Goldstein, “The Independent State of Croatia in 1941: On the Road to Catastrophe,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7, no. 4 (December 2006): 417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760600963206>.

¹³³ See for example, Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, 1948); Edmond Paris, *Genocide in Satellite Croatia, 1941-1945: A Record of Racial and Religious Persecution and Massacres* (Chicago: American Institute for Balkan Affairs, 1961); Vladimir Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac - dokumenti* (Beograd: Rad, 1987); Pino Adriano, Giorgio Cingolani, and Riccardo James Vargiu, *Nationalism and Terror: Ante Pavelic and Ustashe Terrorism from Fascism to the Cold War* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2018).

¹³⁴ Mark Biondich, “Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918–1945¹,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (June 2007): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760701321346>.

¹³⁵ Stanley G. Payne, “The NDH State in Comparative Perspective,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7, no. 4 (December 2006): 412.

was a mere imitation of fascism in Italy or Nazism in Germany.¹³⁶ In the last two decades, historians such as Constantin Iordachi, Goran Miljan, Tomislav Dulić and Rory Yeomans have made innovative contributions which situate the Ustaša history firmly within the methodological and research trends of fascism studies.¹³⁷ Some historians, however, remain skeptical. For example, Alexander Korb, a historian dealing with mass violence and genocide in the NDH, questioned “whether the category of ‘fascist’” in the situation of “ethnicized civil war,” had “any analytical value whatsoever.”¹³⁸

Leading scholars of fascism studies, such as Roger Griffin, insisted that the field must continue to work on “decentering,” comparative fascism studies.¹³⁹ As a result, there is increasing interest in the history of the Ustaša movement within the field. The history of the movement is becoming increasingly visible. Scholars affirm its value for transnational and comparative history of fascism. Consequently, it was only recently recognized that next to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, Second World War Croatia had the only fully fledged fascist regime in Europe.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Iordachi, “5. Fascism in Southeastern Europe,” 389–90.

¹³⁷ Rory Yeomans, “Militant Women, Warrior Men and Revolutionary Personae: The New Ustasha Man and Woman in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 4 (2005): 685–732; Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*; Iordachi, “5. Fascism in Southeastern Europe”; Goran Miljan, “From Obscure Beginnings to State ‘Resurrection’: Ideas and Practices of the Ustaša Organization,” *Fascism* 5, no. 1 (May 26, 2016): 3–25, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00501002>; Goran Miljan, *Croatia and the Rise of Fascism: The Youth Movement and the Ustasha during WWII* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Dulić and Miljan, “The Ustašas and Fascism: ‘Abolitionism,’ Revolution, and Ideology (1929–42)”; Constantin Iordachi and Goran Miljan, “‘Why We Have Become Revolutionaries and Murderers’: Radicalization, Terrorism, and Fascism in the Ustaša–Croatian Revolutionary Organization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, June 7, 2022, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2077730>.

¹³⁸ Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*, (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013), 63.

¹³⁹ Griffin, “Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies.”

¹⁴⁰ Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 19, Apple Books.

Studies of Antisemitism and the Ustaša Movement

In 1994 historian Doris Bergen wrote that despite popular conceptions, scholars dealing with Nazism and the Holocaust have “paid surprisingly little attention to antisemitism.”¹⁴¹ While the field saw advancements in this regard in the last three decades, Jonathan Judaken recently warned that the field of studies of antisemitism remains “under-theorized.”¹⁴² According to Judaken the field of antisemitism suffers from conceptual conundrum in which the term is being used to cover “everything from personal prejudices to genocide.”¹⁴³

While the interwar studies of antisemitism initially focused on a variety of topics and regions, the rise of Nazism and the beginning of the Second World War marked a major shift. Ever since the Second World War, the field of antisemitism studies has remained largely in the shadow of the study of the Holocaust, which led to a preoccupation with the Nazi and the creation of what historian Kalman Weiser coins the “Germano-centric.”¹⁴⁴ The somewhat blinkered focus on German antisemitism gave birth to the Sonderweg thesis, an interpretation which asserted that the Holocaust was initiated by Germany because of its special history and a separate path to modernity in which antisemitism, among other things, played a crucial role.¹⁴⁵ For example, Franz Neumann the author of one of the pioneering studies of the Third Reich, wrote in 1942 that “the whole history of German intellectual life is shot through with Jew-baiting.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (October 1994): 197, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949402900402>.

¹⁴² Jonathan Judaken, “Introduction,” *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (October 1, 2018): 1122, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhy024>.

¹⁴³ Judaken, 1127.

¹⁴⁴ Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, and Kalman Weiser, eds., *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51658-1>.

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Judaken, “Anti-Semitism (Historiography),” in *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, ed. Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, and Kalman Weiser (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51658-1_3.

¹⁴⁶ Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 109.

The “Germano-centric” search for the causes of the Holocaust put modernity at the center of analysis and focused on the “special” historical developments in Germany during the 19th century. This modernist account was rivaled by an interpretation predicated on a distinctly *longue durée* approach which looked for the cause in the deeper history of interaction between Jews and gentiles – a thesis which came to be known as eternalism.¹⁴⁷ The debate revolving around continuity and discontinuity, as well as the conceptual definition of antisemitism which stems from it, became one of defining characteristics of the studies of antisemitism and persists to this day.

The proponents of eternalist interpretation argue that the anti-Jewish attitudes across long periods of human history are essentially variations of the same phenomenon that do not need further conceptual differentiation. This position is best summarized by an Israeli historian Jacob Katz:

In a broader sense, modern anti-Semitism turned out to be a continuation of the premodern rejection of Judaism by Christianity, even when it renounced any claim to be legitimized by it or even professed to be antagonistic to Christianity. The wish to base anti-Semitism on grounds beyond the Jewish-Christian division remained in fact a mere declaration of intent.¹⁴⁸

According to the proponents of eternalist thesis, the canonization of anti-Jewish attitudes by Christian theologians made an imprint on the Western civilization and all other shapes and forms of anti-Jewish attitudes are rooted in this same source.¹⁴⁹ For example, historian Hyam Maccoby argued that

Hatred of the Jews, deeply embedded in the Western mind, was the key. The chief historical factor that made the Holocaust possible was the centuries-long preparation of the Jews for the role of victim by Christian diabolization. The Nazi

¹⁴⁷ Judaken, “Anti-Semitism (Historiography),” 31.

¹⁴⁸ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700 - 1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 319.

¹⁴⁹ For examples of studies which focus on the continuity thesis (eternalism) see: Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994); Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*; Hyam Maccoby, *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity* (London: Routledge, 2009); Robert A. Michael, *A History of Catholic Antisemitism: The Dark Side of the Church* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Victor Karady, “Political Antisemitism and Its Christian Antecedent. Trying to Make Sense of Nonsense,” *Quest Journal*, no. 03 (July 1, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/775>.

movement was not Christian but pagan. But its paganism was post-Christian, not pre-Christian.¹⁵⁰

Hannah Arendt explicitly rejected eternalist approaches to antisemitism, convincingly underlining that the proponents of the continuity thesis are arguing for a

doctrine of an “eternal antisemitism” in which Jew-hatred is a normal and natural reaction to which history gives only more or less opportunity. Outbursts need no special explanation because they are natural consequence of an eternal problem. That this doctrine was adopted by professional antisemites in a matter of course; it gives best possible alibi for all horrors. If this is true that mankind had insisted on murdering Jews for more than two thousand years, then Jew-killing is a normal, and even human, occupation and Jew-hatred is justified beyond the need of argument.¹⁵¹

Arendt, like many other opponents of eternalism, believed that antisemitism only can exist in a modern (post-enlightenment and post-emancipation) society.¹⁵² The new complex realities of the post-enlightenment era, such as the rise of ideologies, the emergence of mass politics and most importantly Jewish emancipation, gave rise to fundamentally new and more complex forms of anti-Jewish attitudes that were essentially different than anything seen before. While adherents of the continuity thesis are more concerned with theology, the history of religion, and the history of ideas, modernists put more emphasis on structural factors such as changes in the political context. Especially the emergence of nationalism, secularism, and the mass politics and media tend to occupy an important place in their work. For this reason, scholars adhering to this interpretation are sometimes referred to as contextualists or functionalists.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Maccoby, *Antisemitism and Modernity*, 29.

¹⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), 7.

¹⁵² For critiques of eternalism see Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; Shulamit Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1978): 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.1093/leobaeck/23.1.25>; Nicholas de Lange, “The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations,” in *Anti-Semitism in Times and Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 21–37; Reinhard Rurup, “Anti-Jewish Prejudices, Antisemitic Ideologies, Open Violence: Antisemitism in European Comparison from the 1870s to the First World War. A Commentary,” *Quest Journal*, no. 03 (July 1, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/787>.

¹⁵³ Manuela Consonni, “‘Upping the Antis’: Addressing the Conceptual Ambiguities Surrounding ‘Antisemitism,’” *Society* 59, no. 1 (February 2022): 25–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-022-00665-4>.

The history of Ustaša movement was unfortunately left out of these debates within the field of modern antisemitism studies. This is despite that it presents an intriguing case of a political organization in which antisemitism played no major role in its early history to the one which came to the forefront in the persecution of Jews just a few years later. The question of whether this was the result of the long-standing Christian legacy, ideological transfers during the modern period and/or a product of the specific context of the 1930s and 1940s remains understudied in existing historiography.

The Ustašas' antisemitism continues to perplex historians dealing with the Holocaust, who often run into contradictory explanations in their interpretations of whether the movement's involvement in mass murder of Jews was primarily a product of local or exogenous motivations (e.g. Nazi Germany). Marie-Janine Calic has recently argued that in Croatia the persecution of Jews was caused by the Ustaša's "own ideological initiative. Even here, however, the Holocaust was primarily planned, directed and systematically implemented by German authorities."¹⁵⁴ Another author similarly argued that antisemitism in the Ustaša movement was the product of Pavelić's ideology, which drew inspiration "from Europe's long intellectual history of antisemitism," but at the same time the antisemitic legislation of the NDH is explained as the Ustaša's attempt to "mimic their masters," with reference to Nazi Germany.¹⁵⁵

Historian Alexander Korb argued that there isn't sufficient evidence to suggest that "the Germans orchestrated the individual steps of the persecution of the Croatian Jews *en détail*, or even imposed this upon the Ustaša." He ascribed causality behind the Holocaust the deteriorating security situation and that the "escalation of anti-Serbian violence radicalized the

¹⁵⁴ Marie-Janine Calic, *The Great Cauldron: A History of Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 457.

¹⁵⁵ Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 384–85.

policies against Jews and Roma.”¹⁵⁶ A similar interpretation was provided by Carl Bethke who argued that “the persecution of Serbs and the ethnic civil war created an atmosphere of terror that favored the unleashing of new waves of anti-Semitic violence.”¹⁵⁷

One of the foremost experts on the topic antisemitism and the Holocaust, Ivo Goldstein, argued that “antisemitism was one of the most important ingredients of the ideology of the Ustaša movement.” Yet in the same breath, he argued that the elevation of Jews to the level of the main enemy in the Ustaša press during the first months of the NDH was “probably the result of the desire to act in accordance with the Nazis.”¹⁵⁸ In another article Goldstein attributed the key causal role for the Holocaust in Croatia to Nazi Germany, arguing that “the Third Reich set an example and served as an incentive for the persecution and killing of Jews, and it was this policy which generally played a decisive role in the NDH.”¹⁵⁹ Historian Alexander Korb carefully concluded that “it is debatable whether the racism and anti-Semitism of the Ustašas were more influenced by traditional stereotypes or by racial-biological paradigms, and to what extent German influence had an impact.” Nevertheless, Korb points out that “although the Ustaša was the party with the most exploit anti-Jewish platform in Croatia, it nevertheless lacked a comprehensive anti-Semitic ideology.”¹⁶⁰ The above-mentioned cases illustrate the interpretative confusion in the existing historiography regarding key motives, agents, and decision-making behind the Holocaust in the NDH. These difficulties stem from the lack of systematic studies of antisemitism in the Ustaša movement and the inadequacy of a clear cut theoretical and conceptual framework.

¹⁵⁶ Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*, 196.

¹⁵⁷ Bethke, *(K)Eine Gemeinsame Sprache?*, 247.

¹⁵⁸ Ivo Goldstein, *Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj od srednjeg vijeka do danas* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2022), 391.

¹⁵⁹ Goldstein, “The Independent State of Croatia in 1941,” 417.

¹⁶⁰ Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*, 136.

1. The Evolution of Ustaša Antisemitism

Introduction

The history of antisemitism and its position within the Ustaša ideology remains one of the most perplexing and understudied topics in the movement's history. Many scholars emphasized that interwar Yugoslav society was one of the least antisemitic in all of Europe.¹⁶¹ Yet, the question of how such a social environment gave rise to a movement that eventually initiated one of the most antisemitic policies in Europe remains unanswered.

The lack of clarity regarding the status of antisemitism in the Ustaša ideology stems from the fact that the sources about the movement's history during the interwar period are scarce due to its relatively minor size and its conspiratorial nature. The absence of outspoken antisemitism immediately after the movement's foundation led scholars to conclude that it adopted antisemitism merely in order to curry favor with Nazi Germany. Thus, it was both implied that the Ustašas were participating in the Holocaust for exterior motives and that their antisemitism was disingenuous. This chapter examines the question whether the Ustaša antisemitism was merely an imitation of Nazism, and thereby a result of a one-way transfer of ideology, or if it was an autochthonous ideological product?

An essential question is where the Ustaša case fits in terms of continuity and discontinuity and in the debates between eternalism and contextualism within the field of antisemitism studies. Was their antisemitism a product of a Christian legacy, a traditional anti-Judaism, which was reinterpreted for modern purposes? A principal aim of this chapter is to

¹⁶¹ Ivo Goldstein writes that "Yugoslav antisemitism was of lesser intensity and not as widespread even in comparison with Soviet Union, or many other democratic countries such as Czechoslovakia, France and Belgium." Goldstein, *Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj od srednjeg vijeka do danas*, 215. Jozo Tomasevich noted that "until the spread of Nazi influence in the late 1930's, there was very little anti-Semitism in Croatia." Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 370. Francine Friedman similarly wrote that "Most Yugoslavs were not antisemitic, yet, during World War II, fear isolated the Jewish communities from society." Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 549.

examine the influence of the Catholic intellectuals and organizations, and how they influenced Ustaša antisemitism.

Another issue which still pervades the historiography is the nature and extent of hatred towards Jews in comparison to other persecuted groups in the NDH, namely Serbs and Roma. Historian Bela Vago writes that the “anti-Jewish zeal of the Ustasha regime was in contradiction to the secondary place allotted by Ustasha to the Jewish problem.”¹⁶² Most historians dealing with the Ustašas would agree that Serbs occupied the position of the “primary” or “foremost” enemy of the movement. This chapter explores the questions of how antisemitism fit into the Ustaša ideology, how it related to other political concepts, and how it was positioned within the larger ideological structure?

The question of how to classify the Ustaša movement remains salient to this day. Historians disagreed whether it should be categorized as a radical, terrorist, and separatist nationalist movement or a fascist one.¹⁶³ While the radical right and fascism can share many common ideological traits such as xenophobia, chauvinism, nationalism, populism, glorification of violence and territorial expansion, what sets them apart is their (anti-)systemic and (r)evolutionary agenda. Fascism aims to transform all aspects of moral life through national rebirth which aims to create a profoundly “New Man.” The radical right can try to establish illiberal and ethnocratic democracies, but they lack the revolutionary zeal and outright totalitarian aspects which are essential for defining fascism according to some authors.¹⁶⁴

The concept of fascistization,¹⁶⁵ referring to a process of becoming fascist through the adoption of fascist ideological concepts, could potentially explain the evolution of the

¹⁶² Bela Vago, “The Reaction to the Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy in East-Central Europe and in the Balkans,” in *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, ed. Francois Furet (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 217.

¹⁶³ Iordachi and Miljan, “Why We Have Become Revolutionaries and Murderers,” 3.

¹⁶⁴ On further distinction between the radical and the extreme right see Griffin, “Ghostbusting Fascism?,” 77. Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 12–13.

¹⁶⁵ In this dissertation I use my own working definition of fascistization which is understood as a process of adoption of fascist ideas, practices, style, or symbolic, organizational and governing characteristics. On the one hand, this process can be partial, where a non-fascist ideology, movement or a regime borrows or imitates fascist

movement from a radical to an extreme one. It is therefore germane to probe what role antisemitism had in the process of fascistization, if any. What was the role of political leaders, elites, members and sympathizers in adoption and dissemination of antisemitism, and how was it adapted or coupled with other political concepts within the Ustaša ideology? Was antisemitism adopted top-down, bottom-up, or simultaneously? This chapter tackles these research questions to arrive at a clearer understanding of the causes leading to the Holocaust in the NDH.

1.1. The Birth of the Ustaša Movement and its Early Ideology (1929-1934)

At the turn of the century, the territory of modern Croatia was an imperial borderland in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was a meeting point of various communities, which were most often identified based on their diverse languages, religions, or ethnicities. The empire's dissolution as the result of the First World War led to a major geopolitical restructuring in Central and Southeastern Europe. The territory of contemporary Croatia was incorporated into the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929). The new state created under the aegis of the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty was conceived as a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. Yet, the parliamentary system introduced with the Constitution of 1921 was not the result of a consensus between the

characteristics without becoming fascist itself; on the other hand, fascistization can also be completed when an ideology, movement or a regime embraces key fascist tenants and transforms itself into a fully-fledged fascist ideology, movement or a regime. In this sense my working definition differs from the existing approaches, outlined for example by Aristotle Kallis who ties the process of fascistization to strategic and calculated move by authoritarian, traditional or conservative elites to imitate parts of fascist ideas or practices in order to undermine its popularity and thus strengthen their own position within the political system. For a detailed elaboration of Kallis's understanding of fascistization see: Aristotle Kallis, "'Fascism', 'Para-fascism' and 'Fascistization': On the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories" *European History Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2003): 219-249.

state's different communities. Thus, the state's legitimacy was questioned by various political actors, among them Croatian politicians, from its very inception.¹⁶⁶

One of the politicians critical of the new system was the Croatian nationalist lawyer Ante Pavelić, who was a rising star within the Croatian Party of Rights. This party argued for the secession of "Croatian lands," from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, basing its ideology on Croatian nationalism, republicanism and Greater Croatia. Pavelić participated in the work of parliament during the 1920s and initially sought to achieve political aims through legalistic means.¹⁶⁷ This changed drastically when the Serbian radical nationalist MP Puniša Račić shot several leaders of the Croatian Peasant Party inside the parliament building in Belgrade. After the primarily Serbian party the Radicals, the Croatian Peasant Party was the second largest political force in the kingdom. Its ideology was predicated on agrarianism, republicanism, federalism, and moderate Croatian nationalism. The leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić, as well as two other members of the Party, died from the consequences of the assassination, sending shockwaves throughout the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

Pavelić witnessed the assassination inside the parliament. Immediately afterwards, he told reporters that "[t]his crime, committed towards the Croatian representatives, is meaningful and well prepared" and that "[t]here shall be a tremendous shift in the political situation."¹⁶⁸ Due to death of Radić and the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship, Pavelić determined that any conventional and parliamentary actions against the state were fruitless. He considered the assassination as a proclamation of war, which made it legitimate to fight the

¹⁶⁶ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), 1.

¹⁶⁷ Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 18; Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret: od nastanka do travnja 1941. godine* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), 165.

¹⁶⁸ Miljan, "From Obscure Beginnings to State 'Resurrection,'" 6.

state with arms.¹⁶⁹ Fearing that he himself could become the victim of political violence, Pavelić emigrated in 1929 and started to form a group of like-minded nationalists who were ready to fight for the secession of Croatia from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes with all available means. Initially Pavelić's group was organized as the paramilitary wing of the Croatian far right.¹⁷⁰

As an organization separate from the Croatian Party of Rights, the Ustaša movement first came into existence sometime between 1930 and 1932. The exact year of the movement's foundation is a subject of dispute in historiography. The Ustašas claimed that it was formed on the 7th of January 1929, a day after the proclamation of King Alexander's dictatorship. However, even some Ustaša members, such as Eugen Dido Kvaternik,¹⁷¹ argued that this temporal placement was a product of manipulation by one of the Ustaša court historians, Mijo Bzik.¹⁷²

Initially the Ustaša movement consisted of small isolated and conspiratorial groups of Croatian emigres, and it did not constitute a well-organized movement. A higher degree of efficiency was reached with the establishment of the Ustaša training camps in Hungary and

¹⁶⁹ Ante Pavelić, "Uzpoztava hrvatske države, trajni mir na Balkanu." Published in *Hrvatski list i Danica Hrvatska*. (New York: Izdanje i Naklada Hrvatski publishing Co., Inc., 1929). Document can be found in Petar Požar, ed., *Ustaša: dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu* (Zagreb: Zagrebačka stvarnost, 1995), 38.

¹⁷⁰ James J Sadkovich, *Italija i ustaše: 1927.-1937.* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing - Tehnička knjiga, 2010), 148.

¹⁷¹ Eugen Dido Kvaternik (1910-1962) was the son of the Austro-Hungarian officer Slavko Kvaternik and Olga Kvaternik, the daughter of Josip Frank – one of the main leaders of the far-right movement in Croatia at the turn of the century. As a young Croatian nationalist activist, Eugen Dido Kvaternik joined the Ustašas in the emigration in 1933 where he stayed until 1941. After the Ustašas took power in the NDH, Eugen Dido Kvaternik became one of the key leaders in the security apparatus. He headed the RAVSIGUR (Ravnateljstvo za javni red i sigurnost [The Main Security Office]) and held the position of the State Secretary in the Ministry of Interior. In this role he was one of the main organizers of the persecution of Serbs, Jews, Roma, antifascists, and other enemies of the Ustaša regime. In 1943 he left the NDH and moved to Slovakia after entering a conflict with Ante Pavelić – the leader of the Ustaša movement. He died in a car accident in Argentina, never facing trial for his role in the implementation of genocidal policies in the NDH.

¹⁷² Mijo Bzik (1907-1945) joined the Ustaša movement in 1933 and soon became one of the main propagandists of the movement. After the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia he became a special commissioner for newspapers and propaganda in the Ustaša government and headed the publishing activities around the *Ustaša* newspapers. He was the main 'court historian' of the Ustaša movement and published a propagandistic synthesis of the complete Ustaša history in three volumes. Mijo Bzik, *Ustaška borba: od prvih dana ustaškog rada do poglavitnikova odlaska u emigraciju* (Zagreb: Državni izvještajni i promičbeni ured, 1942); Mijo Bzik, *Ustaška pobjeda: u danima osnutka i oslobođenja* (Zagreb: Naklada Glavnog Ustaškog Stana, 1942); Mijo Bzik, *Ustaški pogledi* (Zagreb: Glavno ravnateljstvo za promičbu, 1944).

Italy. These countries sponsored the Ustaša activities with the purpose of destabilizing the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which would enable them to push their own revisionist territorial interests. Historian Bogdan Krizman noted that the first of these camps was formed in Bevegno in Italy during the second half of 1931. Initially, the camp consisted of only ten or fifteen Ustaša members.¹⁷³

To attract more members and distinguish itself from other right-wing organizations, the Ustašas started to publish the newspapers *Ustaša: Vijesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca* [The Ustaša: Newspapers of the Croatian Revolutionaries] (1930-1934). A major step in the formation of a more coherent organization was the formulation of the *Ustav Ustaše, hrvatske revolucionarne organizacije* [Constitution of the Ustaša, Croatian Revolutionary Organization] in 1932. Finally on the 1st of June 1933, the movement codified its initial ideological foundations in a document titled *Načela Ustaškog Pokreta* [The Principles of the Ustaša Movement].

1.1.1. The Core of the Ustaša Ideology

Almost a century after the foundation of the Ustaša movement, scholars are still debating the nature of its ideology and how to classify it.¹⁷⁴ The Socialist Yugoslav secret service grappled with this question as well. As one of their reports compiled after the war stated:

it would be wrong to treat Pavelić as a convinced fascist or national-socialist. It would also be wrong to consider him a catholic-socialist..., and an even greater mistake would be to think of him as a democrat of the western type. According to his conviction, Pavelić is none of that. He does not have any structured political program in terms of social or political vision of the state. His only ambition is the desire for power, unlimited power, which would not be controlled by anyone, and it would be total.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše*, 83–84.

¹⁷⁴ Iordachi and Miljan, ““Why We Have Become Revolutionaries and Murderers,”” 3.

¹⁷⁵ HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.1, “Ideološka i vanjsko-politička orijentacija Pavelića i ustaškog pokreta,” [The Ideological and Foreign-Political Orientation of Pavelić and the Ustaša Movement], 30-31.

After the war, many Ustaša members in Yugoslav captivity readily agreed with this assertion. Vladimir Košak, Minister of State Treasury in the NDH and later an ambassador to the Third Reich, concluded that the “Ustaša movement did not have its own original ideology, not even after 1941. Unless we take the desire for the creation of the independent Croatian state into account, the Ustaša movement did not have its authentic content.”¹⁷⁶ Vladimir Židovec, an early member of the Ustaša movement and the NDH ambassador to Bulgaria, similarly doubted that Pavelić had a well-developed ideology besides the insistence on the creation of the NDH and his personal growth of power.¹⁷⁷ Since they were given in captivity and it was in the self-interest of the captured members of the movement to depict themselves as hostages of Pavelić’s will, these statements should be carefully contextualized. The captives often implied that they did not have any insight into the true nature or the aims of the Ustaša regime or denied all together that the movement had any ideology. By denying the existence of an ideological foundation, they hoped that they would not be seen as fascists themselves, and thereby increase their chances of survival in captivity.¹⁷⁸

Besides the dearth of objective contemporary sources, the issues with clarifying the nature of Ustaša ideology is compounded by the absence of studies from the perspective of political sciences. Because of this lacuna, the methodology employed for the analysis of ideology is missing in this case study. According to political scientist Michael Freeden, ideologies are “combinations of political concepts organized in a particular way.”¹⁷⁹ Therefore, in order to understand an ideology, we must begin with identifying, describing, and analyzing

¹⁷⁶ Testimony of Vladimir Košak who performed the role of the Minister of State Treasury of the NDH from 1941-1943. He later became the ambassador of the NDH in the Kingdom of Hungary from 1943-1944, and the NDH ambassador to the Third Reich in 1944-1945. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.49., 32.

¹⁷⁷ Testimony of Vladimir Židovec. He was an interwar Ustaša member in Karlovac, and during the NDH he worked as a diplomat in Bulgaria from 1941-1943, and later as the official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1944-1945. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.56., 138.

¹⁷⁸ Lovro Kralj, “The Rise and Fall of the Independent State of Croatia in the Memoirs and Testimonies of the Ustasha Members,” *History in Flux* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 167–84, <https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2019.1.9>.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 75.

the political concepts that constitute it and determine the relationship among them.¹⁸⁰ Identifying the particular location of the concept in the ideological structure is of great importance because political concepts are mutually defining.¹⁸¹ For example, both liberalism and fascism use the concept of freedom in their ideological structures. However, in liberalism the concept of freedom leans on the concept of individualism, thus imbuing it with meaning from the mutual influence these two concepts have on each other. In fascism, the concept of freedom leans on collectivism and nationalism, thereby defining it in a profoundly different way than liberalism does.

The structure of an ideology is further defined by two clusters of concepts conceived as the core and the periphery. The core of an ideology is “structurally fixed and substantive permanent set of concepts.” The core concepts are usually abstractions, which enable the ideology to function in the long run because they are not bound to a specific historical context.¹⁸² In contrast, peripheral concepts “are located in historical, geographical contexts.” While the core concepts cannot be altered easily because this would lead to the collapse of the entire ideology, peripheral concepts are more malleable and liable to morph under the impact of historical and context-bound changes.¹⁸³ The peripheral concepts should not be mistaken as having less relevance. However, their definition reflects that they are more concrete projections of the abstract core concepts.

In order to identify the core concepts of the Ustaša ideology, we need to abide by the principle of recurrence and durability. Which ideas did the actors themselves give most prominence to and how often did they refer to them in their speeches, writings, and actions? In the case of the early Ustaša ideology – a stage in the development of the movement which is defined as lasting from 1929-1934 – we can identify xenophobia and chauvinism as some of

¹⁸⁰ Freeden, 48.

¹⁸¹ Freeden, 54.

¹⁸² Freeden, 84–85.

¹⁸³ Freeden, 79–80.

the earliest, most important, and reoccurring concepts, besides Croatian nationalism. For example, the earliest known issue of the Ustaša newspapers, which came out in 1930, argued that the

whole Croatian people must become a single Ustaša camp. We should keep in mind that there is no peace with the Serbian tyrants, we should undertake a rebellion so that we can chase the foreigner[s] out of Croatia.¹⁸⁴

In their earliest publications, the Ustašas dehumanized “foreigners” as “parasites, usurpers and oppressors,” who should be “forcefully thrown off our holy land.”¹⁸⁵ These ideas were used repeatedly throughout the movement’s existence and were prominent in virtually all of the early Ustaša publications. Xenophobia and chauvinism are also evident in the constitution of the Ustaša movement, which was published in 1932. The first point of the constitution clearly stated that the “Ustaša, Croatian revolutionary organization, has the aim of liberating Croatia from the claws of foreigners with an armed uprising, so that Croatia could become sovereign and independent country on its complete historical area.”¹⁸⁶

Similar yet more radical ideas were voiced in the Principles of the Ustaša movement published in 1933. The Principles is a foundational ideological document which the Ustaša ideologues would keep returning to throughout the history of the movement. The eleventh point of the Principles stated that

no one except the Croats by blood and heredity can govern the spheres of Croatian public or state life, and, in the same manner, no foreign nation or state should decide about the future of the Croatian people and the Croatian state.¹⁸⁷

This point would prove to be of critical importance for the future development of the Ustaša ideology since it made the movement especially prone to adaptation and development of a fully-fledged racist framework. The Ustašas also emphasized violence as not only

¹⁸⁴ Reprint of the front page of the issue can be found in Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 114.

¹⁸⁵ *Ustaša: Vijesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca*: “Beograd trubi na uzmak!”, April 1932, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Ustav Ustaše, Hrvatske revolucionarne organizacije. A reprint can be found in Požar, *Ustaša: dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu*, 45.

¹⁸⁷ Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše*, 117–18.

legitimate but also welcomed means to accomplish their goals. For example, the newspaper Ustaša claimed in October 1932 that “the age of written and verbal struggle is gone. It was useless. From now on the main means are going to be sacrifice, revolvers, bombs and sharp daggers of the Croatia Ustašas, which will cleanse and cut everything rotten from the body of the Croatian nation.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, glorification of violence was the final ingredient of the early Ustaša ideological core.

The core principles of xenophobia, chauvinism, nationalism can be summarized under the term organic nationalism. Sociologist Michael Mann defined organic nationalists as those who believe (1) in an enduring national character, spirit or soul which can be distinguished from other nations; (2) their right to a state that ultimately expresses these attributes; and most importantly (3) their right to exclude out-groups with different characters who they see as weakening the state.¹⁸⁹ By adopting an organic view of the nation, the Ustašas tended to blame all the economic, social, political and moral issues on other ethnic or religious groups within Croatia. The logic was that by removing the “foreign elements,” all societal problems would disappear. This meant that ethnic cleansing became legitimate means to secure a better future of the whole nation. In October 1932 Ustašas wrote that the movement is

fighting so that future generations would have secured bread and peaceful life, and [in order to do so we need] to exterminate all parasites who had delightfully, without sweat or effort, lived off Croatian resources, and fed themselves off of the misery of the Croatian people.¹⁹⁰

The Ustašas were clear about which methods they were ready to use to fulfill these goals. They claimed that they would not “give up any means, even the most horrible and terrifying, because the great and holy aim blesses any, even the most terrible, of means.”¹⁹¹ By profiling the ideology as organic nationalism, the Ustašas created the preconditions for the

¹⁸⁸ *Ustaša: Vijesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca*, “Neka znadu oni, kojih se tiče!”, 6 October 1932, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Mann. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64.

¹⁹⁰ *Ustaša: Vijesnik hrvatskog revolucionaraca*: “Ustaše! Nama je sudba dosudila!”, 6 October 1932., 1.

¹⁹¹ *Ustaša: Vijesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca*, “I mi konja za trku imamo!”, January 1934, 1.

persecution of all foreigners. However, the exact groups which would be targeted depended on other factors such as historical context, contemporary interests of the Ustašas and international circumstances.

While the core principles of the Ustaša movement, identified here as xenophobia and chauvinism, organic Croatian nationalism, the glorification of violence, and charismatic leadership would fulfil some existing definitions of fascism, there are important ingredients which are missing. The concept of the “New Man” is one of the central tenants of fascist ideology, since it demonstrates the conceptualization of a utopian vision of a society and demands a radical rupture with the previous moral order and calls for the urgent anthropological revolution. The idea of the “New Man” is largely absent from the early Ustaša publications. Instead, the Ustašas focused on the desideratum of secession from Belgrade and the elimination of foreigners, which would supposedly resolve all the moral issues in the country.

The early Ustaša ideology also lacked a concrete vision of how the future state was supposed to be organized. While the movement itself was organized around the principle of charismatic leadership occupied by the Poglavnik Ante Pavelić, it did not display an explicit abandonment of democracy as a system. According to Ivan Perčević, a high-ranking member of the Ustaša movement during the interwar period, Ante Pavelić told him in 1931 that he believed “in the principles of democracy” but insisted that the Ustašas needed help from Italy. Accordingly, he considered necessary to adopt the Italian model to Croatia in the future.¹⁹² However, the Ustaša continued to cooperate with the democratic parties such as the Croatian Peasant Party and restrained from criticizing them until the second half of the 1930s. This degree of tolerance of other political figures and parties inside Croatia in the early Ustaša

¹⁹² Testimony of Ivan Perčević, a prominent interwar Ustaša member and advisor to Ante Pavelić in the NDH period. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.53., 37.

history, creates difficulties in classifying the movement's early ideology as having a clear-cut totalitarian vision. In addition, the early Ustaša program lacked many negative pole values or “-anti” ideas of a typical fascist movement at the time. The Ustašas did not show a clearly anti-capitalist program. Pavelić wrote in 1929 that he hoped that “the international financial circles will have a right insight into the facts,” about how Croatia is economically exploited by Belgrade.¹⁹³ Therefore, the Ustašas hoped to receive international political, as well as financial support for their struggle for Croatian secession from Yugoslavia.

The question of when and how the Ustaša movement adopted racism and antisemitism is also unclear from the current scholarship. For example, historian James Sadkovich argues that the Ustašas openly cooperated with Jews and capitalists from the foundation of the movement. Anti-capitalism and racism first became an integral part of their ideology in the later stages of the movement's evolution. Sadkovich estimates that racism and antisemitism were adopted by the Ustašas sometime after 1936 but notes that further research is necessary to reach a fuller understanding of the ideology and practices of the Ustaša movement.¹⁹⁴

1.1.2. Xenophobia and Minorities in the Early Ustaša Propaganda

In order to further analyze the Ustaša core principles of xenophobia and chauvinism and their connection to antisemitism, we turn to a quantitative analysis of the movement's main newspapers, which were issued on a monthly basis from 1930-1934. Our analysis is based on nine preserved copies of the newspapers, which are held in the Croatian State Archives. Using a sample of 42 articles, we identify xenophobia in the articles by locating negative depictions of foreigners as a generic universal category without any indications of ethnic identity. Thus, we focus on the articles in which the Croatian words for foreigner “stranac” or “tudjinac”

¹⁹³ Ante Pavelić, “Uzpoztava hrvatske države, trajni mir na Balkanu.” Published in *Hrvatski list i Danica Hrvatska. Kolendar za prostu godinu 1930. (Sedmo godišće)*. New York: Izdanje i Naklada Hrvatski publishing Co., Inc. (1929). Document can be found in Petar Požar, *Ustaša*, 37.

¹⁹⁴ Sadkovich, *Italija i ustaše*, 185, 345.

appear. In the case of anti-Roma, anti-Serb and antisemitic articles, only those articles in which these minorities are implicitly or explicitly mentioned and depicted in a negative way are included in the analysis.

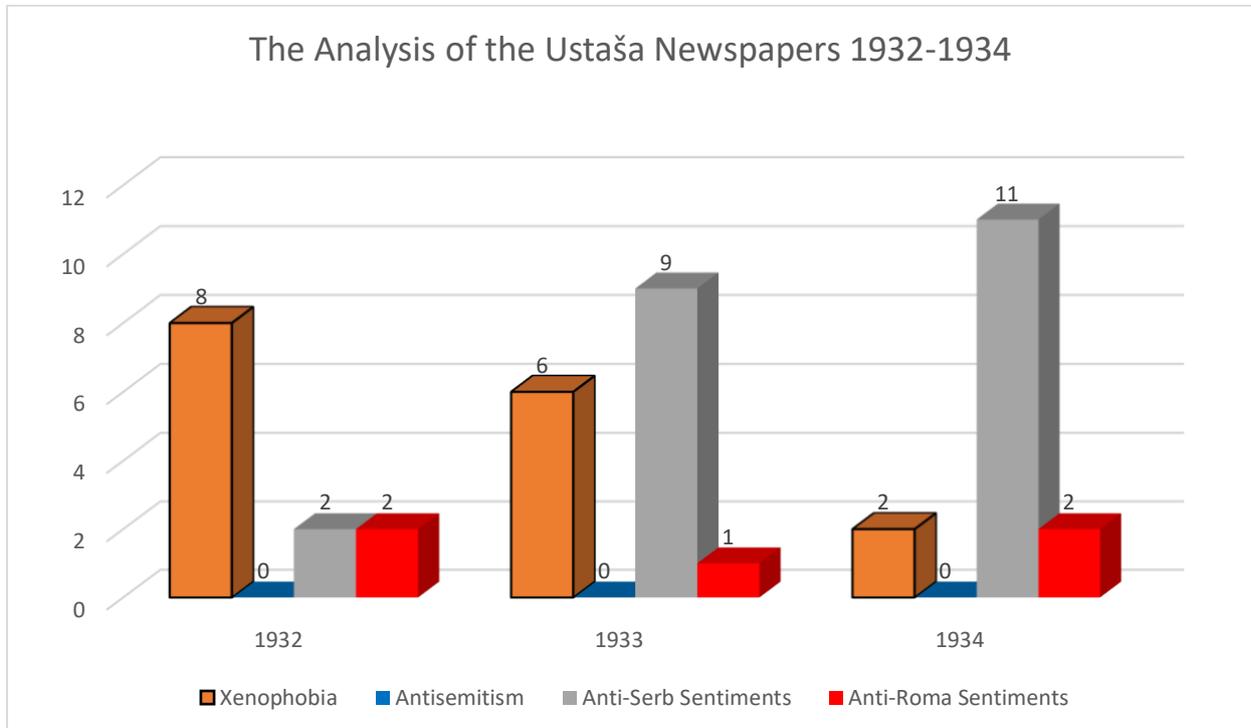


Table 1 – The Analysis of the Early Ustaša Newspapers 1932-1934.¹⁹⁵

The analysis of the early Ustaša newspapers (1930–1934) demonstrates that in 1932 the movement was overwhelmingly targeting all foreigners, an abstract and universalized category of the Other. Negative depictions of Roma and Serbs appeared only in two articles while Jews were not mentioned at all in the newspapers included in the analysis. A year later, in 1933, we see a small decline in the negative attitudes towards all foreigners and a rapid growth of anti-Serb attitudes while the anti-Roma sentiment remained consistent. Jews were still not mentioned in the available newspapers in 1933, and thus antisemitism is given the value of zero. Finally, in 1934, we see a major drop in the articles which target all foreigners and a

¹⁹⁵ The issues of the Ustaša – The Gazette of the Croatian Revolutionaries [Ustaša – Vjesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca] included in this analysis are the ones which came out in: February 1932, September 1932, October 1932, November 1932, May 1933, October 1933, January 1934, March 1934, and April 1934.

major increase in anti-Serb attitudes. In the same year, anti-Roma attitudes remained consistent with the previous years. The same was the case with antisemitism since Jews were not mentioned in available issues of the newspapers.

The analysis demonstrates that the analyzed newspapers do not espouse any significant levels of antisemitism since the words “Jewish,” “Jewry,” or “Judaism,” do not appear in the available articles. In contrast, anti-Roma attitudes were consistently present in the early Ustaša papers. This group mostly appears in the articles with reference to King Alexander or the Karađorđević dynasty, which is depicted as “Gypsy.” Finally, while the early Ustaša newspapers initially focused on the critique of the “Belgrade regime” instead of the Serbs as an entire ethnic group, the highest level of negative attitudes is displayed towards foreigners as an abstract category.

The highest fluctuation is visible when we compare xenophobia with anti-Serb attitudes since we can observe a chronological inversion between the two categories. While xenophobia dominated in 1932, anti-Serb attitudes were rather low in comparison. In 1934, the reverse is true since anti-Serb attitudes dominate while there was a sudden drop in abstract xenophobia. This in fact confirms the interaction between the core concept of xenophobia in the Ustaša ideology and its relation to the peripheral concept of anti-Serbdom. From 1932 to 1934, the Ustašas’ abstract notion of enmity towards all foreigners was gradually transformed into a more precise and historically relevant context of enmity towards a single minority considered a greater threat than the rest.

The absence of antisemitism and the predominance of anti-Serbdom in the early Ustaša ideology is also confirmed by Ustaša members. For example, Vladimir Židovec, an early member of the Ustaša movement and the NDH ambassador to Bulgaria, addressed the issue after the war by claiming that the initial enmity of the Ustaša movement was “mainly directed

against the Serbs living in Croatia. Jews were more likely added later when Hitler's anti-Jewish persecution became more intense."¹⁹⁶

The absence of antisemitism in the early Ustaša press was accompanied by a conspicuous acceptance of members who would later be classified as Jews according to the NDH race laws.¹⁹⁷ For example, Vlado Singer, who became one of the most prominent members of the interwar Ustaša movement after joining it in 1933, came from a Jewish family. He converted to Catholicism in his youth.¹⁹⁸ Ustaša member Ivo Rojnica mentioned in his memories that it was no secret that many high ranking Ustašas had wives who could be classified as Jewish according to the race laws which were introduced after the Ustašas took power in the Independent State of Croatia.¹⁹⁹

There are several potential explanations for absence of antisemitism in the early Ustaša ideological program. While it cannot serve as a sole explanation, yet it is important for context, Jews were a small and politically insignificant minority. According to the 1931 census conducted in Savska Banovina (roughly encompassing the northern half of Croatia in its contemporary borders where the majority of Croatian Jews settled) there were 2,704,383 inhabitants out which 19,575 were Jews which accounts to 0,72% of the total population.²⁰⁰ Thus, Jews did not pose a meaningful political, national, or economic threat to the Ustaša movement. Moreover, the existing Jewish population was highly integrated into the society. According to the census of 1931 around 70% of the Jews in Croatia chose Croatian as their

¹⁹⁶ Testimony of Vladimir Židovec. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.56., 138.

¹⁹⁷ Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše*, 181.

¹⁹⁸ Vlado Singer (1908-1943) would become the head of the Ustaša Secret Service after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. However, he was suddenly arrested in May 1941 by the Ustašas. He was executed in the Jasenovac concentration camp in 1943. There are conflicting reports as to why he was arrested and killed. Officially he was arrested for protecting communist, however some contemporaries argue that he was killed due to his Jewish ancestry. For more on Singer see Darko Stuparić, ed., *Tko je tko u NDH* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 259.

¹⁹⁹ Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 190. For demystification of who was Jewish and who was not in the Ustaša ranks according to the NDH race laws see Nevenko Bartulin. "The question of the 'Honorary Aryans' in the NDH" 2018. Available at: <http://www.historiografija.hr/?p=8534>

²⁰⁰ Melita Švob, *Židovi u Hrvatskoj: migracije i promjene u židovskoj populaciji [Jews in Croatia: Migrations and Changes in Jewish Population]* (Zagreb: KD Miroslav Šalom Freiburger, Židovska općina, 1997), 87.

native language. In 1941 in Zagreb, less than 2% of the Jews belonged to the highly visible Orthodox denomination.²⁰¹ While these structural conditions existed in many other central European countries, they still developed antisemitic movements. Thus, what set the Croatian right-wing politicians apart was a specific historical development of Croatian nationalism and its relationship to antisemitism.

Ante Pavelić, as well as the entire Ustaša movement, drew legitimacy and ideology from the Croatian Party of Rights. One of the leaders of the Rightist movement was Josip Frank (1844-1911), a Jewish born politician who converted to Catholicism in his adolescence. After the death of the founder of modern Croatian nationalism, Ante Starčević in 1896, Josip Frank took over the leadership of the Čista stranka prava [Pure Party of Rights], which made him the effective leader of the Croatian far-right. According to historian Nevenko Bartulin “the Pure Party of Right gained the reputation of being a Jewish run liberal party.”²⁰² Frank introduced militant paramilitarism, anti-Yugoslavism and anti-Serbianism into Starčević’s original program. Competing political organization such as clerical circles and some members of the Croatian Peasant Party tried to discredit Frank politically by referring to his Jewish ancestry.²⁰³ Frank’s followers defended him in the face of these accusations. Frank left a major impact on the Croatian far right. Croatian nationalists were often colloquially called “Frankovci” by their opponents up until 1941. Moreover, Josip Frank’s son Ivo continued to support his father’s policies. Ivo Frank was the most prominent Croatian national émigré in the interwar period until Pavelić’s emigration in 1929.²⁰⁴ He played an important role in creating initial ties between Ante Pavelić and Italy, and there are strong indications that Pavelić’s attitude towards

²⁰¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2004), 17.

²⁰² Nevenko Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans: National-Racial Identity and Protected Jews in the Independent State of Croatia* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2016), 9.

²⁰³ Stjepan Matković, “Političke borbe i prijepori: Čista stranka prava i panoramski pogled na 1903. godinu,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 37, no. 3 (2005): 609–23.

²⁰⁴ Stjepan Matković, “Prilozi za politički životopis Ive Franka i evoluciju pravaštva,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 40, no. 3 (2008): 1086.

Italy and later territorial concessions were based on Ivo Frank's original ideas. Ivo Frank, together with Vladimir Sachs, another pioneer of the Croatian Party of Rights (Sachs claimed in 1910 that Jews in Croatia are not a separate nation but "Croats of the Mosaic faith"),²⁰⁵ were initial supporters of the Ustaša movement. Moreover, it seems that the Ustašas relied on Sachs in the early history of the movement due to his "considerable influence in political and media circles in Vienna."²⁰⁶

Therefore, Pavelić's political program was in many ways based on the platform developed by Josip Frank. Although the Ustašas did not glorify Frank explicitly, they never criticized him in their publications. Pavelić's anti-Yugoslavism, anti-Serbianism and paramilitarism were all based on the tradition of Frankism [frankovci]. Therefore, the first deduction out of an abstract Ustaša organic nationalism was projected into a particular peripheral concept of anti-Serbdom and not antisemitism. In one of his earlier texts, Pavelić wrote that "ten and a half years of joint life [in Yugoslavia] completely justified Croatian instinctive repulsion at mixing with Serbian Orthodox Byzantinism."²⁰⁷ He added that:

Croatian people were raised in Western culture, and they have all the characteristics of a civilized and honest nation. Serbians [Srbijanci] are a nation of eastern culture, purely raised in Byzantine manner and members of Orthodox church who are also sworn enemies of westernism and Catholicism. Not only the wider strata of society, but also their intelligentsia and their ruling circles, identified Serb religion and Serb state and their oriental religious intolerance transferred it into a political struggle, in which they are fanatically and furiously destroying anyone, for whom they think stands on the way of progress and spread of their Serb religion, Serb nationalism and Serb state.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Vladimir Sachs managed to evade persecution in the Independent State of Croatia by applying for the 'Aryan rights' based on his contribution for the support of the Ustaša movement. His request to be excluded from the persecution based on the anti-Jewish race laws was one of the very few which were approved by the Ustaša regime. Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans*, 2.

²⁰⁶ HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.1., 29.

²⁰⁷ Ante Pavelić, "Uzpoztava hrvatske države, trajni mir na Balkanu." Published in *Hrvatski list i Danica Hrvatska. Kolendar za prostu godinu 1930.* (Sedmo godišće). New York: Izdanje i naklada Hrvatski publishing Co., Inc. (1929). Document can be found in Petar Požar, *Ustaša*, 38.

²⁰⁸ Ante Pavelić, "Uzpoztava hrvatske države, trajni mir na Balkanu." Published in *Hrvatski list i Danica Hrvatska. Kolendar za prostu godinu 1930.* (Sedmo godišće). New York: Izdanje i naklada Hrvatski publishing Co., Inc. (1929). Document can be found in Požar, *Ustaša*, 39-40.

In the same text, Pavelić did not mention Jews even once. Instead, it was the Serbian Royal Army which had stepped into Croatian lands in 1918, it was the Serbian royal dynasty of Karađorđević which kept Croatia under the yoke, it was the Serbian radical Puniša Račić who had killed Radić and his associates, it was the Serbian court which had sentenced Pavelić to death in 1929, it was the Serb people who were infected by Greater Serbian ideology spread by the Orthodox church, and therefore it were the Serbs who were the prime enemy of Croatia in Pavelić's imagination.

However, due to the nature of the Ustaša ideological core, which was based on organic nationalism, the movement had a very high potential for adoption of antisemitism. According to the 13th point of the Principles of the Ustaša movement:

Peasantry is the source of all life, and it constitutes the Croatian nation. Accordingly, it bears and exerts all state power in the Croatian State. All the Croatian estates constitute a single national whole, since all other estates of the Croatian nation belong to Croatian blood, all of them are not only tied to the villages through their roots or ancestry, but through family connection. Those in Croatia who do not come from a peasant family, they are in 90 out of 100 cases not of Croatian origin, nor blood, but are migrant foreigners.²⁰⁹

According to the 1931 census about 77.5% of the Jews lived in urban centers in Yugoslavia. Therefore, the Ustaša core ideology, although not containing antisemitism, created a fertile ground out of which future seeds of hate could grow. Ante Pavelić showed the first signs of anti-Jewish attitudes in a novel *Liepa Plavka* [Beautiful Blondie], which he wrote in 1934 and published a year later. Although Jews were not demonized collectively in an explicit way, a couple of characters with names such as Samuel and last names such as Blum, Donner, Freitag, Rosenfeld and Grief are depicted as people who are “fat,” have “hooked noses,” “fat lips,” “lop ears.” Moreover, they are all industrialists and merchants engaged in shady transactions.²¹⁰ Although these anti-Jewish prejudices remain at the level of stereotypes throughout the novel,

²⁰⁹ Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 126–27.

²¹⁰ Ante Pavelić, *Liepa plavka: roman iz borbe hrvatskog naroda za slobodu i nezavisnost* (Buenos Aires: Domovina, 1954).

under the complex historical conditions these attitudes would soon be transformed into a fully-fledged antisemitic ideology with radical consequences.

1.2. Fascistization and antisemitization of the Ustaša Movement (1934-1938)

Scholars of (generic) fascism have recently started to systematically analyze transnational ties and transfer of ideology between different authoritarian and fascist movements. Fascistization, or the process of adopting fascist ideology, values, forms of organization and/or political goals has been studied intensively in the last two decades.²¹¹ Aristotle Kallis points out that the adoptions of antisemitism and fascistization were interconnected processes. He argues that antisemitism is not a part of the ideological core of generic fascism. Instead, the “fusion (or not) of fascism and antisemitism, its particular content and dynamics in each case, reveal more about its long-term national context than about fascism’s generic intellectual qualities.”²¹² However, Kallis recognizes that the intersections between the studies of generic fascism, fascistization, and antisemitism remain understudied in current scholarship.²¹³

After the Nazis’ rise to power in 1933, antisemitism acquired a particular functional quality in the adoption of generic fascist ideology. Antisemitism was deeply embedded within the negative pole of fascist ideology. Many “-anti” concepts were leaning on antisemitism as one of the key interpretative and explanatory concepts. Fascist attitudes such as anti-parliamentarism, anti-democracy, anti-communism, anti-capitalism, anti-individualism, anti-cosmopolitanism, and anti-intellectualism were often couched in antisemitic rhetoric and were

²¹¹ Most case studies of fascistization had been focused on the case of Spain. Ismael Saz Campos, “Fascism, Fascistization and Developmentalism in Franco’s Dictatorship,” *Social History* 29, no. 3 (August 2004): 342–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0307102042000257629>; Javier Rodrigo, “On Fascistization: Mussolini’s Political Project for Franco’s Spain, 1937–1939,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 22, no. 4 (August 8, 2017): 469–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2017.1350024>. For the case of Greece see Aristotle Kallis, “Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4th of August Regime in Greece (1936-1941) and the Dynamics of Fascistisation in 1930s Europe,” *East Central Europe* 37, no. 2–3 (March 25, 2010): 303–30, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187633010X534504>.

²¹² Aristotle Kallis, “Fascism and the Jews: From the Internationalisation of Fascism to a ‘Fascist Antisemitism,’” *Holocaust Studies* 15, no. 1–2 (June 2009): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2009.11087228>.

²¹³ Kallis, “Transnational Fascism: The Fascist New Order, Violence, and Creative Destruction,” 42.

thereby one of the “intellectual shortcuts” for fascistization. Although not necessarily a part of the fascist ideological core, antisemitism is more than just another “-anti” concept. It is an ideological glue which could swiftly and effectively integrate several otherwise alien ideas into a nationalist movement during the process of fascistization. Therefore, a study of antisemitic rhetoric can often be used as a roadmap through fascist ideology.

Intense fascistization of Ustaša ideology started in 1934. In that year, the Ustašas successfully carried out their most ambitious terrorist action during the interwar period: the assassination of King of Yugoslavia, Alexander Karađorđević. Although the assassination was successful in operative terms, it had several negative consequences for the Ustaša movement. The Ustašas hoped that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia would collapse with the death of its dictator and that Croats would rise against the Serbian tyranny. However, none of this happened. The kingdom remained relatively stable.

To avoid sanctions and mollify the international condemnation that followed in the wake of the assassination, the Hungarian government shut down the Ustaša training camp in Janka-Puszta located in the southern part of the country. Italy interned the Ustašas on the island of Lipari which thereby severely restricted their activities.²¹⁴ The Ustaša movement, which by that time had about 500 members, found itself isolated and demoralized. Since it could no longer rely on the support of Fascist Italy,²¹⁵ its leadership sought backing from other fascist movements, most importantly German Nazism.

The attempt of the Ustašas to align themselves with Nazism is best elaborated in Ante Pavelić’s memorandum *Die Kroatische Frage* [The Croatian Question], which Pavelić sent to the German Foreign Ministry in 1936. Because Pavelić summarized the goals of the Ustaša ideology in a comprehensive way for the first time since the publication of the Principles of the

²¹⁴ Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše*, 186.

²¹⁵ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*, 2001, 35.

Ustaša movement, this document is one of the most important sources that sheds light on the development of the interwar Ustaša ideology.²¹⁶

In the first part of the memorandum, much like in the first seven points of the Principles, Pavelić elaborated why the Croats are a separate ethnic group with a distinct history and right to their own state. However, he also made significant ideological recalibrations by claiming that the Croats were of Gothic ancestry and shared an Aryan fraternity with the German people.²¹⁷ Pavelić also reassured his German counterparts that he was a staunch supporter of Germany’s revisionist agenda, stressing that Croats stand side by side with Germany in “our heroic fight against the Versailles.”²¹⁸ The most important part of the memorandum, however, is the identification of the enemies of the Croatian nation. While emphasizing the alleged threat of “the Serbian state authority” and “international freemasonry,” Pavelić for the first time explicitly identified Jews as one of the main enemies of the Ustaša movement.²¹⁹

Pavelić falsely argued that Jews welcomed the “foundation of the so-called Yugoslav state, because the state of Croatia would never be as comfortable as Yugoslavia – a state of many different nations!”²²⁰ Employing economic antisemitism, he wrote that “all financial and commercial businesses” in Yugoslavia were under the control of Jews. In his view, this was the result of a collusion between “Belgrade” and Jews that aimed at “weakening the Croatian national strength.”²²¹ Pavelić also showed a significant degree of socio-cultural antisemitism. In his logic, Jews should not participate in any sort of cultural or public activity in the development of the nation, because they would “poison the minds of the Croatian youth.”

Pavelić also claimed to his German counterparts that “all Croatian media are in Jewish-Freemasonic hands...” This was a calculated claim since it entailed that all criticism of Nazism

²¹⁶ Ivo Bogdan, *Dr. Ante Pavelić rješio je hrvatsko pitanje* (Zagreb: Naklada Europa, 1942).

²¹⁷ Bogdan, 16.

²¹⁸ Bogdan, 23.

²¹⁹ Bogdan, 24.

²²⁰ Bogdan, 16.

²²¹ Bogdan, 25.

that came from Croatia could be attributed to the “Jewish and Freemasonry newspapers,” which “are constantly attacking Germany, German nation and National Socialism, and after that the representative of Belgrade appear and pretend that these are Croatian newspapers, and that therefore, the Croats are antagonistic towards the Germans.”²²²

A major step in the evolution of Pavelić’s earlier attitude towards Communism is visible in *Die Kroatische Frage*. In 1929, Pavelić criticized Communism mildly and did not mention Jews even once in his reflections on the spread of Communist ideology in Yugoslavia.²²³ In stark contrast, Pavelić now fully espoused ideological antisemitism and depicted Jews as standing behind communism. Adding to the widespread notion of the interconnectedness of the Jewry with communism, he showed a certain amount of innovation by adding Serbs in the equation, claiming that “together with the Jews, they [the Serbs] are spreading communist propaganda in Croatia.”²²⁴ In a similar fashion, he pointed out that “communism and Jewry have a completely corresponding view and work together against the national liberation of Croatia.”²²⁵ Describing the situation in the Serbian army, Pavelić claimed that “because of marriage between [Serbian] officers and Jewesses, the officer core had lately been dangerously Judaized: one third of the younger officers of the Belgrade officer core are married to Jewesses. This kind of setting is an especially fertile ground for [spreading] communism in the military.”²²⁶ Pavelić finally concluded that “In the struggle for the independence and freedom, which the Croatian nation is leading against the imposed yoke over the peace dictate [in Versailles], it [the Croatian nation] looks for sympathies in Hitler’s Germany, and in

²²² Bogdan, 26.

²²³ Ante Pavelić, “Uzpoztava hrvatske države, trajni mir na Balkanu.” Published in *Hrvatski list i Danica Hrvatska. Kalendar za prostu godinu 1930. (Sedmo godišće)*. New York: Izdanje i Naklada Hrvatski publishing Co., Inc. (1929). Document can be found in Petar Požar, *Ustaša*.

²²⁴ Bogdan, *Dr. Ante Pavelić riešio je hrvatsko pitanje*, 26.

²²⁵ Bogdan, 27.

²²⁶ Bogdan, 30.

Mussolini's Italy, seeing in them the most capable fighters for natural rights, true culture and higher civilization."²²⁷

In *The Croatian Question*, Pavelić further tried to prove a continuity of antisemitism on the Croatian far-right going back to the mid-nineteenth century. He argued that Ante Starčević (1823-1896), widely considered as the founder of modern Croatian nationalism, was a dedicated antisemite.²²⁸ Pavelić was thus somewhat involved in an “invention of tradition,”²²⁹ with regards to antisemitism in the Ustaša movement – an attempt to demonstrate continuity and longevity of Croatian antisemitism. The language of antisemitism could be a useful tool in legitimizing the Ustaša ideology in the eyes of the Nazis by arguing that both the Ustašas and the Third Reich shared a common enemy.

When comparing *The Croatian Question* (1936) with other major ideological Ustaša documents from the previous periods such as the *Principles* (1933), significant changes and developments in the Ustaša ideology are noticeable in a very brief period of time. Initially opposing the Serbian ruling elite, the Ustašas now generalized their opposition to Serbs as a nation, adding to them a whole range of previously insignificant enemies such as Freemasons, Communists and Jews. Considering that the Ustašas adopted a striking amount of new ideological content, antisemitism was necessary in fulfilling the function of an ideological glue that could hold the framework together. The Ustašas had to find a fast and efficient way of integrating all these new values and attitudes taken from fascism into their own ideological framework, while at the same time couching their own ideology in a new political language of fascism in order to promote its own agenda. Antisemitism was the bridge to accomplish this ambitious task. According to the antisemitic discourse, even the most contradictory ideologies are connected and interrelated, such as democracy, communism, capitalism, liberalism etc.

²²⁷ Bogdan, 32.

²²⁸ Bogdan, 25.

²²⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-2.

Despite the importance of The Croatian Question, this document was not written for propagandistic purposes since it was not intended for circulation among the public until 1941. In 1938, Pavelić published an extensive critique of communism titled *Strahote Zabluda* [Horrors of Illusions] primarily targeted for an Italian audience.²³⁰ Pavelić once again relied on ideological antisemitism to demonstrate that Jews stood behind Communism. While antisemitism played a somewhat less prominent role in the Horrors of Illusions than in the Croatian Question, the repeated reliance on antisemitism demonstrates the increasing integration of antisemitism into Ustaša ideology.

The Ustaša increased adoption of antisemitism in the period from 1934-1938 went hand in hand with the fascistization of the movement. For example, in 1931 Pavelić told one of his closest associates that he stands “by the principles of democracy, but we should look at the times in which we are in. The Ustaša movement does not hope for any help from the democratic countries, but from Italy, and the Duce should see that those he is helping are sharing his outlook onto the world.”²³¹ Pavelić’s gradually abandoned any remnants of the democratic stance which he possibly held in 1931. In 1938, he openly wrote that “[f]ascism came to existence in the West on the ruins of democracy, which was not capable of fighting against Bolshevism which wanted to penetrate from Russia to the West... Something new had to come, something stronger and more potent in the fight against Bolshevism, something capable of defeating it. This was found in Fascism.”²³² However Pavelić did not refer exclusively to Italian Fascism but held a vision of belonging to the transnational generic fascism. Pavelić argued that fascism is a new, modernized version of nationalism which could be adopted anywhere.²³³ He

²³⁰ Ante Pavelić, *Strahote zabluda: komunizam i boljševizam u Rusiji i u svijetu* (Zagreb: Knjižnica živjeti Hrvatsku, 2011), 231. The book was originally published in 1938 in Siena under the title “Errori e orrori,” while Pavelić used a pseudonym A.S. Mrzlodolski.

²³¹ Testimony of Ivan Perčević, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.53., 37.

²³² Pavelić, *Strahote zabluda: komunizam i boljševizam u Rusiji i u svijetu*, 231.

²³³ Pavelić, 231.

predicted that it would spread across the world regardless of whether German Nazis or Italian Fascists considered it favorable for export to other countries or not:

It is a mistake to limit fascism only to two above-mentioned [Italian and German] people. It is a mistake to say that fascism is not for export. Bolshevism is a universal evil which wants to rule everywhere. Fascism is in a struggle to death with it [Bolshevism] and so it should fight it anywhere, in every corner of the world, and therefore it is unavoidable that it [fascism] will become universal, and that it will be spread even in those places in which it is not exported [internationally]. It will spread on its own.²³⁴

1.3. The Consolidation of the Ustaša Ideology (1938-1941)

From 1934-1937, the Ustaša movement's actions on the ground were severely restricted because of the backlash caused by the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles. In 1937 the situation started to improve after Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Italy signed an agreement according to which the Ustašas were allowed to return to the country if they had not directly participated in terrorist actions. The Ustašas used the return of some of their members to Yugoslavia as an opportunity to shift the focus of their recruitment and activities from the emigration to the country. While Ante Pavelić together with some 250 members remained in Italy, approximately 260 Ustašas returned to Yugoslavia from 1937-1938.²³⁵ Some of the repatriated Ustašas were given the responsibility to start mobilizing new members among the members of the largely disunited and disorganized Croatian far-right.

The history of the Ustaša movement is often written in isolation from the rest of the Croatian interwar right-wing groups. Considering that the Ustaša succeeded in recruitment of many members from other far-right organizations in the second half of the 1930s, it is hardly possible to comprehend the development of the Ustaša movement and its ideology without analyzing its relationship with other right-wing groups. This is particularly important because

²³⁴ Pavelić, 238.

²³⁵ Jelić-Butić, "Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti ustaša do 1941," 80–81.

the backbone of the Ustaša propaganda, journalist, and intellectual apparatus during the NDH period was not formed from the emigres, but from the members who were recruited from other right-wing organizations in late 1930s. Prior to joining the Ustaša movement, these intellectuals belonged to radical Catholic, national-socialist, or a web of loosely organized nationalist groups such as the university students.

1.3.1. Radical Catholicism

The Croatian Catholic movement in the interwar period was marked by a perception of impending crisis, which was mainly depicted in moral terms. Catholic intellectuals believed that there was a declining influence of religion within the society and a corollary rise in decadence. In an attempt to re-Christianize the society, the Catholic movement became involved in politics at the turn of the century.²³⁶ In the sphere of party politics, the best-known representative of political Catholicism was the Croatian People's Party [Hrvatska pučka stranka] formed in 1919. The party pursued a Christian Socialist program, while also emphasizing its opposition to liberalism and Marxism. Unlike the nationalist right-wing parties, the Croatian People's Party supported the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It argued for the equality of the three dominant nations (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), while opposing Great Serbian and Great Croatian nationalist agendas. The Croatian People's Party proved to have very limited political success. In the 1920 elections, the party won a mere 9 seats out of the total 419. In the 1927 election, only one of its representatives was elected to the parliament, which hosted 315 of them, thus gaining just 2% of the popular vote in Croatia.²³⁷ The failing popularity of the People's Party was influenced by the increasing

²³⁶ Sandra Prlenda, "Young, Religious, and Radical: The Croat Catholic Youth Organizations, 1922-1945," in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, eds. John Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2004), 83-84.

²³⁷ Biondich, "Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918–1945¹," 384–85.

political dominance of the anti-clerical Croatian Peasant Party as well as its failure to mobilize nationalists, who turned to the Croatian Party of Rights. The Croatian People's Party dissolved in 1929 with the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship and was never reconstituted.

The failure of Croatian People's Party shows that contrary to popularly held beliefs, organized political Catholicism in the form of political parties was rather weak and could not garner mass support. However, unlike the top-down activities through party-politics, grass-root Catholic activism showed greater success during the 1930s. The core of the Catholic mobilization was centered on the youth, which it sought to include in various organizations, mainly the Crusaders [Križari]²³⁸ and Domagoj.²³⁹ According to historian Mark Biondich, the Catholic Youth organizations were “a heterogenous and politically divided movement” although they were all radicalized to different degrees by Croatian nationalism and anti-communism during the 1930s.²⁴⁰ What united them in the early 1930s, besides the Catholic platform, was their staunch anti-communism.

The Catholic newspaper *Hrvatska straža* [The Croatian Guard], which came out in the period from 1929-1941, offers insights into the evolution and radicalization of some of the Catholic intellectuals. Its editors announced that their newspapers would write “in the spirit of Catholic principles” and the struggle against “moral decadence and degeneration” in modern

²³⁸ The Crusaders [Križari] were founded in 1930, as a result of the dissolution of the Eagles – a Catholic youth movement which was shut down after the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929. Led by a Catholic activist Ivo Protulipac, the Crusaders aspired to create a “a disciplined and militant younger generation in order to secure radical Catholicism in many aspects of social life.” Next to anti-liberalism, during the 1930s the organization also adopted radical anti-communism. Prlenda, “Young, Religious, and Radical: The Croat Catholic Youth Organizations, 1922-1945,” 91–92.

²³⁹ The Croatian Catholic Academic Club Domagoj [Hrvatsko katoličko akademsko društvo Domagoj] was founded in 1906. Named after the medieval Duke of Croatia Domagoj, the Academic Club focused on building a new group of Catholic intellectuals who were supposed to play a decisive role in the efforts to fight liberalism and Freemasonry with the aim of bringing religion back into the political and moral life.

²⁴⁰ Biondich, “Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918–1945¹,” 387. Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, a high ranking Ustaša official who performed various roles in the NDH. He was members of the Ustaša Secret Service (UNS) and a close associate of Eugen Dido Kvaternik – the head of the Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR), HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 110.

society.²⁴¹ *Straža*'s agenda was strongly anti-communist and anti-liberal.²⁴² At first, the newspaper did not show a strong antisemitic tendency. In fact, it took distance to and was even critical of Nazi racial policies.²⁴³ Nevertheless, as the 1930s progressed, antisemitism slowly entered *Straža*'s content. Most often antisemitism appeared in articles about the actions of Catholic movements and regimes. For example, an article from a Czech Catholic journal was reprinted in *Straža* which argued:

We have a glorious history of the struggle against liberalism, Freemasonry, Jews, realist progressivism etc., which was used by many political parties of our inglorious past. We have won in all these fights, and this is a guarantee that we will reject similar deceptive ideas whenever they appear, we will reject them with all our traditional energy and sharpness.²⁴⁴

Besides some of the similar reprints of antisemitism from ideologically akin foreign newspapers, *Straža* relied on antisemitism in explaining the domestic and international policies in Europe. Reflecting on the situation in France, authors in *Straža* posited that Leon Blum enabled the penetration of “infiltration of Marxism and Freemasonry” with the help of “Jewish capital” into the French society. The newspaper warned its leaders that countries like France, England and the United States of America were under strong Jewish influence. It concluded that Croats need to learn the lesson: “it is necessary that other nations learn from the French example and to beware of making similar mistakes.”²⁴⁵ Simultaneously, news about the introduction of antisemitic legislation were reported either with explicit approval or without any critical reflection. For example, the newspapers transmitted a speech by Slovakia's Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka, in which he emphasized that his government would devote its energy

²⁴¹ Josip Buturac, “Katolički dnevnik ‘Hrvatska Straža’ 1929-1941.” 13, no. 23 (1989): 148–49.

²⁴² “Jugomasonerija se brani,” *Hrvatska straža*, Year XII, no. 174, 2 August 1940, p. 3. See also “Pomoćnica i zaštitnica hrvatskog naroda,” *Hrvatska Sžstraža*, Year XII, no. 153, 9 July 1940, p. 2.

²⁴³ “Životni prostor naroda,” *Hrvatska straža*, Year XII, no. 13, 17 January 1940, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ “Iz dana u dan,” *Hrvatska straža*, Year XII, no. 16, 19 January 1940, p. 1.

²⁴⁵ “Dva smjera u Francuskoj – Petain ili Reynaud,” *Hrvatska straža*, Year XII, no. 144, 27 June 1940, p. 2.

to the “removal of Jews from the economy and strengthen the efforts to eliminate the corruption.”²⁴⁶

In comparison to other antisemitic newspapers in this analysis, *Hrvatska Straža* was at the lower pole of radicalism. Even though its antisemitism was influenced by Catholic anti-Judaism as well as anti-communism and anti-liberalism, its authors were wary of employing explicit antisemitism consistently. However, what its editors and authors did not bring up in the pages of the newspapers, they did in other publications. This is clear from the activities of Danijel Uvanović, who started working for *Hrvatska straža* in 1930. After his employment, he quickly climbed through the ranks, eventually ascending to the position of the editor of the newspapers in the period from 1937 to 1940. Besides working for *Hrvatska straža*, Uvanović was one of the editors of a series of political booklets and pamphlets known as the Modern Social Library (Moderna Socijalna Knjižnica, MOSK). Editions of MOSK were officially published by the Domagoj Club, an increasingly radicalized Catholic organization, which Uvanović himself had been a member of between 1927 and 1930. While avoiding espousing fervent antisemitism in *Hrvatska straža*, he promoted some of the most radical and blatantly antisemitic publications in the MOSK series.

MOSK editions consisted of 34 short booklets, which were issued throughout middle of the 1930s. They constitute some of the most comprehensive and intellectually developed pieces of antisemitic writing in interwar Croatia.²⁴⁷ The MOSK editions were focused exclusively on intellectually elaborating and disseminating the idea that Jewry, communism, and Freemasonry were a part of a global conspiracy with local branches and influences in Yugoslavia and Croatia respectively. One of the first booklets, issued in 1934, was titled *Who*

²⁴⁶ “Slovaci protiv Židova i korupcije,” *Hrvatska straža*, Year XII, no. 173, 1 August 1940, p. 2.

²⁴⁷ *Kominternu* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna knjižnica, 1934). Bonifacije Perović, *Boljševizam* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna kronika, 1935). *Komunizam protiv vjere* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna kronika, 1935). *Što je masonerija?* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna knjižnica, 1934).

Rules in Russia? The Jews [Tko vlada u Rusiji? Židovi]. Subscribing to the Judeo-Bolshevik myth, the unsigned author wrote:

We wouldn't be Christians if we didn't admit that there were some honest people amongst the Jews, who never stood for bolshevism in Russia. Therefore, our question [from the title] shouldn't be understood as inciting the hatred against Jews. No! We only want to point out that bolshevism, communism, Marxism, socialism, and all similar movements are not only theoretical products of a Jew – Karl Marx. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia is the work of Jews. Jews are the main pillars of bolshevism which rules Russia not in the name of the peasant or a worker, but for the benefit of the Jews.²⁴⁸

In a booklet titled *Jewish Freemasonry* [Židovska masonerija] issued in 1935, the author argued that the “Jewish spirit has deeply infiltrated the Freemasonry. The Jewish spirit permeates it to such a degree that Freemasonry and Jewishness are two indistinguishable terms.” To demonstrate the relevance of this assertion to a Croatian audience, the author argued that Jews and Freemasons supported Gabriele D’Annunzio’s conquest of “Croatian Rijeka,” referring to the Italian proto-fascist establishment of a self-proclaimed Italian Regency of Carnaro in 1919 with the seat in Fiume. Moreover, the author found that all the dominant Serbian political parties in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were under the Jewish influence.²⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the authors of MOSK booklets still tried to convince their readers that their antisemitism was somewhat different from the Nazi Party’s and that they fully adhered to Christian principles. In a booklet issued in 1934 with the title *Why are They Persecuting Jews in Germany*, the editorial board of MOSK wrote a foreword in which they explained:

perhaps some of our readers might expect that we will observe this question from the perspective of German racists – namely those who rise against Jews in the name of the overblown race theory. Far from it, because we know that each man has the right to dignity even though they might have semitic blood in their veins. Thus, we focus on the spiritual and economic questions which led Germans to limit the influence of Jews in Germany.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ *Tko vlada u Rusiji? Židovi* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna knjižnica, 1934), 6.

²⁴⁹ Marko Matulić, *Židovska masonerija* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna kronika, 1935), 3, 14, 23.

²⁵⁰ Antun Matijević, *Zašto u Njemačkoj progone Židove* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna knjižnica, 1934), 3–4.

The apparent paradox of arguing that the Nazis have “overblown race theory,” while at the same time inviting the readers to consider Jews as those who “have semitic blood in their veins” demonstrates the intellectual contradictions caused by the rapid adoption of antisemitism. Similar contradictions were evident when it came to the question of how to solve the “Jewish question.” Almost in the same breath, the authors argued that “We, Catholic Christians could never approve of bloody and illegal bloodshed,” and the fact that “each nation has the right to eliminate foreign influences from their country. If we apply this to Jews... then this is not antisemitism anymore, this is asemitism.”²⁵¹

The shifting attitudes towards violence, the role of the state, and the redefinition of several Catholic intellectuals’ approach to racism were all in great part caused by the adoption of antisemitism, because Jews were the object of all three factors. The role of racism was central in conceptualizing, the state was to be central in organizing while violence was essential in implementing the solution of the “Jewish question.” Thus, the redefinition of the approach of some of the Catholic intellectuals and the abandonment of previously held Catholic attitudes brought them closer to fascism.

Like Uvanović, another member of the Domagoj Club, Ivo Bogdan, played an important role both in *Hrvatska straža* and MOSK editions. Bogdan authored a few MOSK publications himself about the Spanish civil war that were pervaded with the Judeo-Bolshevik myth.²⁵² Already during the interwar period, Bogdan had been one of the founders of the *Hrvatski narod* [The Croatian Nation] – the main Ustaša newspapers in the country after 1939. After the establishment of the NDH, he became one of the most influential propagandists of the Ustaša regime. In 1943, he was appointed main editor of *Hrvatski narod*. The following year, he became the director of the Main Directorate for Propaganda. Historian Rory Yeomans,

²⁵¹ Matijević, 31.

²⁵² Ivo Bogdan, *Nova Španjolska* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna kronika, 1937); Ivo Bogdan, *Komunisti u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Moderna socijalna kronika, 1936).

an expert on cultural policies in the NDH, describes Bogdan as a one of the representatives of the ideological “hardliners” of the Ustaša regime.²⁵³ Uvanović followed a similar trajectory. He joined the Ustaša movement after the proclamation of the NDH and played a major role in the propaganda apparatus. In 1942, he became the main editor of the *Hrvatski narod*.

Other Catholic oriented intellectuals gathered around the *Hrvatska straža* followed suit. Ivan Oršanić also became one of the editors of *Hrvatski narod* in 1939. After the proclamation of the NDH, he was appointed the leader of the Ustaša Youth.²⁵⁴ One of the leaders of the Domagoj Club and an active contributor to the MOSK editions, Bonifacije Perović, became an active contributor to various Ustaša publications after the proclamation of the NDH, such as the weekly magazine *Spremnost* [Readiness].

While the Domagoj Club was an elitist organization primarily comprised of Catholic intellectuals, the Crusaders [Križari] focused specifically on the Catholic youth. The organization was founded in the early 1930s with the aim of creating a disciplined and militant Catholic youth movement poised to secure Christianity’s prominence in society. The movement became increasingly anti-communist and anti-liberal. It promoted Croatian nationalism and the idea of Greater Croatia, which was supposed to incorporate the territories of contemporary Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sylvania. Spearheaded by the Crusaders, the Catholic youth movement had an estimated following of around 40,000 at its peak in 1938.²⁵⁵ From its foundation until 1938, the Crusaders were headed by Ivo Protulipac, a charismatic leader who drew inspiration from international militant Catholic movements and organizations such as Leon Degrelle’s Rexist movement, and Franco’s activities in Spain.²⁵⁶

According to a senior Ustaša official, Protulipac was behind the launch of the *Mlada Hrvatska* [Young Croatia] newspaper, one of the most radical antisemitic news outlets in

²⁵³ Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 254.

²⁵⁴ For the overview of activities of the Ustaša Youth see Miljan, *Croatia and the Rise of Fascism*.

²⁵⁵ Biondich, “Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918–1945¹,” 388–89.

²⁵⁶ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 113.

interwar Croatia. *Mlada Hrvatska* was issued in 15.000 copies per edition.²⁵⁷ Besides adhering to the extreme Croatian nationalism as well as anti-communism and anti-liberalism, what effectively set *Mlada Hrvatska* apart from other antisemitic news outlets was its extremity and the omnipresence of antisemitism. Antisemitic articles appeared in virtually every issue of the newspaper. Besides the already described antisemitic arguments about Judeo-Bolshevik myth, anti-capitalism, anti-democracy and anti-liberalism, *Mlada Hrvatska* went a step further in the adoption of racism and glorification of the persecution of Jews, employing a language that had eliminationist connotations.²⁵⁸ Its authors argued that foreign organisms, mainly Jews, weakened the nation and should be removed from it. Thus, they called for the “cleansing” of Croatian culture by eliminating Jewish and other foreign authors who must be “disposed of on a garbage dump,” potentially alluding to mass murder.²⁵⁹

Another feature that set *Mlada Hrvatska* apart from the rest of the antisemitic press was the extensive usage of antisemitic caricatures, used to strengthen the visual association of Jews with communism, capitalism, Freemasonry and other political movements and ideologies defined as the “enemies of the Croatian nation.” The employment of caricatures also played a major role in furthering the racialized view of Jews as foreigners who must be “cleansed” from society.

²⁵⁷ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 114.

²⁵⁸ “Priznajmo otvoreno istinu”, *Mlada Hrvatska*, Year II, No. 23, 15 August 1937., 3.

²⁵⁹ “Na lomaču...”, *Mlada Hrvatska*, Year II, No. 15, 18 April 1937., p. 8. See also “Narodni organizam”, *Mlada Hrvatska*, Year II, No. 25, 29 August 1937., p. 1.

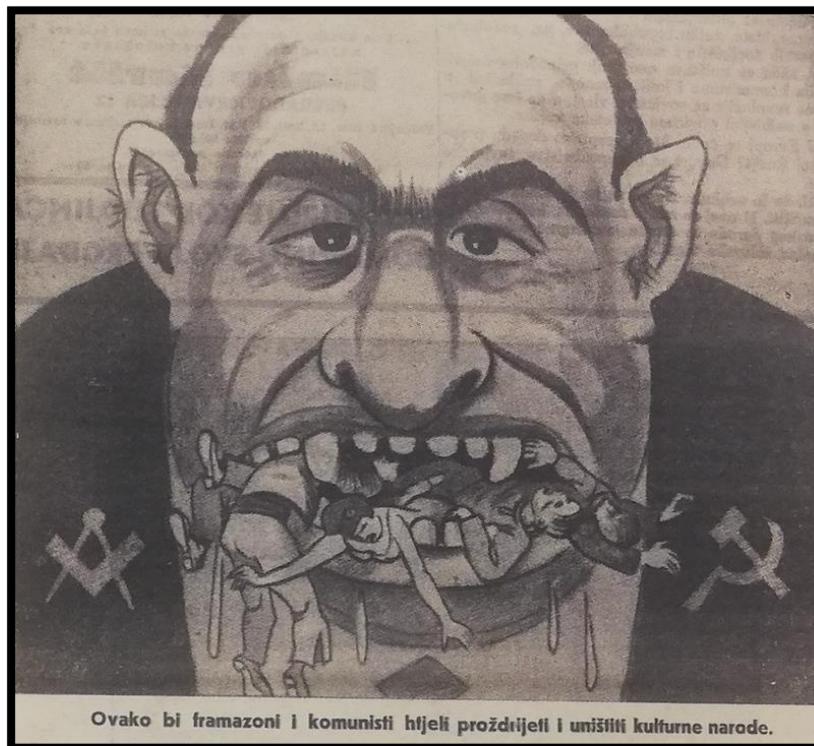


Illustration 1 – An antisemitic caricature depicting a Jew displaying the symbols of communism and Freemasonry on each of his shoulders. The inscription under the caricature states: “This is how Freemasons and communists would like to devour cultured nations.” Source: “Fronta svjetskog satanizma,” Mlada Hrvatska, Year I, No. 10, 17 November 1936, p. 1.



Illustration 2 – An antisemitic caricature depicting Jews as capitalists, communists and Freemasons. Source: “Zločini i grozote krvoločnih komunista: ovako je izgledala Rusija 1917. godine za vrijeme revolucije,” Mlada Hrvatska, Year III, no. 13-14, p. 5.



Illustration 3 – An antisemitic caricature depicting an idealized Croat revealing the alleged Jewish conspiracy. The text below the image states: “‘There you are communists! You are conspiring in secrecy to destroy nations. We will deal with you the same way we dealt with Tatars and Turks!’ – this is what the young Croatian roars while he reveals the work of communists who want to destroy the Croatian nation.” Source: “*Generacija interesa je izdala*,” *Mlada Hrvatska*, Year II, No. 6, 14 February 1937, p. 1.

Antisemitism in *Mlada Hrvatska* had an impact on the Crusaders as well, who also started to rely on it in their public manifestations with increased frequency. For example, during a public event organized by the Crusaders in Požega in April 1938, one of the speakers said that “capitalism, which is represented by Jews, is exploiting workers. Jews have created communism and they finance it. This is visible in our country as well; Jews exploit the workers so they would become communists.”²⁶⁰ Ivo Protulipac was dismissed as the leader of Crusader in 1938, after which he formed another youth organization Hrvatski Junak [Croatian Hero]. Although mainly corroborating with the Croatian Peasant Party, Protulipac also increased his contacts with the Ustaša movement.²⁶¹ Fedor Cicak, a member of the Crusaders, one of the

²⁶⁰ HR-HDA-1354, Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939,1940. Box 9, Inventory number 582. Document dated 10 April 1938.

²⁶¹ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 113. A report of the police from Slavonski Brod noted that Protulipac travelled together with Mile Budak to give a political speech. HR-HDA-1354, Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939,1940. Box 9, Inventory number 596 Document dated 29 January 1939. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55, 113.

prominent authors of antisemitic articles in *Mlada Hrvatska*, and a close collaborator of Protulipac, eventually joined the Ustaša movement. After the proclamation of the NDH, he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the embassy of the NDH in Bulgaria.²⁶² Feliks Niedzielski, another member of Križari who worked with Protulipac, also joined the Ustaša movement. During the existence of the NDH, he became a prominent Ustaša functionary. In 1944, he was appointed the leader of the Ustaša Youth.²⁶³ Unlike some of his associates and other Catholic intellectuals, Protulipac did not join the Ustaša movement, nor did he perform any important function in the NDH. According to an Ustaša official, this was the case because he was not offered any of the top-ranking positions, which he thought would be appropriate for a man of his standing and experience.²⁶⁴

Numerous Catholic intellectuals and organizations went through a radical transformation during the 1930s. They were increasingly frustrated with democracy, which they considered incapable of curbing the growing influence of communism. For some of them, the eruption of the Spanish Civil War was the tipping point, which demonstrated the weakness of democracies and their moral bankruptcy. Instead, they opted for more authoritarian models of governance.²⁶⁵ When it came to antisemitism, Catholic intellectuals were only in part influenced by the traditional and religiously inspired anti-Judaism. Their increasing adoption of antisemitism was mainly a result of the radicalization of their hostility towards anti-communism and anti-Freemasonry, amplified through international ideological transfers from multiple sources. Thus, during the second half of the 1930s, an important part of the Domagoj

²⁶² Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 114.

²⁶³ The Report of the Socialist Yugoslav State Security Service on the Development of the Ustaša Movement in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia up to 1939. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.1., 40.

²⁶⁴ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 114.

²⁶⁵ Biondich, “Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918–1945¹,” 394.

Club and the Crusader organizations gradually internalized a more virulent ideological antisemitism.

After the return of Ustašas from Italy throughout the second half of the 1930s, the movement invested considerable energy to recruiting Catholic intellectuals.²⁶⁶ The Ustašas considered them potential recruits because of their ideological proximity regarding anti-communism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Freemasonry. The assumption was that they easily could be converted into fascist true believers. This proved to be a correct assumption since many intellectuals from the Catholic milieu did join their movement in the end of the 1930s or immediately after the formation of the NDH.²⁶⁷ These intellectuals became the backbone of the Ustaša propaganda apparatus and played a critical role in formulating the regime's cultural policies. In a synergy of mutual exchange, the antisemitism of the recruited Catholic intellectuals was amplified by these activities while also augmenting the Ustaša movement's own antisemitism, which Pavelić had embraced in the middle of the 1930s. While it might be tempting to conclude that the result of this process was the emergence of "clerical fascism," the Catholic intellectuals were in fact increasingly abandoning their previously held positions regarding racism and opposition to totalitarian and fascist movements. Therefore, the result was not the Catholicization of the Ustaša movement, but the Ustašization of the part of Catholic intellectuals and clergy which joined the movement.

1.3.2. Croatian National Socialists

After the Nazis' takeover of power in Germany in 1933, a part of the far-right in Croatia tried to imitate their ideology and style. One of the main carriers of this transfer of ideology was Stjepan Buć. Initially a member of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (Hrvatska

²⁶⁶ Testimony of Mile Budak, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.52., 73.

²⁶⁷ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 23.

Republikanska Seljačka Stranka, HRSS), Buć was elected to the parliament in 1923 and 1925. However, in 1925, he became embroiled in a conflict with the leadership of the HRSS, the reason being that Stjepan Radić, the leader of the party, changed his political course and became a member of the government led by Nikola Pašić, the leaders of the Radicals. Thus, in 1927 he joined the Croatian Party of Rights instead.

After the assassination of Radić in 1928 and the establishment of the dictatorship of King Alexander in 1929, Buć stayed in the country and did not join the Ustašas in emigration. Sensing a vacuum of leadership on the Croatian far-right, he started to entertain the idea of filling that role. As a committed Germanophile, Buć drew inspiration from German Nazism, which he attempted to adapt to the Croatian context by reinterpreting the political thoughts of Ante Starčević and the ideology of the Rightist movement. Buć gathered like-minded intellectuals around the newspaper *Nezavisnost* [Independence], which was in print from 1938 to 1939. Authors in *Nezavisnost* argued that Europe was going through the

revolution of the soul, a fundamental and great shift in the human nature [...], old ideas are being abandoned and new ones are formed. In front of us, and around us, a new man is being born, a new world – completely different from the one before the war. New nationalism is being born. Nations are creating boundaries amongst themselves, they become aware of their individuality, and they are liberated from the pre-war universalist notions which were only dreams and fantasies.²⁶⁸

Believing that society was facing a deep moral, social and political crisis, the authors underlined the need for a “modern nationalism,” which could save the nation from decadence. This was in fact a coded term used interchangeably with fascism in many texts. “Modern nationalism” had to be more energetic, combative, fanatical and violent in comparison to its “old” variant in order to destroy communism. The two world views were engaged in a Manichean life-and-death struggle. As the authors put it, “both of these worldviews are militant; they demand that each man puts his strength in the service of the victory of the idea

²⁶⁸ “Dužnost novih pokoljenja. Oko nas – Novo vrijeme – Komunistička pogibelj – Odlučnost je preduvjet spasa,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 1, 24 February 1938, p. 1.

he believes in.”²⁶⁹ Recognizing the zeal and mass appeal of communism, they argued that only an equally fanatical movement could stop the spread of communism.

The main point that Stjepan Buć and other authors in *Nezavisnost* espoused was that the age of liberalism and democracy was over. The political center had to be destroyed because such parties were impotent in the face of the struggle against those identified as national enemies. They warned their readers that “there are still those who try to sit on both chairs. However, their days are numbered. They need to decide, either they go to the left or to the right. There cannot be any middle ground between these two directions right now.”²⁷⁰ Anyone who did not support fascism was declared an enemy. Their lack of support weakened the national will and caused division within a society that needed to unite in order to combat its enemies. By combining antisemitism, xenophobia and chauvinism, Buć and his supporters focused their criticism on the HSS – the largest Croatian political party in the interwar period. They argued that Stjepan Radić was a Slavophile and therefore a traitor to Croatian national interests. They also claimed that his successor, Vladko Maček, was a Slovene, and thus a foreigner betraying the Croatian national struggle. The leadership of HSS was presented as a tool in the conspiracy of “foreign elements,” who were maintaining the subjugation of Croats. As one of the articles in *Nezavisnost* noted: “We know that Freemasonry and Jewry are leading the entire politics of the ‘former HSS.’ We know who the Freemasons in this party are. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the politics of HSS is anti-Croatian in these fateful moments.”²⁷¹

According to *Nezavisnost*, Jews were at the top of the superconspiracy²⁷² responsible for all societal ills. To drain the nation of its strength, they used Communism, Freemasonry,

²⁶⁹ “Iz omladinskog života,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 3, 12 March 1938, p. 4.

²⁷⁰ “Dva tabora,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 9, 23 April 1938, p. 3.

²⁷¹ “Prekasno gospodine senatore,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 10, 30 April 1938, p. 3.

²⁷² Superconspiracy is a “conspiratorial construct in which multiple conspiracies are believed to be linked together hierarchically. Event and systematic conspiracies are joined in complex ways, so that conspiracies come to be nested within one another. At the summit of the conspiratorial hierarchy is a distant but all-powerful evil force manipulating lesser conspiratorial actors.” Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 6.

democracy, capitalism, and liberalism as tools. After Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, *Nezavisnost* openly declared that Croatia should not take any Jewish refugees who might flee persecution: “we have to say, that we Croats, already have too many of these elements, and we do not need them! We would love to get rid of our own [Jews].”²⁷³ The extreme-right intellectuals gathering around *Nezavisnost* fantasized about a society which a strong authoritarian state led by a fascist dictatorial regime had cleansed of Jews. The future regime was envisioned as a “gardener,” as Zygmunt Bauman put it, who roots out the weeds in order to create a utopian society.²⁷⁴ The authors in *Nezavisnost* similarly noted, by using a clinical medicalized language that “*Nezavisnost* has picked up a knife [...], a knife of a surgeon who sees in front of himself a sick organism which needs many, many cuts in order to heal the patient so that after the operation he could become healthy and strong.”²⁷⁵

Unlike the Ustašas or the radical Catholics, the intellectuals gathered around *Nezavisnost* rarely wrote about or demonized Serbs. This is in part explained by the state censorship, which would take a much tougher stance towards anti-Serbian than antisemitic attitudes. Nevertheless, Jews did occupy a special position within the universe of Others espoused by *Nezavisnost*. It was the Jews that pulled the strings and ultimately controlled all groups defined as “weeds,” starting with communism, capitalism, and Freemasonry. Because they occupied the highest position within the superconspiracy structure they were the archenemy. What further differentiated Jews from other enemies of the nation was that they were the only group defined as the racial enemy, next to Roma.²⁷⁶

While *Nezavisnost* offers one of the most pronounced examples of ideological transfer due to its outspoken imitation and glorification of German Nazism, the authors did not

²⁷³ “Rješenje austrijskog pitanja,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 4, 19 March 1938, p. 1.

²⁷⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1991), 92.

²⁷⁵ “Spasonosnije ja gorka istina od slatke laži,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 3, 12 March 1938, p. 4.

²⁷⁶ “Talijanski fašizam prema rasizmu,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, no. 24, 6 August 1938, p. 3. See also “Treba postaviti rodoslovlje svih naših ideologa i političara,” *Nezavisnost*, Year II, No. 3, 20 January 1939, 2.

exclusively rely on one national movement. They believed that fascism was a transnational phenomenon and saw themselves as belonging to a pan-European movement. Despite repeated glorification of Hitler and Mussolini, they only considered them pioneers of what was to come in every European country.²⁷⁷

Aiming to create a genuine fascist movement with a mass following, Buć tirelessly campaigned among nationalist students within Rightists and clerical circles. Even though he attracted some followers, his aim of establishing himself as the charismatic fascist leader in Croatia ultimately failed.²⁷⁸ Buć's ideas were perceived as merely a foreign import or a pale imitation of Nazi program without any authenticity or historical roots in the history of the Croatian political thought. He encountered strong opposition among Catholic intellectuals, who opposed his openly racist views which attacked all foreigners. Moreover, older Rightists complained that Buć was intentionally misinterpreting and falsifying the teachings of Starčević, whom Buć depicted as the embryo of Croatian National Socialism.²⁷⁹

Unlike the Ustašas, Buć never managed to establish a movement, even though in many ways the fascist ideology found in *Nezavisnost* was intellectually more developed than the Ustaša's at the time. Failing to mobilize mass support, Buć's newspapers soon encountered several issues which led to its discontinuing. Due to the increasing success of Ustaša recruitment, subscriptions to *Nezavisnost* started to dwindle. Gradually, many of the newspaper's financial sponsors abandoned Buć. At the same time, some of the associates working for the newspaper crossed over to the Ustaša.²⁸⁰ One of these men was Mirko Puk, a prominent nationalist activist and a wealthy lawyer in Glina. Puk had not only supported

²⁷⁷ "Dva vodje," *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 12, 14 May 1938, 1.

²⁷⁸ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 87, 97.

²⁷⁹ Testimony of Ivan Kirin given to the Sarajevo police on 25 June 1939. HDA. Fond 1354. Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939,1940. Box 9, File Inventory Number 593-607. See also the testimony of Drago Jilek given to the police in Sarajevo on 22 June 1939. HDA. Fond 1354. Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939,1940. Box 9, File Inventory Number 593-607. See also the testimony of Gregurić Dragutin given to the police in Zagreb on 30 June 1939. HDA. Fond 1354. Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939,1940. Box 9, File Inventory Number 593-607.

²⁸⁰ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., pp. 99-100.

Nezavisnost financially but also wrote some of its most antisemitic articles. In 1938, he wrote an article in which he tried to demonstrate that Starčević was a pioneer of antisemitism on a European level:

Ante Starčević, as a genius, already predicted a long time ago what would be the consequences of the entry of Jews into the public life. Thus, he demanded their removal from the national community. His ideas and decisions are completely identical to the final results of the newer and modern ideologies. The only difference is his criterion for excommunicating this race from the public life, which he based on moral and ethnics, while the new ideologies base this criterion on blood and economy.²⁸¹

Besides cooperating with Buć, Mirko Puk maintained a close relationship with the leader of the Ustaša movement – Ante Pavelić. He met him several times in person and acted as one of the carriers for his messages to Croatia in the late 1930s. In 1938 due to political differences, Puk distanced himself from Buć and became fully committed to Pavelić.²⁸² He soon became an associate of the newly created mouthpiece of the Ustaša movement, *Hrvatski Narod* [The Croatian People] whose first issue appeared in 1939.²⁸³ After the establishment of the NDH, Puk became the Minister of Justice of the NDH. According to another senior Ustaša member, Ante Moškov, Puk was one of the key advisors to Pavelić and a prime instigator of the genocidal violence against minorities.²⁸⁴ Another supporter of Buć during the interwar period, Mirko Vutuc also joined the Ustašas after the establishment of the NDH and became the vice-director of RAVSIGUR – the main security office in the country.²⁸⁵ While in office, Vutuc

²⁸¹ Mirko Puk, “Ante Starčević i Židovi,” *Nezavisnost*, Year I, No. 15, 4 June 1938, p. 1. Historian Mato Artuković argued that Starčević opposed antisemitism both in its economic and racial form. For a brief overview see Mato Artuković, “Ante Starčević i Židovi (prema pisanju lista Sloboda),” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 42, no. 2 (2010): 483–511.

²⁸² The main cause of the fallout between Puk and Buć was the positioning towards the Ustaša movement and Ante Pavelić. The immediate trigger was the decision of whether the Croatian far-right should invite its members to support the Croatian Peasant Party during the parliamentary elections of 1938. A long-time critic of the Croatian Peasant Party, Buć opposed this idea, while Puk, following instructions from Pavelić argued that Croatian politicians are to demonstrate a unified political front and support the Peasant Party. HDA. Fond 1354. Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939, 1940. Box 9, Inventory number 561-586. Document dated 22.11.1938.

²⁸³ HR-HDA-1354, Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939, 1940. Box 9, Inventory number 561-586. Document dated 22.11.1938. Igor Mrkalj, “Tko je bio Dr. Mirko Puk, odvjetnik i organizator ustaškog pokreta u Glini? (2)” 136 (2017): 45–46.

²⁸⁴ Ante Moškov and Petar Požar, *Pavelićeva doba* (Split: Laus, 1999), 242–43.

²⁸⁵ Testimony of Oktavijan Svježić, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.55., 87.

was one of the key organizers of genocide, personally signing some of the main orders regarding mass deportations of Jews and Serbs to concentration camps.²⁸⁶ Many other intellectuals who wrote for *Nezavisnost* followed a similar trajectory, joining the Ustaša movement in different capacities and thus fusing parts of the ideology expressed in *Nezavisnost* with the Ustaša movement's.

In contrast, Buć maintained distance to the Ustaša movement. In June 1940, he founded the Croatian National Socialist Party as a fascist rival to the Ustašas.²⁸⁷ However, the Croatian National Socialists never attracted a mass following. On 28 September 1941, the movement formally fused with the Ustaša, thereby conceding the supremacy over right-wing politics in Croatia to Pavelić.²⁸⁸

1.3.3. Nationalist Students

The radicalization of the right-wing politics in interwar Croatia was, in part, facilitated by the eruption of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The conflict polarized the public in many European countries and drew a sharp line between those who supported Franco's nationalists who received the backing not only from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, but other smaller fascist movements and organizations across the continent; and those who supported the Republicans – a loose coalition of democrats, communists, and anarchists. The readers of political publications such as newspapers and pamphlets were exposed to narratives which depicted the war as a Manichean struggle between the forces of ultimate good and evil. Readers and intellectuals following the war were involved in a European-wide debate on pressing ideological matters, which were wrapped inside the debates about the causes of the Spanish

²⁸⁶ Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 230–31.

²⁸⁷ Goldstein and Goldstein, 22.

²⁸⁸ The elaborate on the history of the Croatian National-Socialist Labor Party, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 01.51., p. 8.

Civil War. These truly transnational debates helped articulate and refine ideological positions of various political actors both on the left and on the right across Europe.²⁸⁹ The result was the adoption of new ideological content and the radicalization of the political landscape, mainly at the expense of the centrist position represented by the Croatian Peasant Party.

This was most clearly visible among the students at the University of Zagreb. While the Croatian Peasant Party was the most popular political force in Croatia, its influence was increasingly shrinking among students who were leaning more towards the radical positions located either on the left or the right side of the political spectrum. Students were divided between various clubs, which were organized on political grounds. In 1936, the club affiliated with the Croatian Peasant Party had only 150 students. The nationalist club hosted 300 and the communist as many as 400 students at the University of Zagreb.²⁹⁰ Students were dissatisfied with the HSS's pacifist and pro-democratic attitudes, as well as the party's reluctance to take side during the conflict. Even though the party had a left and a right wing, the HSS leadership considered the Spanish Civil War to be a struggle between two "foreign ideologies," communism and fascism, which only brought suffering to the Spanish peasantry.²⁹¹ Yet, many students considered it imperative to take a firm stance in a Manichean struggle that would decide if the continent would be dominated by democracy, communism or fascism in years to come.

The University of Zagreb became a battleground of radical ideas, which resulted in numerous physical altercations between pro-fascists and pro-Communists. The situation escalated in 1937 when a group of right-wing students ambushed and murdered the communist student Krsto Ljubičić. Such violence was a consequence of a broader radicalization fueled by

²⁸⁹ Vjeran Pavlaković, "Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," *Historijski zbornik* 62, no. 2 (2009): 490.

²⁹⁰ Pavlaković, 492.

²⁹¹ Vjeran Pavlaković, "Vladko Maček, the Croatian Peasant Party and the Spanish Civil War," *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 2 (2007): 285, 238.

tireless pro-fascist propaganda aimed at transforming and uniting all right-wing students under the fascist banner. As mentioned earlier, one of the most active agents in this regard was Stjepan Buć, who gave many speeches to students in an attempt to mobilize them around National Socialist ideas. Just a few months before Krsto Ljubičić's murder, Buć gave a speech to nationalist students in which he argued that:

Modern nationalism is a firm hand, relying on the nation and national will – in the interest of the people! [...] Militant nationalism does not differentiate, as was the case in the Jewish-communist understanding of pre-war “democracy”, between workers, the peasantry, townspeople, etc. – it only knows the whole, the totality... Militant nationalism knows only the nation and its members, who place all their energy into service for the nation – and the enemies of that nation.²⁹²

Buć's speech epitomizes the attempt of the radicals to mobilize their supporters on extreme political platforms which demanded a firm disavowal of any ideas associated with the political center. This process was reminiscent of the “reflective equilibrium,” a concept from philosophy employed by John Rawls to describe the revision of individuals' moral beliefs and convictions when they enter a contradiction.²⁹³ When we become aware that we hold two moral beliefs which contradict each other we must determine which of the two convictions is more important to us. The choices we make can have far-reaching consequences because we operate in a system of beliefs which support each other. Thus, when one conviction is challenged, it can lead to refining and restructuring of the entire system of beliefs.

Applied to our case, the adoption of antisemitism restructured a wide range of existing beliefs among the nationalist students and the broader society in general. Once the individual with democratic or liberal beliefs adopted antisemitism, an ideological contradiction surfaced. This was caused by the fact that antisemitism in this period was entangled with other political ideas such as anti-communism, anti-liberalism, anti-democracy, anti-individualism, and

²⁹² Pavlaković, “Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939,” 495.

²⁹³ Daniels Norman, “Reflective Equilibrium,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/reflective-equilibrium/>.

xenophobia. Antisemitism thus became, what historian Shulamit Volkov termed a “cultural code,” a sign of political identity through which one could communicate a whole set of political ideas which went far and beyond the issue of hatred of Jews.²⁹⁴ Individuals who integrated political antisemitism into their ideological worldview had to completely reject liberal and democratic values in order to reach logical coherence in their moral and political belief system. The result of this ideological “reflective equilibrium” was that antisemitism became a major tool for fascistization and radicalization of the right-wing students and other groups and organizations in Croatia. By the end of the 1930s, right-wing students at the University of Zagreb increasingly utilized antisemitism as a mean of political mobilization. In 1938 they demanded the introduction of “*numerus clausus*,” for Jews at the University of Zagreb.²⁹⁵ One nationalist pamphlet from October 1939 described the University of Zagreb as the battleground between two political camps. According to the author, on the one side stood “communists of different nationalities, namely Serbs and Jews.” On the other side were “Croatian students who are fighting for the ideals of establishing a Croatian state.”²⁹⁶ Simultaneously, nationalist students were also becoming affiliated with and bound to the Ustašas. In the second half of the 1930s, they increasingly distanced themselves from the HSS and the political center. At various university events, they shouted out rally calls such as “Long live our leader and chief Dr. Pavelić.” Increasingly, they employed Ustaša slogans which stated, “we don’t recognize Dr. Maček as a leader, our leader is Pavelić,”²⁹⁷

The deterioration of the relations between the Ustašas and the HSS, which would escalate into open hostilities was triggered by the conclusion of the agreement between the Yugoslav Prime minister Dragiša Cvetković and the leader of the HSS, Vladko Maček. The

²⁹⁴ Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code,” 34–35.

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 482.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Jareb, 474.

²⁹⁷ Quoted in Pavlaković, “Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939,” 495-496.

Maček-Cvetković Agreement gave large degree of autonomy to a newly established administrative unit of Banovina Croatia within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Ustašas considered this to be treason because it fell short of complete independence. They interpreted the Agreement as an attempt to save Yugoslavia instead of demolishing it. The Ustašas launched a relentless propaganda campaign against the HSS claiming that the party sided with “all Serbs, all Slovenes, all Jews, all Communists, all Russians, all Freemasons, and all Capitalists,” that is all the enemies of the Croatian nation.²⁹⁸ As a result of the Maček-Cvetković agreement, the Ustašas would break the few remaining relations with the HSS, essentially cutting off the last threads that tied them to any democratically oriented political forces. Maček’s HSS also divorced itself from political extremism on the left and right political spectrum. As a consequence, Banovina Croatia under the leadership of the HSS crackdowned the Ustašas, some of whom were arrested and put into improvised detention sites where they remained until the establishment of the NDH.

The Ustašas benefited greatly from the political polarization at the domestic and international level, attracting disillusioned supporters of HSS as well as radicalized nationalist students, Catholic intellectuals and fascisticized elements of the disunited far-right groups in Croatia. In operational terms, this process was facilitated by the repatriation of some of the Ustašas from emigration. In 1937, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Italy signed the Belgrade Agreement, which stipulated that both countries would cut off support for any political movement and terrorist organization that endangered the political or territorial integrity of the signatories of the agreement.²⁹⁹ As a result, Mussolini allowed all Ustašas to return to Yugoslavia unless they had been directly involved in terrorist actions. In 1937, 33 Ustašas

²⁹⁸ Quoted in Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*, 2001, 43.

²⁹⁹ “Dokumenti (1915-1955) za istraživanje jugoslavensko-talijanskih odnosa,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 7, no. 1 (1975): 269–70.

members returned from Italy. In 1938, the number rose to 207 members and in 1939, 20 Ustašas returned. According to the data given by the Yugoslav police, 250 Ustašas remained in Italy.³⁰⁰

Although unintended, the Belgrade Agreement strengthened the Ustašas in the country since many of the returnees remained loyal to the movement. In one of its reports that dealt with the Ustašas in the interwar period, the security service of Socialist Yugoslavia noted that “up to 1939, there were not many formal Ustaša in Croatia.” The hotbed of Ustaša activism and recruitment in this period was the University of Zagreb. However, “there was no firm organization or cohesion,” among the students who sympathized with the Ustaša movement.³⁰¹

Aiming to broaden the Ustaša membership in Croatia, Ante Pavelić instructed the repatriated Ustašas to focus their recruitment activities on the fragmented far-right groups. To achieve this, Pavelić found it useful to employ the ideological concepts which were commonly found among different right-wing organizations in the country. Antisemitism as a “cultural code” was key in this regard. In 1939, the police of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia got a hold of a document in which the Ustašas detailed how their organization was supposed to be structured within the country. In this document the Ustašas for the first time explicitly forbade Jews from entering the movement, proscribing that member of “any religion except Jewish” could be recruited. The organizational instructions also delineated that “members of the organization should work against Marxism, Communism and Freemasonry.”³⁰²

The Ustaša recruitment efforts were relatively successful. By the end of 1940, the movement had managed to mobilize around 2,000 members. Almost half of them were in Zagreb, while the rest were scattered across Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most new recruits were nationalist university students, who would become the core group of activists that

³⁰⁰ Jelić-Butić, “Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti ustaša do 1941,” 80–81.

³⁰¹ The Report of the Socialist Yugoslav State Security Service on the Development of the Ustaša Movement in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia up to 1939. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.1., 37-38.

³⁰² HR-HDA-1354, Atentatori i teroristi, režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1938, 1939,1940. Box 9, Inventory Number 593-607. 08.07.1939.

furthered the mobilization of new members and spread Ustaša ideology through propaganda.³⁰³ According to the movement's own propagandistic history written during the war, Ante Pavelić established "permanent contact with his confidants in the country in the autumn of 1940."³⁰⁴ It was during that year that he started to maintain closer contact with the "homeland" wing of the movement which was rapidly growing. Pavelić started to send a series of instructions, messages, and propaganda materials to Ustaša members in Croatia, which emphasized the need to prepare all Ustašas in the country for an armed uprising. Pavelić was convinced that "Jews and England" ensured that the war would spread to the Balkans.³⁰⁵ On 31 October 1940, he sent a message to the Ustašas in Yugoslavia, in which he distanced himself from the HSS and reaffirmed his rejection of democratic values by arguing that

We must emphasize the historical thread of the struggle for Croatian state rights, which has nothing in common with contemporary representatives of the so-called democratic system – which represents nothing else than service in the interests of the Jewish and Freemasonic-Plutocratic world.³⁰⁶

By this stage, antisemitism has clearly become one of the key messages in the Ustaša propagandistic efforts and heavily pervaded Pavelić's political language in his correspondence with the "homeland," wing of the movement. In further communication on 15 November 1940, Pavelić emphasized that

Jews have robbed the Croatian people for centuries, especially the common man. They managed to acquire almost the entire Croatian national wealth. In an organized and systematic manner, they poisoned Croatian generations through press and books and denationalized them for years. In the future Independent State of Croatia, they will not be able to do this because the Croatian economy and education of youth will be in Croatian hands.³⁰⁷

In the same message, Pavelić informed his supporters that when he liberates the country "Croatia will be a Ustaša state," hinting at the fact that he would forbid all other political

³⁰³ The Report of the Socialist Yugoslav State Security Service on the Development of the Ustaša Movement in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia up to 1939m HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.1., 41.

³⁰⁴ Bzik, *Ustaška pobjeda: u danima osnutka i oslobođenja*, 37.

³⁰⁵ Bzik, 39.

³⁰⁶ Bzik, 39.

³⁰⁷ Bzik, 43.

parties. He concluded that “the existing life and system will have to stop. A new order will be introduced.” It would be an order in which “foreign roots of postwar upbringing will be ruthlessly destroyed.”³⁰⁸ There was no doubt that in Pavelić’s imagination Jews were one of the key agents of these “foreign” influences which he aimed to eliminate. On 14 March 1941, less than a month before the proclamation of the NDH, he openly accused Jews of “treason and anti-national work,”³⁰⁹ identifying them as one of the foremost enemies of the Ustaša movement and the Croatian nation. On 4 April 1941, just days before taking power, the Ustaša radio which emitted programs from Italy announced that “foreign parasites who have lived off of the peasant misery will be expelled [...], the enemy will be defeated and destroyed quickly. He will be removed from the Croatian territory.”³¹⁰

Antisemitism, thus, became an integral part of the Ustaša ideology in the period from 1938-1941. While antisemitism was initially spread from above through the evolution of Pavelić’s ideological evolution and innovation, the movement also adopted it from below through the influx of new members from various political grouping belonging to the Croatian far-right. The Ustašas synthesized antisemitism from different intellectual and ideological strands into a single narrative. The product of this process was an original and authentic integration of antisemitism into the Ustaša ideology and political program where the “Jewish question,” became on the main issues.

³⁰⁸ Bzik, 42.

³⁰⁹ Bzik, 48.

³¹⁰ Bzik, 67.

1.4. The Ustaša Ascent to Power

After the victory in the brief April War, Germany and Italy supported the dismemberment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the creation of the Independent State of Croatia. The state was proclaimed in Zagreb on 10 April 1941 by Slavko Kvaternik – one of the leaders of the Ustaša movement’s “homeland” wing. At the time, Ante Pavelić was still in Italy. It was first on 15 April 1941 that he arrived in Zagreb, the capital of the new state, together with the remaining Ustašas in emigration.

According to historian Stanley Payne, the NDH has a “unique place in history,” because it was the “only new fascist state placed directly in power by Hitler with the opportunity to enjoy extensive autonomy and to develop its own system.”³¹¹ As the Ustašas themselves explained, the new system which was introduced in the NDH was based on “totalitarianism because it desires to oversee, lead, govern and structure in all matters.”³¹² The regime was predicated on a charismatic system of leadership in which the central role was played by the Poglavnik³¹³ – Ante Pavelić. The Ustaša regime governed without constitution, parliament, or any form of political opposition since all political parties were forbidden. As Pavelić explained in 1943,

Today, when we, the Croatian people, have accepted, adhered to the new ideas and rejected the individualistic and democratic ideas, the entire nation becomes one family, what the Germans today call Volksgemeinschaft. Individuals, individual people, cease to be of value if they are not members of the national community.³¹⁴

The NDH consisted of the territories of modern Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of northern Serbia. It had around six million inhabitants. Those identified as Croats by

³¹¹ Payne, “The NDH State in Comparative Perspective,” 409.

³¹² Danijel Crljen, *Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* (Zagreb, 1942), 113.

³¹³ Poglavnik refers to the leader and constitutes a Croatian equivalent to the German word *Führer* or Italian *Duce*. Throughout the existence of the Ustaša movement, the title of Poglavnik was used only in reference to Ante Pavelić.

³¹⁴ Dulić and Miljan, “The Ustašas and Fascism: ‘Abolitionism,’ Revolution, and Ideology (1929–42),” 301.

the Ustašas (including around 700,000 Muslims) made up 61% of the population. Serbs, who made up 30% of the population, constituted the second largest ethnic group. In addition, there were around 40,000 Jews (0,6%) and 15-25,000 Roma on the territory of NDH. This multiethnic composition was considered a threat to the future of the NDH as it obstructed the plans for a “new beginning” and the “rebirth of the nation,” as defined by the Ustaša ideology. Reducing the number of minorities through ethnic cleansing was therefore of utmost importance to the Ustaša leaders.³¹⁵

The Ustašas conceived the elimination of targeted minorities as a historical mission. From their perspective, the ongoing World War II and other international circumstances offered a unique opportunity to solve the Serbian, Jewish, and Roma question(s). Vlado Singer, a prominent Ustaša member who oversaw the establishment of the Ustaša secret service in the NDH, noted privately in May 1941 that

our revolution is taking place during a great war. In such circumstances, things can happen, which usually cannot occur [...] We must seize this opportunity. Serbs have been threatening our existence for three hundred years [...] Now is the chance!³¹⁶

Pavelić entrusted the operational task of persecuting Serbs, Jews, and Roma to Eugen Dido Kvaternik – the head of the Main Security Office of the NDH (Ravnateljstvo za javni red i sigurnost, RAVSIGUR). Kvaternik had direct access to Ante Pavelić. The two men met daily to coordinate state security.³¹⁷ According to the senior Ustaša official Vladimir Židovec, Kvaternik told one of his associates in 1944 that Pavelić himself had ordered him to implement the measures against the Serbs and Jews immediately upon their return from Italy in April 1941:

When we came back from emigration, Ante Pavelić tasked me with executing the measures against Jews and Serbs. I immediately took this task without any hesitation. Even though, it was clear to me that this means my political death. I

³¹⁵ Lovro Kralj, “The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941,” in *Fascist Warfare, 1922-1945: Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation*, ed. Miguel Alonso, Alan Kramer, Javier Rodrigo (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 245.

³¹⁶ Goldstein, *1941*, 113.

³¹⁷ Testimony of the Ustaša member Oktavijan Svježić. HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.55., 64.

knew that after these measures were implemented, I could never appear in the political sphere. This was demanded of me as a young, ambitious, and energetic man. To sacrifice myself for this task. I did not hesitate even though I knew what this decision meant. I knew what the attitude of Jews towards the ideals of the Croatian nation were. I was aware of the role they have played in the last decades of the Croatian political life. I was especially aware of the mortal danger which threatened the Croatian people from the Serbian side [...]. Therefore, I knew that this question had to be solved for the future of the Croatian people and its state. Someone had to sacrifice himself so that these gruesome, but necessary, measures were implemented.³¹⁸

Kvaternik's invoking of selfless sacrifice for a higher mission, as well as his depiction of himself being in a completely submissive position to Pavelić should be interpreted within the context of self-victimization which many Ustaša's pursued after the war to reduce their agency.³¹⁹ Kvaternik's statement throws the regime's radical agenda into relief, albeit the exact nature and scale of the persecution was not planned beforehand. Historian Alexander Korb cautioned that while many scholars imply that the Ustaša regime created genocidal plans "these plans remained virtually undocumented."³²⁰ However, the Ustaša intention, to discriminate and "cleanse" the society of Serbs and Jews was no secret. Consistent with their ideology of organic nationalism, xenophobia, chauvinism, and antisemitism, the Ustaša leadership clearly and publicly stated that they wanted to solve the "Jewish question" as quickly as possible. In April 1941, upon inquiries from Adolf Hitler about how Croats will treat the Jewish minority, German Military Attaché Glaise von Horstenau reported that after the meeting with Ante Pavelić, "the [Croatian] government needs money, and therefore they will start to solve the Jewish question as soon as possible."³²¹ German diplomatic sources, however, suggest that "Germany was in principle politically disinterested in Croatian questions," of internal

³¹⁸ Eugen Dido Kvaternik allegedly told this to one of his associated from the Ministry of Interior of the NDH in 1944 after he has fell out of favor and power with Ante Pavelić. Testimony of the Ustaša member Vladimir Židovec. HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.56., 139-140.

³¹⁹ For a more detailed analysis of self-victimization narratives among the Ustaša members see Kralj, "The Rise and Fall of the Independent State of Croatia in the Memoirs and Testimonies of the Ustasha Members."

³²⁰ Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*, 176-177.

³²¹ Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, *Zapisi iz NDH* (Zagreb: Disput, 2013), 92.

governance. German interests in the NDH initially focused on economic and military domain.³²² Thus, historians such as Alexander Korb concluded that “there is insufficient evidence to confirm the prevalent supposition that, during the early phase of the NDH, the German orchestrates the individual steps of the persecution of the Croatian Jews *en détail*, or even imposed this upon the Ustaša.”³²³

Immediately after the formation of the NDH the Ustaša press initiated a relentless propaganda campaign against Jews and Serbs. According to the postwar study conducted by the State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators, the Ustaša daily newspaper *Novi list*, for example published more than half of all antisemitic articles ever issued in its history during 1941.³²⁴

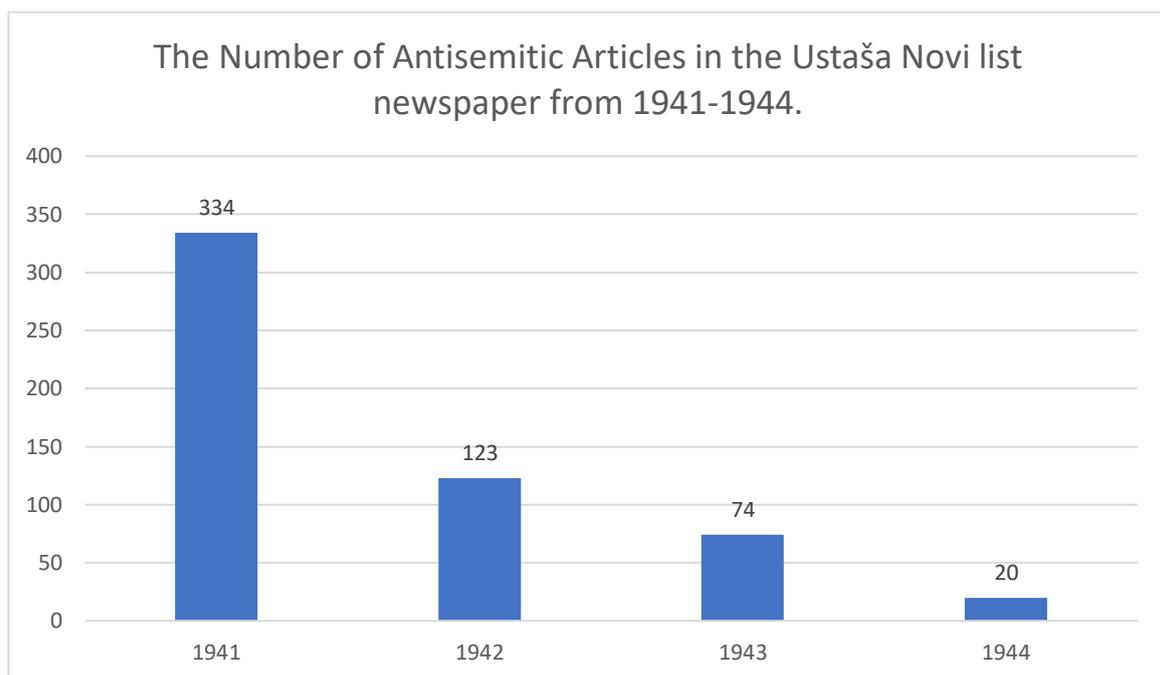


Table 2 – The Number of Antisemitic Articles in the Ustaša Novi List Newspaper from 1941-1945.³²⁵

³²² Record of the Conversation Between the Reich Foreign Minister and Count Ciano at the Hotel Imperial in Vienna, 22 April 1941. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, vol. 12 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 606–7.

³²³ Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*, 139.

³²⁴ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, Frame number: 542-569.

³²⁵ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, Frame number: 542-569.

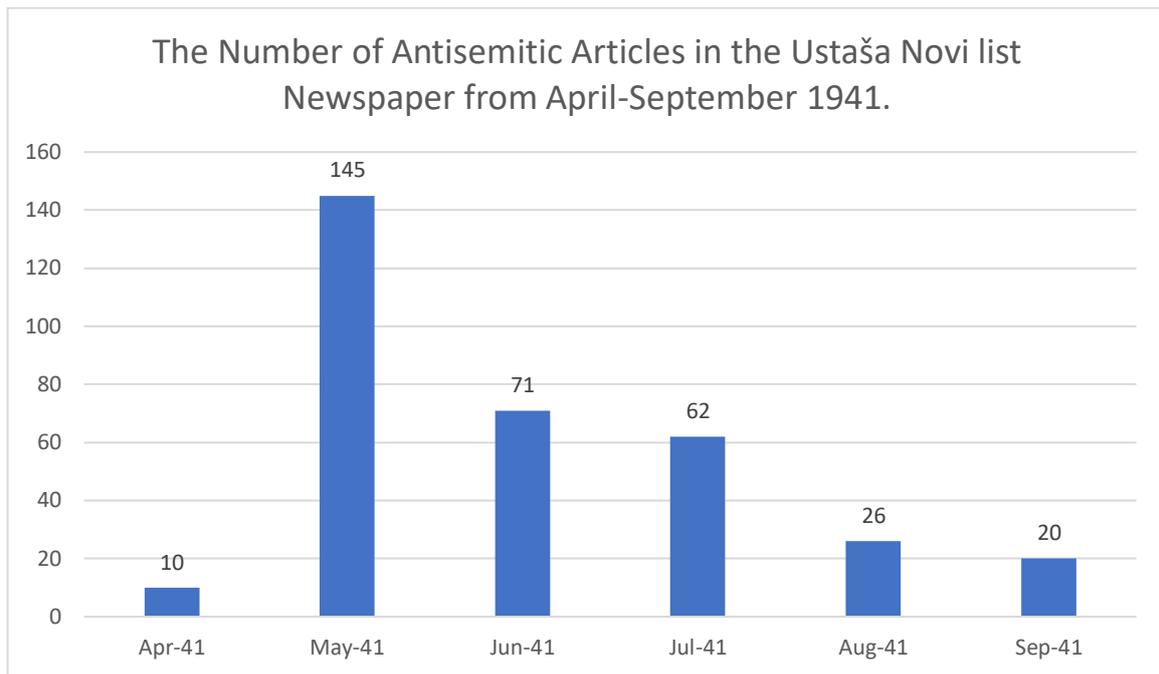


Table 3 – The Number of Antisemitic Articles in the Ustaša Novi List Newspaper from April – September 1941.³²⁶

The height of the antisemitic campaign against Jews was during spring and the summer of 1941, when the *Novi list* newspaper published an average of three antisemitic articles per day through May, June, and July 1941. While some historians maintain that the explosion of antisemitism in the NDH is tied to the invasion of the USSR, the evidence suggests that May of 1941 was the month in which the Ustaša propaganda was by far most intense. According to fragmentary but indicative data, antisemitism in the Ustaša press decreased after the summer of 1941, virtually disappearing from the press by the beginning of 1945.³²⁷ This, however, cannot be interpreted as merely a brief explosion of antisemitism in the Ustaša movement, solely contingent on external factors, such as the desire to demonstrate loyalty to Nazi Germany. Somewhat counterintuitively, the antisemitic propaganda started to decrease when the Ustaša-organized mass deportations of Jews intensified during August 1941. While the

³²⁶ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, Frame number: 542-569.

³²⁷ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, Frame number: 542-569.

correlation between antisemitic propaganda and deportations needs further analysis in historiography, the relative decline of antisemitism in the press could be tied to the idea that the beginning of the deportations would bring an immediate solution of the “Jewish question.” Even though antisemitism remained an important part of the Ustaša propaganda, the increased disappearance of Jews from the public life as the result of mass deportations reduced the urgency of antisemitic propaganda.

The relentless antisemitic propaganda was coupled with the introduction of comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation. The first antisemitic law in the NDH was proclaimed on 19 April 1941. It nullified all large business arrangements (more than 100.000 Dinars) which had been concluded between Jews and non-Jews two months before the proclamation of the NDH.³²⁸ Yet, this hastily constructed law motivated by economic antisemitism did not define who was Jewish.

A set of comprehensive race laws was issued on 30 April 1941. The first legal decree issued on that date regulated the issue of citizenship by stipulating that a “citizen is a member of the state who is of Aryan heritage and who has proved through his actions that he did not work against the liberation of the Croatian people and who is willing to loyally serve the Croatian people and the Independent State of Croatia.”³²⁹ The Legal Decree on Racial Kinship, issued on the same day, defined that “a person of Aryan kinship originates from ancestors who belong to the European racial community or from the members of this community who reside outside of Europe.” This law provided a racial definition of Jews who were identified as persons who have three Jewish grandparents. According to the racial legislation, the Jewishness of grandparents was determined if they belonged to “Moses’s religion or were born to into this religion.” Further specific questions related to determination of one’s Jewishness was handled

³²⁸ The Legal Decree about the Preservation of the Croatian National Property, 19 April 1941. A Mataić, *Zakoni i zakonske odredbe i naredbe proglašene od 11. travnja do 26. svibnja 1941.*, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, n.d.), 20.

³²⁹ The Legal Decree on the Citizenship, 30 April 1941. Mataić, 1:107–8.

by the Racial Political Committee, which was supposed to mediate in the question of race.³³⁰ These laws also defined Roma as individuals who had two or more Roma grandparents. The race laws also introduced the category of “Honorary Aryans,” which allowed for potential exemptions if the persons of Jewish or Roma origin were especially worthy of such treatment based on their merit for the “Croatian nation, and especially its liberation.”³³¹

The race law introduced on 30 April 1941 was the Legal Decree on the Protection of the Aryan Blood and the Honor of the Croatian people. Its first article forbade “marriage between Jews and other non-Aryan individuals with those of the Aryan descent.” It also forbade “extramarital sexual relations of Jewish and other individuals of non-Aryan blood with a woman of Aryan descent.” Moreover, “Jews or other individuals of non-Aryan descent cannot employ women of Aryan descent under the age of 45 in their household.”³³² Finally, according to this legal decree, Jews were forbidden from hanging the Croatian flag or the national symbols in public.³³³

While the race laws in the NDH were modeled on Nazi Germany’s, the Ustaša regime also demonstrated a degree of innovation. This is especially clear regarding the Roma. While Nazi racial legislation included the Roma into the race laws, they nominally remained citizens of the Reich until 1943. In Croatia Roma lost the right to citizenship just like Jews, thus setting them apart from the Nuremberg laws. Historian Nevenko Bartulin, convincingly argues the Ustaša regime “conducted its own racial politics which was without any doubt shaped under the influence (but not under the “pressure”) of the German Reich.”³³⁴

³³⁰ The Legal Decree on Racial Belonging, 30 April 1941. Mataić, 1:109-110.

³³¹ The Legal Decree on Racial Belonging, 30 April 1941. Mataić, 1:111. For a detailed analysis of the “Honorary Aryans,” see Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans*.

³³² The Legal Decree on the Protection of the Aryan Blood and the Honor of the Croatian Nation, 30 April 1941. Mataić, *Zakoni i zakonske odredbe i naredbe proglašene od 11. travnja do 26. svibnja 1941.*, 1:113-115.

³³³ The Legal Decree on the Protection of the Aryan Blood and the Honor of the Croatian Nation, 30 April 1941. Mataić, 1:113-115.

³³⁴ Bartulin, “‘Cigansko pitanje’: dokaz da NDH nije proglasila rasne zakone pod pritiskom Njemačkog Reicha.”

Following the introduction of race laws in May and June 1941, Ustaša ministers and other high-ranking members of the movement gave statements in the press inciting the removal of Serbs and Jews from the NDH. Already in May 1941, the future Minister of Foreign Affairs of NDH and one of the key Ustaša ideologues, Mladen Lorković, said in his public speech that:

the Croatian nation needs to be cleansed from all the elements which are a misfortune for our nation, who are alien and foreign in that nation, who melt down the healthy strength of the nation, who for decades have been pushing that nation from one disaster to another. Those [elements] are our Serbs and our Jews.³³⁵

The persecution of Serbs and Jews started in various forms immediately after the Ustašas took power in April 1941 while the destruction of Roma first began in earnest in 1942. There were two main commonalities in the persecution of Serbs, Jews, and Roma. First, persecution of these minorities had a common root in the xenophobic and chauvinistic Ustašas ideological core. Second, the persecution was influenced by a common structural factor: none of these minorities could rely on their nation-states for protection. Serbia was occupied and ceased being able to protect its citizens, while Jews and Roma could not count on any neighboring state to intervene on their behalf.³³⁶

Despite these similarities, methods of ethnic cleansing applied differed greatly due to various structural factors. Jews and Roma were defined by state legislation as racial categories through the race laws on 30 April 1941. This policy was followed relatively consistently. Most Jews and Roma in NDH were murdered through state-organized operations such as concentration and death camps. No such definition of Serbs, in the framework of state legislation, existed in the NDH, which gave more impetus to disagreement concerning how exactly the regime should solve the “Serbian question,” especially by opening the possibility of forced assimilation. Another major factor that led to divergences in the persecution of Jews

³³⁵ Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*, 87.

³³⁶ Kralj, “The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941,” 246–47.

and Serbs was the demographic and geographic distribution of these minorities. Jews were overwhelmingly concentrated in urban areas. More than 77% resided in towns and cities.³³⁷ This placed Croatian Jews in a particularly perilous situation, because they were in the immediate vicinity of the centers of repressive apparatus and effective transit networks such as railways. In contrast, the Serbs were distributed across 60–70% of the territory of the NDH, populating mostly rural areas. These, and other factors, resulted in different methods of violence and ethnic cleansing against Serbs, Jews and Roma communities in the NDH.³³⁸

Given the higher number of Serbs in the state, the Ustašas oscillated between the application of non-lethal methods of ethnic cleansing such as assimilation, deportation to Serbia, and, ultimately, genocide. The NDH policy of deportations of Serbs was closely intertwined with German policies. The two countries reached an agreement in June 1941 which envisioned a large-scale exchange of populations. Approximately 180,000 Serbs from the NDH would be deported to Serbia, which was under German occupation. In turn, the Germans would deport an equivalent number of Slovenes from the newly annexed territories to the NDH.³³⁹ However, the deportation policy was a failure for the Ustašas because the Germans cancelled the agreement in September 1941 after 17,706 Serbs were “legally” deported to Serbia. The Germans complained that the Serbian refugees were deported in terrible conditions, that they were spreading diseases. Most importantly, there were growing concerns that the deportees would join the resistance.³⁴⁰ Parallel to the “legal” top-down deportations, the Ustašas were also conducting “wild” deportations. This resulted in the flight or expulsion of 200,000 Serbs who found refuge in Serbia by the end of 1941.³⁴¹

³³⁷ Švob, *Židovi u Hrvatskoj: migracije i promjene u Židovskoj populaciji [Jews in Croatia: Migrations and Changes in Jewish Population]*, 74.

³³⁸ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*, 2001, 380. See also Kralj, “The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941,” 247.

³³⁹ Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*, 96.

³⁴⁰ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*, 2001, 350–67.

³⁴¹ Alexander Korb, “Nation-Building and Mass Violence: The Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945,” ed. Jonathan Friedman C. (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 292. See also Kralj, “The Evolution of Ustasha

The policy of mass deportations was entangled with the assimilationist policy implemented through conversions to Catholicism. Only the lower Serbian classes, such as the peasants, could be converted to Catholicism. The Serbian intellectual, political, religious, and economic elite was forbidden from converting. Instead, they would disappear from the NDH either through deportation or mass murder. The total number of Serbian converts possibly reached 250,000.³⁴² However, the assimilationist policy was rejected by the Ustašas hardliners and revolutionary purists. The armed Ustaša groups operating in the countryside often killed Serbs regardless of whether they had converted to Catholicism or not.³⁴³ By the end of the summer of 1941 alone, the Ustašas had killed over 100,000 Serbs in the countryside.³⁴⁴

The evolution of violence against Jews and Roma developed in a different way in comparison to the one applied against Serbs. Jews and Roma were forbidden from converting to Catholicism or any other state sanctioned religion in the NDH. Generally, they were not exposed to violence of the paramilitaries such as the Ustaša corps operating in the countryside. The state institutions tried to keep control over the pace of the persecution of Jews through state, rather than party, institutions. After the introduction of race laws, the NDH legislation kept introducing antisemitic legislation which aimed to exclude Jews from the public, professional and economic life of the Croatian state. On 4 June 1941, a Legal Decree about the Protection of the National and Aryan Culture of the Croatian People was issued. According to it, the “Jewish race must not have any influence on the national and Aryan culture. Thus, it is forbidden for them to participate in any work with the organizations and institutions of social,

Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941,” 247–48.

³⁴² Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*, 2001, 408.

³⁴³ Kralj, “The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941,” 248.

³⁴⁴ Alexander Korb, “Understanding Ustaša Violence,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, no. 1–2 (June 2010): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2010.508273>.

youth, sport or cultural life relevant for the Croatian nation. This is especially relevant for literature, journalism, arts, music, urbanism, theatre, and film.”³⁴⁵

On the same date, 4 June 1941, another legal decree was issued, according to which all Jews who changed their names or last names after 1 December 1918 had to change them back to the original. Moreover, all Jewish firms had to be marked. Jewish firms were defined as those fully owned by Jews, but also those which even had a single Jewish co-owner. Moreover, if even a single Jew performed a role in the board of directors, the supervisory board, or the management the company was classified as Jewish owned. All such firms had to be marked as Jewish publicly. ³⁴⁶ On 1 July 1941 the NDH formed the State Secretariat for Economic Renewal which among its functions had the role of “buying out the property of Jews and Jewish businesses,” or in other words, it oversaw “Aryanization,” of Jewish property. ³⁴⁷

According to the regulation introduced on 4 June 1941, Jews could not display any Croatian national symbols or “Aryan emblems.” Instead, “Jews older than 14 have to wear a Jewish sign whenever they leave their apartment.” The “Jewish sign” was a round metal plate 5 cm in diameter, which was painted with yellow color and a black letter “Ž” (for Židov) inscribed in the middle. This order systematized the various local initiatives by emphasizing that “all other regulations regarding the marking of Jews cease to exist with the date of this decision.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ The Legal Decree About the Protection of the National and Aryan Culture of the Croatian People, 4 June 1941. A Mataić, ed., *Zakoni i zakonske odredbe i naredbe proglašene od 27. svibnja do 30. lipnja 1941.*, vol. II (Zagreb: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, n.d.), 40–41.

³⁴⁶ The Order about the Change of Jewish Last Names and the Marking of Jews and Jewish Firms, 4 June 1941. Mataić, II:54–56.

³⁴⁷ The Legal Decree About the Foundation of the State Secretariat for Economic Renewal, 1 July 1941. A Mataić, *Zakoni i zakonske odredbe i naredbe*, vol. III (Zagreb: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, n.d.), 88–89.

³⁴⁸ The Order about the Change of Jewish Last Names and the Marking of Jews and Jewish Firms, 4 June 1941. Mataić, *Zakoni i zakonske odredbe i naredbe proglašene od 27. svibnja do 30. lipnja 1941.*, II:58–57.

On 4 June the Ustaša regime also put into force the Order for the Establishment of Racial Affiliation of State and Independent Officials and Independent Academic Professions. According to this directive, all state and private employees had to report their and their spouses' racial affiliation to the authorities within 14 days.³⁴⁹ The state also instructed its officials, as well as all those in the private sector who will gather the materials, to take great care of potential falsification. They received special instructions on who had to be particularly screened. Among other, the instructions stated that “suspicion about the authenticity of the provided data [on racial affiliation] can be raised by a Jewish physical appearance or the Jewish character (high degree of selfishness, high degree of adaptability to other people, lack of any aloofness and high degree of sociability with unfamiliar individuals).”³⁵⁰

Throughout April and May 1941 Jews were exposed to the violence in the streets, individual arrests, as well as harsh legal and informal discrimination. The first mass deportation of Jews in the NDH occurred in Zagreb when Jewish youths were summoned by the Zagreb police to report for forced labor. Many answered the call and 165 of them were deported to Danica – one of the first concentration camps established by the Ustaša regime. While Danica was not a death camp, almost all Jews from this group were later murdered in a web of Ustaša death camps which were established in the second half of 1941.³⁵¹ This instance of mass deportations demonstrates that the Ustašas began with the “cleansing,” of Jews weeks before the invasion of the USSR began. However, this action was mainly of local character at the time, and there was still no order to implement the mass deportations on the state-wide level. This was about to radically change in the following weeks.

³⁴⁹ The Order for the Establishment of Racial Affiliation of State and Independent Officials and Independent Academic Professions, 4 June 1941. Mataić, II:105–8.

³⁵⁰ Instructions About the Creation of the Lists of State and Self-Governing Officials [...] Who Do Not Have Aryan Forefathers. Mataić, II:111.

³⁵¹ Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016, 110, 203, 224.

On 26 June 1941, Poglavnik Ante Pavelić accused the Jews in the NDH of being responsible for “spreading false news” and “sabotaging supplies of necessary goods for the population through speculation.” He concluded that Jews “are considered collectively responsible, and actions will be taken against them. Besides the regular criminal procedure, they will be sent to concentration camps [zatočenička zbirališta] under the open sky.”³⁵² Pavelić’s words marked the beginning of intensive decision-making regarding the Holocaust on the state-wide level in the NDH. On 8 July 1941, his decree was formalized into an order issued by the Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR) in the form of an instruction to all heads of the police on regional level in which it was written:

When the interest of the public security demands the removal of undesirable people from place of their residence, all Greek-Easterners [Serbs] and Jews (even those who converted to Catholic religion after 10 April 1941) should be sent to Gospić [concentration camp] ... No one else should be sent to the concentration camp “Danica” in Koprivnica [from now on]. Catholics and Muslims should not be sent to Gospić [concentration camp].³⁵³

This order set a major precedent and presented one of the major steppingstones in the evolution of the Holocaust in the NDH. Serbs and Jews were supposed to go through a fundamentally different process than the rest of the population when accused of the same “crimes.” Instead of going through the regular legal proceedings, court, and prison system, they were to be deported directly to camps. Moreover, since the Danica camp was being shut down, all Serb and Jewish deportees were now to be sent to the Gospić camp system which had a fundamentally different role. Instead of being merely a detention site, Gospić complex was a hybrid camp which also had a function of a death camp in the subcamp of Jadovno.

³⁵² Ante Pavelić. “Izvanredna zakonska odredba i zapovijed” *Hrvatski narod*, no 133, 27 July 1941, p. 1.

³⁵³ Ravnateljstvo za javni red i sigurnost za Nezavisnu Državu Hrvatsku to all regional and city police authorities, 8 July 1941. Antun Miletić, ed., *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac: 1941-1945.: dokumenta*, vol. Vol. 1. (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1986), 52.

The designation of “undesirable people” people issued in this order was further specified in a similar order issued on 23 July 1941, when all 22 *velike župe*, the main regional administrative units in the NDH,³⁵⁴ received instructions to

urgently imprison all Jews and Serb-Orthodox, who were known as communists, or are even slightly suspicious of sympathizing with this [communist] movement. Same measures should be taken against communists who belong to the Catholic or Muslim religion and others. However, they should be kept in detention, while Serbs and Jews should be immediately deported to concentration camp Gospić.³⁵⁵

Probably due to additional inquiries from local security agencies, this order was reissued again by the Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR) on 30 July 1941 with the additional clarification that Jews and Serbs could be deported “without any material evidence” proving that they were suspicious of being communists.³⁵⁶ As a result, all legal and procedural barriers were eliminated for the deportations to take place. Considering that the Ustaša antisemitic propaganda repeatedly utilized the Judeo-Bolshevik myth according to which Jews stood behind communism, the Ustaša elites implied that all Jews should be deported to the concentration camps. Therefore, this set of orders issued in July 1941 (from now on referred to as “July orders”) present us with some of the most important decision-making steps in the escalation of the Holocaust in NDH.

The July orders offered a critical overarching framework for the implementation of mass arrests and deportations of both Jews and Serbs. They were among the most important radicalizing signals emitting from the macro level. Yet, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, their translation into concrete policies at the meso- and micro levels were far from uniform and led to conspicuously divergent results.

³⁵⁴ Velike župe were officially introduced through a legal decree issued on 10 June 1941 when they became the main regional administrative units which performed a similar function to the Gaue in Nazi Germany.

³⁵⁵ Directorate of the Ustaša police of NDH to all the velike župe and to the Ustaša Commissioner for Bosnia and Herzegovina [Jure] Francetić, issued on 23 July 1941. Slavko Vukčević, ed. *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu: zbornik dokumenata*. (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1993), 366.

³⁵⁶ Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSGIUR) to all velike župe and Directories of Police in Zagreb, Banja Luka and Sarajevo, 30 July 1941. Vukčević, 414.

Conclusion

One of the central questions in antisemitism studies is determination of continuity or discontinuity between different form of anti-Jewish attitudes across different time periods. There is little evidence which would confirm that Ustaša antisemitism was derived from previous upswings of antisemitism in Croatia. Even though the Ustašas tried to demonstrate the continuity of antisemitism with earlier periods of political thought in Croatia, this was an attempt at invention of tradition aiming to legitimize the adoption of antisemitism.

When the Ustaša movement was founded, antisemitism was not a noteworthy part of its ideology, rhetoric, or policy. In the early history of the Ustaša, dated 1929-1934, the most important organizational, ideological and propaganda materials did not pay any significant attention to, nor did they pose the “Jewish question.” Although Pavelić and some other members of the movement showed signs of anti-Jewish stereotypes in the early phase of Ustaša history, these were not elevated to the level of major political and ideological concerns. Antisemitism was thus not a part of the Ustaša ideological core. The core of the Ustaša ideology consisted of organic nationalism, glorification of violence, xenophobia, and chauvinism. The very core of the Ustaša ideology was a foundation which was susceptible to future adoption of antisemitism.

In the second phase of the development of the Ustaša movement, starting in 1934, the Ustašas started to increasingly align themselves with German Nazism. The Ustašas embraced the revisionist politics of “New Order” in the international arena and began to accept racism, anti-communism, anti-democracy, anti-capitalism, anti-parliamentarism and anti-liberalism. These concepts that were rapidly adopted through the process of fascistization were so closely tied to the concept of antisemitism that they would lose their appeal significantly if antisemitism was not used as the ideological glue that gave them more prominence within the ideological structure. It is precisely this deep embeddedness of the antisemitism within the

negative pole of fascist ideology, which makes it essentially different, by virtue of its functionality, from any other “anti-ethnic components, such as anti-Serbian or anti-Roma in the case of the Ustaša movement.

The interdependent processes of fascistization and antisemitization of the Ustaša movement was initiated by Ante Pavelić and his closest circle. Antisemitism was therefore disseminated from top to bottom within the Ustaša movement. Even though Ustaša antisemitism was first extensively used in communication with Nazi German agencies, Ante Pavelić did not adopt it to satisfy the Germans but to modernize the Ustaša ideology. The adoption of antisemitism was driven by inner Ustaša dynamics and not by exogenous factors.

In this sense, Pavelić was following a trend which was simultaneously underway in the broader Croatian far-right within Yugoslavia. The intensified recruitment of Ustaša members within the country in the period from 1937-1941 among the nationalist students, Catholic intellectuals, and other right-wingers in effect further sharpened and amplified Ustaša antisemitism. Many of those recruits were the true believers in antisemitism long before they joined the Ustaša movement. Therefore, despite Pavelić’s role at the top, antisemitism was simultaneously entering the movement from below, further demonstrating the authenticity and originality of Ustaša antisemitism. Many of these antisemitic and right-wing intellectuals would form the backbone of the Ustaša propaganda and security apparatus, thus ensuring that antisemitism became an integral part of the NDH’s policies.

2. The Antisemitic Avant-Grade: The Town of Križevci

Introduction

Considering the highly multiethnic composition of the population of the Independent State of Croatia, the town of Križevci in the northwest of the country exhibited a particularly homogenous population. In 1931, the last census before the war, the town had a population of around 7000. Roman Catholics, an overwhelming majority of them Croats, accounted for almost 95% of the population, while the combined Jewish and Serbian population constituted 4%.³⁵⁷ In absolute numbers, there were 133 Serbs and more than 100 Jews, both forming small minorities in the overall population of the town.³⁵⁸ Unlike Serbs and Jews, the Roma mostly resided outside of the town in the rural areas of the district of Križevci, where they numbered 249 members in the 1931 census.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Since there was no category of ethnicity within the 1931 Yugoslav census, the number of Croats can only be determined roughly by reducing the number of non-Catholic and non-Serbo-Croatian speaking population from the total number of residents. This method cannot be considered as precise due to the inability of the language and religious criterion to accurately capture ethnic identity, and often these identities were fluid. According to the 1931 census, the town of Križevci had a total population of 7035. Broken down by religion, the population consisted of 6,683 Roman Catholics, 133 Christian Orthodox, 78 belonging to other churches, 9 Protestants, 6 Muslims and 126 of those of “other religions,” which were mostly Jews. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga I: Prisutno stanovništvo, broj kuća i domaćinastava*, 1:88. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga II: Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti*, 2:88.

³⁵⁸ The number of Jews is based on the report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci compiled after the war. According to the report, on 6 April 1941 the Jewish community consisted of 39 men, 32 women, 7 children and 31 elderly Jews. One should keep in mind that this list includes only those Jews who were registered as members of the Jewish Religious Community and doesn't include those who did not self-identify as Jewish. Moreover, the number doesn't include all those who were targeted by the race laws as Jews, thus the number of those considered Jewish by the race laws of the NDH was significantly higher than the one listed here. Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 311.

³⁵⁹ Filip Škiljan, “Odnos ustaške vlasti na Kalniku i u potkalničkom kraju prema Srbima, Židovima i Romima 1941. godine.,” *Cris: Časopis Povijesnog društva Križevci* XI, no. 1 (2009): 91.

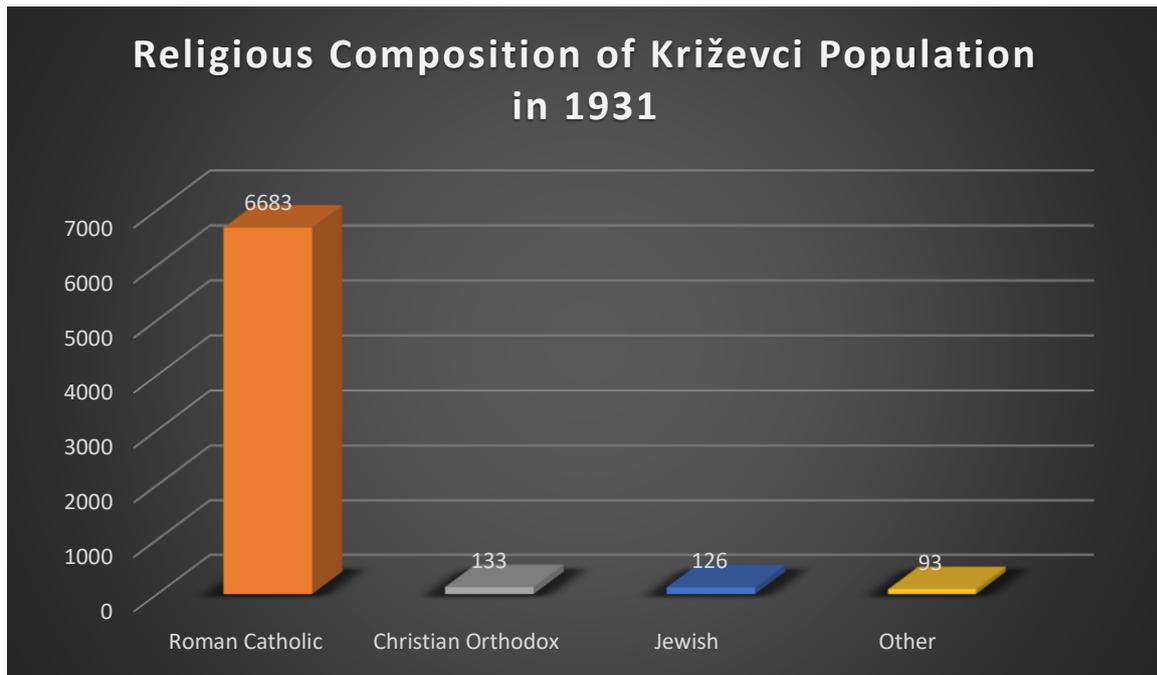


Table 4 – Religious Composition of the Population of Križevci in 1931.³⁶⁰

The Jewish community in Križevci was well integrated in the local society. Jews served as mayors and town senators. For example, Aleksandar Goldschmidt was one of the longest serving town senators of Križevci, while also performing the role of the president of the Jewish Religious Community for 19 years.³⁶¹ Almost 10% of the entire Jewish community was highly educated and Jews played an important role in town's economy, mainly in the textile industry and trade.³⁶²

Holocaust survivors from Križevci reflected after the war that antisemitism at the local level among the general population in the interwar period “was weak.” Many did not even find it worth a mention.³⁶³ Yet, paradoxically, the town of Križevci became the site of one of the swiftest and most radical implementations of antisemitic measures and legislation on the

³⁶⁰ Kraljevina Jugoslavija, Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga I: Prisutno stanovništvo, broj kuća i domaćinastava, 1:88. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga II: Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti, 2:88.

³⁶¹ “Aleksandar Goldschmidt,” *Židov*, 21 July 1939, no. 29, p. 2.

³⁶² Ljiljana Dobrovšak and Dejan Pernjak, *Židovi u Križevcima - povijest, značaj i naslijeđe* (Križevci: Gradski muzej Križevci, 2015), 43, 50, 55.

³⁶³ Renee Malecek. Interview 20444, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 25 September 1996. See also Branko Marsic. Interview 39259, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 30 December 1997.

territory of the NDH. The postwar report of the Jewish Religious Community in Križevci pointed out that persecution of the town's Jews started "immediately after the proclamation of the NDH [...], long before any anti-Jewish measures were put into place" on the state level. Virtually all the discriminatory acts against Jews were implemented in Križevci before they were introduced on the state-level.³⁶⁴

When the investigators of the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators were tasked with compiling a report on the persecution of Jews in the town of Križevci, they found it difficult to explain the events there through the lenses of the existing Yugoslav narrative about the Holocaust. The City Commission of Križevci took it upon itself to conduct the first investigation. One of the commission's main sources of information was a man who had served in the town's police force during the war and therefore had access to the inner-workings of the decision making. The former policeman stressed that the persecution of Jews was implemented on local initiatives. As he put it, "since these orders were issued two or three days after 10 April 1941, it is clear that they [Ustašas] couldn't have received these orders [from above]."³⁶⁵ To ensure its compatibility with the Yugoslav narrative, the Križevci Commission doubled down on the intentionalist narrative and argued that the:

fascist fifth column – the Ustaša functionaries in Križevci – received insight into the plans regarding the persecution of Jews [before the occupation]. By agitating against the Jews, they prepared the terrain so that the persecution of Jews could be easily implemented in the first days of the occupation. Therefore, they executed the plan which was prepared earlier. The fact that the Ustaša functionaries, who were organizing and commanding the persecution and robbery of Jews, were well informed and had insight into the unique fascist plan even before the occupation is best proven by that the persecution started immediately [after the occupation] on 13 April 1941. This was only two or three days after the arrival of the occupiers and the proclamation of the NDH. In such short period no order or directions could

³⁶⁴ Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 310.

³⁶⁵ Testimony of Franjo Novosel, a police officer from Križevci, given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators, 31 August 1945. Document number: 32/45. HDA-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 286.

have arrived, especially considering that in these days the Ustaša government in Zagreb did not function in full capacity and they didn't issue such orders [regarding the persecution of Jews]. The fact that the order and the methods of the persecution [of Jews] were the same in other places where Jews lived proves that the basic plan was the same and that the organizers and the executioners of the persecution received instructions about this from the same place – that is the fascist, Ustaša main command in the emigration.³⁶⁶

This chapter examines whether there were indeed existing plans for the implementation of the Holocaust devised by the Ustašas before their arrival to power both on the national and local level. By exploring the interaction between the macro, meso and micro level, it also probes the degree of agency the local authorities had in pursuing their own agenda and influence the central policies in Zagreb.

2.1. The Establishment of the Ustaša Elite

The town of Križevci immediately felt the consequences of the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941. Since the town was located close to the state borders and hosted a large military magazine filled with ammunition for the Yugoslav army, many citizens took refuge outside the town's borders. Križevci itself was briefly turned into a frontline zone as skirmishes between the Royal Yugoslav Army and the Wehrmacht took place just outside the town. The shots died out around 3 p.m. on 10 April 1941 after the Yugoslav military started to retreat through the town.³⁶⁷ Parts of the German military's 14th armored division entered Križevci on that afternoon. However, they did not stay in the town for long and entrusted locals with maintaining order.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Report of the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci, sent to the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Bjelovar. Document number: 17-1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 307.

³⁶⁷ Report of the Yugoslav Security Services created after the war on the history of the "Ustaša apparatus and movement in the district of Križevci, 10 April 1957. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.17., 5.

³⁶⁸ Rade Milosavljević, *Križevci u NOB i revoluciji* (Križevci: Narodno sveučilište Križevci, Gradski muzej Križevci, 1982), 12.

The local Ustašas gathered around Dr. Dane Miletić, the president of the county court in Križevci, who immediately took power in the town. Before the war, Miletić had maintained close contact with the two prominent Ustaša members Aleksandar Seitz and Mladen Lorković. Back in 1940, Miletić met the two men in Zagreb. During the meeting, they agreed that if Yugoslavia was caught up in a war this would provide a unique chance to establish an independent Croatian state led by the Ustašas. They agreed to make necessary preparations for such course of events. Consequently, Miletić started to organize a trusted circle of people in Križevci who were slated to take over various positions in the local governance in case of an invasion of Yugoslavia.³⁶⁹ As a judge and member of the city elite, Miletić had access to members of the local community who wielded considerable influence. Upon hearing that the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed on 10 April 1941 via the radio transmission, he met with two of his most trusted aides, Đuro Bičanić, a lawyer, and Vladimir Heim, an employee of the county administration who had knowledge on the inner working of the local state institutions.³⁷⁰

Besides Bičanić and Heim, Miletić also enlisted support from professors, judges, priests, and administrative staff. On 10 April 1941 the core group of his supporters discussed how to proceed with the organization of power in the town. One result of the meeting was that Miletić was “elected” leader of the Ustaša *Logor* – a newly formed party position within the emerging Ustaša organization of power on the county level of Križevci while Heim was appointed as his deputy. Heim also received the position as the head of the county, a corresponding state position which was on the same level as *Logor*. Heim’s occupation of both the state and party offices assured that there would not be any conflicts or competition between

³⁶⁹ HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.17., 3-4.

³⁷⁰ HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.17., 5.

these two levels of power. Finally, another of Miletić's aides from before the war, Bičanić, received the position as mayor of the town.

What was particular about the consolidation of Ustaša power in Križevci in comparison to many other locations in the NDH was the level of cooptation of the local elites. Some of the people Miletić assembled on 10 April 1941 became the leaders of the Ustaša organization in the city. For example, the newly formed Logor had nine members, all of whom had performed important roles in the local community.³⁷¹ In addition, the locals also formed the "Ustaša board," which functioned as an advisory body to the Logor. It consisted of 15 members, including representatives of the Catholic Church, members of the local administration, bank officials, merchants, and small entrepreneurs.³⁷²

The cooptation of broad segments of local elites into various positions of power performed several important functions. First, it aimed to mobilize the support of the local citizens. Figures of authority on the local level, such as priests, teachers, and public officials usually enjoyed a considerable amount of respect and trust by the local population. Thus, their support for the Ustaša movement legitimized the new fascist governance on the local level. Second, by including the local elites into different layers of power on the local level, the Ustašas prevented potential rivalry and competition between them. This gave rise to a peculiar form of decision-making. In many locations across the NDH, there were significant tensions between the Ustaša party and state institutions, which was caused by overlapping competencies on the ground.³⁷³ However, in Križevci, local officials received both positions within the Ustaša party and the local state authorities. Thus, they maintained the coherence and unity of power between

³⁷¹ Members of the Logor included a local judge, lawyer, former local administration employee, three veterinarians and a professor. In the later stages its members also included two teachers and the head of the local railway station. See The Report of the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci, 31 August 1945. Document number: 32/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 286. See also HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.17., 6-7.

³⁷² HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.17., 8.

³⁷³ For a brief elaboration of the conflicts and tensions between the state and party institutions in the NDH see Kralj, "The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941."

the two major decision-making hierarchies. Such a structure prevented any form of conflicts and contradictions between the two axes of power, and the effective communication and coordination between them ensured a relatively uniform decision-making. The result was that the party and state institutions in Križevci supported each other's efforts, thereby furthering the Ustašas' consolidation of power in the town.

2.2. First Measures Against the Jews and the Ustaša Terror

On 11 April 1941, one day after they took power in Križevci, the Ustaša triumvirate Miletić-Heim-Bičanić started to issue antisemitic and anti-Serbian decrees, targeting entire communities as "unwanted." One of the first orders issued by Bičanić, the newly appointed mayor of Križevci, was the confiscation of all weapons, radios, bicycles, binoculars, and cameras possessed by Jews and Serbs.³⁷⁴ Police officers from Križevci went from house to house and inquired about these objects among the local Serbs and Jews and confiscated all they could find.³⁷⁵ Available evidence suggests that these orders were the product of local decision making since the first government of the NDH still had not been formed and Ante Pavelić had still to arrive in Zagreb.

The fact that the confiscation of objects associated with spying and sabotage was specifically directed against Serbs and Jews indicates that both ethnic groups were collectively considered as a potential security threat by the newly established Ustaša authorities. The depiction of Jews as a looming threat drew continuity from the interwar period. To a large extent antisemitism became integral to the ideological makeup among some of the nationalists in Križevci during the Spanish Civil War. As noted in the previous chapter, the nationalist Croatian press tended to frame the war as a struggle between two Manichean forces. One the

³⁷⁴ Milosavljević, *Križevci u NOB i revoluciji*, 13.

³⁷⁵ Report of the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Bjelovar, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2943, frame number: 282.

one hand stood the nationalists aiming to preserve Europe, and on the other, communists who were framed as the ultimate force of evil orchestrated by Jews. Considering that the Ustašas in Križevci started to maintain closer ties with the Ustaša elites only in the late 1930s, they first started to interact with the movement and its propaganda in earnest at a point where they fully had absorbed antisemitism.³⁷⁶

The urgency with which the Ustašas in Križevci started to deal with the “Jewish question” was without precedent on the local level since a similar measure which treated Jews as the “fifth column,” first was introduced at a later date even in nearby locations. For example, in Bjelovar which is located 30 kilometers southeast of Križevci, the measure for the confiscation of radios and other materials was introduced on 25 April 1941 – two weeks later than in Križevci. Having in mind that all the confiscated radios and other material went to Bjelovar before they were transported to Zagreb and other locations, it is likely that the Ustašas in Bjelovar imitated the orders of their fellow Ustašas from Križevci.³⁷⁷

A similar measure concerned with the confiscation of Jewish and Serbian property considered useful for sabotage and dissemination of propaganda was proposed on the state level only in May 1941 by the main propaganda office of the Ustaša regime.³⁷⁸ The confiscated Jewish cameras eventually became one of the most wanted items of various propaganda offices across the NDH. Due to “lack of necessary material,” the Ustaša propaganda offices sent several requests to get the cameras, typewriters and pens confiscated from Jews.³⁷⁹ It was not only the propaganda offices that were interested in these items. Institutions such as the Croatian State Archives also requested cameras and furniture owned by Jews to equip their offices and

³⁷⁶ Report of the Yugoslav Security Service on the Development of the Ustaša movement in the district of Križevci, 10 April 1957. HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.17., 3-4.

³⁷⁷ Representatives of the City Police in Bjelovar to the City Authorities in Bjelovar, 28 April 1941. Document number: 3384/1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 22-9, 5.

³⁷⁸ The Main Headquarters of the Field Marshal [Glavni stožer Vojskovođe] to the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs with the Ustaša Police [Povjereniku za Židove pri ispostavi ustaškog redarstva], 20 May 1941. Document number: 544. HR-HDA-252, RUR – Židovski odsjek, file number 27224.

³⁷⁹ The Office of the Presidency of the Government of NDH – Press Section to Ustaša Police – Jewish section, 27 June 1941. HR-HDA-252, RUR – Židovski odsjek, file number 27499.

technical departments.³⁸⁰ Therefore, the parts of the NDH institutions and its propaganda offices that headed the campaign against Jews had to rely on the property of the very people they would persecute.

The second antisemitic measure introduced in Križevci on 11 April 1941 was the so-called “contribution.” This was a euphemism for a ransom which Jews had to pay to avoid being arrested. Local Ustašas compiled a list of individual Jews who had to pay specific amounts of money considered appropriate according to their occupation and personal wealth. The total sum requested in Križevci was 294,000 Yugoslav dinars, which amounts to approximately 110,000 US Dollars in its current value.³⁸¹ The city police started to collect the money for the contribution immediately, going from house to house.³⁸² By 17 April 1941, twenty-five Jews had paid 244,000 Dinars. The list of contributors included nineteen merchants, three large landowners, one industrial miller, a pharmacist, and a teacher.³⁸³ The idea of the contribution was based on the antisemitic notion that the Jewish community had extreme riches, which they had earned on the backs of the rest of the population. The Ustašas were, however, quickly disappointed since not all the members of the Jewish community could pay the contribution. The final extorted amount turned out to be lower than expected.

The contribution was only applied against the Jewish community and demonstrates a significant difference in the Ustaša anti-Serb and antisemitic attitudes. Serbs were seen as primarily a political and military threat while Jews were constructed as an economic, political, ideological, and racial threat. However, local Ustašas were clearly aware that the narrative about the collective riches of the Jewish community did not correspond to reality. The fact that

³⁸⁰ State Archives in Zagreb to the Ustaša Police – Jewish Section, 27 June 1941. HR-HDA-252, RUR – Židovski odsjek, file number 27500.

³⁸¹ The Report of the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Bjelovar sent to the National Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes and the Occupiers and Their Collaborators, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 282.

³⁸² Testimony of Holocaust survivor Pšerhof Makso given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 27 August 1945. Document number: 28/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 287.

³⁸³ Excerpt from the Jewish Fund for year 1941. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 293.

the contribution was set on an individual basis, with each member of the Jewish community having to pay an amount corresponding to their perceived wealth, belied the notion of all Jews as unscrupulous hoarders. Of course, the issue was also highly gendered. Almost exclusively men were designated to pay the contribution while women were not seen as relevant economic agents.

Not everyone could pay their “contribution,” and this triggered some of the first arrests which targeted exclusively Jews. At least three Jews were arrested in the first days after the Ustašas took power.³⁸⁴ These were by no means the only arrests conducted in Križevci in the first days of the Ustaša rule. To preempt any form of opposition the Ustašas arrested some of the prominent citizens already on 11 April 1941. The arrestees were men who had previously held power or belonged to political groups that the Ustašas considered a threat. The arrestees included Lavoslav Hanžek,³⁸⁵ a prominent politician who served as the Minister of Sports in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1932-1934, Milan Margulit – a Jewish pharmacist who also served as the mayor of Križevci in the early 1930s, Šimica Stjepan a city employee, and Horvat Šimun, a local miller. All four of them were questioned and tortured by Heim, Bičanić and Miletić.³⁸⁶

The contribution was only the first in a long series of measures designed to systematically rob the Jewish community of all their property. Beginning in the middle of April 1941, the Ustašas in Križevci started to take control of Jewish owned business by introducing “commissioners.” Formally, the role of the “commissioner” was to oversee the running of a

³⁸⁴ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 30 August 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 289.

³⁸⁵ Lavoslav Hanžek (1884-1942) was a lawyer in Križevci who built a prominent political career in interwar Yugoslavia. Initially Hanžek was a member of the Starčević's Party of Rights, a Croatian nationalist party, he performed the duties of the mayor of Križevci from 1921-1924. He was one of the founders of the Croatian Federalist Peasant Party which was a rival of the Croatian Peasant Party. After the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929 Hanžek became the supporter of Yugoslav unitarism and joined the Yugoslav National Party. After his arrest in 1941 he was transferred to various camps of the NDH and died in Stara Gradiška as the result of severe dysentery.

³⁸⁶ HR-HDA-1561, SDS, 013.0.17., 11.

Jewish owned business and ensure that it operated in accordance with what was perceived as Croatian national interests. However, this was merely a coverup for requisition of money, goods and entire businesses before the formal laws which would allow for the legal nationalization of the property were being introduced. On April 29, the Ustaša headquarters in Križevci reported that they already appointed ten “commissioners” in Jewish owned businesses.³⁸⁷

Even after the “contribution” and the confiscation of their businesses, local Ustašas’ remained convinced that the Jews were hiding immense riches. In June 1941, all the housekeepers working in houses of Jews were arrested and kept in the police building in Križevci until the evening. The housekeepers were questioned about the behavior of their employers and were promised a hefty reward if they gave up any compromising information. However, most of the questions did not revolve around security matters or ideological affiliation, but whether Jews were hiding money or other valuables which the Ustašas still had not seized.³⁸⁸ Thus, on the local level, some of the first measures against Jews were primarily concerned with requisition of property. Jewish assets were an essential vehicle for solidifying the Ustašas’ control of the town as they used them to buy the loyalty of incoming members.

However, it was not only the Ustašas who reaped the benefits from robbing the Jews. Looted Jewish property was stored in the Synagogue, which was turned into a large warehouse and an auction house for this purpose. The auctions of Jewish property were organized by Franjo Petranović – a clerk working in the local savings bank.³⁸⁹ The public could participate

³⁸⁷ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 299.

³⁸⁸ Testimony of Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 30 August 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 291.

³⁸⁹ Report of the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci sent to the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes and Their Collaborators in Bjelovar, Document number: 17-1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 308.

in these auctions, and various segments of the society benefitted from taking part in them. The Catholic Church was among the beneficiaries. Soon various items and furniture from the Synagogue found their way into local Catholic churches.³⁹⁰

Searches of Jewish apartments for any remaining property took place throughout the late spring and summer of 1941. For example, Makso Pšerhof lost his business in April 1941 due to the introduction of “commissioners.” On 27 May 1941 police detective came to his apartment and seized all valuables they could find, including silverware. After Pšerhof was arrested in August 1941, the mayor of Križevci Bičanić took over the apartment. He ordered Pšerhof’s mother and sister, who were still living in the apartment, to move out on 28 September 1941. Thus, within just five months after the establishment of the NDH, the Pšerhofs had lost virtually all their property.³⁹¹

Another measure which was introduced in the middle of April 1941 was forced labor. Initially, it seems only some individual Jews had to report for forced labor. However, by the middle of May 1941, the entire Jewish community, regardless of age, gender or health conditions had to participate. Forced labor was first introduced much later in some of the neighboring locations. For example, in the town of Koprivnica, located some 30 kilometers northeast of Križevci, the local Ustaša authorities confined themselves to sending a recommendation to the city authorities for the introduction of forced labor for the local Jews on 7 July 1941.³⁹² By that time, the Jews in Križevci were toiling under harsh conditions. Among other, they were forced to move heavy objects, unload wagons, clean the marketplace,

³⁹⁰ Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 311.

³⁹¹ Testimony of Pšerhof Makso given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 27 August 1945. Document number: 28/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 287.

³⁹² The Ustaša Head Office for the City and District of Koprivnica to the City Authorities in Koprivnica, 7 July 1941. HR-HDA-252, RUR – Židovski odsjek, File number: 27649.

scrub toilets, clean the streets and the public canals. They had to perform forced labor from 7 am to 12 pm and from 1 pm to 6 pm.³⁹³ Forced labor was supplemented by other regulations which served the purpose of excluding Jews from the society further. One regulation was the introduction of the “Jewish sign,” on 29 April 1941. It consisted of a yellow cloth with a star of David on it and a letter “Ž” for Židovi [Jews] on it.³⁹⁴ Similar order was issued in Zagreb almost a month later, on 22 May 1941.³⁹⁵ Moreover, a curfew was introduced, which prevented Jews from leaving their homes after 7 p.m.³⁹⁶

The forced labor and other measures humiliated Jews, but they also served a pragmatic security function. The Križevci police, as well as the local Ustašas had their hands full with supervising the arrested Yugoslav officers and soldiers who were kept in a makeshift prison located on the grounds of Križevci gymnasium. Further detention was organized for the local Serbs who were being arrested *en masse* in the preparation for their deportations to Serbia. Thus, forced labor enabled a continuous supervision of the Jewish community without implementing mass arrests immediately due to logistical restraints.³⁹⁷ Forced labor, just like many other antisemitic measures which were introduced in Križevci were a product of local conditions and motives combined with ideological antisemitism. For example, evidence suggests that the introduction of forced labor was not the product of serious long-term planning but was proposed by mayor Bičanić’s wife.³⁹⁸ Until recently the role of women and their impact

³⁹³ Testimony of Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 30 August 1945. Document number: 31/45. Document number: 28/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 290.

³⁹⁴ Report of the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci sent to the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes and Their Collaborators in Bjelovar, Document number: 17-1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 308.

³⁹⁵ Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 121.

³⁹⁶ Testimony of Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 30 August 1945. Document number: 31/45. Document number: 28/45. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 289.

³⁹⁷ Testimony of Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Križevci, 30 August 1945. HR-HDA-306 ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 290.

³⁹⁸ The Report of the Jewish Religious Community in Križevci sent to the Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 21 July 1947. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 290.

on the Ustaša genocidal policies was almost completely understudied. Historian Martina Bitunjac, brought attention to this important topic by concluding that women were active political agents within the Ustaša movement and that some of them “exercised considerable political influence.”³⁹⁹

2.3. Orders from Above and Actions from Below

As with the first antisemitic measures, an understanding of the factors that catalyzed the deportations of Jews from Križevci and other towns across the NDH requires a close look at the interaction between the macro, meso, and micro levels. By June 1941, most of the measures introduced on the local level in Križevci had been implemented at the national level of the NDH. The elevation of antisemitism to the status of state-sanctioned policy and ideology turned it into a political language and a “social practice.” Yet, this process cannot be fully comprehended as top-down since it was not confined to the regime or party politics. To reach a more nuanced understanding of the anti-Jewish persecution, it is necessary to transcend the simplified distinction “between rulers and ruled” and frame antisemitization as a process in which the entire society participated.⁴⁰⁰ Citizens were involved through a variety of actions which are often difficult to categorize as mere acts of support or resistance to the antisemitic ideas, policies, and actions.

Before returning to Križevci, it is germane to look at the developments across the NDH to understand the specificities of the antisemitic measures in that town. The introduction of the first antisemitic legislation on the macro level gave birth to a variety of responses from citizens and different officials active on the meso and micro levels. Soon their responses flooded

³⁹⁹ For the involvement of women in the Ustaša movement generally see Martina Bitunjac. *Verwicklung. Beteiligung. Unrecht. Frauen und die Ustaša-Bewegung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2018), 226.

⁴⁰⁰ Frank Bajohr, “‘Consensual Dictatorship’ (Zustimmungsdiktatur) and ‘Community of People’ (Volksgemeinschaft): Some Reflections on the Interaction Between Nazi State and German Society in the Persecution of the Jews After 1933,” *Politeja* 14 (2010): 521–22.

different NDH institutions and ministries. The most intense communication was between Jews and the regime since many victims of discrimination sought exemption from anti-Jewish measures by receiving the status of the “honorary Aryan.” According to Rory Yeomans, persecuted minorities in the NDH “employed the state’s totalizing discourse to express a sense of belonging to the Croatian national community under construction.”⁴⁰¹ Considering that the Ustašas attempted to redefine the Croatian identity by utilizing antisemitism as well, some Jews attempted to use such political language to save their lives. For example, Josip Fried from Zagreb, wrote a petition to get the “Aryan” rights in the end of May 1941. In it, Fried emphasized that he “always cooperated with the [Croatian] nationalists in the struggle against communists and Jews.” Fried argued that he was known in Zagreb as an antisemite and thus that he himself couldn’t be Jewish regardless of his heritage. By employment of the antisemitic language, Fried tried to demonstrate that he belonged to the new society and its norms. This was a successful strategy in his case since he was granted the “Aryan” rights.⁴⁰² However, his case was exceptional. Out of approximately 40,000 Jews in the NDH, only 500 people received the status of “honorary Aryans.”⁴⁰³

By writing to the NDH authorities many Jews tried to at least get the exemption from wearing the “Jewish sign,” which was introduced locally as early as April 1941 in various parts of the NDH and on the state-level in June 1941. The policy of public branding of Jews caused mixed responses. Some citizens considered it unfair that all Jews without difference had to wear the “Jewish sign” while many Freemasons did not. According to Ustaša reports, citizens complained that if Jews controlled the Freemasons, why were they not marked as well since

⁴⁰¹ Rory Yeomans, “In Search for Myself - Autobiography, Imposture, and Survival in Wartime Croatia,” *S:I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*, 4, no. 1 (2017): 22. See also Francine Friedman, “Writing for Survival: Letters of Sarajevo Jews Before Their Liquidation During World War II,” in *Nostalgia, Loss and Creativity in South-East Europe*, ed. Catharina Raudvere (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 189–212, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71252-9_8.

⁴⁰² Josip Fried to The Ustaša Police – Jewish Department, 29 May 1941. HR-HDA-252, Directorate of the Ustaša police. Jewish section, File number 27113.

⁴⁰³ Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans*, 74.

they were Jewish servants. They argued that even more radical measures should be taken against them because they were Croats who took active acts of treason against their people only for the material benefits for themselves.⁴⁰⁴ Some ordinary citizens, therefore, carefully, and systematically analyzed the regime’s propaganda and held the government accountable and expected it to be true to its own words. Eugenio Coselschi, head of the Italian mission in Zagreb reported that the Croatian public was against this measure. Many Jews never wore the “sign,” risking arrests.⁴⁰⁵ Others, according to Ustašas own reports, wore “the sign full of pride.”⁴⁰⁶

In any case, the higher visibility of Jews within the society due to the “Jewish sign,” exposed Jews to arbitrary violence in the streets as well as denunciations. In June 1941, a citizen from Zagreb complained to the Ustaša police that Jews were visiting public beaches on the river Sava and demanded actions against them.⁴⁰⁷ Such denunciations were not coming from a single social group such as the “misfits” or the jealous worse-off individuals hoping to receive rewards. Instead, they were the fulfillment of the newly introduced norms in which antisemitism started to regulate social behavior. For example, in June 1941 Rudolf Mađarević – a local doctor from Čazma, located some 30 kilometers south of Križevci, sent a letter to the Ustaša police in Zagreb in which he complained that the Jews in Čazma district still did not have to wear the “Jewish sign,” and that their stores were also not marked by the Star of David. He protested that Jews “still behave as if they were true Croats, even though until the last moment they were listening only to the English radio stations.” Mađarević complained that the local state officials did not share his antisemitic zeal. He implied that the local state officials

⁴⁰⁴ Ustaša Security Office to State Secretary for Security, 29 May 1941. HR-HDA-252, Directorate of the Ustaša police. Jewish section, file number 27134.

⁴⁰⁵ Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016, 122.

⁴⁰⁶ Ustaša Security Office to State Secretary for Security, 29 May 1941. HR-HDA-252, Directorate of the Ustaša police. Jewish section, file number 27134.

⁴⁰⁷ Miro Koa to Ustaša police – Jewish Section, 28 June 1941. Directorate of the Ustaša police. Jewish section, file number 27501.

found excuses for their inaction by arguing that they didn't receive direct orders to begin with the widespread persecution of Jews. Mađarević, however, insisted that this was not a plausible explanation since these antisemitic measures were issued as laws on the state level.⁴⁰⁸ These and many other instances of denunciations and demands for the radicalization of antisemitic measures demonstrate how quickly some of the ordinary citizens not only embraced the antisemitism sanctioned by the government, but also tried to influence it. Therefore, even ordinary citizens were active agents interacting with many of regime's policies.

Similar process regarding antisemitism and the implementation of anti-Jewish policies was taking place within the Ustaša movement's branches and local state administration on the meso level. Yet what is striking is the differences in the pace and scope of antisemitic measures in different localities, which in turn were contingent on specific constellations of factors and actors. Even in the vicinity of Križevci, differences were marked. In Kutina, a town located approximately 65 kilometers south of Križevci, it was local officials who called for an intensification of the discrimination. On 15 June 1941, some lower ranking Ustašas raised objections against the "Ustaša headquarters" on the local level because they "still had not taken any actions against Jews." The local Ustaša *Rojnik* – the head of the lowest ranking organizational unit within the movement's organization – complained that his superiors did not implement the measures regarding the wearing of the "Jewish sign," in Kutina. Moreover, he bemoaned that Jews could still move freely and that there were no commissioners put into their stores. Perhaps the strongest accusation against the Ustaša leadership in Kutina was that they socialized and fraternized with the Jews. According to the *Rojnik*, the Ustašas had their celebrations and events in a bar owned by a Jew. These events were allegedly visited by the entire leadership of the "Ustaša headquarters in Kutina."⁴⁰⁹ Such reports from below were

⁴⁰⁸ Dr. Rudolf Madjarević to Ustaša Police – Jewish Department, 18 June 1941. HR-HDA-252, Directorate of the Ustaša police. Jewish section, file number 27394.

⁴⁰⁹ *Rojnik* Ivan Vulinec to Ustaša Police – Jewish Department, 15 June 1941. HR-HDA-252, Directorate of the Ustaša police. Jewish section, file number 27332.

instrumental for the Ustaša central authorities to keep them informed about the progress in the implementation of antisemitic measures.⁴¹⁰

A similar case occurred in the town of Đurđevac, located some 40 kilometers east of Križevci. Đurđevac county was home to approximately 60 Jews, who all converted to Catholicism hoping that they could save themselves from racial discrimination. Available evidence suggests that the Jewish community in Đurđevac was assisted in this endeavor by Milan Mrkalj, the local state official performing the role of the district prefect [Kotarski predstojnik]. He hoped that the mass conversion of Jews to Catholicism meant the resolution of the “Jewish question,” on the local level even though this ran contrary to the proclaimed race laws on the macro level. However, Mrkalj perhaps thought that they could negotiate this question further with the central authorities.

The local Ustaša movement organization in Đurđevac, however, was not content with Mrkalj’s actions. On 12 September 1941, members of the Ustaša Logor in Đurđevac complained to the Regional Prefecture [veliki župan] of Bilogora that Jews were not wearing the “Jewish sign,” which they should be doing regardless of their conversion. These complaints from below were aimed to create pressure on Mrkalj who refused to take further actions arguing that this question is fully under his jurisdiction, and he refused to succumb to pressure from the local Ustaša officials.⁴¹¹

One of the most important contentions on the local level between Mrkalj and the Ustašas revolved around the July orders, which suggested that Serbs and Jews should be deported to

⁴¹⁰ Report of the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes and Their Collaborators in Bjelovar to the Republican Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 280.

⁴¹¹ The Ustaša Logor Gjurjevac to Regional Prefect [veliki župan] of Bilogora, 12 September 1941. Document number: 269/1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 4.

the concentration camps.⁴¹² District prefect Mrkalj did not undertake any measures in that direction, insisting that the “Jewish question,” had been solved through the conversions to Catholicism.⁴¹³ This explanation did not satisfy the local Ustaša officials, who directed attention to other towns where Jewish converts to Catholicism had been among the deportees.⁴¹⁴ By quoting this “precedent,” they conveyed the message that there was nothing which prevented the deportation of all Jews from Đurđevac. Such complains increased the pressure on Mrkalj, who was also receiving inquiries from the Regional Prefecture [velika župa] on what was being done regarding the “Jewish question” in Đurđevac. Mrkalj responded that

There are 60 Jews, including men, women and children on the territory under our jurisdiction. Three Jews have been deported to the concentration camp and all the rest have converted to the Catholic religion. The movement and actions of Jews living in this district are good and nothing has changed. There are no new developments which would urge new actions against Jews. All the local authorities and gendarme stations are reporting that Jews are loyal and that they submit to our authorities. There is nothing suspicious about them.⁴¹⁵

Mrkalj, thus, remained steadfast in his view that deportations should be conducted against individuals who could be considered a threat, but collective deportations of the entire Jewish community were unnecessary. This position, which could also be found elsewhere in the early stages of the Holocaust in the NDH, meant that local officials interpreted the July orders in a different way than was intended by central actors in Zagreb. The Ustaša propaganda repeatedly relied on the Judeo-Bolshevik myth by arguing that Jews were the prime source of communism in the NDH. Applying this narrative to the July orders meant that all Jews were to be deported.

⁴¹² See Chapter I, subchapter “The Ustaša Ascent to Power.”

⁴¹³ Testimony of Milan Mrkalj given to UDB offices in Zagreb on 13 June 1952. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴¹⁴ Ustaški logor Gjurjjevac to Regional Prefect [veliki župan] of Bilogora, 12 September 1941. Document number: 269/1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 4.

⁴¹⁵ The District of Gjurjjevac to the Regional Police in Bjelovar, 31, 31 December 1941. Document number 462-Pr-1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-1, 3-4.

Further clarifications from the Main Security Office of the NDH made it clear that no investigation or evidence was necessary for proving whether a Jew was in fact a communist or not. Thus, by insisting on individual investigations and waiting for evidence of Jewish “suspiciousness,” Mrkalj asserted his agency in determining the pace of the persecution of Jews on the meso level under his jurisdiction. According to Mrkalj’s postwar testimony, the central authorities were forced to intervene in response to repeated complaints from the local Ustaša officials. They sent police agents from Zagreb and arrested Jews to remedy Mrkalj’s continuous delays of the deportations. Mrkalj, thus, belonged to the group of the NDH officials who can be classified as “genocidal underperformers,” and he was relieved from his position in 1943 upon repeated complaints from the local Ustaša organization.⁴¹⁶

In stark contrast to the previously described situation in Đurđevac and Kutina, the Ustaša officials in Koprivnica, located some 30 kilometers northeast of Križevci, showed initiative and resolve to speed up the deportations of Jews under their jurisdiction. Ustaša leaders in Koprivnica considered that the deportations were not organized in a comprehensive way and demanded a more active role from the central agencies of the NDH. On 30 June 1941, they sent a request to the Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR) in which they wrote:

This [Ustaša] commission feels free to express our opinion, that it would be best to arrest all Jews [in Koprivnica], without any difference in sex or age, and put them into the nearby concentration camp “Danica” in a single building where they would be under the harshest possible guard of the Ustaša. They should remain there until there is a possibility to remove [odstrani] them from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia altogether. Many of them have invested huge amounts of money in Palestine. They built palaces and founded entire farms. Therefore, this is where they belong, and let them be dealt with by their own race.⁴¹⁷

This was in fact a policy recommendation sent from the meso to the macro level in which the Ustaša officials from Koprivnica already envisioned a state-wide solution of the “Jewish

⁴¹⁶ Testimony of Milan Mrkalj given to UDB offices in Zagreb on 13 June 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴¹⁷ The Main Ustaša Office for the City and District of Koprivnica to the Main Ustaša Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR), 30 June 1941. HR-HDA-252, Directorate of the Ustaša Police. Jewish Section, file number 27592.

question,” implying that any local measure should only be considered a temporary solution. Thus, they expected that the government would deliver on their promise of “cleansing” the state of Jews in practical and logistical terms.

Following the July orders issued from the top, the Ustašas in Koprivnica immediately arrested all 213 Jews on 22 July 1941. They were taken to the Danica camp from where they were deported to the Gospić system of camps. After this mass deportation, the only remaining Jews were four individuals in “mixed marriages” and the few who were in the hospital at the time of the deportations.⁴¹⁸ In a later report from 6 October 1941, the city police in Koprivnica, thus, proudly concluded that “all the Jews from the area of the city of Koprivnica were deported to the concentration camp.”⁴¹⁹

The above-mentioned cases, all in the relative vicinity of Križevci, demonstrate the complexities surrounding the implementation of antisemitic legislation and deportations on micro level across the NDH. While the genocidal architects created the ideological, propagandistic, and legislative conditions for the persecution of Jews, the decisive influence during 1941 on whether Jews in the certain area would be deported and to which degree largely depended on the local authorities.

2.4. Deportations of Jews from Križevci

When the Križevci police received the July orders which instructed that “unwanted” Serbs and Jews should be immediately deported to concentration camps, the local security agencies did not hesitate. The authorities in Križevci used the previously established forced labor to conduct

⁴¹⁸ The District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators to the National Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number 278. See also Škiljan, “Odnos ustaške vlasti na Kalniku i u potkalničkom kraju prema Srbima, Židovima i Romima 1941. godine.,” 95.

⁴¹⁹ The Main Office of the City Police in Koprivnica to the Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] of Bilogora, 6 October 1941. Document number: 486. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, p. 10.

the mass arrest of all Jewish men aged 16-60. All Jewish men who were returning from work on 31 July 1941 were taken to the police station where they were told that they “would be going to work in road construction in Velebit.”⁴²⁰ Unbeknown to the victims, Velebit was the location of the Jadovno death camp, which was a part of the Gospić system of camps.

All the arrested Jewish men from Križevci were driven to the railway station at 3 a.m. on 1 August 1941, where they were loaded onto freight cars on a train which was leaving for Zagreb.⁴²¹ According to Holocaust survivor Makso Pšerhof, the transport from Križevci included 36 Jewish men.⁴²² The only person excluded from the deportations was Đuro Weisz, who was kept in place because he was a doctor deemed necessary for maintaining a functional health system in the region.⁴²³ The fact that exclusively men were included in the initial deportations was in part the outcome of a patriarchal political vision predicated on the notion of men as the source of political, economic, and military agency.

Jews from Križevci arrived in Zagreb on 1 August 1941. They were detained in the Zagreb fair, which was turned into an improvised transit camp for the Jews of the NDH in the early stages of the Holocaust. Vladimir Švarc, Holocaust survivor from Križevci, described their treatment in detail:

In Zagreb, we were taken off the trains, and then to a “meeting place” [Zagreb Fair]. At the entrance to the “meeting place” [Zagreb Fair] they took away from us all the things that we had. There I learned that the same train had brought Jews from Osijek and Bjelovar that they had also been in the freight cars and that two of

⁴²⁰ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Švarc given to District Court in Križevci on 25 June 1952. HR-HDA- 421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴²¹ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci on 30 August 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 291. See also Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Švarc given to District Court in Križevci on 25 June 1952. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴²² According to the available sources we can identify 25 Jews by name who were included in this deportation. These were Samuel Grossman, Božo Grossman, Josip Goldberger, Vilko Goldberger, Vlatko Hirsch, Vilko Hirsch, Zdenko Hirsch, Naci Kende, Franjo Pollak, Ignac Prohnik, Maks Pšerhof, Dragutin Pšerhof, Oskar Raudnik, Leo Šauer, Alfred Šenbaum, Vlado Švarc, Zvonko Švarc, Robert Švarc, Oto Straus, Ervin Straus, Marijan Šubinski, Ervin Šubinski, Feliks Vajnberger, Leo Vajnberger and Drago Vajnberger. See The Report of the District Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Bjelovar, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number 282.

⁴²³ Renee Weisz-Maleček, *Židovi u Križevcima* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 2012), 99.

them had died. I remained at the “meeting place” [Zagreb fair] three days and on the fourth night succeeded in escaping with two other Jews. During my stay at that place, we received no food whatsoever and life was unbearable. The Ustašas surrounded us and beat us so that a few of the Jews committed suicide. They separated us into groups which they took away. Three groups were never returned, and I learned later that they had been taken off to be shot. After my escape, I went to Susak where I was arrested and put in prison. I was then transferred to a prison in Rijeka, then in Trieste and from Trieste I went with a group of political prisoners to the concentration camp in Ferramonti, Italy.⁴²⁴

Others who remained in the Zagreb fair transit camp were separated into different groups. The reason for this division related to the Križevci’s Ustašas’ overzealousness. By arresting all Jewish men without exceptions, they had breached the NDH’s regulation according to which Jews in “mixed marriages,” were not supposed to be deported. This caused grave difficulties for the Ustašas in Zagreb, who decided to allow four Jews to return to Križevci, three of them because they were intermarried to “Aryans,” and a doctor who was considered as essential for the functioning of the local community in Križevci. A couple of men from the Križevci transport received travel passes from the Ustašas in Zagreb, which enabled them to travel to Italy.⁴²⁵ Makso Pšerhof was one of them and he survived the war in the Italian zone until its capitulation in 1943 after which he escaped and joined the Yugoslav Partisans.⁴²⁶ Robert Švarc too received the permission to go to the Italian occupation zone in Italy. The Ustašas took him close to the border with Italy in Kraljevica where he was forced to strip naked, and all the valuable possessions were taken from him. He was then ordered to leave the territory of the NDH within two hours after which he crosses the border to Italy in Sušak.⁴²⁷ The remaining

⁴²⁴ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Švarc given to District Court in Križevci on 25 June 1952. HR-HAD-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴²⁵ The Report of the District Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Bjelovar, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 282.

⁴²⁶ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Makso Pšerhof given to the City Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci on 27 August 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, Frame number: 287. document number: 28/45.

⁴²⁷ Testimony of Holocaust survivors Vera and Robert Švarc given to the City Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci on 26 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, Frame number: 294.

Jews who were not allowed to emigrate or to return to Križevci were sent to the Gospić camp system, where most of them were killed.

The remaining Jews in Križevci, mostly consisting of women, children and the elderly, continued to perform forced labor. In October 1941, mayor Bičanić issued an order according to which the remaining property of Jews, which at that time came down to real-estate, was to be confiscated. All the Križevci Jews were forced to move into a few “Jewish houses” located on the periphery of the town.⁴²⁸ Jewish property from these apartments was sold at the public auction organized in front of the Jewish temple. Parts of the synagogue itself were looted upon the order of the Catholic Church Vicar Josip Veljak, a member of the “Ustaša advisory board.” The benches and the organ [orgulje] were taken from the synagogue and placed in the Church of the Saint Cross in Križevci. Soon afterwards the synagogue was turned into the barracks of the Ustaša Corps, while the building of the Jewish Religious Community became the seat of the Ustaša female section.⁴²⁹

The Ustašas in Križevci wanted to deport the remaining Jewish women, children and elderly as quickly as possible. However, they complained that their plans for further deportations had to be paused because they received orders from Jasenovac that camp’s capacity was full and that no more prisoners should be sent there.⁴³⁰ According to the Križevci police, therefore, their eagerness for the complete deportations of Jews were only thwarted by the inefficiencies of the Ustaša genocidal logistics, i.e., the limited capacities of the

⁴²⁸ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Gizela Straus, Testimony of Gizela Straus given to the City Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci on 30 August 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 290. See also Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number 311.

⁴²⁹ Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, Frame number: 311. For a further elaboration of the activities of the Ustaša female section see: Bitunjac. *Frauen und die Ustaša-Bewegung*.

⁴³⁰ The Head of the City Police of Križevci to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Bilogora, 16 December 1941. Document number: 2974. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, p. 22.

concentration camp system. However, this was about to change rapidly as Jasenovac was quickly turned into a death camp in the end of 1941. The deportations resumed, and on 31 December 1941, the local authorities in Križevci reported that “very few Jews and Serbs,” remained in Križevci and its surroundings.⁴³¹

When comparing the antisemitic persecution and subsequent deportations in Križevci to many other locations in its vicinity, it becomes evident how radical the city’s elite was. In fact, their zeal was surpassed by very few other Ustašas in the region of Velika župa Bilogora. While the deportations of Jewish men in Križevci were swiftly implemented during the summer of 1941, in Grubišno Polje, some 60 kilometers east of Križevci, the 50 Jews who comprised the entire Jewish community remained in the town by the end of 1941. Upon inquiries from regional police, the local authorities in Grubišno Polje responded that they had not deported any Jews, nor were any arrested, because “there was nothing suspicious about their activities, and they were very placid [povučeni].”⁴³²

A similar report was sent from the district of Čazma, less than 40 kilometers south of Križevci. The local officials reported that there were up to 50 Jews on the territory under their jurisdiction, and that “All Jews are silent, and they are dealing with their trades. They are reserved and they do not stand out anymore. All of them have converted to the Catholic religion. We are watching their movements.”⁴³³ The fact that the local authorities in Čazma and Grubišno Polje still maintained that Jews did not constitute a threat significant enough to justify deportations, stood in stark contrast to the notion entertained by the Ustašas in Križevci or Koprivnica. This is indicative of just how different interpretations and understanding of

⁴³¹ The District Authorities of Križevci to the Regional Police in Bjelovar, 31 December 1941. Document number: V.T.16/1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-2, 3.

⁴³² The District Authorities in Grubišno Polje to the Regional Police in Bjelovar, 10 December 1941. Document number V.T. 413 pr. 1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-1, 1.

⁴³³ The District Authority in Čazma to the Regional Police in Bjelovar, 22 December 1941. Document number: Prs. 370-1941. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-1, 2.

antisemitism and related policies could be among local officials. Thus, in the early stages of the Holocaust in the NDH, the swiftness of implementation of largely depended on types and degree of antisemitization of Ustašas and state officials on the meso and micro level.

The absence of deportations in some parts of the NDH did not only capture the attention of the institutions at the top but was also cause for alarm among antisemitic citizens from below. In May 1942, the Ministry of Association of the NDH received an anonymous report from a citizen in May 1942, who complained that he regularly travels through the region near Križevci and that Jews “are still interacting and maintaining contact with the [Croatian] peasants.” He alleged that Jews “found protection among individuals in Zagreb. They socialize with these people in Zagreb, and these people in Zagreb now say that these Jews converted to Catholicism and that they are great Croats now.” He added: “I personally know what Jews believe in, including our domestic Jews. I know what they are capable of doing for money, just so they can stay eternally in power. I personally think, according to my own conscience, and from our history and Christian upbringing that Jews were always the enemies of Christendom, and especially against us Croats.”⁴³⁴ The appellant letter was dominated by economic and religious anti-Jewish attitudes synthesized under the umbrella of Ustaša promoted antisemitism.

The anonymous citizen was highly critical of the local Ustašas and state officials, accusing them of “protecting Jews.” Such criticism was especially directed against local actors who argued that conversions to Catholicism were the best way to solve the “Jewish question.” However, according to the author of the letter “if they [Jews] weren’t willing to convert over the past centuries, especially since they moved into our country, then today it is too late. We

⁴³⁴ Anonymous letter sent to the Ministry of Association of the NDH on 15 May 1942. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 63-68.

do not need them.”⁴³⁵ The author argued that it was his national “duty to report this,” and emphasized that he “cannot get over the fact,” that Jews “still live on the Croatian land.”⁴³⁶ He went further and proposed which policies should be followed regarding the “Jewish question” in his opinion:

I do not think they [Jews] should be killed, because there is an opportunity for them to work. They should work, 8 or 10, maybe even 16 hours, just like our workers have worked for them. If they do not want to work, they should be sent to our good Lord [they should be killed]. If all of them were to be killed, then this would be suspicious to the peasants, and they would criticize the regime. However, if Jews were to perform forced labor so they can dig and sow [just like peasants], then the peasants will see this and say that the regime has created a good order. I know very well that all of you in different ministries are not acquitted with the situation in the countryside, but I will kindly ask you to liquidate the Jews immediately – they should do other kind of work than dealing with trade which allows them to organize their agents who will spread false news in the countryside.

The author wrote that this matter is of utmost urgency, concluding that Jews “should be slowly eliminated and removed. The same should be done in all the other places where Jews live – they should be removed immediately.”⁴³⁷ The central authorities took these accusations very seriously and demanded explanations for the local Ustaša authorities. Considering that the anonymous report specifically mentioned the situation in the town of Križ, some 40 kilometers south of Križevci, the local authorities responded that “the accusations given in the report are completely false” and defended some of the local Jews, stressing that they were helping Croats and therefore it would be unjust to deport them. They concluded:

If the anonymous writer of the report felt like a good Croat, as he claims to be in his report, then he should have honestly reported these cases to the authorities as well and sign them with his name. However, it is noticeable from the way he writes that he would like to easily get his hands on someone else’s property and real estate. This gendarme station is supervising the activities of Jews [...], just as it has done

⁴³⁵ Anonymous letter sent to the Ministry of Association of the NDH on 15 May 1942. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 63-68.

⁴³⁶ Anonymous letter sent to the Ministry of Association of the NDH on 15 May 1942. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 63-68.

⁴³⁷ Anonymous letter sent to the Ministry of Association of the NDH on 15 May 1942. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, p. 63-68.

before. We did not notice any suspicious activities. If in the future anything suspicious will be noticed, then we will immediately report this.⁴³⁸

Regardless of such explanations, by the middle of 1942 the pressure from central Ustaša agencies was mounting on local officials to implement the deportations as soon as possible. State institutions took an increasingly proactive role during the spring and summer of 1942 in solving the “Jewish question.” Even in Križevci, a few remaining Jews who had managed to evade the deportations for various reasons, were now deported to concentration camps during the summer of 1942.

According to a postwar report by the Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators, there were 683 Jews before the war in the region where the city of Križevci was located (Okrug Bjelovar). Of these, only 91 survived, bringing the rate of the destruction of the community to 86,67%.⁴³⁹ Concerning Križevci itself, the Jewish Religious Community reported that it had 110 members before the war. This number only included individuals who self-identified as Jewish, and the Ustaša regime’s race laws expanded the category Jewishness according to racial criteria. Thus, the number of those persecuted as Jews during the war was higher than the estimate given by the Jewish Religious Community. According to their report, 29 Jews from Križevci survived the war.⁴⁴⁰

2.5. Genocidal Entanglements

Even though their removal was an integral part of the utopian vision of a new Croatian society, the Ustaša regime not only targeted Jews. In the first weeks following the establishment of the

⁴³⁸ The Gendarme Station in Križ to the District Authority in Čazma, 22 June 1942. Document number: 270/taj. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 62.

⁴³⁹ The District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Bjelovar to the National Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators, 23 September 1945. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 272.

⁴⁴⁰ Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 311.

NDH, both Serbs and Jews were arrested on an individual basis. However, towards the end of April 1941, a transition to mass arrests took place. In the city of Križevci and its immediate surroundings, more than 120 Serbs were arrested in the end of April. Most of them were arrested under the pretext that they supported communism or other parties which the Ustašas classified as anti-Croatian. All of them were brought to the regular prison in Križevci, which quickly became overcrowded.⁴⁴¹ Similar actions took place in various localities in the NDH. In the beginning of May, the Ustašas began to deport arrestees to the newly opened concentration camp Danica.⁴⁴²

At the same time, during May 1941, on the international level, Nazi Germany began implementing a major plan for the ethnic reorganization of South-Eastern Europe. The German authorities intended to Germanize the newly annexed Slovenian territories of southern Carinthia and southern Styria. An initial arrangement foresaw the deportation of between 220,000-260,000 Slovenes to German-occupied Serbia.⁴⁴³ After learning of this plan in the beginning of May 1941, the NDH authorities made a counter proposal, which called for the settlement of the Slovenes in Croatia and the displacement of Serbs into Serbia. Despite the commander of the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt—RSHA), SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich's opposition to include the NDH the resettlement plans, Hitler approved the Croatian proposal.⁴⁴⁴ This was one of the first major diplomatic successes for the Ustaša regime, which aspired to assert itself on an international level. Domestically, the deportation agreement offered the Ustaša regime an opportunity to drastically reduce the Serb population in the NDH and to legitimize their policy of ethnic cleansing internationally.

⁴⁴¹ Filip Škiljan, "Vjerski prijelazi s pravoslavne na rimokatoličku i grkokatoličku vjeroispovijest na području kotara Križevci u vrijeme NDH," *Cris: Časopis Povijesnog društva Križevci* XVII, no. 1 (2015): 99.

⁴⁴² Škiljan, 99.

⁴⁴³ Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, 1962, 12:725–26.

⁴⁴⁴ Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, vol. 13 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), 157, 570–71.

These international developments had a major impact in Križevci. The Ustaša planners intended to resettle 2500 Slovenes on the territory of Križevci and its surroundings within the framework of the deportation scheme.⁴⁴⁵ The Slovenes were to be settled in the place of Serbs. After the German approval of the Croatian proposal, the Ministry of Interior of the NDH arranged a meeting with local authorities in Križevci, where Vladimir Heim told them that “all Serbs, with a few exceptions, should be deported to Serbia.” Local government and Ustaša officials were visited by special emissaries from the Ministry of Interior of the NDH. Together they devised the plans for the mass deportations of Serbs and were warned that the plans must remain a secret under the threat of death sentence.⁴⁴⁶ The first stage of the deportations was supposed to include the Serbian elites, intellectuals, educators, priests, and economically prosperous Serbs. In the county of Križevci some of the first Serbian Orthodox priests and their families were deported on 11 July 1941.⁴⁴⁷

The anti-Serbian deportations culminated in August 1941. Since the Ustaša security apparatus in Križevci lacked the manpower for such a large-scale action, Vladimir Heim invited a detachment of Ustašas from Zagreb to assist with the deportations. The combined force of the Ustašas from Zagreb, and around 25 police and Ustaša officers from Križevci went to nearby villages and forced all Serb residents to march on foot to the Križevci railway station. Those who refused to comply or tried to hide were shot on the spot. Seventeen residents of the village of Vojakovački Osijek were killed during the roundups for the deportations.⁴⁴⁸ On 19 August 1941 another action was organized when 400 Serbs were deported from the county of

⁴⁴⁵ Škiljan, “Odnos ustaške vlasti na Kalniku i u potkalničkom kraju prema Srbima, Židovima i Romima 1941. godine.” 100.

⁴⁴⁶ Testimony of Delak Vilijam given to Kotarski sud u Koprivnici on 23 June 1952. HR-HDA-421, box 128,

⁴⁴⁷ Filip Škiljan, “Prisilno iseljavanje Srba iz Podravine i Kalničkog prigorja u ljeto i ranu jesen 1941. godine,” *Cris: Časopis Povijesnog društva Križevci* XIV, no. 1 (2012): 349.

⁴⁴⁸ Report of the Yugoslav Security Service on the History of the “Ustaša Apparatus and Movement in the District of Križevci,” 10 April 1957, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.17., 15.

Križevci.⁴⁴⁹ They were sent to an improvised detention center in Bjelovar from where they were moved into a camp in Požega where they waited for their deportation to Serbia.⁴⁵⁰

Besides the mass murder and deportations, Serbs were also exposed to a policy of forced conversions to Catholicism. While Serbs submitted requests for conversions in formal terms, these actions should largely be treated as forced because they were mostly the result of fear, blackmail, and extortion. In 1941, 483 Serbs in Križevci county submitted requests to convert to Catholicism. A further 371 did so in 1942, and 5 in 1943. Out of those, 57 requests came from the city of Križevci itself.⁴⁵¹ According to historian Filip Škiljan, the available data suggests that out of the 2952 Orthodox Serbs who lived in and around Križevci, between 1400-1500 Orthodox Serbs submitted requests to convert to Roman or Greek Catholicism in Križevci area.⁴⁵²

In the beginning of 1942, there were renewed efforts from the Ustaša side for the conversions of Serbs. However, the local reports from Velika župa Bilogora reveal that this campaign had a very limited success because of the rumors of new “cleansing,” which would begin against Serbs. These rumors were spread by the newly arrived colonists from Herzegovina who had family members in the Poglavnik’s personal guard (PTB).⁴⁵³ Ultimately the policy of conversions was a failure since “converted,” or not, Serbs were still exposed to discrimination, deportations, and mass murder as a preferred method of ethnic cleansing employed by the Ustaša regime both on the macro and meso levels.

⁴⁴⁹ These deportations included 364 from Osijek Vojakovački, 9 from Vojakovac, 3 from Veliki Grabičani, 16 from the city of Križevci itself, 2 from Sveti Ivan Žabno, 3 from Kraljevica, 18 from Brezovljani, 5 from Rovišće, 3 from Veliki Brezovac, 2 from Radeljevo selo, 6 from Rasinjice, 6 from Veliki Poganac, 2 from Sokolovac, 4 from Gradec and 2 from Mala Mučna. Škiljan, “Prisilno iseljavanje Srba iz Podravine i Kalničkog prigorja u ljeto i ranu jesen 1941. godine,” 351.

⁴⁵⁰ Škiljan, 359. See also Milosavljević, *Križevci u NOB i revoluciji*, 21.

⁴⁵¹ Škiljan, “Vjerski prijelazi s pravoslavne na rimokatoličku i grkokatoličku vjeroispovijest na području kotara Križevci u vrijeme NDH,” 100.

⁴⁵² Škiljan, 106.

⁴⁵³ The District Authority in Grubišno Polje to the Regional Police in Bjelovar, February 1942. Document number: V.T. 30/1942. USHMM, RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, p. 92.

Of all three persecuted groups in Križevci, the plans to eliminate the Roma demonstrate the clearest continuity between the interwar and the wartime period. Prejudices against the Roma in Croatia revolved around robbery, theft, violence, spread of epidemics, and lack of hygiene. As early as 1930s, local authorities demanded that the state solve the “Roma question.” They proposed that Roma should be resettled at an undisclosed location where they would be “civilized,” through “education” and “domestication.” During the interwar period, Roma were also expelled from some of the villages around Križevci and their property was burned.⁴⁵⁴

After the proclamation of the NDH, approximately 2500 Roma lived in the regional administrative unit of Velika župa Baranja. However, this was only an official census, and it is possible that the number was significantly higher because of the nomadic lifestyle of some of the Roma.⁴⁵⁵ The overwhelming majority, 97% of them, lived in the rural areas. The Ustaša persecution of Roma in Križevci turned out to have some particular features in comparison to the rest of the country. According to historian Danijel Vojak, that “the local authorities in Križevci were the first in all of Independent State of Croatia to request the deportation of Roma from their area [of jurisdiction].”⁴⁵⁶ This process was initiated from below by multiple requests from ordinary citizens who demanded a solution to the “Gypsy question.”

On 3 June 1941, nineteen inhabitants of Sv. Ivan Žabno, located some 10 kilometers south of Križevci, wrote a petition to the city authorities in Križevci accusing that the Roma community lived “in the most horrible stench and chaos.” They claimed that the Roma pose a health concern to the rest of the society. Furthermore, writers of the petition alleged that Roma

⁴⁵⁴ Danijel Vojak, “Počeci progona Roma u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj ili o inicijativi Križevaca o potrebi ‘odstranjenja’ Roma,” in *Holokaust nad Jevrejima, Romima i Srbima u Drugom svetskom ratu*, ed. Vojislav Vučinović (Beograd: Univerzitet “Union-Nikola Tesla,” 2015), 44–45.

⁴⁵⁵ Željko Karaula, “Stradanje Romskog stanovništva na području Velike župe Bilogora za vrijeme Nezavisne Države Hrvatske (1941.-1945.),” in *Zbornik radova stradanje Roma u Europi za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata s posebnim osvrtom na stradanje u NDH*, 2018, 88.

⁴⁵⁶ Vojak, “Počeci progona Roma u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj ili o inicijativi Križevaca o potrebi ‘odstranjenja’ Roma,” 43–44.

were stealing the property of citizens, including the tools necessary for agricultural activities. The signatories requested that Roma be “removed” from their surroundings. Paradoxically, despite referring to Roma as impoverished and unclean, the local petitioners demanded that they receive all Roma property ones they were deported. The city authorities of Križevci quickly forwarded this petition to the district level, and the central authorities of the NDH took notice. At the same time the Ministry of Interior of NDH and the agency for colonization [Zavod za kolonizaciju] were communicating on how to solve the “Gypsy question,” and proposed that a location should be found where all the Roma could be “colonized.”⁴⁵⁷ The petitions from below, such as the one from Sv. Ivan Žabno, created further incentives to speed up the decision-making regarding the deportations of Roma at the macro level.

In preparation for the solution of the “Roma question” the authorities of Velika župa Bilogora started to create lists of all Roma residing on its territory in July 1941.⁴⁵⁸ The first deportations of Roma started soon thereafter. During July and August 1941, approximately 733 Roma from Velika župa Baranja were deported to the concentration camp Danica.⁴⁵⁹ Yet again, the policy was not implemented in the same manner across the board. In this matter too some of the local security agencies maintained their agency. For example, the gendarme commander of Sokolovac, a village some 18 kilometers away from Križevci, refused to execute the order for the deportation of Roma. As a result, they survived the war.⁴⁶⁰

In Križevci itself, the deportations of Jews and Serbs created incentives to solve the “Gypsy question,” as well, even though their numbers were wholly insignificant in the city itself. In January 1942, a dozen citizens sent a request to the city authorities in which they

⁴⁵⁷ Vojak, 46–47.

⁴⁵⁸ Danijel Vojak, “Stradanje romskog stanovništva na širem bjelovarsko-bilogorskom području za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata (1941. – 1945.),” *Radovi Zavoda za znanstvenoistraživački i umjetnički rad u Bjelovaru* 12 (2019): 71, <https://doi.org/10.21857/yq32oh4349>.

⁴⁵⁹ Vojak, 73.

⁴⁶⁰ Vojak, 76.

claimed that the Roma in Križevci area are “filthy” and that they leave a “bad impression” on the citizens and visitors of Križevci. They requested that authorities find

the solution of this question of these dangerous Gypsies, because otherwise we will be forced to leave our economies and fields which are located close to the Gypsies [...] we hope that the authorities will find our complaints justified and that they will provide us with the protection against our Gypsy enemies and that they will be removed from our midst.⁴⁶¹

The city authorities in Križevci forwarded this request from ordinary citizens to the Ministry of Interior of the NDH and emphasized that the “colonization” which was a code word for deportations, was the key to the resolution of the “Gypsy question.” Local authorities also emphasized that the removal of Roma from Križevci would alleviate the pressure from the Križevci city authorities because they would not have to dedicate so many resources to this question.⁴⁶²

Approximately four months later, in May 1942, the Ministry of Interior of the NDH issued an order according to which all Roma, across the state, were to be deported to concentration camps. After receiving the order, a meeting between the representatives of the gendarmes, city police and the head of the district was organized in order to discuss how to execute the deportations.⁴⁶³ They decided to deceive the Roma by telling them that they should assemble in order to be resettled into the villages of previously deported Serbs. Perpetrators from Križevci, thus, utilized the widespread knowledge about the ethnic cleansing conducted against the Serbs and Jews in order to persecute the Roma as well. An order was issued to the Roma to assemble on 30 May 1942 in Križevci. The survivor of the genocide against Roma in Križevci, Toma Đurđević, detailed the events surrounding the deportations on that day. He noted that Ustašas

⁴⁶¹ Vojak, “Počeci progona Roma u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj ili o inicijativi Križevaca o potrebi ‘odstranjenja’ Roma,” 48.

⁴⁶² Vojak, 49.

⁴⁶³ Testimony of Susovic Mijo given to the District Court in Križevci on 24 June 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

were saying we should not be afraid, and that we will go to a village where the Orthodox citizens were moved from. We should receive their houses and land. I got the family ready, we put as many things as we could on the horse-drawn-cart, and we started moving together with the other Roma who were already gathered outside. Together with them we were going to the market [sajmište] in Križevci [...]. Eventually around 420 Gypsies from Križevci area gathered there. On the same day, around 16 hours we were moved to the train station in Križevci, and we were put into boxcars... The boxcars were locked so we couldn't escape, and the gendarmes and the police were guarding us [...]. We arrived to Jasenovac the next day, on 2 June 1942 [...]. Our boxcars were taken in front of the camp, where we were all taken off the wagons. All our property, as well as food were taken from us and they took us to the camp, where we were handed over to the Ustašas. There we were lined up with our families. Then an officer with a gun in his hand came and told us we need to hand over all our belongings such as money or other objects, and if anything was found on us afterwards, we would be shot immediately. After this, three Ustašas came with suitcases and lined them up in front of us. All of us handed everything we had. After they took our belongings, they ordered us to sit down, and we stayed seated the whole evening and until the next day... Then two Ustaša officers came and separated a group of 50 Gypsies who were told that they were going to be sent to Germany for work. Then the Ustašas started to tie all the other Gypsy men with wire. Hands were tied behind their backs. Afterwards they lined them up and took them in the direction of Sava River. Women and children were not tied, but they were following the men. In this group, which was taken to the river Sava, I do not know exactly, but I think were around 1500 Gypsies, men, women and children. I didn't know it then, that this group was taken to be murdered. I found this out on the next day, on 4 June 1942 when around 50 of us who were separated, together with 350 Orthodox [Serbs], were taken to perform forced labor in Germany. The Orthodox people told us in the train that Gypsies were taken to be shot, and that they knew this because they were digging the mass graves for the murdered Gypsies. Another Gypsy, Đorđević Đuro told me about the same event in 1943 when I escaped from Germany and came home to Križevci. He told me that together with 49 other Gypsies he was designated to dig graves at the location where those Gypsies who were shot, beaten [to death] or slaughtered were buried [...] The Orthodox individuals also told me about the murder of Gypsies which was conducted almost every day from 16 p.m. until the evening.⁴⁶⁴

The Roma Genocide was the swiftest and most effectively conducted case of mass murder of a single ethnic group in proportional terms in NDH's history. This is shown by the demographic data, which shows that only 47 of the 2605 Roma who resided on the territory of Velika župa Baranja before the war remained alive in 1948.⁴⁶⁵ This was a destruction rate of 98%. The near total destruction of the Roma community can be explained by the expertise the Ustašas had

⁴⁶⁴ Testimony of Đurđević Toma given to the District Court in Križevci on 24 June 1952. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴⁶⁵ Vojak, "Stradanje romskog stanovništva na širem bjelovarsko-bilogorskom području za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata (1941. – 1945.)," 80.

accumulated through implementing the genocide against Jews and Serbs. Through the process of trial and error conducted during the mass deportations of Jews and Serbs, the Ustašas refine the logistical and organizational aspects of genocide, which ensured a more efficient implementation of the destruction of Roma. Moreover, the Ustašas utilized the public knowledge about the ethnic cleansing of Serbs and twisted it to their advantage by promising the Roma that they would receive Serbian property in order to quell their fears of deportations. The transparency of the destruction of one group could easily be used to intimidate the other as well. When Jews performed forced labor, they were threatened that they too would be deported to Serbia together with Serbs during the spring and summer of 1941 if they did not comply with all Ustaša requests.⁴⁶⁶

Genocide against Jews, Serbs and Roma in the NDH was one of the main causes for the broad and powerful uprising against the Ustaša regime. The Croatian population in Križevci initially showed significant reservations towards the Partisans. Most Croats in the town were prewar supporters of the Peasant Party. They opposed the Ustašas and Germans, but they were also afraid of communists.⁴⁶⁷ However, from 1942 onwards the communist-led Partisan movement was gaining increasing support around Križevci. The Ustaša authorities were largely discredited by their indiscriminate violence and attempted to save face by replacing some of the local Ustaša leaders while also increasing the engagement with public through speeches and propaganda. These efforts were a failure. The repression against the civilian population intensified and during the spring of 1942 the Ustaša police arrested approximately 80 civilians who were allegedly suspicious of collaborating with the Partisans.⁴⁶⁸ Most of the arrested

⁴⁶⁶ The Report of the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Križevci to the District Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Bjelovar, Document number: 17-1945. HDA, ZKRZ GUZ br. 2235/16 – 56, p. 1402 (Microfilm roll 2943, frame number 308).

⁴⁶⁷ Milosavljević, *Križevci u NOB i revoluciji*, 33.

⁴⁶⁸ Testimony of Josip Stilinovic given to District court in Bjelovar on 26 January 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

civilians were executed while a smaller number was deported to the concentration camps. In the autumn of 1942, the Ministry of Interior of the NDH issued a directive according to which not only sympathizers of the Partisan resistance, but also their entire families should be deported to the Ustaša concentration camps.⁴⁶⁹

In 1943 the Partisans managed to gain increasing control over the countryside around Križevci, which caused a serious deterioration of security situation for the Ustašas. Orders were issued to all Ustaša officials to retreat to Križevci. It was only at this point that the first serious frictions started to arise among the Ustaša elite locally. Most significantly, the conflict escalated between the mayor Bičanić and the head of the Logor Stjepan Fištrović since the latter harbored a growing distrust of the police and the gendarmes which reported directly to the city administration. Mayor Bičanić was soon relieved of his duties. Yet the terror against the citizens only intensified as the Partisans were closed in on the city. In September 1943 Partisans attacked Križevci itself, however, after capturing a few streets they had to retreat.⁴⁷⁰

The only remaining Jewish family in the town of Križevci at the time were the Weisz's. They were not deported because Đuro Weisz was a doctor and was left in the city because the authorities needed his expertise. At the time there were only three doctors in the entire Križevci district. In 1945 the Ustašas created a list of around 150 citizens who were to be eliminated in the case of the retreat from the city. Weisz family was on the list, including the 15-year-old girl, however, the city was liberated by the Partisans on 7 May 1945 and the Ustašas did not have the time to implement the orders and the family survived.⁴⁷¹ Some of the key perpetrators from Križevci were immediately arrested and brought to justice. The mayor Bičanić was

⁴⁶⁹ Testimony of Josip Stilinovic given to District court in Bjelovar on 26 January 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁴⁷⁰ Report of the Yugoslav Security Service on the History of the "Ustaša Apparatus and Movement in the District of Križevci," 10 April 1957, HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.0.17., 17-20.

⁴⁷¹ Renee Malecek. Interview 20444, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 25 September 1996.

sentenced to death and executed in Bjelovar in 1946. Police chief Heim was sentenced to death in 1947 after he was extradited from abroad.⁴⁷²

Conclusion

In the beginning of 1942, the Minister of Interior of the NDH, Andrija Artuković, organized a meeting with the high ranking Ustaša officials from different parts of the NDH. During the meeting, he scolded some of the present Ustašas for not doing enough to “cleanse” their territory. However, there was one region he mentioned as a positive example which was supposed to be followed by everyone else. Artuković pointed to the Velika župa Bilogora, where Križevci was located.⁴⁷³ Indeed, when it came to the swiftness of the persecution of Jews, as well as Serbs and Roma, Križevci constituted a case of genocidal overperformance in comparison to many other locations across the NDH.

The genocidal overperformance in Križevci was facilitated by several important factors which distinguish it from cities such as Osijek and Sarajevo. The Ustašas in Križevci managed to quickly consolidate power locally through effective mobilization of elites. By securing the support from people of different walks of social, political, and institutional life such as judges, lawyers, priests, and municipal employees, the Ustašas quickly legitimized their claim to power. Moreover, they structured power on the local level in an effective way, creating a synergy between state and party institutions and agencies on the local, regional, and state level. Thus, early on, they avoided competition for power and conflicts among various members of the elites on the local level, securing a more efficient decision-making process in comparison to cities such as Osijek and Sarajevo.

⁴⁷² Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Križevci sent to Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, 15 May 1947. Document number: 1872/47. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number 310.

⁴⁷³ Testimony of Telarević Osman given to County Court in Bosanska Gradiška, 11 June 1952, HR-HDA-421, box 128,

What further set apart Križevci from two other case studies are structural reasons such as proximity to centers of power in Zagreb and the size of the city. The fact that Croats formed most of the population in the city of Križevci helped to consolidate the Ustaša elites since they didn't have to share power with any other groups. Moreover, due to this very same reason the "cleansing" of Križevci could be implemented in a straightforward way since Jews, Serbs and Roma formed a tiny minority of the entire population in a city which had around 7,000 residents in total. The Ustašas in Križevci could "Croatize" the city through deportations of a few hundred citizens. These structural reasons simplified planning and logistical issues related to mass deportation compared to many other locations across the NDH, Sarajevo and Osijek included. Moreover, the fact that Križevci was near Zagreb entailed that local security agencies could rely on support from the central state agencies, which aided the genocidal process by providing manpower and other resources required to situate the city among the genocidal overperformers.

3. The Radicalizer(s): The Holocaust in the City of Sarajevo

Introduction

Globally, the history of Sarajevo is mostly remembered as a site of political violence. The assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 and the siege of Sarajevo during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s are often seen as symbolizing the beginning and the end of the bloody history of Europe's "Short Twentieth Century."⁴⁷⁴ The disastrous siege of Sarajevo caused the death of an estimated 5,000 civilian victims.⁴⁷⁵ Yet, in terms of civilian casualties, the year 1941 was far more devastating, claiming almost twice the number of those killed in the city during the 1990s. In total, 9071 civilians died as the victims of "fascist terror" in World War II Sarajevo. However, one group of victims was vastly overrepresented: the Sarajevan Jews. Considering that 77% of all victims in Sarajevo during the Second World War were Jews, they are the only minority of interwar Sarajevo's ethnic mosaic that virtually ceased to exist by the war's end.⁴⁷⁶

Jews were an integral part of the city's communal life since the early modern period. The Sarajevan Jewish community witnessed the rise and fall of two empires: the Ottoman, which ruled the city from 1463-1878 and the Austro-Hungarian which control it from 1878 to 1918.⁴⁷⁷ Sarajevo's architecture, culture, economy, politics and society were shaped by both empires although the multiethnic and multiconfessional character of the city was primarily a consequence of the Ottoman heritage.

⁴⁷⁴ Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: biografija grada* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2006), 23.

⁴⁷⁵ Ewa Tabeau, Jakub Bijak, and Neda Lončarić, "Broj žrtava u opsadi Sarajeva od aprila 1992. do decembra 1995. Studija o stopi smrtnosti na osnovu osam velikih izvora podataka" (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2003), 2, https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/prosexp/bcs/mil-rep-tabeau030818b.pdf; Donia, *Sarajevo*, 365.

⁴⁷⁶ Božo Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata," in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: u borbi do punog oslobođenja (novembar 1943 - april 1945)*, vol. 4 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1981), 653.

⁴⁷⁷ Emily Greble, "A City Apart: Sarajevo in the Second World War" (Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford, California, Stanford University, 2007), 7.

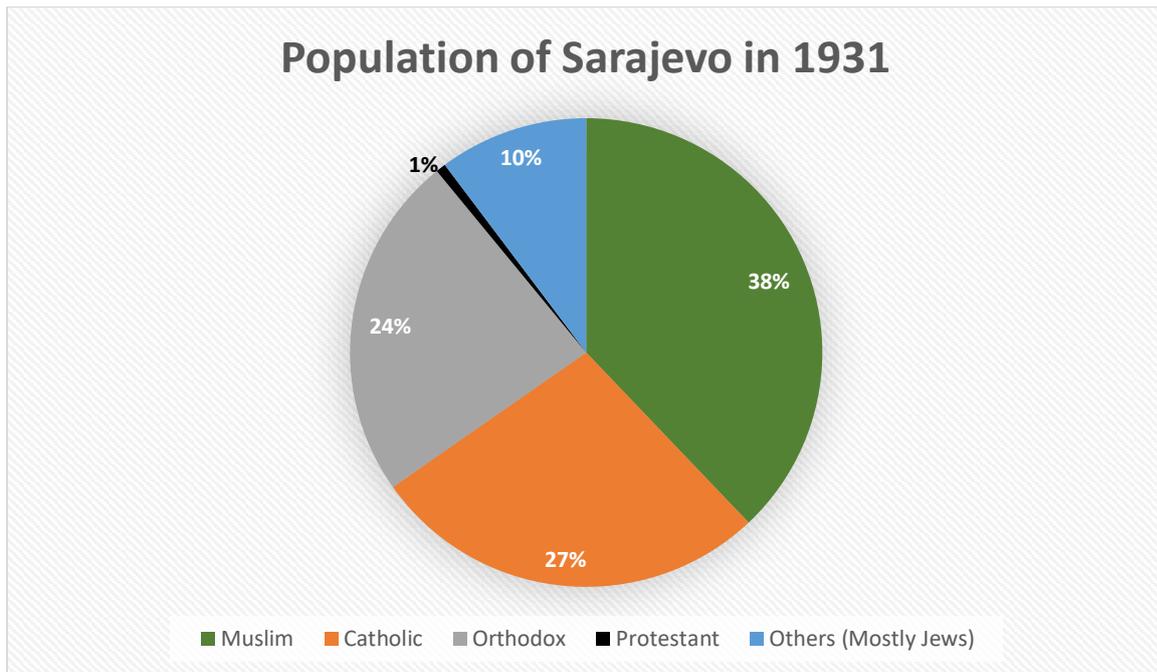


Table 5 – Religious Composition of Sarajevo according to the 1931 census.⁴⁷⁸

With an estimated Jewish population of almost 12,000, the city was home to the second largest Jewish community in the NDH. 75% of all Jews living in Bosnia and Herzegovina resided in Sarajevo. Unlike the previously examined case of Križevci, Sarajevo thus presents a profoundly different ethnic, religious and social setting, which begs different yet interrelated questions about the process of fascist mobilization, antisemitism, and decision-making in a multiethnic environment. What were the similarities and differences in the emergence of fascist elites in a multiethnic compared to a monoethnic setting? What was the relationship between the fascist centers of powers and local politics? How did the elevation of antisemitism to the level of state-sponsored ideology and policy influence the preexisting ethnic and religious groups in Sarajevo? Was antisemitism perceived, resisted, adopted and adapted in different

⁴⁷⁸ According to the 1931 census, the total population was estimated at 78,173 residents. There were 29,649 Muslims, 21,372 Catholics, 18,630 Christian Orthodox, 534 Protestants and 7988 of those who were classified as others – majority of whom were Jewish. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, *Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga I: prisutno stanovništvo, broj kuća i domaćinstava*, 1: XIV. Kraljevina Jugoslavija, *Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine. Knjiga II: prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti*, 2:41. By 1941 the population was estimated to grow to 85,000 residents, and the Jewish population was estimated between 10-12,000 due to increased urbanization. Thus, Jews constituted around 12% of the entire population of Sarajevo in 1941. Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 382.

ways among the different non-Jewish ethnic and religious groups? What was the position of Jews in comparison to Serbs and Roma? Did the multiethnic composition of the city, and its perception as a city of tolerance in which many groups lived side by side for centuries, speed up or slow down the persecution and deportations?

Considering that Sarajevo's Jewish community constituted more than a quarter of all Jews in the NDH, the impact of the Holocaust was far-reaching and exceeds the importance of the local history. The deportations of Jews from Sarajevo were a training ground for some of the most important organizers of the Holocaust on the state-level. Thus, the experiences from Sarajevo were implemented elsewhere and became a template for the implementation of the Holocaust in many other locations across the NDH.

3.1. The Establishment of the Ustaša Elite and the “Yerushalayim Chico”

The Jewish community of Sarajevo dates to the 16th century when the Sephardim who fled the persecution in Spain and Portugal settled in Ottoman-dominated Bosnia.⁴⁷⁹ Initially, thirty Jewish families settled in Sarajevo in the 1530s. The community thrived, and the number of Jews who settled in Sarajevo grew considerably in the coming years. By 1779 there were already 1100 Sephardic Jews in Sarajevo.⁴⁸⁰ Sometimes referred to as the “little Jerusalem” [Yerushalayim chico in Judeo-Spanish],⁴⁸¹ Sarajevo became the entry point of Ottoman Jewry in a migration wave to smaller Bosnian cities and towns. Soon after establishing a permanent community in Sarajevo, Jews settled in smaller towns in the Bosnian countryside, where they established numerous communities. Under Ottoman rule, the Jewish community in Bosnia enjoyed the same rights as other non-Muslim groups. They maintained religious autonomy, which extended to the domains of law and education. In return, the Jewish community had to pay a religious tax to the Ottoman authorities.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Great Eastern Crisis led to a significant reconfiguration of borders in the Balkans at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. Because of the Ottoman retreat, the Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878. This would have a significant cultural, economic, political, and social impact on the entire population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Austro-Hungarian occupation changed the fabric of the Jewish community in Sarajevo due to the migration waves of Ashkenazi Jews, who began to settle in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time in city’s history. Already in 1879,

⁴⁷⁹ Avram Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987), 11–12.

⁴⁸⁰ Benjamina Londrc, *Pravni položaj jevrejske zajednice u BiH od 1918. do 1945. Godine* (Sarajevo: IKD “University Press--Izdanja Magistrat,” 2017), 24. Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine*, 13.

⁴⁸¹ Francine Friedman, “Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 83–84.

an official Ashkenazi community was founded in Sarajevo next to the existing Sephardic Community.

Increasing modernization in the form of industrialization, a developing schooling system, and urbanization during the period of Austro-Hungarian rule created a high demand for a new educated class in the city. Jewish institutions encouraged the younger generations to pursue a career path in state service. In the 1904/5 cohort of students in Sarajevo Gymnasium, 10,5% of the students were Jewish.⁴⁸² The influx of Jewish girls in the education was particularly remarkable. When the first state school for women opened in Sarajevo in 1904, Jewish students made up 35% of all enrolled students. Access to education lifted many Sephardic Jews from poverty and put them at the forefront of a new entrepreneurial class in Sarajevo, which was especially the case with Ashkenazi Jews. According to available statistics, Jews in Sarajevo owned 50% of all bookstores, made up 75% of all glassworkers, 20% of all shoemakers, and 25% of all tailors. Nonetheless, at the turn of the century, there were still 2000 Jews in Sarajevo who were in a state of destitution without any income to sustain them. However, they were helped by a web of social institutions created by the Jewish Religious Community.⁴⁸³

After the First World War, Jews from the rural areas started to migrate to larger urban centers such as Sarajevo in pursuit of better educational and career opportunities. In the three decades before the Second World War, the number of Jews in Sarajevo tripled.⁴⁸⁴ Out of the 14,710 Jews who lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1931, 77,5% of them resided in the city of Sarajevo, thus making it the epicenter of Jewish life in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine*, 82.

⁴⁸³ Pinto, 66, 73, 146.

⁴⁸⁴ Pinto, 15.

⁴⁸⁵ Pinto, 163.

While most Bosnian Muslim newspapers attributed the growth of antisemitism at the turn of the century in Europe to Christianity, it was the process of rapid urbanization and the arrival of Ashkenazi Jews which sparked antisemitism in Sarajevo. During the Austro-Hungarian period, Ashkenazi Jews were seen as “foreigners,” unlike the Sephardic Jews, who had resided in the city for centuries. The former were depicted as “colonizers,” and “settlers.” They appeared frequently in the larger discussion of who had the right to vote and wield political influence in city politics.⁴⁸⁶ At the same time, the emergence of Zionism at the turn of the century provoked criticism from Bosnian Muslim intellectuals, who still tended to adhere to Pan-Islamism. The Bosnian-Muslim press criticized the potential revision of the status of British Mandatory Palestine that favored the creation of the state of Israel. However, this criticism was largely couched in the discourse of anti-British colonialism and did not take the form of antisemitic propaganda that could encourage violence against local Jews. Thus, antisemitic outbursts remained rare. Several Holocaust survivors from Sarajevo recounted that they never felt endangered until the middle of 1930s, where antisemitism started to gain traction among some right-wing groups, mainly the extreme nationalist Serb supporters of Dimitrije Ljotić and extreme Croatian nationalists.⁴⁸⁷

While no major antisemitic incident or act of violence took place in Sarajevo throughout the interwar period, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia promulgated a set of antisemitic laws during the autumn of 1940. These laws included the introduction of the *numerus clausus*, which limited the number of Jewish students to 108 across the country. Another law restricted the role

⁴⁸⁶ Carl Bethke and Dževada Šuško, “Percepcija Jevreja u bošnjačkoj štampi u periodu od 1878. do 1914.,” in *Suživot Jevreja i Muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: primjeri tolerancije od 16. stoljeća do danas*, ed. Dževad Šuško (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2021), 140, 154.

⁴⁸⁷ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Misa D., Interview code: HVT 2211, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 1991. Testimony of Holocaust survivor Iakov K, Interview code: HVT 3572, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 1993. Halid Čaušević, “Sociološki presjek pojave antisemitizma u BiH,” in *Sefarad 92 - zbornik radova* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju - Sarajevo, Jevrejska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine - Sarajevo, 1995), 125–27.

of Jewish businesses in wholesale trade of food supplies.⁴⁸⁸ In response, the Sarajevo Jewish community swiftly organized the Jewish gymnasium where teachers from regular state schools gave classes to Jewish pupils to continue their education.

After the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, the German army entered Sarajevo on 15 April 1941. At this point, Sarajevo had approximately 85,000 residents among whom 12,400 were Jewish. Approximately, 85.5% of the Jewish citizens were Sephardic while the remaining 14.5% were Ashkenazi Jews.⁴⁸⁹ Already on 16 April 1941, a pogrom was organized by the local German forces, which gentile Sarajevo residents took part in. During the pogrom, the Sephardic synagogue was demolished. German soldiers destroyed the inside of the synagogue by throwing hand grenades. They also burned the archive and the library of the Jewish Religious Community. Simultaneously, the Sarajevo crowd that participated in the pogrom stripped the synagogue of its massive copper roof. According to available sources, there were no Jewish victims during the pogrom. The crowd mainly targeted the symbols of Jewish culture and religion in the city.⁴⁹⁰

The Ustaša regime was slow to establish its rule in Sarajevo. During the interwar period, the Ustaša movement had very little support among Sarajevo Croats. Nonetheless, in line with their aspiration to create a Greater Croatia, the Ustašas received approval from the Axis forces to include Bosnia and Herzegovina into the newly formed NDH. Bosnia and Herzegovina was officially annexed to the NDH on 24 April 1941. On the same day, a large Ustaša delegation was sent to the city, which included about 800 people, primarily politicians and members of the Ustaša paramilitaries who subsequently became Ustaša functionaries in the city.⁴⁹¹ The

⁴⁸⁸ Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine*, 85–89.

⁴⁸⁹ Josip Albahari Čučo, “KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima,” in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Komunistička partija Jugoslavije u pripremama i organizaciji ustanka*, vol. 2 (Sarajevo, 1977), 677.

⁴⁹⁰ Friedman, “Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” 85–86.

⁴⁹¹ Emily Greble, *Sarajevo*, p. 63.

newly emerging Ustaša elites were given two tasks which they were supposed to implement in Sarajevo as soon as possible: to consolidate Ustaša rule in the city and to eliminate Jews and Serbs from the state apparatus and later from public life.⁴⁹² Nonetheless, the establishment of the Ustaša power in Sarajevo stood in stark contrast to the situation in Križevci. The Sarajevo's Ustaša elite was established from above and consisted of many "outsiders." Križevci epitomized a more bottom-up mobilization, which also included the local elites from the beginning, giving it more legitimacy and support from below. This difference would have important impact on the operating of the Ustaša security apparatus, its relationship to citizens and ultimately the implementation of the antisemitic legislature and deportations.

In order to consolidate their power not only in Sarajevo, but in entire Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ustašas had to secure the support of Bosnian Muslims for the NDH. The decline of the Ottoman Empire and the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Austro-Hungarian Empire meant that Muslims ceased to be a dominant political group. Consequently, the Muslim elite was forced to redevelop its political position and relationship to the state. According to scholar Desmond Maurer, most of the Muslims elites started to disavow their own national movements exactly because "they never envisioned the possibility of once again being the dominant class within a state of their own and so being able to identify themselves with the state."⁴⁹³ Instead, some Muslim intellectuals started to identify with the rising nationalist movement in Croatia and Serbia. Accordingly, they considered the Muslim population either to be Islamicized Serbs or Croats.⁴⁹⁴ The Ustašas' perception of and relation

⁴⁹² Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, eds., *Genocid nad Muslimanima 1941-1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990), 52–53.

⁴⁹³ Desmond Maurer, "On Reading the Muslim Resolutions," in *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo; Virginia: Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks; Center for Islam in the Contemporary World at Shenandoah University, 2021), 43.

⁴⁹⁴ Xavier Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires* (London; Oxford; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 9, 26–27; Maurer, "On Reading the Muslim Resolutions," 40.

to the Bosnian-Muslim elite was ambiguous and complicated. Officially, the Bosnian Muslims were portrayed as descendants of the racially purest Croats who converted to Islam in order to preserve the Croatian noble rights. This flattering portrayal was rooted in the writings of Ante Starčević, who described the Bosnian Muslims as “the flower of the Croatian Nation.” Nevertheless, some high-ranking Ustašas in fact had serious concerns about the loyalty of the Muslim elite. Yet, securing their support was vital for legitimizing their claim that Croats had an ethnic majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With the aim to demonstrate that Muslims were an integral part of the Croatian nationhood, Ante Pavelić included Muslims into some of the highest offices in the newly established government on 16 April 1941.⁴⁹⁵ While Muslims were overrepresented in the government, where they constituted over 35% of the members, Muslims remained severely underrepresented among the army generals, directors of various state, as well as party institutions.⁴⁹⁶

Bosnian Muslims were divided on their stance towards the Ustaša movement and the NDH.⁴⁹⁷ Just as the war broke out in Yugoslavia, some Muslims hoped that Bosnia and Herzegovina would receive autonomy under the German occupation and retain a greater level of political agency. For a brief period after the entry of the German army in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the local population operated in an information vacuum with the future status of the region remaining unclear. Various ethnic groups attempted to use the situation to assert their dominance in different localities. For example, in Bijeljina, the local Volksdeutsche and

⁴⁹⁵ Marko Attila Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History*, 2014, 15.

⁴⁹⁶ Nada Kisić-Kolanović, “Muslimanska inteligencija i islam u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 36, no. 3 (2004): 906.

⁴⁹⁷ Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 3 (1990): 282. Xavier Bougarel, “The Muslim Resolutions of 1941: Between Moral Courage and Political Impotence,” in *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo; Virginia: Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks; Center for Islam in the Contemporary World at Shenandoah University, 2021), 135–36.

some Muslims took down Croatian flags, hoping that they would govern the town and that it would not be included in the newly proclaimed Independent State of Croatia.⁴⁹⁸ After the proclamation of the NDH a group of politicians (Muslims, Serbs and Croats) who opposed the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the NDH wrote a memorandum to the German military authorities demanding a direct German military administration over Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴⁹⁹

A pro-Croatian faction of Muslim elites involved in the Muslim Organization (Muslimanska organizacija, MO) initially provided the strongest support for the NDH. The MO was formed in 1935 as a response to the dissatisfaction with the activities of the main Muslim party, the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (Jugoslavenska Muslimanska Organizacija, JMO). Unlike JMO, MO argued for greater cooperation with the opposition led by the Croatian Peasant Party. After the establishment of the NDH, some of the leaders of the Muslim Organization were promoted to top-ranking positions within the Ustaša regime. For example, Adamega Mešić⁵⁰⁰ became the deputy head of state [doglavnik], while Hakija Hadžić⁵⁰¹ became one of Pavelić's most trusted men in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁴⁹⁸ The Commissioner for the District of Bijeljina, Čedomir Koharović, to Poglavnik's Commissioners in Sarajevo, 9 May 1941. Historijski Muzej BiH [The Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina], Fond NDH, box 1, file 1614.

⁴⁹⁹ According to historian Marko Attila Hoare the initiative for this proposal came from JMO Muslim leaders Hadžihasanović, Husein Kadić and Asim Šeremet. The Serbian signatories were Milan Božić, Vojislav Besarović, Dušan Jeftanović and Milan Jojkić. Croatian signatories included Luka Čabrajić and possibly Vjekoslav Jelavić. The Serbian signatories such as Božić, Besarović and Jeftanović were quickly arrested afterwards and all of them were later executed. Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War*, Cass Military Studies (London ; New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 178.

⁵⁰⁰ Adamega Mešić (1861-1945) was born into a family of well-off merchants in Tešanj. Mešić was exceptionally active in the creation of various cultural and economic institutions during the Austro-Hungarian and Kingdom of Yugoslavia period. He identified himself with the pro-Croatian strand of Muslim politics and left the JMO after it decided to join the Yugoslav Radical Union in 1935. In 1936 he founded the Muslim organization affiliated with the HSS. On 8 May 1941 he was named as the Doglavnik [Deputy of the Poglavnik] of the Ustaša movement.

⁵⁰¹ Hakija Hadžić (1883-1945) was a professor of Latin language who was educated in Mostar, Jena, and Vienna. In 1918 Hadžić joined the Croatian Republican Peasant Party and in 1936 together with Adamega Mešić he founded the Muslim organization which was affiliated with the Croatian Peasant Party. In 1941 he joined the Ustaša movement after which he was appointed as the Ustaša commissioner of the Main Ustaša Headquarters in Tuzla.

In contrast to their counterparts from the MO, representatives of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (Jugoslavenska Muslimanska Organizacija, JMO) who had cooperated with several governing Serbian parties in the interwar period, were initially reluctant to openly support the NDH. In order to clarify and determine how to position themselves towards the new state, some the leaders of the JMO organized a meeting in the summer of 1941 in the town of Doboj. Despite the opposition of the majority of those present, former leaders of the party such as Uzeir-aga Hadžihasanović and Džafer Kulenović decided to support the NDH. Moreover, two present Bosnian-Serb politicians, Savo Besarović and Dušan Kecmanović also advocated that JMO politicians should join the NDH government in the hope that this could improve the position of Serbs in the NDH. Consequently, on 14 August 1941 a delegation of Muslim notables, including Kulenović and Hadžihasanović went to see Ante Pavelić and delivered him a declaration of Muslim loyalty to the NDH. Even though the Ustašas were radically anti-Yugoslav and showed enmity towards prominent politicians and bureaucrats who cooperated with the regime in Belgrade during the interwar period, they made an exception when it came to the leadership of JMO. The Ustašas rewarded Džafer Kulenović, the former leader of the party with the position of the vice-president of the government of the NDH in November 1941.⁵⁰² This was the result of the Ustaša leadership's attempt, on the macro level, to garner support and mobilize Muslims around the Ustaša movement and the NDH.

According to historian Xavier Bougarel, the radical shift of the JMO from cooperation with Serbian centralist parties to the support of the NDH can be explained by the traditional Muslim support for the centers of power in exchange for security guarantees and religious autonomy.⁵⁰³ The Ustaša officials promised to improve social, political and religious conditions for the Muslim community if they collaborated with the regime.⁵⁰⁴ Another potential

⁵⁰² Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War*, 41. Kisić-Kolanović, "Muslimanska inteligencija i islam u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj," 907.

⁵⁰³ Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 55–56.

⁵⁰⁴ Maurer, "On Reading the Muslim Resolutions," 36.

motive for the support of the NDH was JMO representatives' resentment towards several policies in interwar Yugoslavia which they interpreted as anti-Muslim. Most gravely, was Serbian paramilitary violence, which JMO saw the government as being responsible for. The violence peaked in 1924 when several hundred Muslims were killed mainly in the Sadžak region which is located between Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, parts of the Muslim elite were economically weakened by the 1919 land reform, which distributed land to the Christians who cultivated it, thus financially damaging the land-owning Muslim elites.⁵⁰⁵

As for the Muslim religious elites, they too initially welcomed the establishment of the NDH. Fehim Spaho, the reis-ul-ulema (head of the Islamic community), held a speech at the great mosque in Sarajevo on 11 May 1941, where he complimented the Ustaša regime for organizing the state without much bloodshed. In his speech he pointed out:

The Independent State of Croatia has been born and has begun to live. We Muslims have greeted it with all our hearts, bearing in mind that we are entering it as citizens with equal rights and strongly believing that no injustice will be committed against any Muslim.⁵⁰⁶

Nonetheless, similarly to the political elites, the Muslim religious leadership's attitudes and allegiances rapidly started to shift and demonstrated a certain level of political fluidity.⁵⁰⁷ The religious elites themselves were facing a challenge from within. A group of Muslim intellectuals, known as the Young Muslims, challenged the role of the Islamic Religious Community by accusing them of serving the interests of regimes, instead of their congregations. The Young Muslims denied that there could be any mediation between the God and men and therefore opposed the established religious elites. They believed that the clerics were incapable of revitalizing Islam because they were too close to the system and the state. They also lacked the creative energy to mobilize the population and immerse them into

⁵⁰⁵ Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 34.

⁵⁰⁶ Bougarel, 56.

⁵⁰⁷ Jelinek, "Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems," 284.

rejuvenated Islamic thought. Further divisions existed regarding the relationship between religion and nationalism. Muftić opted for pan-Islamism, believing that Bosnian Muslims were members of the population of 400 million believers who could establish “the great Islamic state.” Pan-Islamism stood in direct contradiction with the Ustaša ideology since it undermined the Ustaša efforts at Croatization of Muslims while also questioning the territorial integrity of the NDH. Moreover, Muftić directly challenged the role of secular political ideologies by claiming that “Islam was not merely a religion, but the most perfect universal ideology.”⁵⁰⁸

Various Ustaša policies, however, quickly started to cause discontent among the Muslim elites. Several Muslim dignitaries repeatedly expressed their concern that Muslims were discriminated against in comparison to Catholics. Already in early May 1941, reis-ul-ulema Fehim Spaho complained to the Ustaša authorities, decrying that Muslim state officials were being fired from instead of rewarded with existing administrative positions, a development that marked a radical departure from the upward social mobility the regime had promised the Muslim community.⁵⁰⁹

Further tensions between the authorities of the NDH and the Islamic Religious Community revolved around the demands for religious autonomy, which went against the grain of the totalitarian and secular nature of the Ustaša regime. The Ustaša commissioner for Bosnia and Herzegovina Hakija Hadžić, himself a Muslim, complained to the Ministries in Zagreb that some Muslim newspapers failed to show sufficient enthusiasm for the NDH. Hadžić implied that the Muslim leadership, headed by Spaho, was tainted by their past cooperation with the Yugoslav regime.⁵¹⁰ The conflict between Hadžić and Spaho further escalated in the coming days when the former ignored the autonomy of the Islamic Religious Community and interfered

⁵⁰⁸ Kisić-Kolanović, “Muslimanska inteligencija i islam u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj,” 927.

⁵⁰⁹ Reis-ul-ulema in Sarajevo to Hakija Hadžić, on 8 May 1941, HM BiH, Fond NDH, Box 1, file 1131, document number: 738/1941.

⁵¹⁰ NDH Commissioners in Sarajevo to Doglavnik Mile Budak, document issued on 25 July 1941, document number: 2343/41. HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 4, file 1711.

with their work.⁵¹¹ These were only the initial conflicts that derived from the Muslim agenda of increased religious and political autonomy, on the one hand, and an aggressively nationalizing, secular, totalitarian, and fascist regime, on the other hand.

Perhaps the greatest concern of the Muslim community not only in Sarajevo, but in the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the fear that the Ustašas would eventually turn against them after they had eradicated Serbs and Jews. Despite the proclaimed tolerance and inclusion of Muslims, there was a growing fear that ethnic homogenization would be followed by a religious, Catholic homogenization.⁵¹²

Muslims were especially disturbed by the swiftness of the persecution, which started already in late April 1941 in Sarajevo. Among the first people arrested was Bishop Petar Zimonjić, the leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the city, Šefkija Behmen – a former delegate of the JMO who self-identified as a Serb, and Šime Jurišić – a pro-Yugoslav Croatian lawyer.⁵¹³ The initial arrests focused on the known ideological enemies of the Ustaša regime since those arrested in fact came from all three dominant ethnic groups in Sarajevo. These arrests caused uproar across Sarajevo, especially in the case of Zimonjić who was respected across the city. According to one contemporary observer, a delegation mostly consisting of Catholic Croats went to visit Ivan Šarić, the Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Sarajevo, asking him to intervene for Zimonjić's release. However, Šarić declined under the excuse that he too could be arrested if he pursued the matter.⁵¹⁴ A few weeks later, in June 1941, Zimonjić was murdered by the Ustašas.⁵¹⁵ According to one Ustaša official from Sarajevo, Zimonjić's

⁵¹¹ Reis-UI-Ulema to Poglavnik's Commissioners on 29 July 1941, HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 4, document number 96/41.

⁵¹² Jelinek, "Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems," 282.

⁵¹³ Testimony of Salihbegović Avdo given to the County Court in Sarajevo on 8 January 1953. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128, p. 1.

⁵¹⁴ Testimony of Pavičić Ivan given to County Court in Sarajevo on 15 January 1953. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁵¹⁵ There are conflicting reports as to what happened with Zimonjić, according to Milan Radeka, he was taken to Kerestinec where he was murdered. Testimony of Milan Radeka given to the District Court in Karlovac, 28 August 1951. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

arrest and subsequent murder was the result of orders issued by Minister of Interior Andrija Artuković, one of the architects of genocidal policies in the NDH. The order had to come from the central authorities because “no one in Sarajevo would dare to arrest” Zimonjić and risk the political backlash from the local public.⁵¹⁶ The continuous interventions from the state security institutions on the macro level into the local matters in Sarajevo was characteristic throughout 1941 and demonstrates a degree of distrust between the elites in the center and periphery.

Individual arrests and murders were soon followed by more systematic discrimination and persecution of Jews and Serbs. Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the regions where the Ustaša policy of genocide was supposed to be implemented most intensely. In June 1941, the Minister of Interior of the NDH, Andrija Artuković reportedly said that “Bosnia is Croatian, it always was, and it always will be Croatian. You should know that streams of blood will flow through Bosnia.”⁵¹⁷ When some Muslim officials in Bosnia complained that the indiscriminate persecution of Serbs could have serious security consequences for Catholics and Muslims if a Serbian rebellion erupted. Artuković responded that the best way to curb any basis for a rebellion was to murder all Serbs. Thus, Artuković implied that instead of complaining, Muslims and Catholics should start working together to kill all the Serbs in their locality. Officials were shocked by Artuković’s outspoken genocidal intent against Serbs when he concluded that “nothing will remain of this evil kin, born or unborn, it will all be eliminated.”⁵¹⁸ In Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, and Sarajevo in particular, this genocidal policy aimed to change the multiethnic character of the region. The Ustašas saw the ethnic homogenization as an urgent political project which would change the contested status of the region. Genocide

⁵¹⁶ Testimony of Mesic Zlatko given to County Court in Zenica on 14 August 1951, p. 3. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 129.

⁵¹⁷ Testimony of Šefkija Behmen given to the County Court in Jajce on 7 July 1952. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128,

⁵¹⁸ Testimony of Muftić Omer given to the County Court in Zenica on 29 June 1951, p. 1. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 129,

would lead to securing Croatian national and political dominance and cementer the status of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the new heartland of the NDH.

The Ustaša genocidal intent was not only directed outwardly, towards the “Others,” identified for mass murder, namely Serbs, Jews and Roma, it also served the purpose of creating inward cohesion between people of different political, religious and ethnic identities. The Ustaša genocide was thus seen by many as an instrument of nation-building in which the perpetrators would erase their previous differences and create “New Man,” born out of the melting pot filled by the blood of the Ustaša regime’s enemies. One pro-Ustaša official from Sarajevo wrote to Ante Pavelić, recommending that hatred towards Serbs and Jews should be “carefully and methodically directed” to unite Muslims and Catholic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina behind the Ustaša banner:

The extermination [iztriebljenje] of Jews and Serbs in Bosnia would build brotherhood and trust among Muslims and Catholics [...]. Bosnia, which had been stuck in backwardness because of its [historical] torment, would move towards the path of nationalization, Europeanization, and prosperity [after the extermination of Jews and Serbs].⁵¹⁹

Accordingly, antisemitism was supposed to serve the purpose of nation-building by expediting the process of Croatization of Bosnian Muslims. The newspapers of the two communities continued to use antisemitism as a political language, using primarily religious, economic, and ideological arguments. However, both the Catholic and Islamic leadership seemed to reject the notion of racial antisemitism initially. Their antisemitism relied on previously nurtured anti-Jewish tropes such as economic, religious, and socio-cultural arguments. For example, the Catholic Weekly [Katolički tjednik], a mouthpiece of the Catholic Church under the control of Ivan Šarić, wrote in May 1941:

The Jews, who have led Europe and the whole world toward disaster – religious, moral, cultural and economic disaster – they have appetite for nothing less than the

⁵¹⁹ Petar Pavić “Problem Bosne,” Zagreb, September 1941. ABiH, ZKUZ, box 7, file 181.

whole world... Satan himself aided them in the invention of Socialism and Communism... We Catholics are not put in charge of the persecution of the Jews. This does not suit us. We do not wish any kind of inhumanity. We do not suggest draconian measures [...]. [But] there is a limit to love. The movement for liberation of the world from Jews is a movement for the renewal of human dignity. Omniscient and omnipotent God stands behind this defense, behind this movement.⁵²⁰

Despite these antisemitic attitudes and in defiance of the race laws issued by the Ustaša regime in Zagreb local clergy members immediately started to convert Jews to Catholicism. For example, Božidar Bralo a Catholic priest and one of the highest Ustaša functionaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina personally oversaw the conversion of more than a thousand Sarajevo Jews to Catholicism.⁵²¹ Besides the pressure to convert stemming from the propaganda of the religious communities, some Jews were also approached by their neighbors, colleagues at work, or other acquaintances who exerted informal pressure on them to convert. According to a Holocaust survivor from Sarajevo, her father was approached by a Muslim colleague who told him that he “should convert to Islam, or perhaps to Catholicism” to keep his job. He refused because he wanted to keep his Jewish Orthodox religious identity. A few weeks later, in May 1941, he lost his job.⁵²²

The Croatian Catholic clergy probably hoped that they could negotiate the fate of the Jews who converted to Catholicism and demanded from the central authorities in Zagreb to alleviate the antisemitic discriminatory measures against those who converted to Catholicism.⁵²³ More than 500 Sarajevo Jews converted to Islam and between 1,400-3,800 to Catholicism after the proclamation of the NDH.⁵²⁴ The lower number of converts to Islam was probably due to the perception that the Catholic Church and its organizations would be more

⁵²⁰ As quoted in Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 455.

⁵²¹ Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 94–95.

⁵²² Testimony of the Holocaust survivor Rikki R., Interview code: HVT 1686, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 1991.

⁵²³ Sarajevo chief of police to the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, document dated 21 June 1941. HR-HDA-223, MUP NDH, box 101,

⁵²⁴ Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945*, 2011, 93.

powerful and more able to protect the converts than the Islamic community. Muslims felt threatened by the large number of people who tried to convert to Catholicism and complained to the authorities in Zagreb. In September 1941, the leader of the Muslims in the NDH, Reis-ul-ulema, wrote a letter to the government of NDH in which he argued that Serbs and Jews who converted to Catholicism were treated better than those who converted to Islam. He wrote that converts to Catholicism are often exempted from arrests and deportations, while those converted to Islam are not.⁵²⁵ There were widespread rumors that the Catholicization of all Muslims in NDH would be imminent after the Serbian and Jewish “questions” were solved in the NDH.⁵²⁶

The efforts to convert Jews to either Catholicism or Islam provoked a response of the Ustaša regime, which repeatedly stated that Jewishness is a racial category which cannot be altered by any religious conversion. The Ustaša regime completely banned conversions in October 1941. The Ustaša antisemitic campaign, however, provoked unintended consequences and exacerbated competition between the Muslims and the Catholic religious communities in Sarajevo instead of bringing them closer together. While the conversions could have been motivated by ethical concerns, they were also interpreted as being weaponized for political purposes. At the core of the issue was the question of which religious community would dominate the future political landscape of Sarajevo. If Serbs and Jews were to disappear from the NDH as was intended by the Ustaša elite’s ideologues at the macro level, then the only remaining communities in Sarajevo would be Muslims and Catholics. Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina feared such an outcome because it would leave them isolated as the only religious minority in a dominantly Catholic country.⁵²⁷ Thus, some Muslims interpreted the conversions of Jews to Catholicism in Sarajevo as an attempt to increase the number of Catholics, which

⁵²⁵ The Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Modruš to the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, 4 October 1941. Dedijer and Miletić, *Genocid nad Muslimanima 1941-1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja*, 20–21.

⁵²⁶ Dedijer and Miletić, 38–39.

⁵²⁷ Maurer, “On Reading the Muslim Resolutions,” 34.

would solidify their political position in the future city politics. This in turn galvanized the Islamic clerics to intensify their own conversion efforts in order to curb the development. Therefore, the result was the utilization of antisemitic policies, for the purposes of competitive community-building.

Beyond conversions, a similar process of competition between the two communities was taking place regarding “Aryanization,” – the confiscation and redistribution of Jewish property in Sarajevo. When the NDH was established, Jews in Sarajevo owned around 400 stores, 300 workshops and three large industrial complexes which employed more than 100 workers. In May 1941, all of these were seized by the Ustašas, who placed 303 commissioners in Jewish-owned business in order to manage them.⁵²⁸ On 1 July 1941, the NDH regime formed the State Directorate for Economic Renewal [Državno ravnateljstvo za ponovu], whose function was to manage and redistribute the confiscated property of Serbs and Jews. The local office of for Economic Renewal immediately became a battleground for the discussions on which property should be given to Catholics and which to Muslims. As with the conversions, the Muslim elite feared that Catholics would dominate the redistributive process. This would in effect create a competitive edge for the Catholic community, enabling it to cultivate a future city elite faster than the Muslim community could.⁵²⁹

Further ruptures between the Muslims and the Catholics were caused by severe deterioration of the security situation, which started in mid-1941. Besides deporting the Serbian political and economic elites from the cities, the Ustaša paramilitaries also conducted ruthless mass murder in the countryside. By the end of the summer of 1941, more than 100,000 Serbs had been murdered across the NDH.⁵³⁰ The widespread persecution of Serbs caused an armed uprising, which first started at the end of June 1941 in eastern Herzegovina and then quickly

⁵²⁸ Donia, *Sarajevo*, 201.

⁵²⁹ Testimony of Salihbegović Avdo given to the County Court in Sarajevo on 8 January 1953. p. 4., HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128,

⁵³⁰ Korb, “Understanding Ustaša Violence,” 5.

spread to the other regions of the NDH. The resistance against the Ustašas was split between the Serbian nationalist Chetniks and the communist-led Partisans. The Chetniks were mainly active in eastern Bosnia, where they committed numerous crimes against Muslims either as retribution against the previous crimes committed by the Ustašas or with the ideological aim of creating ethnically homogenous Serb territories. Chetnik activities and the inability of the NDH to protect the Muslims in the east triggered waves of Muslim refugees, who tried to find refuge in Sarajevo and the other areas. Throughout the war, there were more than 210,000 Muslim refugees in NDH.⁵³¹ Accommodating so many refugees and providing them with the necessary supplies was a severe challenge for the NDH authorities on state and especially on the local level.

In comparison to locations such as Križevci, the attempted Ustaša nation, state and fascist elite-building in Sarajevo was largely a failure. Instead of delivering on the promise of increased political participation and representation, upward social mobility, political and economic stability, and prosperity, the Ustašas created a series of severe crises on the local level. The result was the alienation of parts of Muslim elites and general population which perceived the Ustašas as lacking any capacity or competency to secure even the most basic needs of the citizens such as security and economic stability. This was in large part a self-inflicted crisis since the increasingly dysfunctional local administration was caused by the dismissal of skilled professionals as the result of the campaign of ethnic homogenization and discrimination of Serbs and Jews. Moreover, the increasing pressures and meddling from the central authorities in Zagreb to radicalize the campaign of ethnic cleansing led to further fragmentation and conflicts among the ranks of the Ustaša elite in Sarajevo.

⁵³¹ Marko Attila Hoare. *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 118.

3.2. Orders From Above and Actions from Below: Genocidal Decision Making in Sarajevo

Like all other security forces in the NDH, the police apparatus in Sarajevo received an order from Zagreb on 23 July 1941 which called for the urgent imprisonment of all Jews and Serbs “who are known as communists” and their deporting to concentration camps.⁵³² Police officials in Sarajevo interpreted this order literally, arresting those who were reportedly suspicious of being communists without targeting the Jewish or Serbian community *in toto*. For example, one of the first groups of deportees after the order was issued included 35 people who were sent to the Gospić camp complex on 25 July 1941. The transport’s ethnic composition was mixed.⁵³³ On the same day, the police chief reported that the Sarajevo police had deported “only” nine Serbian families up to that date.⁵³⁴

The initial order from 23 July confused some police officials in the NDH. It was unclear what kind of evidence was required to justify deportations of communist suspects. Should the officials follow existing legal proceedings, or did this order override them? Moreover, for many police officials, it was unclear if Jews who had converted to Catholicism, Islam, or other religions should be deported or not. Facing many questions related to the ambiguity of the order, the main security office, RAVSIGUR, sent a clarification of this order on 30 July 1941. It stressed that Jews and Serbs who are “suspicious of communism” were to be deported to the concentration camps regardless of whether they had converted to any other religion. More importantly, it was explicitly permitted to continue with these deportations “even if there is no evidence” to justify the arrests.⁵³⁵

⁵³² Directorate of the Ustaša police of the NDH to all the Regional Prefectures [velike župe] and to the Ustaša Commissioner for Bosnia and Herzegovina [Jure] Francetić, issued on 23 July 1941. Vukčević, *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu - zbornik dokumenata.*, 366.

⁵³³ Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo to the Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Vrhbosna, 25 July 1941. HM, Fond NDH, box 4, document number 1030/41.

⁵³⁴ Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo to State Directorate for Nationalized Property in Zagreb, 25 July 1941. Vukčević, *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu - zbornik dokumenata.*, 387.

⁵³⁵ Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR) to all Regional Prefectures [velike župe], 30 July 1941. Vukčević, 414.

This effectively erased any existing legal buffers which still might have stood in the way of mass deportations. Because of RAVSIGUR's clarifying instructions, police officials and Ustaša security staff could now proceed with the deportations in whatever way they saw fit. Accordingly, the intensity and scale of the arrests and deportations were primarily contingent on the initiatives and zeal of the actors on the ground. While the Ustaša elite signaled their intention to rid the entire territory of Croatia of Jews through deportations to Ustaša concentration camps, there was no comprehensive plan from the top to this effect. Instead, the Ustašas, state police, gendarmes, and other state officials were expected to “work towards the leader”⁵³⁶ through their own initiative. Each state or party official was expected to contribute to the “Final Solution” in their capacity and to the best of their ability.

This set of orders related to deportations of Serbs and Jews to concentration camps issued in the second half of July 1941 triggered a wave of deportations across the NDH which differed significantly in scale. In the Bosnian town of Bijeljina, the Ustašas displayed a particular radical comportment. On 1 August 1941, they arrested all Jewish men. Arrests of women and children followed the next day. In the first two days of August 1941 alone, approximately 350 people were deported to the concentration camps in. In a report from 9 August 1941, the local Ustaša authorities in Bijeljina boasted that they have “thoroughly cleansed all the kikes [Ćifuti]. There are only two [Jews] remaining in our district, both are aged between 70-80, and they are blind.”⁵³⁷

Nevertheless, the radical pattern in Bijeljina was not repeated everywhere in the NDH. Unlike many other places across the NDH, such as Križevci for example, no mass deportations in Sarajevo took place following the receipt of the July orders. The regional head or *veliki*

⁵³⁶ For the concept of “working towards the leader” see Ian Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer.’ Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (1993): 103–18.

⁵³⁷ The Ustaša Logor in Bijeljina to the Main Ustaša Headquarters in Zagreb, 9 August 1941. Document number 342/41. HM BiH, UNS, box 1, file 25, p. 2. Testimony of Holocaust survivor Rahela Altaras, available in Aleksandar Gaon, *Mi smo preživeli... Jevreji o Holokaustu* (Beograd: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2001), 19.

župan immediately passed down the orders through the chain of command. However, when the 30 July clarification order was issued to all the gendarme stations in Sarajevo and its surroundings, it simply stated, “arrest all communists regardless of their religion.”⁵³⁸ This significantly altered the original intent of the order. Instead of carrying out arrests and deportations in an indiscriminate manner – that is wholesale targeting of Jews and Serbs – the local Ustašas in Sarajevo did the exact opposite. Instead, the police in Sarajevo continued to arrest and deport Jews and Serbs on an individual basis. In fact, the first deportations after the orders were issued took place on 2 August 1941 when fourteen people were sent to Gospić concentration camp from Sarajevo. Nine of them were accused of being Chetniks, one of being a communist and four Jews were included in this deportation.⁵³⁹

This shows how local security agencies could assert their agenda in deciding how to implement the orders from above. The divergences show that the orders from Zagreb issued in July 1941 were, in fact, not a clearcut instruction. Instead, they legalized the mass deportations of Jews regardless of any legal restrictions and implicitly encouraged an extremer approach. Yet, the level of radicalization depended on the intensity of local security officials’ antisemitism. As a result, unlike in other large cities and towns in NDH, no mass deportations of Jews took place from Sarajevo immediately after the July orders.

Nevertheless, officials in Sarajevo were not per se averse to radical measures. This was shown in the aftermath of a partisan sabotage action. On 29 July 1941, a bomb was planted in the Sarajevo railway works by the resistance. It was supposed to signal the beginning of an uprising in Sarajevo and potentially trigger the uprising against the Ustaša regime in Sarajevo. As an immediate response to this action, the local Ustašas ordered the mass shooting of approximately 50 hostages who were already kept in prison, mostly Serbs. However, the

⁵³⁸ The Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Vrhbosna to the District Authority in Sarajevo, 31 July 1941. HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 4, file 2656, document number V.T. 47/41.

⁵³⁹ Vukčević, *Zločini na Jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu - zbornik dokumenata*, 431–32.

gendarmes who were given the order to implement the mass shooting on 31 July simply refused to execute the prisoners. The commander of the gendarmes sent a report to his commanding officers demanding an explanation if gendarmes were supposed to comply with such orders issued by the Ustašas and participate in mass murder.⁵⁴⁰ This cause of refusal is important in key regards. It not only showed that the security forces in the NDH were not a monolith, but also that some of its elements continued to operate with the notion that punishment should not be divorced from individual guilt.

Even though Sarajevo's own police investigation showed that the sabotage was conducted by four non-Jewish resistance members,⁵⁴¹ the local Ustaša security officials held a meeting about the railway sabotage and concluded that several Jews had to be included in a retaliatory shooting. Since the Minister of Interior, Andrija Artuković, was supposed to visit Sarajevo in the coming days, the inclusion of Jews in mass shootings would demonstrate to the elite in Zagreb that Sarajevo was indeed working on the solution of the "Jewish question." The execution of Jews also had the task of demonstrating to the local population that Jews were indeed entangled with communism, therefore, legitimizing the antisemitic agenda of the Ustaša ideology and the regime's anti-Jewish policies. On 1 August 1941, ten prominent Jewish citizens of Sarajevo were arrested and shot together with ten Serbs at the outskirts of Sarajevo.⁵⁴² This was the first case of a mass shooting of Jews in Sarajevo since the establishment of the NDH. News about it reached the population already the following day when the Ustaša newspapers publicized the massacre and issued a warning that further executions would follow if the security situation deteriorated further in the city. This sent

⁵⁴⁰ Telegram from the 4th Gendarme Regiment to the Gendarme Central Command sent on 31 July 1941. Vukčević, 418.

⁵⁴¹ Report of the Directorate of the Sarajevo Police to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Vrhbosna – Sarajevo, 24 September 1941. HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 6, file 2175.

⁵⁴² The report of Srećko Bujas, ZKRZ, Microfil Roll 2942, Frame Number: 202, 258. Milan Bulajić, *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, vol. 1 (Beograd: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad," 1988), 752.

shockwaves throughout the Sarajevo Jewish community. Many Jews started to plan their escape from the city in an effort to reach the Italian occupation zone, which they considered to be a safe haven in comparison to remaining in Sarajevo. The mass shootings are important because they constituted an autonomous attempt by the local Ustašas to solve two different issues. The first was to demonstrate their own contributing to anti-Jewish policies. The second was how to deter further partisan activities.

According to some reports, even though they were antisemitic, the leaders of the city's police were not prone to take any radical actions of their own against the Jewish community.⁵⁴³ Up till this point, they had primarily conducted antisemitic actions in response to specific events, such as Artuković's visit and the partisan railroad sabotage. The local Ustaša officials did not only react to the orders they received from the top, but they also discussed and designed their own plans for the possible solution of the "Jewish question," locally. The numerous attempts by Jews to leave the city gave rise to new ideas and proposals. Srećko Bujas, the Ustaša-installed commissioner who supervised the work of the Jewish Sephardic Religious Community, suggested to the chief of police, Branko Điković, that perhaps mass migration of Jews would be useful for the city. He employed the political language of antisemitism, which was familiar to the Ustašas, and recommended selling legally issued travel papers to Jews who wanted to emigrate. Bujas argued that Jews were emigrating anyway by bribing Ustaša officials and that such a step would enable a more effective seizure of money from Sarajevo Jews. Bujas also suggested that if Jews emigrated collectively, they would have to leave all their property behind. In such a way, the city would benefit financially and could use their property for other purposes. The chief of Sarajevo police was intrigued by this suggestion, but ultimately refused it with the excuse that this question was out of his jurisdiction.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfil roll 2942, frame number: 250; 255.

⁵⁴⁴ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 258.

The implementing of the Holocaust in Sarajevo was profoundly tied to the interaction between local Croatian and Muslim actors on the ground. On 5 August 1941, the Minister of Interior, Andrija Artuković, arrived in Sarajevo to address several important issues which troubled the Ustaša elite in Zagreb. Artuković primarily intended to solve severe tensions between different powerholders in Sarajevo. Most importantly, his main desideratum was to alleviate the conflict between Muslims and Catholic Croats since the government in Zagreb “believed that the alliance with Croats of Islamic religion was endangered.”⁵⁴⁵ In order to win Muslims over, Artuković held several meetings with Muslim officials and representatives. During one of these meetings, Artuković stressed that “Jews had to be eliminated because they hold the main economic levers in their hands.” He tried to explain to the Sarajevan Muslim elite why the solution of the “Jewish question” was one of the main aims of the government and demanded that antisemitic persecution should be radically implemented in Sarajevo as soon as possible.⁵⁴⁶ The leading Ustašas in Sarajevo, such as the Ustaša commissioner Jure Francetić and his deputy Drago Jilek, agreed with Artuković. They told him that all the difficulties in Sarajevo could be resolved if Jews were to be removed from the city.⁵⁴⁷

In their meetings with Artuković, the Muslim leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina tried to intervene on behalf of the Roma who had converted to Islam. On the one hand, the efforts to exclude the Muslim Roma from the persecution was an attempt to protect their religious community. On the other hand, the Muslim elite feared that arbitrary persecution of various groups could potentially result in them becoming a target of the Ustaša regime in the future.⁵⁴⁸ In order to appease the Muslim elite, Artuković was ready to make a compromise

⁵⁴⁵ Testimony of Kurbegović Hamid given to the County Court in Sarajevo 7 July 1952., HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128, see also Bulajić, *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, 1:757.

⁵⁴⁶ Testimony of Hasan Hadžiosmanović, the Ustaša Logornik in Sarajevo, given to the County Court in Zenica on 28 June 1952. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

⁵⁴⁷ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 259.

⁵⁴⁸ Alexander Korb, “Ustaša Mass Violence Against Gypsies in Croatia, 1941-1942,” in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 81.

regarding the persecution of Muslim Roma. To resolve this issue and secure the loyalty of the Bosnian Muslim elite, he ordered the establishment of a committee tasked with creating pseudoscientific explanation for the exclusion of Bosnian Roma Muslims from the race laws. Since all members of this newly formed committee were Sarajevo Muslims, the outcome of their deliberations was predictable. The committee concluded that Roma Muslims belonged to the “Indo-European race” since they originated from Northwest India. The committee members also concluded that Roma spoke the Croatian language and that they are integrated into the society. Following the conclusions of the committee and after having returned to Zagreb from his visit to Sarajevo, Artuković issued a decree on 30 August 1941 stipulating that Muslim Roma were to be exempt from any form of persecution.⁵⁴⁹ The case of the Muslim elite’s intervention on behalf of the Roma demonstrates that despite the rigidity of race laws in NDH, the racial categories could still be negotiated when the political gains of such actions outweigh the costs.

During his stay in Sarajevo, Artuković had also reprimanded the local Ustaša leadership for their lack of proactivity in cleansing the city of Serbian influence.⁵⁵⁰ The first chief of police in Sarajevo, Josip Zubić was forced to resign because he did not implement the genocidal policies against the Serbs energetically enough.⁵⁵¹ Reflecting on the previous situation in Sarajevo during 1942, Artuković was enraged that Sarajevo still had not been “cleansed” of Serbs. He explicitly brought up Francetić, asking “Why is Jure Francetić not executing the orders I gave him? I do not want any Serbs in eastern Bosnia, nor in Croatia in general. I gave orders to eliminate their bishop [Petar Zimonjić]. Thus, I don’t want any Serbs to remain.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹ Bulajić, *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, 1:758–59.

⁵⁵⁰ For example, he was angry with Jure Francetić because he did not order the destruction of a Serbian Orthodox Church in the city of Sarajevo. Bulajić, 1:757.

⁵⁵¹ Testimony of Ćurčić Kosta given to District Court in Sarajevo on 6 August 1951, p. 1-2. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128,

⁵⁵² Testimony of Mesic Zlatko given to the County Court in Zenica on 14 August 1951, p. 3. HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 129.

As Artuković desired, the massacres against Serbs had begun in certain regions of NDH already in April 1941. By the end of the summer of 1941, more than 100,000 Serbs have been murdered across the NDH.⁵⁵³ However, Sarajevo was another aberration in this regard. While Serbs in Sarajevo were subjected to harsh discrimination and violence, the local Ustaša authorities authorized several exemptions from the persecution of the local Serbs. Authorities in Sarajevo gave more urgency to pragmatism, foreseeing that a too swift persecution of Serbs would result in the collapse of the local administration, economy, and the supply chain due to the embeddedness of Serbs into the administrative and economical fabric of the city. Despite several orders from central authorities in Zagreb to dismiss Serbs and Jews from all state positions, almost 25% of all employees in the municipality of Sarajevo remained Orthodox Serbs until November 1941.⁵⁵⁴

Some Ustaša members from Sarajevo, such as Dragutin Kamber, wrote to Pavelić, arguing that the mass murder of Serbs in the countryside could prove to be disastrous. Kamber held anti-Serb attitudes himself. He argued that “Serbs are collectively and individually guilty, and they are an irreconcilable enemy of our state and its existence.” However, Kamber pointed out that the “unreasonable and unlawful murder of Serbs has to be stopped” because it would cause a powerful uprising which the Ustašas would be unable to contain. Kamber supported the idea that Serbs should be resettled elsewhere. More specifically, he hoped for their mass deportations to Germany as a labor force. However, he concluded that

I am not a supporter of the idea that Serbs should have equal rights while they are among us. Nor am I supporting the idea that they should stay among us for long. However, while they are still here, they should be second-class citizens, but still, there must be some laws that have to be respected and which cannot be broken as one saw fit. They cannot stand outside of the law.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ Korb, “Understanding Ustaša Violence,” 5.

⁵⁵⁴ Emily Greble, “When Croatia Needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941-1942,” *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 127.

⁵⁵⁵ Dragutin Kamber to Ante Pavelić, 29 September 1942. State Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ZKURZ, Referati, box 7, file 173, p. 4.

While Serbs nearby Sarajevo, as well as across the NDH, were being murdered, the Sarajevo police were still employing four Serbian chauffeurs despite direct orders from the top to replace them with Croats.⁵⁵⁶ However, after Artuković's visit to Sarajevo in August 1941, the police started to take more active measures against the Serbs. On 11 August 1941, the police arrested all the Serbian-Orthodox priests in Sarajevo, deporting them to a transit camp, from where they were supposed to be expelled to Serbia.⁵⁵⁷ The arrests of Serbian priests, teachers, intellectuals, and anyone else who could be seen as potentially belonging to the "national elite" was a widespread policy in the first months of the NDH's existence. According to an agreement between NDH and Third Reich, Serbs with a "developed national consciousness" were to be deported to Serbia proper.

The pressure to start with the deportations of Jews was building up not only from the Ustaša elite from Zagreb but from other institutions as well. On 7 August 1941, the local military command sent a report to the central authorities in Zagreb, stating that actions against Jews in Sarajevo were not implemented harshly enough. The heads of the security apparatus in Zagreb demanded an explanation from the regional authorities of the *velika župa*, asking why more active measures had not been taken. The office of the *velika župa* responded that some measures had been taken but tried to excuse itself by putting responsibility for the persecution of Serbs onto the police and other security agencies.⁵⁵⁸

The growing pressure for a radicalization of the persecution occurred around the same time that the city of Sarajevo started to face a major housing crisis, which was initially caused by a massive inflow of Ustaša officials and security forces. Originally, the police in Sarajevo had 200 officers. However, in June 1941, the decision was made to hire an additional 800 men

⁵⁵⁶ Greble, "When Croatia Needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941-1942," 126.

⁵⁵⁷ Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo to the State Directorate for Economic Renewal, 12 August 1941, HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 5, file 1849, document number 104.

⁵⁵⁸ The Directorate of the Ustaša Police of the NDH to the Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo, 28 September 1941. HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 6, file number 2187.

in order to improve the security situation.⁵⁵⁹ However, the chief of police of Sarajevo, Branko Điković, was unable to ensure their accommodation. He first asked the *velika župa* if he could use the building of the “Women’s State Gymnasium,” but his request was refused because it would endanger the education of 1,600 students. After hearing about the issues with accommodating the newly hired policemen, the head of the RAVSIGUR, or the main security office in Zagreb, Eugen Dido Kvaternik, was surprised that the chief of Sarajevo police had not simply requisitioned the buildings from Sarajevo Jews and Serbs for this purpose. Kvaternik quickly ordered that several buildings owned by Jews should be emptied and assigned to the police.⁵⁶⁰

Housing was also needed for the Ustaša Corps [Ustaška vojnica] units which were being formed in Sarajevo as a response to the uprising against the Ustaša regime.⁵⁶¹ The commander of this newly formed unit, Jure Francetić ordered the first mass arrest of Jews on 1 September 1941. Virtually all Jews in the immediate center of the city were arrested.⁵⁶² On 3 September 1941, the first transport with 324 Jews was taken to the Kruščica concentration camp, and on 9 September 1941, another transport of 331 Jews was taken to the same place.⁵⁶³ According to the testimony of the Holocaust survivor, Jozef Alkalaj, he went to the police after these mass arrests in order to inquire about his brother’s fate, who lived in the center of the city, which was targeted by these deportations. Alkalaj managed to talk directly with the chief of Sarajevo police Branko Điković, who told him that the mass arrests were not conducted on his initiative

⁵⁵⁹ The Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo to the Regional Prefect [veliki župan] of Vrhbosna, HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 6, file number 2226, document number 25113/41.

⁵⁶⁰ The Main Security Office of the NDH to the Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo, HM BiH, box 6, file number 2226, document number 31.926/41.

⁵⁶¹ Ministry of Interior of the NDH’s Order About the Accommodation of the Active Ustaša Battalion, 7 September 1941. HM BiH, box 6, file 2122, document number 670.

⁵⁶² HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 261. See also Albahari Čučo, “KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima,” 687.

⁵⁶² HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 260.

⁵⁶³ Madžar, “Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata,” 652–53; Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, 130; Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945*, 2011, 111.

and that he was simply following orders. Alkalaj got the impression that Điković tried to whitewash his responsibility and place all the blame on Jure Francetić.⁵⁶⁴ The Ustaša commissioner who oversaw the activities of the Sephardic Jewish Religious Community similarly argued that Jure Francetić personally told him that the first wave of deportations from Sarajevo, beginning in September, were conducted because Francetić needed additional housing for the members of his “Black Legion” Ustaša units.⁵⁶⁵

Entire families, including women and children, were imprisoned for a few days in Sarajevo, after which they were deported to the Kruščica concentration camp in the nearby town of Travnik. Kruščica concentration camp was originally a detention site that was formed during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the end of 1940 to intern different political extremists, mainly the Croatian Ustašas and Serbian Ljotić supporters. Around 50 Ustaša prisoners escaped from the detention site in early April after the war broke out. The existing infrastructure was used by the Ustašas to form a concentration camp in July 1941. It first hosted around 100 Serbian prisoners who were taken there by the Ustašas to expand camp infrastructure. However, in early August, due to abuse and arbitrary executions, some prisoners tried to escape when the camp commander started shooting at them. The escape was a failure, and all the Serbian prisoners, including a few Muslims and Croats, were executed. Afterward, Kruščica was turned into a concentration camp mainly for Jews of Sarajevo. By the middle of September 1941, the camp already hosted 1539 prisoners – most of them Jewish. This number included 780 Jewish deportees from Sarajevo, as well as 759 Jews who were deported from Zenica. The local Ustašas from nearby Travnik complained to the central authorities that they wanted to use Kruščica as a concentration camp for Jews and Serbs from Travnik and that current prisoners

⁵⁶⁴ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Jozef Alkalaj given to Sarajevo Commission for War crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators on 28 November 1945. Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo, Fond ZKURZ, Box Jevreji po mjestima, File Sarajevo – no. 16.

⁵⁶⁵ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 261.

should be deported elsewhere because the camp has reached its maximum capacity. The leader of the Ustašas from Travnik wrote to the main security office of RAVSIGUR that

a certain territory must be found where Jews from the entire country could be deported to and where they would be isolated from our people. On this territory, Jews should be guarded and supervised. In this way, we would cleanse our cities from the Jewish element.⁵⁶⁶

The Ustašas from Travnik were therefore demanding a more organized, systematic, and coordinated effort to solve the “Jewish question.” Instead of local solutions, they demanded state-wide planning that would increase the concentration camp capacities. The main security office in Zagreb promised help in this matter, and the Ustašas in Travnik received instructions to close the Kruščica concentration camp and deport all the prisoners to the newly formed Jasenovac concentration camp, which would soon become the main death camp of the Independent State of Croatia. Jewish men from Kruščica were deported to Jasenovac concentration camp on 5 October, and women were deported on the next day to the newly formed Lobar concentration camp, which was created specifically as a camp for women and children.⁵⁶⁷

The first mass deportations of Jews from Sarajevo in September, therefore, included approximately 6% of the entire Jewish population of Sarajevo, most of whom lived in a narrow area of the city center. The police did not continue with the mass deportations from the rest of the city during this month. However, some Jews were reported to the police on made-up charges of being suspicious of communism. Instead of immediate deportations in such cases, the police still conducted investigations to gather evidence. For example, Holocaust survivor Jozef Alkalaj was arrested in September 1941 after an anonymous denunciation that claimed he was a communist. The police searched his apartment but did not find any compromising

⁵⁶⁶ The Regional Prefect Nikola Tusun to the Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR), 19 September 1941. As quoted in Ćamil Kazazović, *Travnik u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu* (Travnik: Naša riječ, 1969), 83–84.

⁵⁶⁷ Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, 130–31.

material. He was then taken to the police station and questioned. Alkalaj recounted that the questioning was not harsh and that “everything was done according to the law.” Due to the lack of evidence, he was released from prison.⁵⁶⁸

Such investigations clearly ran contrary to the July 1941 orders, according to which any Jew or Serb suspicious of communism should be deported to the concentration camp immediately. The slowing pace of the deportations of Jews from Sarajevo was seen with suspicion by the main security office in Zagreb, and the Sarajevo chief of police was falling out of favor. Moreover, Điković was further suspicious because his brother was a suspected communist who allegedly supplied many Jews with forged travel documents which helped them escape to the Italian occupation zone.⁵⁶⁹

3.3. Radicalization of Antisemitic Persecution in Sarajevo

Dissatisfied with the situation in Sarajevo, the head of the main security office (RAVSIGUR), Eugen Dido Kvaternik demanded in September 1941 that more skilled police officials be sent to the police in Sarajevo to further coordinate security forces in the city. One of the suitable security officials was found in Ivan Tolj, a close associate of Andrija Artuković and one of the most radical mid-level organizers of deportations. Tolj was involved in the deportations of tens of thousands of Serbs from the NDH to Serbia proper while he was the chief of police in Vinkovci and later Bijeljina.

Minister Artuković himself expressed disappointment that the deportations did not continue throughout September and October of 1941, complaining to Tolj that Branimir

⁵⁶⁸ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Jozef Alkalaj given to Sarajevo Commission for War crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators on 28 November 1945. Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo, Fond ZKURZ, Box Jevreji po mjestima, File Sarajevo – no. 16.

⁵⁶⁹ Đžiković's brother was Veljko Đžiković. For his activities see the testimony of Holocaust survivor Gonda Pinto Izrael in Aleksandar Gaon, *Mi smo preživeli...3: Jevreji o Holokaustu*, vol. 3 (Beograd: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2005), 67–68.

Điković, the current police chief in Sarajevo, had not made sufficient progress in his mandated mission to ‘Croatise’ the city through the “destruction of all non-Croatian elements”.⁵⁷⁰ As Tolj’s mission to remove ‘foreign elements’ from Bijeljina foundered in September 1941 due to the refusal of the German military authorities to accept deportees in Serbia, Artuković decided that Tolj’s initiative and expertise in deportations could be more effectively applied in Sarajevo.

Tolj received orders to go to Sarajevo at the beginning of October 1941 in order to assess the situation in the city, to organise further deportations of Jews, and to report on the performance of the Sarajevo police, whose level of commitment to the policy of ethnic cleansing had generated doubt at the top-level security agencies. Tolj reported that the existing security apparatus in Sarajevo in fact lacked both initiative and leadership.⁵⁷¹ Tolj’s critique of the Sarajevo police confirmed Zagreb’s suspicions regarding Điković, and he was forced to resign his position in Sarajevo and was ordered to move to Zagreb, where he was assigned to serve in the main security office of RAVSIGUR.⁵⁷² Tolj formally replaced him as chief of police in Sarajevo in November 1941 and quickly consolidated his authority in the city.⁵⁷³ He introduced himself to local Ustaša officials, one of whom reported that everyone “immediately understood that he nurtures a demonic hatred towards Jews.”⁵⁷⁴

On the same day that Tolj assumed his duties in Sarajevo, roundups of Jews recommenced. On the evening of 20 October 1941, police rounded up Jewish men above the age of sixteen in various parts of the city, removing them from their apartments, loading them onto trucks, and bringing them to a local army barracks guarded by German military

⁵⁷⁰ Testimony of Zlatko Mesić, personal secretary of Ante Vokić, given to the county court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, HR-HDA-421, box 129, p. 3.

⁵⁷¹ Ivan Tolj to Ministry of Interior of the NDH, 14 October 1941. Vukčević, *Zločini*, 813.

⁵⁷² Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ABiH), Fond Velika župa Vrhbosna, box 18. Document number 6143-I-B-1941.

⁵⁷³ HR – HDA – 223, MUP NDH, file 463 (Ivan Tolj).

⁵⁷⁴ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 268.

personnel.⁵⁷⁵ This detention site was chosen because it was one of the few facilities in the city with sufficient capacity for the number of deportees. Two days after the mass arrest, Tolj came in person to inspect the prisoners. Srećko Bujas, the Ustaša-installed commissioner for the Jewish Sephardic Religious Community in Sarajevo, tried to intervene on behalf of some of the arrested Sarajevo Jews, arguing that one could not really consider the sick and the elderly to be a threat to Sarajevo's security. Tolj responded, however, that sick and elderly Jews were "all actors who are only pretending they were ill." Only Jews married to 'Aryans' were released due to laws protecting persons in 'mixed marriages.'⁵⁷⁶ After six days of incarceration in Sarajevo, the Croat authorities deported 695 Jewish men in two transports to the Jasenovac concentration camp.⁵⁷⁷

Further arrests and deportations followed almost daily throughout the first half of November 1941.⁵⁷⁸ It seems that Tolj's eagerness to deport all Jews from Sarajevo as swiftly as possible created significant logistical difficulties in Jasenovac, to where most of the deportees were sent. The camp administration intervened with the authorities in Zagreb and demanded deportations from Sarajevo be slowed down.⁵⁷⁹ Tolj received direct orders from Zagreb to immediately stop all deportations to Jasenovac on 13 November 1941. Disregarding these orders, Tolj undertook the most ambitious roundup of Jews in Sarajevo up to that point. On Sunday morning, 16 November 1941, at 8 a.m., Croat police blocked off the main streets in Sarajevo and rounded up nearly 3,000 Jews regardless of gender or age in a single day, including even Jews who held locally issued documents (*žute legitimacije*) that supposedly

⁵⁷⁵ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 262.

⁵⁷⁶ Jews who married non-Jews were in principle exempted from deportation, but many of them were killed, nevertheless. Moreover, legal "protection" depended on various factors such as actions of local Ustaša officials as well as the gender or ethnicity of their spouse. Jewish women in "mixed marriages" were considered to be more secure than Jewish men. Moreover, Jews married to Serbs were particularly vulnerable to persecution even though they too were in "mixed marriages." Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016, 325–29.

⁵⁷⁷ Albahari Čučo, "KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima," 688–89.

⁵⁷⁸ Avram Pinto and David Pinto, eds., *Dokumenti o stradanju Jevreja u logorima NDH* (Sarajevo: Jevrejska opština, 1972).

⁵⁷⁹ Directorate of the Ustaša Police to Velika župa Vrhbosna, 13 November 1941. Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac 1941-1945. Dokumenti*, Vol. 1.:93.

exempted them from arrest.⁵⁸⁰ The sheer scope of the roundup overwhelmed the space in the military barracks in Sarajevo and the German commander refused to provide guards for the prisoners due to fear of epidemics.⁵⁸¹ Tolj solved this issue by turning two existing synagogues and another building owned by a Jewish social institution, La Benevolencija, into detention sites.⁵⁸² Imprisoned Jews were held in horrible conditions without any hygienic infrastructure. Upon inquiries by Commissioner Srećko Bujas about additional food for prisoners, Tolj simply responded: “let them all die like dogs.”⁵⁸³

Contrary to orders he received four days earlier to decelerate the deportations, Tolj deported 400 Jewish men from the latest roundup to Jasenovac on 17 November 1941. According to the testimony of a Jasenovac survivor, the arrival of a large number of Jews from Sarajevo in the autumn of 1941 created the need to expand the camp’s capacity.⁵⁸⁴ During the autumn of 1941, at the height of the Sarajevo deportations, the Jasenovac camp complex expanded its functions from those of a forced labour camp into a killing site for persons who could not be accommodated in the camp. As the mass inflow of deportees from Sarajevo and other locations across the NDH overwhelmed the capacity of the camp, its commanders decided that the number of inmates should not rise above 3,000. Any prisoners above this threshold were considered ‘surplus’ to be physically eliminated.⁵⁸⁵ The acceleration of deportations from Sarajevo under Tolj was, therefore, one factor driving other Ustaša security agencies to expand the genocidal apparatus of the regime.

Until the autumn of 1941, anti-Jewish deportations across the NDH overwhelmingly targeted Jewish men. This was in part the outcome of a patriarchal political vision which

⁵⁸⁰ Madžar, “Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata,” 652–53.

⁵⁸¹ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 270.

⁵⁸² Albahari Čučo, “KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima,” 691.

⁵⁸³ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2942, Frame number: 270.

⁵⁸⁴ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Otto L. Interview 4297403. Tel Aviv: Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 1991.

⁵⁸⁵ Goldstein, *Jasenovac*, 493.

considered men to be the source of political, economic and military agency. These entanglements between antisemitism, gender and politics were, however, reconsidered with an emphasis on race that erased differences within the targeted group. Racial politics shifted the psychological threshold from a focus on deporting and killing men, to killing entire communities including women, children and the elderly. Ivan Tolj was one of the Ustaša perpetrators who pioneered this approach in the NDH. Already in Bijeljina, Tolj was one of the first Ustaša perpetrators to deport Jews regardless of gender or age. In Sarajevo, he followed the same pattern, insisting that “both male and female Sarajevan Jews are the worst enemies of the Independent State of Croatia.”⁵⁸⁶

Having deported most of the Jewish men from Sarajevo to Jasenovac, Tolj confronted an obstacle to removing the women and children. He sent approximately 1,200 Jewish women and children to the Lobar concentration camp located in the northwest of the NDH. Commandant Karlo Heger, however, noting that the camp was already overcrowded, re-directed the transport back to Sarajevo.⁵⁸⁷ Tolj now had to contend with a demand from German forces stationed in Sarajevo that he halts the deportations for the time being. The Sarajevo Ustašas appealed to Artuković in Zagreb, insisting that, in view of the significant benefits they brought to the city, the deportations should continue.⁵⁸⁸ Once again, Tolj’s insistence on the complete deportation of the Sarajevo Jews forced the Ustaša security agencies in Zagreb to seek solutions to the logistical problem of the internment of Jewish women and children from Sarajevo. To enable further deportations from Sarajevo, the Ustaša authorities in Zagreb determined that the establishment of a new concentration camp specifically intended for women and children was urgently needed. The location was found near to the town of Đakovo.

⁵⁸⁶ The Office of Poglavnik to the Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] of Sarajevo, 24 December 1941. Antun Miletić, ed., *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac - dokumenti*, vol. 3 (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1987), 74–75.

⁵⁸⁷ Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, 131–32.

⁵⁸⁸ Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945*, 2011, 116.

The first prisoners, arriving in December 1941, were 1,200 Jewish women and 300 children from Sarajevo.⁵⁸⁹

At the beginning of the war, Sarajevo was home to approximately 11,400 Jews, making it the second-largest Jewish community in the NDH. By the end of 1941, only a few hundred Jews remained in the city. Many of them were ‘protected’ as workers essential to the municipal administration. Some Jews were exempt from deportation as partners in intermarriages with non-Jews; others remained in hiding. In little over two months as police chief in Sarajevo, Ivan Tolj had removed virtually the entire Jewish population of the city. Tolj’s ‘cleansing’ of Sarajevo was therefore not only of local or regional relevance, but was one of the most relevant chapters in the history of the Holocaust in the NDH.

The speed and scope of Tolj’s deportations, as well as the terror perpetrated against other civilians, caused difficulties with some local Ustašas. When the Croat police ignored the exemption papers carried by individual and sometimes influential Jews, Tolj was criticised for breaching the laws of the NDH. Local authorities demanded the immediate release of such persons and appealed to Zagreb when the Sarajevo police stonewalled them. When Tolj deported Ignac Fischer, a ‘protected’ Jew, no less of an authority than the office of Poglavnik (the Leader; i.e., Pavelić) itself accused Tolj of disobeying direct orders. Tolj justified his actions:

I arrested Jews according to my conscience, after seeing evidence that they were helping the Četnik-Communist actions, which were directed at the destruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its secession from the Independent State of Croatia. The greatest enemies of the independence of the Croatian state are Jews from Sarajevo, both men and women [...]. All Jews are equal, regardless of whether they are honorary Aryans or whether they converted to Roman Catholicism, Islam, or the Evangelical religion or not. They all feel the same and they all want to harm the Independent State of Croatia and its allies [...]. As a Croat and loyal follower of the Poglavnik, I need to tell the truth, the rebellion was caused mainly by Jews,

⁵⁸⁹ The report of the Jewish Religious Community of Osijek on “The Female Prisoner Camp in Djakovo”, 4 December 1941. Državni Arhiv u Osijeku (DAOS) [State Archives in Osijek] – 1177, Fond Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file 2.4.4. Unutarnja i vanjska politika.

and therefore they should be quickly and thoroughly exterminated from the face of Bosnia.⁵⁹⁰

There was, of course, no evidence that Jews had disproportionately supported the resistance, but Tolj's deeply held antisemitism justified the accusation. Moreover, it was in his interest to depict the Jewish community in Sarajevo as a major threat to security in order to validate his overzealous approach to deportations and dismiss complaints from other Ustaša agencies. Tolj's stay in Sarajevo was marked by frequent and fierce conflicts with some local officials. According to multiple sources, Tolj was a difficult person to deal with and had a highly conflicting personality. Local Ustašas complained that he was arrogant, aggressive, and condescending towards the Ustaša and state officials with whom he interacted. According to Arif Balta, the deputy director of police in Sarajevo, "Tolj was harsh towards anyone he encountered. He was impervious and stubborn. Everyone feared him. Everyone tried to avoid him."⁵⁹¹ The conflict with the locals spawned one of the most bizarre episodes in Tolj's career.

Already troubled by Tolj's arrogance and impulsiveness, the local Ustašas complained to minister Artuković, but in vain.⁵⁹² Both the Germans and some Muslim leaders also intervened, advocating Tolj's removal from his post as chief of police in Sarajevo.⁵⁹³ The situation escalated in early 1942 when Tolj decided to deport 200 leading intellectuals and public officials from Sarajevo. A day before this deportation was supposed to take place, police agents leaked the information to the highest ranking Ustaša official in the city, namely Ante Vokić – the head of the Ustaša railway battalion. Vokić immediately informed Jure Francetić, one of the most influential Ustašas in all of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the leader of the

⁵⁹⁰ The Office of Poglavnik to the Regional Prefecture of Vrhbosna, 24 December 1941. Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac - dokumenti*, 3:74–75.

⁵⁹¹ Testimony of Arif Balta, former deputy police chief in Sarajevo, given to district court in Sarajevo, 6 August 1951, 1-2. HR-HDA-421, box 128.

⁵⁹² Testimony of Zlatko Mesić, personal secretary of Ante Vokić, given to county court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, 3. HR-HDA-421, box 129.

⁵⁹³ Testimony of Stjepan Bratelj, former official of the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, given to district court in Zagreb, 26 June 1952, 1. HR-HDA-421, box 129,

infamous Black Legion Ustaša units.⁵⁹⁴ Both Francetić and Vokić probably considered that Tolj's planned deportation of Sarajevo notables would further alienate the Muslims and Catholics from the Ustaša movement in the city. This would create a major security risk in the form of a potential armed rebellion against the NDH within Sarajevo itself.

Vokić and Francetić met with Tolj and tried to persuade him to rescind the deportation order, but the latter refused to back down. Fearing loss of control over the city if Tolj were not removed, local Ustaša leaders held a secret meeting which included Vokić, Francetić, Krešo Togonal as the representative of the Ustaša secret service (UNS), and Marko Mihaljević, the head of the Ustaša regional organisation (Stožer). The conspirators decided that Tolj had to be arrested and Vokić designated ten soldiers from his railway battalion for the mission. With the assistance of police agents dissatisfied with Tolj, ten armed men barged into police headquarters in Sarajevo and, at gunpoint, ordered police officials inside to stay at their desks.⁵⁹⁵ The conspirators arrested Tolj, reportedly putting him into a straitjacket to transfer him to a prison in Zagreb.⁵⁹⁶ Local newspapers, firmly under Ustaša control, wrote about Tolj's departure as a sensational event; residents of Sarajevo celebrated his removal. The Ministry of Interior requested that Derviš Omerović, the Ustaša regional prefect in Sarajevo, submit a report on the arrest of Tolj. Omerović explained:

It is true that due to frequent imprisonment of citizens without any reason, their deportations to concentration camps, as well as other incidents, there was widespread panic amongst the citizens of Sarajevo. No one was safe from persecution, and therefore it is understandable that his [Tolj's] departure caused relief. According to the reports I have received, Tolj had to leave his position upon the insistence of the commissioner of the Ustaša Secret Service.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ Testimony of Hasan Hadžiosmanović, former Ustaša functionary (*Logornik*) in Sarajevo, given to county court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, 1. HR-HDA-421, box 128.

⁵⁹⁵ Testimony of Arif Balta, former deputy police chief in Sarajevo, given to district court in Sarajevo, 6 August 1951, 3-4. HR-HDA-421, box 128.

⁵⁹⁶ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 273.

⁵⁹⁷ The Regional Prefect of Velika župa Vrhbosna to the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, 7 March 1942. HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 9, file 6222/6.

Perceiving Tolj's detention as an attack on his personal authority, Interior Minister Artuković was enraged, and threatened that Sarajevo Ustašas involved in Tolj's arrest would face severe consequences. In fact, one of the people alleged to have been involved in Tolj's arrest was sent to a concentration camp but was soon after released.⁵⁹⁸ Artuković released Tolj from prison and decided to put him back in the field. His experience as the deportation expert were used again in 1942 when he was put in charge of mass deportations of remaining Jews in the northeast of the NDH.

After Tolj's departure from Sarajevo, very few Jews remained in the city. The last big deportation was implemented in August 1942 when 300 Jews were deported. Afterward, only around 120 Jews remained in the entire city. About half of them were unable to work because they were ill or too elderly. The rest were experts who were essential for the functioning of the city.⁵⁹⁹ Between 7000-9000 Sarajevan Jews were killed in concentration camps, and 316 Sarajevo Jews died as Partisans during the Second World War. Around 1,277 Jews came back to Sarajevo after the war, 120 emigrated to Palestine, around 100 stayed in Italy, and 40 emigrated to the United States of America.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ Testimony of Zlatko Mesić, personal secretary of Ante Vokić, given to county court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, 3. HR-HDA-421, box 129.

⁵⁹⁹ Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata," 652–53.

⁶⁰⁰ Postwar Study of the Occupiers and their Collaborators – Concentration camps, Inventory. ABiH, ZKUZ, Box 5, Number 50, File 147, p. 356.

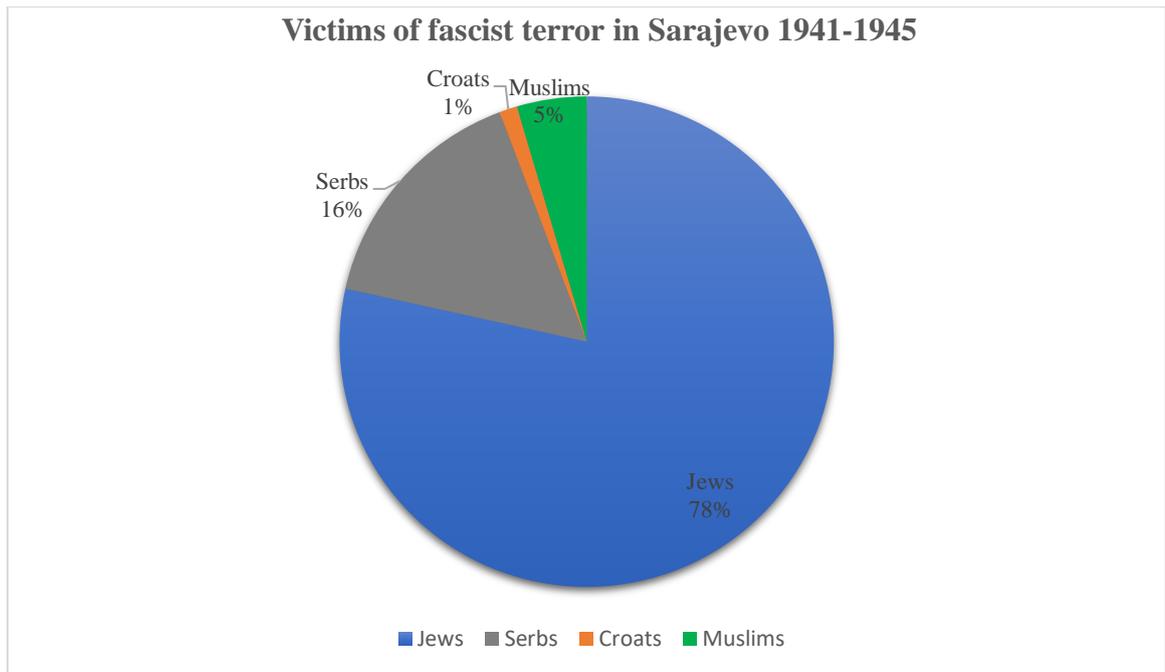


Table 6 – Victims of fascist terror in Sarajevo 1941-1945.⁶⁰¹

According to the demographic research conducted by scholar Božo Madžar, 7092 Jews from Sarajevo were killed as civilians by fascists during the Second World War. Both in absolute and relative terms, Jews were by far the most numerous group among the victims of Ustaša persecution in Sarajevo. In the same period, 1427 Serbs were killed as civilians, followed by Muslims with 412 victims and 106 Croats. Thus, Jews constituted 78% of all Sarajevoan victims of fascist terror killed during the Second World War.⁶⁰²

Conclusion

While discrimination and violence were applied against Serbs and Jews in Sarajevo in the first few months after the establishment of the NDH, the city remained one of the most notable cases of genocidal underperformance in the country. The local Ustašas were repeatedly criticized from various security agencies in Zagreb for not doing enough regarding the deportations of the “unwanted minorities.” Minister of Interior of the NDH, Andrija Artuković explicitly

⁶⁰¹ Madžar, “Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata,” 652–53.

⁶⁰² According to the research conducted by Božo Madžar there were in total 9071 Sarajevoan civilians who were killed as a consequence of fascist terror during the Second World War. According to nationality the victims included 7092 Jews, 1427 Serbs, 412 Muslims, 106 Croats, 16 Montenegrins, 5 Slovenes, 1 Macedonian and 12 classified as others. Madžar, “Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata,” 662.

scolded the Ustašas from Sarajevo for their “inactivity in the cleansing of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”⁶⁰³

The genocidal underperformance in Sarajevo was the result of several different factors which did not exist in order locations such as Križevci. The multi-ethnic structure of Sarajevo’s population did not allow for the consolidation of the local elites which remained divided between the Catholics and Muslims who continued to fight among each other for their own interests. Thus, the elites of each group attempted to adjust the state policies to their own interests which resulted in the slowdown of genocidal planning and avoidance restraint in taking radical actions which might alienate the elites and Muslim and Catholic population in Sarajevo. Antisemitism was a part of this process where both the Catholic and Muslim elites attempted to use it in an effort to strengthen their own position vis-à-vis the other one. This escalated into the weaponization of antisemitic rhetoric which became the instrument of competitive nation-building.

The case of Sarajevo demonstrates the importance and agency of local actors in influencing the dynamic of genocide. Chiefs of police, first Zubić and then Điković tried to balance the repressive apparatus in Sarajevo to fulfil some of the expectations from the top, while also being aware of the local specificities. Demands for the rapid Croatization of the city through radical cleansing might have been feasible for mid-level Ustaša officials in Križevci where Croats made more than 90% of the population, but in locations such Sarajevo where Catholic Croats made barely more than a quarter of the population, such aims seemed logistically difficult during the summer of 1941. Moreover, local elites in Sarajevo still hoped that they could negotiate their agendas with the central authorities, particularly those concerning the elimination of Serbs, Jews, and Roma. This assumption proved to be true for

⁶⁰³ HR-HDA-421, box 128, Testimony of Telarević Osman given to County Court in Bosanska Gradiška, 11 June 1952.

Roma, and Serbs to a degree. The Muslim elites in Sarajevo managed to convince the central authorities to exempt Muslim Roma from the persecution, proving that the racial policies of the regime could indeed be moderated when the regime faced serious opposition or risked the alienation of local elites. However, no significant interventions were made by any group in favor of the Jewish community.

The central authorities in Zagreb decided to intervene in the local matters of Sarajevo in October 1941 by eliminating those deemed too moderate from the security apparatus and transferring Ivan Tolj, a genocidal outperformer who was tasked to implement a more radical “cleansing” operations in the city. Tolj’s transfer to Sarajevo as police chief was both a message to those who fell behind in the implementation of genocidal measures and a test to see how far Tolj could push “cleansing” operations. In Sarajevo, Tolj demonstrated that despite a lack of manpower and detention sites he could destroy one of the oldest and most numerous Jewish communities in the Balkans in just over two months. The inclusion of both women and children in Tolj’s deportations further set an example to be followed by other local Ustaša leaders and governors.

Mid-ranking genocidal perpetrators like Tolj were instrumental in removing obstacles and organizing an effective and murderous division of labor on the ground. He effectively neutralized competing agencies which could have obstructed his deportation efforts, expanded the detention sites for prisoners awaiting deportation, and facilitated the enlargement of concentration-camp capacities on the macro level. The deportations of Jews from Sarajevo were one of the most important chapters of the history of the Holocaust in the NDH, considering that Sarajevan Jews constituted more than a quarter of all Jews in the NDH. When Ante Pavelić met Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, in December 1941

he boasted that the Jewish population of the NDH was already reduced by a third.⁶⁰⁴ The overwhelming majority of the deported Jews Pavelić was referring to came from Sarajevo.

⁶⁰⁴ Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 400.

4. Negotiating Genocide in the Microcosmos of Fascism: The Holocaust in the City of Osijek

Introduction

The city of Osijek was one of the unique places in Europe during the Second World War where the Jewish minority faced three fascist movements which coexisted simultaneously in a single location – the German Nazis, Croatian Ustašas, and the Hungarian Arrow Cross. However, Holocaust survivor Aleksandar Goldstajn noted after the war that “the massive tragedy of the Jewish people was delayed in Osijek in comparison to other locations in Croatia.”⁶⁰⁵ Other Holocaust survivors, such as Vlado and Nada Salzberger concurred, concluding that the “long-gap” in the deportations of Jews from Osijek could be explained by the specific ethnic makeup of the city. Salzbergers hinted at the fact that decision-making regarding the deportations of Jews, as well as which fascist group would have control over the Osijek Jewish Religious Community became a means of asserting power over the entire city.⁶⁰⁶

The history of the Holocaust in Osijek was therefore ridden with contradictions. While no less than three fascist movements were active in the city, it was also one of the last places in the fascist Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH), where large scale deportations occurred. With the aim of addressing this seeming paradox, this chapter examines how different ethnic groups and fascist movements interpreted antisemitic ideologies and policies, as well as how they adapted antisemitism and tailored it to serve their specific ideological aims.

While the field of fascism studies is increasingly employing a transnational approach and tackles various methodological and conceptual questions, surprisingly little attention had

⁶⁰⁵ Goldstajn, Aleksandar. Interview 6204. Segments 42-43. *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 30 March 2021.

⁶⁰⁶ Aleksandar Gaon/Stephen Agnew/Jelena Babšek Labudović, eds., *We Survived ---: Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: The Jewish Historical Museum, Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia 2005), 145-6.

been paid to the dynamics of fascist interactions between different movements on the regional and local levels. By applying the approaches from studies of fascism, Holocaust, and antisemitism studies to a regional case study of the city of Osijek, this chapter examines the multifaceted interaction among different fascist movements on a local level with regards to the Holocaust. How did the cooperation, and hostilities among different fascist movements impact the implementation of antisemitic measures, violence, and the decision-making behind the Holocaust on the local level?

4.1. The Establishment of the Ustaša Elite in the Microcosmos of Fascism

Located on the southern bank of the river Drava, between the Danube in the east and Sava to the south, the city of Osijek has held an important strategic position throughout history. Geographically part of the Pannonian basin, its fertile land attracted various peoples who migrated through the region. As a result, the city changed hands and names several times throughout its turbulent history (in Hungarian, the city is known as Eszék and in German as Esseg).

The city of Osijek expanded significantly during the Habsburg rule due to increased migration from the other parts of the Empire. Initially conceived as the fortress guarding the eastmost border of the Habsburg Empire, the city quickly turned into an urban, economic, and political center of the entire Slavonian region after the Berlin Congress in 1878. Throughout the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, Osijek was modeled as a multiethnic Austro-Hungarian city, primarily relying on migration and economic ties to the rest of the empire. In 1890, nearly 54% of Osijek citizens declared German as their native language. By 1910, the city had a total population of 34,014. Around 37% of the population was ethnic Croatian, 33% German, 11% Hungarian, 8,5% Serbian, 6,7% Jewish, and 3,5% others.⁶⁰⁷ According to the 1910 census, only 46,5% of the residents of Osijek were native-born, while 32,15% had migrated to the city either from Hungary or Austria.⁶⁰⁸

During the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a brief power vacuum ensued before the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed (from 1929 named Kingdom of Yugoslavia). In this period, violent outbursts of antisemitism took place. Most of these pogroms were mobilized from below by deserters and demobilized soldiers of the Austro-

⁶⁰⁷ Zlata Živaković-Kerže, *Židovi u Osijeku: 1918.-1941.* (Osijek: Slavonski Brod: Židovska općina Osijek; Hrvatski institut za povijest-Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2005), 16.

⁶⁰⁸ Zlata Živaković-Kerže, "Udio Židova u gospodarstvu Osijeka u prvoj polovici 20. stoljeća," *Osječki zbornik* 28 (2007): 161–62.

Hungarian military.⁶⁰⁹ Osijek and its vicinity were no exception. Jews in the countryside were especially exposed to violence, and their stores and houses were looted. This initiated a wave of increased Jewish migration from the rural areas to the city of Osijek itself.⁶¹⁰

After 1918, the entire region surrounding Osijek experienced intense migration and changes of ethnic composition. Approximately 20,000 ethnic Hungarians, amounting to almost 25% of their population before the First World War in the region, and around 2,850 ethnic Germans were either expelled or left the area after 1918. In their stead, approximately 40,000 “Serbian volunteers” who served in the army of the Kingdom of Serbia received fertile plots of land in the regions of Slavonia and Syrmia to settle.⁶¹¹ Additionally, a significant number of White Russian emigres, who enjoyed support from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, settled in here as well.

Croatian nationalists considered the influx of ethnic Serbs after 1918 as a political ploy to radically alter the ethnic composition of the region and subject Croats to the will of the Serbian elites in Belgrade. During the 1920s, Croatian nationalists were organized in the Croatian National Youth organization (Hrvatska Nacionalna Omladina, HANAO), which had around 500 members and often clashed with the local members of the rivaling Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists (Organizacija Jugoslavenskih Nacionalista, ORJUNA). HANAO also repeatedly attacked the recently settled White Russian and Serbian colonists.⁶¹² Though not central to their political ideology, HANAO often employed antisemitism. Their accusations drew on stereotypes and paranoid fantasies from the Austro-Hungarian period, where Jews were seen as proxies of German and Hungarian imperialism. Though the same logic was at play, Jews were now depicted as being in the league with the “Belgrade regime.” Moreover,

⁶⁰⁹ Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu 1918-1941*, 47.

⁶¹⁰ The Vinski Report. ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2944, frame Number: 184.

⁶¹¹ Filip Škiljan, *Organizirana prisilna iseljavanja Srba iz NDH* (Zagreb, 2014), 115.

⁶¹² Željko Karaula, *HANAO: Hrvatska nacionalna omladina: teroristička organizacija mladih u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1921-1925* (Zagreb: Naklada Breza, 2011), 107–8.

members of HANA O demanded the introduction of a variant of *numerus clausus* when it came to employment in both the private and public sectors. They demanded that Croatian firms should primarily hire Croats instead of “Jews and foreigners.”⁶¹³

The growth of antisemitism caused turmoil within the Jewish community of Osijek. The city was one of the leading centers of Zionism in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and assimilationists blamed them for the increase in antisemitic incidents. However, as one Jewish observer noted after the war, “[b]oth groups remained blind to the fact that antisemitism was not a Jewish problem, but quite the contrary, in its essence it was a non-Jewish problem because its source was not the Jews but the people in whose surroundings the Jews lived.”⁶¹⁴

The Chetniks were quite influential in Osijek and its surroundings, and their membership consisted almost exclusively of ethnic Serbs, mainly the recently settled “Serbian volunteers.” The Chetniks had their paramilitary units, which were often armed and actively participated in conflicts with members of HSS and other Croatian nationalists. However, the Chetniks were also an instrument of intra-ethnic policing as they repeatedly harassed Serbs who voted for the opposition – particularly those who supported cooperation with HSS.⁶¹⁵

After 1933, the German minority in Yugoslavia witnessed the rise of a new generation of leaders, the so-called Rejuvenators [Erneuerer], who argued for increased mobilization of ethnic Germans based on National-Socialist ideas. The Rejuvenators considered the previous leaders of the German minority as “old,” “clerical,” and insufficiently nationalistic.⁶¹⁶ In the

⁶¹³ Karaula, 211.

⁶¹⁴ The Vinski Report. ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 187.

⁶¹⁵ Royal Ban Administration of Savska Banovina to the Ministry of Interior, Section for State Protection, 9 May 1936; see also: Section for State Protection in Zagreb to the Ministry of Interior, Section for State Protection, 18 October 1935. See the reprint of these documents in Fikreta Jelić-Butić, “Iz povijest četničkog pokreta u Hrvatskoj između dva rata. Prilog građi o četničkim udruženjima u Savskoj banovini 1934-1936,” *Radovi: Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* 21, no. 1 (1988): 227, 183. See also Zdravko Dizdar, “Osnivanje i djelatnost četničkih udruženja na području grada i kotara Osijek u monarhističkoj Jugoslaviji (1918.-1941.) (Drugi dio),” *Scrinia Slavonica: Godišnjak podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest* 6, no. 1 (2006): 342–401.

⁶¹⁶ Vladimir Geiger, “Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera vođe Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u Upravi državne bezbjednosti za Narodnu Republiku Hrvatsku 1949. godine,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 31, no. 3 (1999): 579.

city of Osijek, the Rejuvenators were led by Vladimir Altgayer.⁶¹⁷ He considered that the German minority in Yugoslavia was threatened by assimilation into the Croatian and/or Yugoslav nationhood. Therefore, he argued that ethnic Germans had to be reawakened both culturally and ideologically. Altgayer's aim of turning the ethnic German minority into a single homogenous political community was further helped by the rise of Milan Stojadinović, Prime Minister of Yugoslavia from 1935-1939, who relied on building a closer diplomatic and economic relationship with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Stojadinović saw the ethnic German minority in Yugoslavia as a significant factor in establishing closer connections with Germany internationally. He also sought to use the local Germans to suppress the rising influence of the Croatian parties, particularly in the eastern parts of Croatia where the German minority was concentrated.

This led to a proliferation of tensions in the villages surrounding Osijek, where some members of HSS were afraid of increasing German activism and disturbance in the political balance. For example, in the village of Berak, around 50km from Osijek, Germans demanded that Catholic mass be held in the German language. They also took control over various local institutions. The leader of the local municipality, an ethnic German, identified himself as a Yugoslav and demanded that Croatian nationalism be suppressed. When a group of Croats started to gather and sing Croatian patriotic songs in the village, the leader of the municipality ordered their arrest for "anti-state" behavior – one of the Croats slapped him, and the crowd quickly dispersed. Outraged, the leader of the municipality mobilized his supporters amongst the ethnic Germans. Armed with axes and clubs, they ransacked Croatian houses, killing one

⁶¹⁷ Branimir Altgayer (1897-1950) grew up in Slavonia. He was a World War I veteran and a decorated officer of the Austro-Hungarian military. In 1936 he founded the Kultur-und Wohlfahrtsvereinigung der Deutschen in Slavonien. In 1938 he became the leading representative of Germans in Slavonia on a Yugoslav level. In 1941 he became the leader of the German National Group in NDH. In December 1941 he became the State Secretary in the NDH and a member of the Ustaša Corps. He briefly fought in the Eastern Front in 1943. At the end of the Second World War, he fled NDH and took refuge in Austria. In September 1946 he was extradited by the British forced to Yugoslavia where he was put on trial and executed in 1950.

Croat and seriously wounding his mother, who was hit in the head with a “blunt object.” Most of the Croats saved themselves by hiding in the attics of their houses.⁶¹⁸ Episodes like these only affirmed the belief among some Croats that the ethnic Germans were indeed in league with the regime. Accusations against the ethnic Germans, due to the perceived support for the Belgrade regime, spread quickly.⁶¹⁹

By 1937, individuals around Osijek complained about the “mutual hatred” between Croats and Germans. Even though this assessment was perhaps overblown, the political activists of the Croatian Peasant Party and the members of the Kulturbund were in fact slowly becoming political enemies. Many appealed to Stjepan Hefer in the hope that he could ease the tensions between the two communities. Hefer was an elected representative of HSS from Slavonia. Due to the perception that he was a “Croat of German origin,” he was seen as a model for German-Croatian cooperation in the Yugoslav political arena.⁶²⁰ However, Hefer identified himself as a political Croat and despised the Nazified Kulturbund, because he considered them a proxy of the Serbian governing elites in Belgrade.⁶²¹ Hefer openly accused Altgayer of treason in a letter from 1937 after Altgayer had joined Stojadinović’s party, the Yugoslav Radical Union (Jugoslavenska Radikalna Zajednica, JRZ). However, Hefer distinguished between the ethnic German population and the Kulturbund by writing to Altgayer that he was “convinced that the real German peasants will not follow you” because he believed that HSS best supported the class interest of the peasantry.⁶²² According to one later report, Altgayer received orders to support the Yugoslav government directly from the Reich and considered

⁶¹⁸ Letter from a Berak resident to Stjepan Hefer, 24 September 1934. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – razno, 1937.-1943.

⁶¹⁹ Letter of Franjo Marinović to Stjepan Hefer, 24 November 1935. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – razno, 1937.-1943.

⁶²⁰ Letter of Pavao Matić from Gunja to Stjepan Hefer, 11 September 193(?7). HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – razno, 1937.-1943.

⁶²¹⁶²¹ Letter without a signature dated 4 January 1938. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – razno, 1937.-1943.

⁶²² Letter of Stjepan Hefer to Branimir Altgayer, 26 June 1937. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943.

that more benefits were gained from the government than from the Croats who “are powerless in every regard.”⁶²³

The tables quickly turned in August 1939 when a new autonomous Croatian entity within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was formed – the Banovina Croatia [Banovina Hrvatska] headed by the HSS political elites. Seeing that the HSS was now in charge of large swaths of land populated by ethnic Germans, Altgayer tried to find common ground with the party. He also demanded a meeting with Hefer due to rumors that the HSS wanted to assimilate Germans into the Slavic majority.⁶²⁴ However, Hefer maintained his distance from Altgayer, especially since he had seen the Kulturbund as a potential competing elite. Altgayer increasingly started to use the Third Reich as leverage for his actions. He wanted to secure the status of the ethnic Germans as the main economic agents in the region by granting them a monopoly on the import of German products – this would turn the German minority into a future economic elite in Slavonia. Altgayer also propagated for greater inclusion of ethnic Germans into the Reich’s policies and encouraged recruitment of local Germans into the Waffen SS – around 200 of them signed up in the interwar period.⁶²⁵ However, from the perspective of the HSS, the most severe threats were seen in Kulturbund’s relentless attempts at solidifying and expanding their numbers. Kulturbund members often entered various villages and threatened Croats with German-sounding last names to either join the organization or be blacklisted as “traitors.” They warned that those found on such a list “would be deported to concentration camps” once Hitler

⁶²³ RAVSIGUR to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of NDH, 28 August 1941. Zdravko Krnić and Martin Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, vol. 1 (Slavonski Brod: Historijski arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, 1962), 127–28.

⁶²⁴ Letter of Branimir Altgayer to Stjepan Hefer, 31 August 1939. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943. Document number AP-XXII/H – 8/14.

⁶²⁵ Geiger, “Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera vođe Njemačke nrodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u Upravi državne bezbjednosti za Narodnu Republiku Hrvatsku 1949. godine,” 581.

conquers these lands.⁶²⁶ When various members of HSS complained against such practices, Altgayer responded, “Croats should be careful. Otherwise, they will end up like the Czechs.”⁶²⁷

During the Axis power(s) attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, Altgayer was in Novi Sad. He had been invited there for an urgent meeting of all representatives of ethnic Germans from across Yugoslavia in order to consult about the international situation following the coup d'état that took place in Belgrade on 27 March 1941 and resulted in the deposing of the pro-Axis government.⁶²⁸ During the invasion, the Yugoslav ethnic-German leadership was briefly cut off from communication with the decision-making centers in Berlin. They entertained themselves with the vague idea of potentially creating either an autonomous region or a new Gau directly attached to the Third Reich, which would consist of a homogenous territory carved out of Syrmia, Banat, Bačka, and Slavonia – regions heavily populated by ethnic Germans. On 14 April, the ethnic German leaders decided that the idea should be presented in Berlin.⁶²⁹ Their ideas were rejected, and it was agreed that Slavonia and Syrmia would be incorporated into NDH. However, a semi-autonomous territory in Banat was created where local Germans became the decision-making elite. Even though the idea of a German state in the Lower Danube was a “wild political fantasy” as historian Mirna Zakić put it,⁶³⁰ it fed the fears of some Croats. The continued existence of German autonomy in Banat, as well as aggressive agitation from the ethnic Germans in Croatia, was a daily reminder for many

⁶²⁶ Letter from Čačinci to Stjepan Hefer, 15 January 1941. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka narodnosna skupina – razno, 1937.-1943.

⁶²⁷ Letter of Mirko Vulanac(?) to Stjepan Hefer, 16 March 1940. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943.

⁶²⁸ Geiger, “Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera vođe Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u Upravi državne bezbjednosti za Narodnu Republiku Hrvatsku 1949. godine,” 584–85.

⁶²⁹ German National Group in Croatia: Current Situation and Development from April to November 1941, 5 December 1941. See the reprint of the document in Krnić and Kaminski, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:329. See also Geiger, “Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera vođe Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u upravi državne bezbjednosti za Narodnu Republiku Hrvatsku 1949. godine,” 592.

⁶³⁰ Mirna Zakic, *Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 77.

Croatian nationalists in Slavonia that a similar occupation regime could be introduced in parts of NDH populated by ethnic Germans as well.

4.2. First Measures Against the Jews and the Beginning of the Inter-Ethnic Friction

On the day of the proclamation of NDH, 10 April 1941, an armed group of Ustašas entered the police headquarters of Osijek, breaching the building without facing any resistance. Inside, they found mayor Stjepan Vukovac and the chief of police with several other police agents. Upon entering, the head of the Ustaša group, Antun Hamš, rose his right hand, forming a fascist salute, and yelled “long live Ante Pavelić!” before proceeding with to giving a long-winded speech. Hamš informed everyone in his presence that the Croatian state had been proclaimed and that he was there to take power. Mayor Vukovac interrupted him in the middle of his speech, objecting that he had not receive any official notification to this effect and that he needed to phone the central authorities in Zagreb. After reaching the Ustašas in Zagreb, mayor Vukovac convinced them over the phone that it would be in the best interest if he and the current city administration continued to hold the main levers of power in Osijek until the situation normalized. The leading Ustaša in Zagreb, Slavko Kvaternik, agreed.⁶³¹ The local Ustašas were a phone call away from taking complete power in the city. This critical delay preserved the partial autonomy of the police and the administrative apparatus, which would have a significant impact on the further developments in the city.

The German military entered the city the following day to the sight of a cheering crowd waving Nazi flags. According to Jewish survivor Pavle Vinski (Weinberger),⁶³² an agreement

⁶³¹ Davor Kovačić, “Stjepan Vukovac – osječki gradonačelnik u vladi Nezavisne Države Hrvatske 1941. godine” *Scrinia Slavonica: Godišnjak podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest* 6, no. 1 (2006): 450–51.

⁶³² Pavle Vinski (Weinberger) (1906-1962) was a jurist in the interwar Osijek. Vinski was in mixed marriage with a Catholic and evaded the first waves of deportations. After February 1942 he fled Osijek with falsified travel papers to littoral Croatia which was under Italian control. After the war Vinski wrote an official report about the persecution of Jews in Osijek for the Yugoslav war crimes commission. The Vinski report which was written

was made between the representatives of the Ustaša movement and the German National Group⁶³³ immediately after the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia. The German National Group was tasked with the persecution of Jews in Osijek, while the Ustašas were to spearhead the “cleansing” of Serbs.⁶³⁴ It appears that the Wehrmacht authorized the local ethnic Germans to arrest any potential enemy spies within the context of ongoing combat operations against the military of Yugoslavia. The German National Group used their newly acquired power as an excuse to start arresting Jews only a day later. Jewish survivor Bernard Krešić (Kohn) testified that he was apprehended on 13 April 1941 when one of the members of the German National Group, Hans (Ivan) Binder, entered his apartment and yelled, “Hands up, you are arrested in the name of the German Wehrmacht!” Krešić was taken into a makeshift prison in the so-called Braunhaus – the seat of the Osijek Kulturbund. There, he found several more Jews who had been detained earlier under the pretense that they were “English spies.” However, this was merely an excuse, and the arrests had nothing to do with the military operations. The imprisoned Jews had each been questioned about any valuables currently in their possession and were subsequently robbed at the time of their arrest.⁶³⁵

Amid the ongoing arrests, an anti-Jewish pogrom was organized on 14 April 1941. The crowd of ethnic Germans and Croats marched towards the Synagogue in the Upper town and burned it down by throwing an incendiary grenade into the building. Pavle Vinski argues that the pogrom was organized by the members of the German National Group. He further claims that the firefighters were forbidden from extinguishing the fire. Instead, they were only allowed

immediately after the war spans over more than a hundred pages and remains one of the most detailed accounts of the Holocaust in Osijek.

⁶³³ Immediately after the formation of NDH, Branimir Altgayer reformed and renamed the interwar *Kulturbund* into the German National Group in Croatia [Die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Kroatien].

⁶³⁴ The Vinski report. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 193.

⁶³⁵ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Bernard Krešić (Kohn). HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943.

to prevent it from spreading to neighboring buildings. Afterward, the crowd proceeded to the Jewish cemetery, where they demolished the morgue and destroyed several gravestones.⁶³⁶

In the following days, further arrests of Jews ended up overcrowding the holding cells in the *Braunhaus*. Finally, members of the German National Group confiscated the Jewish school and turned it into a makeshift prison. By 15 April 1941, some fifty Jews were already imprisoned. On 18 April, six prominent Jews were taken from Osijek to Zagreb. The captives included the head of the Jewish Religious Community and the Osijek Zionists, Edmund Altmann.⁶³⁷ The remaining Jewish prisoners in Osijek were harassed, humiliated, and tortured by Hans (Ivan) Binder, who, forced them to clean toilets and prevented some from sleeping for days.

On 20 April, Binder ordered that a “contribution” of twenty million Dinars (approximately 6.5 million USD in its current value) should be collected from the Jewish community. Those imprisoned effectively became hostages until the Jews of Osijek paid the ransom. The community managed to pay sixteen million Dinars by 3 May. A satisfied Binder released most of the hostages after being locked up for two or even three weeks.⁶³⁸ However, financial extortion from individual Jews continued with almost no pause. Hans Binder again visited Krešić in his apartment. With his gun pointed at Krešić’s wife, he demanded all remaining valuables. Otherwise, he would shoot her. Krešić handed over the little cash, gold coins, and other valuables that had not already been looted. Immediately after the incident, Krešić went to the city police and reported it as a simple robbery. To his surprise, he was taken into a room with the mayor of the city and head of the Ustaša movement in Osijek, Franjo

⁶³⁶ The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 199.

⁶³⁷ Zlata Živaković Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja: holokaust u Osijek i život koji se nastavlja* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2006), 109.

⁶³⁸ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Bernard Krešić (Kohn). HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, p. 2444-6 (Microfilm Roll 2943).

Lukac.⁶³⁹ The Ustašas questioned Krešić about the actions taken against Jews by the German National Group. They were particularly interested in the “contribution.” The Ustašas and the mayor told Krešić that such actions had not been sanctioned by NDH and were, therefore, illegal. That the ethnic Germans had attempted to keep the loot for themselves made them particularly outraged. The local Ustašas complained to the authorities in Zagreb, who promptly established a special commission in order to decide on how to proceed with the matter. Allegedly, Ante Pavelić himself decided that the “contribution” money would be split equally between Croats and Germans. The Croatian ‘earnings’ were then halved again, with one part going directly into the state treasury and the other to the Osijek city authorities.⁶⁴⁰

The incident around the “contribution” was only the tip of the iceberg. The Ustaša authorities in Osijek had a change of heart regarding leaving the Jewish community at the mercy of the German National Group. The Ustašas thought that the local Germans had received too big of a concession. Moreover, the independent actions of the German National Group were seen as disruptive and potentially undermining the monopoly on force that the Ustašas and the local police sought to establish for themselves. However, the most significant point of contention was the issue of Jewish property. The Ustašas feared that any sign of an equitable financial ‘opportunity’ with others (i.e., the local German community) could result in the emergence of the new “foreign” economic elite. According to Ustaša ideology, this position was to be reserved exclusively for Croats. The rise of a German economic elite ran counter to their aspiration to create an ethnically homogenous state. The Osijek Ustašas were not exceptional in this line of argumentation; similar incidents were registered in Romania. As one leader of the Romanian fascist Iron Guard put it,

⁶³⁹ Franjo Lukac (1894-1946) was a prominent Ustaša member. He was one of the main organizers of the Ustaša movement in Osijek. In June 1941 he became the Chief of Staff of the Ustaša Corps [Ustaška vojnica], and afterwards held many important military and security positions within the NDH apparatus.

⁶⁴⁰ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Bernard Krešić (Kohn). HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, p. 2448 (Microfilm Roll 2943). See also Geiger, “Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera vođe Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u Upravi državne bezbjednosti za Narodnu Republiku Hrvatsku 1949. godine,” 602.

When Antonescu and Horia Sima came to power [...], many Jews started to sell their companies. They felt threatened and tried to sell their businesses. To whom did they sell? In general, they sold to the Saxons [local ethnic Germans] and to German citizens. They had money. Very few ethnic Romanians possessed the necessary capital for investment [...] In this way, these businesses entered into the hands of foreigners [...] perhaps worse than the Jews, because they also had substantial political power.⁶⁴¹

The first step in preventing the German National Group's dominance over the "Jewish question" in Osijek was to take control over the Jewish Religious Community [Židovska Bogoštovna Općina], which served a similar function as the Judenrat in other European countries occupied by Nazi Germany. The position of the commissioner for the Jewish Religion Community in Osijek performed the function of the main link between the entire Jewish community and the authorities. Therefore, the commissioner had a large amount of autonomy in deciding how the Jewish community would be treated. Furthermore, the commissioner had the power to introduce new measures against Jews locally and define how harshly the state-issued antisemitic legislation should be implemented.

The position of the commissioner of the Jewish Religious Community of Osijek was first taken by Hans (Ivan) Binder in late April 1941.⁶⁴² He was particularly violent and even sadistic when it came to the treatment of Jews. For example, on one occasion, he forced a 62-year-old Jew, Branko Klein, to jump out of a speeding train onto the street because he did not want to share the carriage with Jews.⁶⁴³ According to Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum, commissioner Binder quickly "entered into a conflict with the police" in Osijek. The basis of their conflict was that the police and the German National Group issued contradictory measures against the Jews. Moreover, the widespread violence, arbitrary intrusions into Jewish

⁶⁴¹ Stefan Cristian Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to 'Romanianization', 1940-44* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 120–21.

⁶⁴² Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1242.

⁶⁴³ Živaković Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja*, 34.

apartments, and arrests created a perception among some citizens that the authorities of NDH were incapable of establishing order and preventing chaos.⁶⁴⁴

Members of the police invited the leadership of the Jewish Religious Community for a secret meeting in which they inquired about all potential illegal actions that Binder had taken. Binder was quickly relieved from his position, and in his stead, deputy police chief to Osijek Ivo Hočevar took over as the new commissioner of the Jewish Religious Community. One of the Jewish community members, Slavko Klein, managed to establish an exceptionally close relationship with Hočevar, which would have a decisive impact on future developments.⁶⁴⁵ Hočevar insisted that any anti-Jewish measures in Osijek had to be implemented through the institutional and legal framework. He told the Jewish Religious Community members that he expected total compliance with the anti-Jewish measures issued at the state level, adding that he would not introduce any new measures locally if they complied.⁶⁴⁶ The German National Group despised Hočevar for his perceived softness. They were not alone in this view. Radicals within the Ustaša organization shared similar attitudes. As a result, Hočevar was soon relieved from his position. However, witness testimony underscores he maintained contact with the members of the Jewish Religious Community.⁶⁴⁷

After Hočevar's departure, the power struggle over control of the Jewish Religious Community was mainly fought between the city authorities on the one hand and the Ustaša organization on the other.⁶⁴⁸ Hočevar's successor, Pavao Kapun, was a high positioned member of the Ustaša organization.⁶⁴⁹ Holocaust survivors described Kapun as an uneducated brute

⁶⁴⁴ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2943, frame number: 1247.

⁶⁴⁵ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1244.

⁶⁴⁶ The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 224.

⁶⁴⁷ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1247.

⁶⁴⁸ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Mirko Najman, "Stradanje osječkih Jevreja," in *Mi smo preživeli...: Jevreji o Holokaustu*, vol. 2 (Beograd: Jevrejski istorijski muzej Saveza jevrejskih opština Srbije, 2003), 211.

⁶⁴⁹ The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 226.

who was particularly prone to corruption, He also flirted with some unusual ideas on how to resolve the “Jewish question” in Osijek, for example, suggesting that the “Jews of Osijek should collectively convert to Catholicism.”⁶⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, this policy was supported by the Catholic clergy in Osijek, who attempted to exploit the persecution of Jews to increase its power. According to the Vinski Report, the Church organized special courses for Jews who wanted to convert to Catholicism.⁶⁵¹ However, these suggestions were wholly unrealistic. The Ustaša regime in Zagreb rejected such options because they were contrary to existing race laws; the German National Group leadership also echoed this position. Unrealistic ideas aside, it was Kapun’s notoriety for corruption that led to his removal.

Kapun’s corruption soon became evident, and the police used this opportunity to reestablish control over the “Jewish question.” Kapun was relieved in the autumn of 1941, and the new commissioner Dragan Bratuša, the head of the police, held this position until June 1942.⁶⁵² Jewish survivor Arnold Kohn characterized Bratuša as a person who “always behaved well towards us, and he maintained a good relationship with the members of the executive board of the Jewish Religious Community.”⁶⁵³ Much like Hočevar, Holocaust survivors described Bratuša as a strict legalist who did not initiate any new anti-Jewish measures on his own accord. Instead, he confined himself to enforcing existing regulations and sometimes even softened those issued at the state level.⁶⁵⁴

Bratuša was forced to leave his position in Osijek due to repeated conflicts with the head of the Ustaša movement on the regional level (Stožernik) Ćiril Kralj in June 1941.⁶⁵⁵ Bratuša was transferred to the position of the police chief in Dubrovnik. The next and last

⁶⁵⁰ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1247.

⁶⁵¹ The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 209.

⁶⁵² HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1247.

⁶⁵³ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Arnold Kohn HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1312.

⁶⁵⁴ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1248.

⁶⁵⁵ Testimony of Dragutin given to the Yugoslav State Security Service (UDB) in Zagreb on 18 November 1948. DAZ-1007, District Court in Zagreb, K-259-49, p. 21.

commissioner of the Jewish Religious Community in Osijek was Josip Seiler, described as childish, untrustworthy, hedonistic, and unreliable. During his reign, the mass deportations of Jews from Osijek commenced, and immediately afterward, he became the proud owner of the “Aryanized” Patria factory and moved into the apartment of one of the deported Jews.⁶⁵⁶

In less than a year and a half, the Jewish Religious Community changed no less than five commissioners who held the fate of the Osijek Jews in their hands. Nowhere else in the NDH were commissioners replaced so rapidly. This is testament to the incessant power struggle between the Ustašas, the police, and the German National Group that continuously threatened the Jewish community of Osijek.

4.3. Orders from Above and Pressures from Below: The First Deportations

As the most crucial meso-level actor in the city, the implementing of the Holocaust in Osijek was profoundly shaped by the agenda and aspirations of Stjepan Hefer. A representative of the Croatian Peasant Party during the interwar period who turned to the Ustašas after the establishment of the NDH. During the war Hefer performed the role of the leader of the newly established administrative county of Velika župa Baranja⁶⁵⁷ with a seat in Osijek. Hefer was an ambiguous figure. He was a Croatian nationalist and staunchly anti-communist, but he also belonged to the more moderate wing of the Ustaša movement. When recruiting the staff for his administration in June 1941, he required skilled officials and demanded to be permitted to employ Serbs. In a letter to the Ministry of Interior of NDH, he noted, “I am not afraid of employing non-Croats, because I am capable of controlling them. I am more fearful of

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid, see also Živaković Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja*, 104–5.

⁶⁵⁷ The Regional Prefecture of [Velika župa] Baranja included the city and the municipality of Osijek, and the municipalities and towns of Našice, Donji Miholjac, Podravska Slatina, Djakovo, Valpovo, Orahovica and Virovitica. It had three veliki župans throughout its existence 1. Stjepan Hefer from 11 April 1941 – 12 June 1943, 2. Ivan Asančajić from 12 June 1943 – 10 March 1945. 3. Ivan Šredl from 10 March 1945 – 10 April 1945. HR-HDA-1561, 013.0.34. Elaborat o ustaškoj upravnoj i političkoj vlasti na kotaru Osijek, Djakovo, Valpovo i Beli Manastir, written on 28.6.1962., 12-13.

incompetence and corruption in this difficult period.”⁶⁵⁸ This was nothing short of ideological blasphemy within the Ustaša framework of thought. Unlike the more radical elements within the Ustaša movement, he initially argued that the “Serbian question” in NDH should be solved primarily through assimilation by converting Serbs to Catholicism. Hefer was also greatly concerned with blocking German influence in the city, eradicating communism, and containing the anti-NDH rebellion in the countryside. However, he was not shy of expressing his support for antisemitic measures and regularly attended antisemitic lectures and manifestations. He equipped his office with confiscated Jewish property and encouraged distribution of such items to different regime organizations such as the Ustaša Youth.

Nevertheless, Hefer was concerned about the pace with which antisemitic measures proliferated. In a letter sent to the Ministry of Interior of NDH on 22 June 1941, he wrote that he was

tormented with issues related to the Jewish question. Since the first day [I took office], I did not have a single day of rest when it comes to this because many people constantly brought up various issues related to it. This is because our authorities implement [antisemitic] measures too quickly and too eagerly while they only later realize that these measures cannot be enforced.⁶⁵⁹

It is unclear which specific measures Hefer was referring to. However, the available documents suggest that much like the commissioners of the Jewish Religious Community, Hočevar, and Bratuša, he maintained that the antisemitic measures were to be implemented gradually through a strictly legal framework. Interpreted within the context of inter-ethnic relations in Osijek, the emphasis on institutional and legal framework gave a competitive edge to the Ustašas. An institutional approach to the “Jewish question” meant that the Ustaša authorities would determine the pace of the persecution and tailor it to their own needs. In this

⁶⁵⁸ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 14, file: Veliki župan Velike župe Baranja 1940-1944. Document dated 22 June 1941.

⁶⁵⁹ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 14, file Veliki župan Velike župe Baranja 1940-1944. Document dated 22 June 1941.

regard, the Ustašas had an advantage over the German and Hungarian organizations because they controlled the state apparatus.

The rapid and disorganized implementation of antisemitic measures that Hefer and his police force sought to curtail stemmed from a host of different actors, including Croats. One of the first points of frictions revolved around the use of Jews as forced laborers, a practice that started in June 1941. The immediate trigger was a request made by the German military, who demanded more manpower to sort out large amounts of accumulated war loot left behind by the retreating Yugoslav army. Both the Ustašas and the German National Group simply kidnapped people who were known to be Jewish, hurdling them from their apartments and their places of work. In some cases, they picked people up right off the street. The wanton arrestees were accompanied by open violence in the streets, which contributed to a widely held feeling of lawlessness. The Osijek police blamed the disorder on the German National Group as part of an attempt to curb its power and influence. From July 1941 onwards, the police introduced a more organized system regarding forced labor. Each Jewish community member had to conduct a 5–8-day labor shift before the next group could relieve them. Jewish men mostly worked with construction while women were forced to pull weed in various parts of the city.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁶⁰ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2942, frame number: 369.



Illustration 4 – Propaganda photograph showing Jewish women performing forced labor in Osijek during summer 1941.⁶⁶¹

The introduction of forced labor increased the visibility of Jews in the local community, which in turn called for their removal from the city. This caused an intense pressure on Hefer and his administration not least because the complaints also came from within the Ustaša's own ranks, tilting the scale in favor of a more radical approach. The German National Group was especially dissatisfied and demanded that at least a part of the Jewish community be deported to the concentration camps. They complained that there were too many Jews in the city, which presented a danger "for the public order and security in the city of Osijek."⁶⁶² It was within this context that a wave of anti-Jewish protests was organized. The amount of anti-

⁶⁶¹ *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 16. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ-GUZ 2235/24-45, box 13.

⁶⁶² The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 214.

Jewish demonstrations in Osijek was exceptionally high in the context of NDH. These protests transcended ethnic lines. The first antisemitic demonstration was organized by the German National Group, only eight days after the German military entered Osijek.⁶⁶³ Not to be outdone, however, the Ustašas soon organized their own protests, which shows how the antisemitic activism of these two organizations fed each other.

After the beginning of the Axis invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941, the protests in Osijek intensified, combining antisemitic messages with patriotic support for the war effort. One of the largest antisemitic demonstrations was organized on 5 July 1941 in cooperation between the German National Group and the Ustaša movement. A large crowd gathered and marched through the streets, carrying banners with messages such as “Jews, Masons, and Capitalists are responsible for the war,” “We want social justice in the New Europe,” “Jews, Bolsheviks, and plutocrats are prolonging the war,” and “We stand together with Germany during this war in order to build a social and national Croatia.”⁶⁶⁴

The proliferation of the demonstrations demands a deeper explanation. Rather than solely being testament to rampant and virulent antisemitism, they performed several functions for ordinary citizens in Osijek who participated in them. One of them is the participation in what seemed to be a prevailing sentiment within the public opinion which is defined as “the opinion which can be voiced in public without fear of sanctions and upon which action in public can be based.”⁶⁶⁵ It is not necessary if the people participating in them believed in the message the demonstrations espoused. Rather, their participation showed conformity and was to a large extent induced by fear of isolation based on antisemitism. Divergent opinions certainly existed, but the demonstrations were instrumentalized in order to keep the differing opinions silent.

⁶⁶³ Najman, “Stradanje osječkih Jevreja,” 208.

⁶⁶⁴ Živaković Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja*, 84–86.

⁶⁶⁵ Jacques Semelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 96.

Thus, the propaganda’s function was twofold, to induce fear of the Other defined as Jews, but even more importantly, to engender fear of ostracization and isolation from the ingroup.

Conspicuously, according to Pavle Vinski, one of the organizers of the first Ustaša-led antisemitic demonstrations in Osijek was Ivo Korsky. Despite Korsky being a leading Ustaša intellectual who was respected nationwide, reports claimed that both his father and mother were Jewish. Vinski described Korsky as a “traitor to his nation.” Demonstrators carried a degrading caricature of Korsky’s grandfather, who was once the president of the Jewish Religious Community.⁶⁶⁶ Korsky’s role in the demonstration captures the importance of antisemitic activities as a way of demonstrating both commitment to the new state and avoiding stigmatization.



Illustration 5 – Propaganda photographs depicting antisemitic demonstrations in the city of Osijek during the summer of 1941. The placard on the picture on the left states: “We demand forced labor for the guilty ones – the Jews,” while the placard on the image on the right states: “Jews, Communists, and Masons must be hanged!”⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁶ The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 200.

⁶⁶⁷ *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 7-8. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, box 13.



Illustration 6 – Propaganda photographs of antisemitic protest in Osijek during the summer of 1941. School children can be seen holding an antisemitic caricature.⁶⁶⁸

Pressure for deportations did not only stem from actors on the ground. At roughly the same time as the demonstrations peaked, the central state agencies intensified the planning for mass arrests and deportations of Jews. On 26 June 1941, Ante Pavelić announced that Jews in NDH are to be considered “collectively responsible” for spreading alarming news and added that “they will be sent to the detention centers under the open sky [concentration camps].”⁶⁶⁹ Around the same time, transports from smaller detention camps and prisons to the Gospić camp complex intensified.⁶⁷⁰ A month later, on 23 July 1941, the Directory of the Ustaša Police in Zagreb issued its order to “urgently imprison all Jews and Serb-Orthodox who were known or even slightly suspicious of being sympathetic to the [communist] movement. The same measures are to be taken against communists of the Catholic and Islamic

⁶⁶⁸ *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 10-11. HR-HDA-306, box 13.

⁶⁶⁹ Vukčević, *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugim svetskom ratu*, 154–56.

⁶⁷⁰ Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016, 239.

religions, or any other [religion]. However, they are supposed to be taken into prison detention, while the Serbs and Jews should be deported to the Gospić concentration camp.”⁶⁷¹ On 30 July 1941, the NDH main security office (RAVSIGUR) issued further clarifications, stating that Jews and Serbs suspicious of communist sympathies are to be deported to Gospić, regardless of whether they converted to Catholicism or not. More importantly, the main security office clarified that no evidence or legal procedure was necessary for deportation.⁶⁷²

Faced with pressure from both below and the top, the police in Osijek was galvanized into action. According to the testimony of an official working in the police at a time, Stanko Puratić together with the chief of the political section of the police, Ante Marsić and a few other police employees arrived at the main administrative office of the police in Osijek in the end of July 1941. They started to go through the personal files on different residents suspected of criminal activities, scanning for the files of Serbs and Jews. Unsurprisingly given the regime’s racism and ethnic chauvinism most of these files pertained to Jews and Serbs. The process was rather hectic, but also selective, Puratić noted several times during the selection “we will leave these for later,” acknowledging that not all Serbs and Jews were to be deported at that time.⁶⁷³ Instead of wholesale deportation of all Jews as, for example, in Bijeljina, the selectivity and the recourse to police records in the selection for the deportations underscores that the police in Osijek still sought to couch the arrest in a semblance of legality. Nevertheless, the comment “we will leave these for later” certainly indicated a readiness to expand the deportations further. On 30 July 1941, the same day that the main security office of NDH issued the decree mentioned above, the arrest began. Based on Puratić’s and Marsić’s selection, approximately 700 Jews and Serbs were arrested in Osijek and were deported to camps. The

⁶⁷¹ The Directorate of the Ustaša Police in Zagreb to all Regional Prefectures of the NDH, 23 July 1942. Vukčević, *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugim svetskom ratu*, 366.

⁶⁷² Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR) to all Regional Prefectures, 30 July 1941. Vukčević, 1:414.

⁶⁷³ Testimony of Stjepan Vukušić, a former employee of the Regional Police in Osijek given to the District Court in Osijek on 14 June 1952. HR-HDA-421, box 128.

police coordinated the arrests, but members of the Ustaša and the German National Group actively assisted as auxiliaries.⁶⁷⁴ Prisoners were kept in the makeshift detention center in Tvrđa [The Fortress] – a Habsburg-built star fort from the eighteenth century. On the evening of 31 July 1941, a selection was made to determine which prisoners would be deported and which would be released. Up to eighty prisoners were released due to various interventions and connections.⁶⁷⁵ Between 120 and 150 were placed into three wagons attached to the back of a regular passenger train operating on the Osijek-Zagreb railway line. They reached Zagreb on 1 August, where they were put into an Ustaša administered transit camp at the Zagreb fair (present-day location of the University of Zagreb Student Centre). One of the Ustašas in charge at the Zagreb fair camp was from Osijek and, in an extraordinary change of heart, decided to release eighteen Jews to go back to Osijek. Additionally, ten Jews from Osijek were permitted to emigrate to Italy. However, all remaining Jews from Osijek, who were deported to Zagreb, were transferred to the Gospić complex on 2 August 1941.⁶⁷⁶

Just one day after the first mass deportations from Osijek took place, another antisemitic demonstration was organized, which underlined the support from below for an escalation of the deportations. Eight days after the first deportation, a new roundup of Jews was organized by the Osijek police. Mirroring the last selection, between 120 and 150 Jews were arrested. Yet this time, most of the prisoners were youths. They were deported directly to the Gospić camp complex in locked wagons that were not opened until they reached their destination. The deportations conducted on 31 July and 7 August 1941 included between 250 and 280 Osijek Jews. Only six from these two deportations survived the war.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁴ The Vinski report, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2944, frame number: 213.

⁶⁷⁵ The Vinski report, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2944, frame number: 215.

⁶⁷⁶ The Vinski report, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 216. See also the testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1245.

⁶⁷⁷ The Vinski report, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 217-218.

4.4. Between Transnational Fascism and Competitive Nation-Building

Osijek was one of the few places in Europe during the Second World War where the Jewish minority faced three fascist movements which coexisted simultaneously in a single location – the German Nazis, Croatian Ustašas, and the Hungarian Arrow Cross. The sights of marching columns of the Ustaša, Nazi and Arrow Cross members side by side in Osijek invoke the image of the ideal “New European Order,” propagated at the time by various fascist intellectuals across the continent. Like many other fascist movements in Europe, all three groups shared a belief in the “history-making” project to bring about a new civilization, one based on a radically transformed society. They saw themselves as the avant-garde of the “New Man,” acting in the name of an “all-encompassing, regenerated nation-state.” This was to be achieved through “creative destruction” which was supposed to annihilate the old world of perceived “decadence” and purify the nation in order to give birth to a new civilization accomplished through anthropological revolution.⁶⁷⁸

Fascists shared a hostility against common enemies, primarily identified as communists, democrats, conservatives, and liberals.⁶⁷⁹ In the minds of the Ustašas, Nazis, and the Arrow Cross, Jews epitomized everything they opposed. Antisemitism became a cultural code which projected all the wrongs of a “decadent” society onto Jews.⁶⁸⁰ In Osijek too, antisemitism was supposed to be a unifying force which was supposed to bring various agents together and harmonize the life in the microcosmos of fascism. In 1942 the Ustaša regime, in cooperation with the German embassy in Zagreb organized a joint “anti-Masonic” exhibition,

⁶⁷⁸ Kallis, “Transnational Fascism: The Fascist New Order, Violence, and Creative Destruction,” 41.

⁶⁷⁹ Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, *Fascism without Borders*, 3.

⁶⁸⁰ The idea of antisemitism as a cultural code was developed by Shulamit Volkov in the end of the 1970s by building upon, and further developing ideas of Clifford Geertz. She applied her interpretative model primarily on German Empire as a case study. Yet the concept of antisemitism as a cultural code is transferrable to other periods as well. For further elaboration see Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code.”

which was shown in Osijek. The exhibition was supposed to demonstrate a unified German-Croatian effort in a shared struggle against the Jewry.⁶⁸¹

The Hungarian Arrow Cross was the least numerous of the three fascist movements in Osijek. Yet, its members were ambitious and active, aspiring to turn Osijek into a breeding ground for political agitation outside of Hungary. It was Arrow Cross members who organized one of the first antisemitic protests in the city in early May 1941.⁶⁸² Dressed in their green uniforms and waving flags with party symbolism, they bore standards with trilingual inscriptions in Hungarian, German and Croatian declaring “victory persists.”⁶⁸³



Illustration 7 – Members of the Arrow Cross marching through the streets of Osijek in 1941.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸¹ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan (Esteban) Hefer, odvjetnik političar, veliki župan župe Baranjske [Stjepan (Esteban) Hefer, Lawyer, Politician, and the Head of the Baranya County], box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno [German National Group – Various Files], 1937.-1943. Document number: 8-588. Letter of the German Embassy in Zagreb sent to veliki župan Stjepan Hefer, 24 February 1942.

⁶⁸² Bethke, (K)*Eine Gemeinsame Sprache?*, 291.

⁶⁸³ Hungarian National Group. *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* Osijek 1942, 10-11. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, box 13.

⁶⁸⁴ Hungarian National Group. *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* Osijek 1942, 11. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, Frame number: 149.



Illustration 8 – Members of the Arrow Cross visiting the “anti-masonic” exhibition in Osijek in 1942.⁶⁸⁵

Like their Croatian and ethnic German counterparts, the Arrow Cross in Osijek published a propaganda booklet written in Hungarian, Croatian and German titled “The Jewish question?” They admired Hitler, Pavelić and Szálasi as the fascist triumvirate united in their struggle against Jews. In their publication, Osijek Arrow Cross members lauded Hitler as “the great liberator of Europe from the Jewish-Bolshevik invasion.” The leader of the Ustaša movement, Ante Pavelić, was praised as the one who “managed to solve the Jewish and Masonic question” within a year after coming to power. Finally, the leader of the Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi was depicted as a victim of Horthy’s regime, which, it was alleged, had imprisoned him because of his “opposition to Jewish plutocracy.” Osijek Arrow Cross members announced that Szálasi “will solve the racial question and bring harmony for all working nations so that they can earn

⁶⁸⁵ Hungarian National Group. *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* Osijek 1942, 12. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, Frame number: 150.

their daily bread. He will cleanse this beautiful homeland of ours of Jews.”⁶⁸⁶ While Arrow Cross, as well as the other two fascist movements, used antisemitism as a consensus-building tool which could transcend political and other divisions in the city, it becomes clear upon a closer examination that the differences between Osijek fascists persisted.

Where did the “homeland of ours” that Osijek Arrow Cross members referred to in their propaganda begin and where did it end? Osijek Arrow Cross supported the ideal of a Greater Hungary, or as Szálasi put it, a Hungarian state which is territorially “circumscribed by the Carpathians and stretching out to the Adriatic.” According to this perspective, the Croatian lands were supposed to be a part of *Hungária Egyesült Földek* [United Lands of Hungary]. Moreover, Szálasi considered only the Germans, Italians, and Hungarians to be among the “leading” nations of Europe. Therefore, Croats were supposed to be subjugated to the Hungarian “masterclass.”⁶⁸⁷ This was in clear contradiction to the Ustaša territorial and ideological aspirations. According to the Principles of the Ustaša movement, one of its founding documents, the Croats could be the only sovereign in the NDH. Moreover, the Ustašas argued that “only those who are descendants of Croats by blood can govern [*odlučuju*] in Croatia.”⁶⁸⁸ Despite the fact that Arrow Cross members in Osijek toned down the Greater Hungarian rhetoric, their overall ideology could not coexist with the Ustašas’ on an equal footing in the NDH.

In fact, the Ustašas viewed the Arrow Cross with deep suspicion. To a large extent their apprehension stemmed from their own reports which showed that most Hungarians in Croatia would have preferred to live under Hungarian sovereignty.⁶⁸⁹ Numerically, the Hungarian

⁶⁸⁶ Hungarian National Group in Osijek, *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?*, Osijek 1942, 34.

⁶⁸⁷ Szele Áron, “The Arrow Cross : The Ideology of Hungarian Fascism : A Conceptual Approach,” 2015, 99, 106., <https://doi.org/10.14754/CEU.2015.06>.

⁶⁸⁸ Crljen, *Načela Hrvatskog Ustaškog Pokreta*, 60, 63.

⁶⁸⁹ Davor Kovačić, “Pitanje Međimurja u redarstveno-obavještajnim odnosima Nezavisne Države Hrvatske i Kraljevine Mađarske u Drugom svjetskom ratu,” *Polemos: časopis za interdisciplinarna istraživanja rata i mira* 13, no. 26 (2010): 69.

minority was far from insignificant. In the area around Osijek, they populated fifty-eight different villages and towns, amounting to almost 10% of the entire population in the region.⁶⁹⁰ From the perspective of the Ustašas, the threat of Hungarian irredentism was especially salient in Osijek since the city was located right on the border with Hungary. The Ministry of Interior of the NDH concluded in December 1941 that Hungarian agents are infiltrating Croatia and that they are “spreading the news that Strymia and Slavonia will be annexed to the Hungarian crown.”⁶⁹¹

Ethnic Hungarians, much like Croats and Germans, did not singleheartedly support the fascist movements which claimed to represent them. Hungarians were deeply divided between supporting the Hungarian Cultural Community [Mađarska Kulturna Zajednica/ Horvátországi Magyar Közművelődési Közösség] with its seat in Zagreb, and the Arrow Cross with its seat in Osijek. The Hungarian Cultural Community was considered more conservative of the two, and its members supported the policies of Miklós Horthy. The Arrow Cross was a fascist movement which was inherently revolutionary and more antisemitic in comparison to the Hungarian Cultural Community. The tension between the two groups ran so high that they often applied physical violence against each other.⁶⁹²

To discredit the rival Hungarian Cultural Community, the Arrow Cross weaponized antisemitism, arguing that they were covertly helping Jews migrate from Croatia to Hungary. Arrow Cross members stressed that such actions ran contrary to the principle of “national socialism” and were stain on all Hungarians in the NDH.⁶⁹³ In a subsequent investigation, the Croatian authorities completely rejected such claims, concluding that there was no evidence to

⁶⁹⁰ HR-DAOS-1281, box 1, Stjepan Brlošić, Osijek i okolina u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi, [Osijek and its surroundings during the National-Liberation Struggle], Chapter III, Unpublished manuscript, 21-22.

⁶⁹¹ Report of the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, 18 December 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:399.

⁶⁹² Marica Karakaš Obradov, “Dobrovoljna i prisilna preseljenja u Hrvatskoj tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata i poraća” (Zagreb, Sveučilište u Zagrebu - Hrvatski studiji, 2011), 237.

⁶⁹³ The Hungarian National Group in Croatia to the Economic Inspection of the State Treasury, 20 July 1941. HR-HDA-1521, Box 36, book XIV, 272.

support their accusations against their fellow Hungarians from the rival organization.⁶⁹⁴ Despite extensive efforts to mobilize new members, the majority of ethnic Hungarians in Croatia refused to join the Arrow Cross.⁶⁹⁵

Arrow Cross expansion was also hindered by the activities of the local Ustašas in Osijek. Importantly, the Ustašas denied them the right to formalize their organization in an effort to delegitimize it. Although Hungarians could organize themselves on cultural grounds, any nationalist political activism would be vigorously opposed. Seeking to change this defiant attitude, the leader of the Arrow Cross in Osijek, Antun Kovač, did his best to secure the support of the Croatian authorities by relying on arguments of shared fascist values. In October 1941, he wrote to the Ministry of Interior of NDH, stressing that Arrow Cross members

consider it our duty, to respect and defend this homeland of ours in which we live together. Therefore, we think that we have the same right to rally our brethren around us and prepare them for the new order. Through this, we can only affirm the brotherhood between our two nations [...] we ask to be protected and to be allowed to continue with our work which we began among our brethren because we are all fighting for the same idea, here in the homeland as well as at the front, the creation of a new and more optimistic future of Europe.⁶⁹⁶

The Arrow Cross plea fell on deaf ears. In June 1942, the police arrested Antun Kovač and his secretary under the suspicion that they were conducting espionage for the Hungarian authorities.⁶⁹⁷ Soon afterwards, in September 1942, the Ministry of Interior of NDH declared that all the activities of the Arrow Cross in Croatia are “illegal,” including the public display of any party symbols or flags associated with the organization.⁶⁹⁸ The aims of the Arrow Cross to create the Hungarian National Group inspired by the German Volksgruppe was thus a failure.

⁶⁹⁴ Ministry of Interior of the NDH to the German Embassy, 18 March 1944. HR-HDA-1521, Box 36, book XIV, 275.

⁶⁹⁵ District of Grubišno Polje to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Bilogora, 21 October 1941. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 90.

⁶⁹⁶ Antun Kovač to the Ministry of Interior of NDH, 17 October 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:218–19.

⁶⁹⁷ The High Command of 3rd Gendarmes Regiment to the Main Security Office in Zagreb (RAVSIGUR), 6 September 1942. HM BiH, Fond UNS, box 2, file number 364, document number 1492.

⁶⁹⁸ State Archives in Zagreb, HR-DAZG-26, Redarstvena oblast za grad Zagreb [Police District for Zagreb], box 874, file: Povjerljivi spisi/dnevne zapovijedi 1942 [Secret Files and Daily Orders 1942] (21/68). Daily order no. 47, 11 September 1942.

Despite their ambition, the Arrow Cross could not rely on the institutional, diplomatic, and political capital of Hungary in comparison to the Volksgruppe which skilfully used the Third Reich as leverage in Croatia. Nor did the Arrow Cross ever establish its political dominance over the majority of ethnic Hungarians in Croatia, unlike the Volksgruppe.

The Arrow Cross relationship with the Ustašas was further strained by the question of Međimurje, a region in the north of Croatia which was annexed by Hungary after the occupation of Yugoslavia even though it was overwhelmingly populated by Croats. When Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross, took power in Hungary in 1944, there were attempts to establish a closer relation between the Ustašas and the Arrow Cross. For this purpose, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Gábor Kemény visited Pavelić, and they discussed the possibility to allow Croats in Međimurje to form the Ustaša party organizations, as well as the Hungarian privileged access to the port city of Rijeka. The agreements were supposed to be finalized in the meeting between Szálasi and Pavelić which was being planned. However, upon Gábor Kemény's return from Zagreb, he gave a speech in which he proclaimed that Hungary is the dominant state in the Danube basin. This did not sit well with Pavelić who saw this as the continuation of Hungarian imperialism and territorial expansion. Thus, all plans for the meeting between Pavelić and Szálasi were abandoned.⁶⁹⁹

Even though the expansionist agenda of the Arrow Cross remained a concern for the local Ustaša, such considerations remained secondary to the conflicts with the German Volksgruppe. The local Nazis had been in a contradictory position ever since the occupation of Yugoslavia. Nazi ideology encouraged them to perceive themselves as members of the “master race” destined to lead new Europe as the continent's foremost elite. Yet, in practice, they were supposed to subjugate themselves to the decision-making of a *de facto* Slavic-led,

⁶⁹⁹ Testimony of Mehmed Alajbegović, the last Minister of Foreign Affairs of the NDH. HR-HDA-1561, SDS RSUP SRH, 013.5.50, 22.

second-tier fascist state of the NDH. Nevertheless, considering that the Third Reich would be the primary arbiter in international relations after the war, some members of the Volksgruppe in Osijek still fantasized about creating a German-led state in South-Eastern Europe. Paying homage to and idealizing Eugen of Savoy, whose conquests marked the beginning of the intensive German settlement of South-East Europe, the imagined state was referred to as “Prinz Eugenland.”⁷⁰⁰

Ever since the occupation of Yugoslavia in April 1941, local Volksgruppe members had taken decisive independent steps in Osijek. They not only conducted mass arrests of Jews and confiscated their property, but they also took control of the Jewish Religious Community – an institution which served a similar role to the “Jewish councils,” in Nazi occupied Europe. Most of these actions were conducted independently from the Ustaša as the Croatian authorities were only being formed in April 1941. Upon intervention from the German Embassy in Zagreb, the ethnic Germans were brought in line. On 7 May 1941, representatives of the Volksgruppe in Osijek met with Wehrmacht, SS Security Service officials as well as the newly appointed German ambassador in Croatia Siegfried Kasche. The latter insisted that the Volksgruppe could no longer act independently. He demanded that they submit to his will and cooperate with the new Croatian authorities. In response, Volksgruppe members tried to justify their actions by arguing that Croats were too lenient towards Jews. Yet, this failed to sway the ambassador, who ordered a halt to any independent Volksgruppe action against Jews. Finally, Kasche demanded that the Volksgruppe should hand over all the Jewish valuables they had confiscated so far, so that the German embassy could mediate in the redistribution with the Ustaša regime.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰ Report of the High Command of the II. Domobranstvo Army to the Main Headquarters of the Domobranstvo, 5 July 1942. Zdravko Krnić, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, vol. 2 (Slavonski Brod: Historijski arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, 1963), 264.

⁷⁰¹ Report titled “Dogovor u Osijeku” [An Agreement in Osijek], 8 May 1941. HR-HDA-1521, Hans Helm – policijski izaslanik pri Poslanstvu Trećeg Reicha u Zagrebu, Box 37, book XIX, p. 132.

The intense economic competition between the Ustašas and the Volksgruppe, led some Croatian fascists to refer to the ethnic Germans as the “Other Jews” due to the xenophobic projection that Germans as foreigners would dominate the political and economic landscape of Croatia.⁷⁰² The question of the property was considered especially salient because of the Ustašas and Nazis’ shared antisemitic belief that Jews ran the economy, which paradoxically placed two fascist movements at odds with each other. The Ustaša in Osijek argued repeatedly that all companies “owned by Jews and foreigners” should be awarded to Croats. Being aware that relatively few Jewish businesses which were “Aryanized” ended up in Germans hands, Volksgruppe members counterargued that they could only secure their economic prosperity by having a monopoly on trading with all imported German-produced goods in the NDH.⁷⁰³ They maintained that whoever controls the “Aryanization” would control the economic future of the city. Accordingly, the struggle over the Jewish property became a battlefield over fascist-elite building and securing the dominance over the future city-politics.

In various public events organized by the Volksgruppe in Osijek, speakers emphasized their racial superiority, which disturbed many Croats.⁷⁰⁴ Volksgruppe members considered themselves as pioneers of modernization. They argued that Slavonia was a prosperous region because

German craftsmen and German peasants contribute to the development of the economy through their progressive methods far more than their Croatian counterparts [...]. This is the result of greater work capabilities, and diligence of the German peasants and craftsmen [...] the German peasant and craftsmen should be rightfully seen as the teacher of other nations in this region.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰² Danijel Matijević, Germans, Jews and “Other” Jews: The Holocaust in Vukovar, Croatia, in Light of the Historical Record. Presentation held at the Claims Conference Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies, Online Summer Workshop, 19-23 July 2021.

⁷⁰³ Bethke, (*K*)*Eine Gemeinsame Sprache?*, 275–77, 279.

⁷⁰⁴ The Report of Velika župa Baranja sent to Ministry of Interior of NDH, 11 July 1942. Krnić, *Grada Za Historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog Pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:283.

⁷⁰⁵ The Report of the Volksgruppe on the Current Situation and Development from April to November 1941, 5 December 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:333.

Due to such attitudes many local non-German residents expressed “dissatisfaction due to the arrogance of the German minority.”⁷⁰⁶ The feeling of resentment was further deepened by the special privileges that the Ustaša regime in Zagreb gave to the Volksgruppe. In August 1941, Branimir Altgayer, the leader of the Volksgruppe, wrote to the NDH authorities in Zagreb requesting that in “purely German” villages only Germans should hold public office while in “mixed [German-Croatian]” municipalities, this power should be shared. In the latter cases, no Croatian official should take public office without the approval from the Volksgruppe.⁷⁰⁷ It seems that the authorities in Zagreb had given verbal consent to such a practice, which put the Volksgruppe in Slavonia in a powerful position from which they could impact the appointments in public offices across the regions around Osijek. The Ustaša elite in Zagreb considered this a minor concession because ethnic Germans constituted around 3% of the population state-wide. However, what was seen as a minor concession in Zagreb was a major political threat to the Ustašas in Osijek, where the number of ethnic Germans reportedly skyrocketed from around 30% to almost 43% in a few months.⁷⁰⁸

This increase was a result of aggressive efforts of ethnic demographic expansion. In mid-1941 a rumour started to circulate about the potential population census which should take place in the NDH by the end of 1941.⁷⁰⁹ This created an incentive for the Volksgruppe to recruit as many members as possible to strengthen since the census was expected to be followed by a redistribution of administrative positions. In other words, they had to “make” more Germans. In Slavonia, a local NDH official reported in November 1941 that “since the legal regulations

⁷⁰⁶ The Command of the Osijek Division Area to the Ministry of Armed Forces of the NDH, 28 August 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, 1:124–25.

⁷⁰⁷ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943. Branimir Altgayer, the leader of the German National Group to Ministry of Interior of NDH, 2 August 1941.

⁷⁰⁸ Živaković-Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja: holokast u Osijeku i život koji se nastavlja*, 12.

⁷⁰⁹ Minutes from the Meeting of the Regional Leader [of the German National Group], 5 December 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:341–42.

Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa* 1:341-342. See also The Report of the German National Group in Croatia on Current Situation and Development from April to November 1941, 5 December 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa* 1:325.

gave certain privileges to the German National Group, which are based on certain percentages [of the population in a given community], they are trying to raise their numbers from 8% to 20% by all available means.”⁷¹⁰ The recruitment was primarily conducted among Serbs and Croats. Some Croat decided to declare themselves ethnic Germans under the promise that they would receive better food provisions, while others joined to evade military conscription since Germans didn't have to serve in the NDH armed forces.⁷¹¹ The German recruitment campaign was a major success in certain areas. Some local German schools reported that they had up to 70% newly registered children who did not speak a single word of German.⁷¹²

One of the greatest thorns in the eyes of the Ustaša was the perception that the Volksgruppe was recruiting ethnic Serbs, promising them protection from the Ustaša genocidal campaign if they declared themselves as ethnic Germans. The Ustaša saw this as a direct threat to Croatian dominance.⁷¹³ According to a report which reached the German Embassy in Zagreb, “the overwhelming majority of Ustaša [in Osijek] are agitating against the Volksdeutsche and Germany. The Ustaša claim that Germany is to be blamed for the insurrection in Croatia, because they did not allow the Ustaša to destroy Serbs last year.”⁷¹⁴ Therefore, in the eyes of some Ustašas, ethnic Germans had become a genuine obstacle in the attempt to create an ethnically homogenous Croatian state.

Various Croatian officials complained to the state authorities in Zagreb that members of the German National Group were behaving as if “they are a state within a state” and

⁷¹⁰ District Authorities in Virovitica to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Baranja, 1 November 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:258–59.

⁷¹¹ The High Command of the Osijek Division Area to the Commander of the Land Army (Military Office), 18 June 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, 1:32.

⁷¹² The Report of the Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Baranja sent to Ministry of Interior of NDH, 11 July 1942. Krnić, *Grada Za Historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog Pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:282.

⁷¹³ Report of the High Command of the Osijek Division Area, 18 October 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:226.

⁷¹⁴ HR-HDA-1521, Hans Helm – policijski izaslanik pri Poslanstvu Trećeg Reicha u Zagrebu, Box 36, book VIII, File II „Ustaški pokret,“ p. 171, Document dated 28 August 1942. Document number: 31/8, 2170/2.

demanded concrete instructions on how to deal with them.⁷¹⁵ In several localities, the Ustašas obstructed the formation of Volksgruppe organizations. For example, in one village they prevented the participation of Volksgruppe members at the Labour Day celebration, threatening to use force and issuing a warning: “We are not an occupied country.”⁷¹⁶ The conflicts between the Volksgruppe and the Ustašas did not remain at the verbal, written, or abstract ideological level. It sometimes escalated into open violence. During the summer of 1942, members of the Ustaša Youth armed with pistols organized an attack on the Hitler Youth in Osijek. They surrounded their headquarters with the intention of starting a full attack, but the plan was obstructed by the police with a timely intervention that prevented any bloodshed.⁷¹⁷ In other cases, tensions into violent confrontations, such as in the village of Kapan where the Volksgruppe tried to disarm the local Ustašas after they harassed local ethnic Germans. The Ustašas refused to surrender their weapons, and in the ensuing brawl, three of them were wounded. In a later incident, ethnic Germans occupied the local school and refused to host classes in Croatian. The Ustašas intervened and tried to force ethnic Germans to accept Croatian children. However, they were chased away by an armed mob of local Germans.⁷¹⁸

Besides the common arguments that the Ustašas were generally incompetent, corrupt, and disorganized governors, one of the Volksgruppe’s most common accusation against the Ustašas was that they were not antisemitic enough. For example, Branimir Altgayer argued

⁷¹⁵ The Report of the High Command of the Osijek Division Area to the High Command of the Land Army (Military Office), 18 June 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:35. See also The Report of the High Command of the Osijek Division Area, 28 October 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, 1:248. See also The Report of the District Authorities in Virovitica to the Regional Prefecture of Baranja, 1 November 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, 1:248.

⁷¹⁶ The Report of the leader of the German minority in Croatia – Branimir Altgayer, 12 May 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:17.

⁷¹⁷ HR-HDA-1521, Hans Helm – policijski izaslanik pri Poslanstvu Trećeg Reicha u Zagrebu, Box 36, book VIII, File II „Ustaški pokret,” p. 171, Document dated 28 August 1942. Document number: 31/8, 2170/2.

⁷¹⁸ The District Leader of the German National Group in Middle Drava Area to the Leader of the German National Group, 10 November 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:267–77.

that the clerical elements in Osijek were protecting Jews in Osijek.⁷¹⁹ Others accused Ustaša officials of “fraternizing with Jews in broad daylight.”⁷²⁰ Such accusations, aimed to delegitimize the Ustašas as a competing political movement and aimed to discredit its position within the “New Order.” Similarly, to the situation in Sarajevo where Muslim intellectuals weaponized antisemitism for their political agenda, in Osijek too antisemitism became a tool of competitive nation-building. Thus, antisemitism failed to transcend national and political differences and became subjected to particular nationalist interests.

⁷¹⁹ The Report of the leader of the German minority in Croatia – Branimir Altgayer, 12 May 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 17.

⁷²⁰ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – razno, 1937.-1943. Document number 3832-42-SK/B. Deutsche Volksgruppe Unterdrau section to veliki župan Stjepan Hefer, 10 June 1942.

4.5. From Ghettoization to Deportation

By the end of 1941, most Jews in NDH had been deported to the concentration camps or fled to the Italian zone in littoral Croatia. In Sarajevo, from September 1941 to January 1942, more than two-thirds of Jews were deported to Ustaša concentration camps, in total more than 7,000 people. Others fled to the Italian zone, and no more than 500 Jews remained in the city by the summer of 1942. Almost all the Jewish men from Križevci had been deported to concentration camps in August 1941 while women, children, and the elderly were imprisoned in “Jewish houses.” At the same time, Jews in Osijek were victims of violence, discrimination, forced labor, and looting. Yet, the bulk of the Jewish population remained in the city. According to the available sources, from April 1941 until August 1942, the Ustašas deported around 250 Jews from Osijek to concentration camps, amounting to 10% of their entire population. Compared to other major cities in the NDH, this was an exceptional low number. Instead of deportations, the local authorities planned to establish a ghetto in the suburb of Tenje just outside the city of Osijek. This was to prove the only instance of ghettoization in the entire NDH. This unique development can be explained as a consequence of local contingencies and specific patterns of interaction between the different actors on the ground.

An important backdrop for the Tenje ghetto’s establishment was the proactivity exhibited by the Volksgruppe in their demands for an intensification of antisemitic persecution. Amid the widespread deportations of Jews in NDH, the German National group organized a meeting in Osijek in late December 1941. Branimir Altgayer demanded that “the most radical measures must be taken against Jews and Serbs.”⁷²¹ Beyond satisfying their ideological antisemitism, members of the Volksgruppe had much to hope for in the case of total deportations of Jews and Serbs. Keeping in mind that Serbs constituted around 14.5% and Jews 6% of the interwar population of Osijek, their complete disappearance would mean that

⁷²¹ Živaković Kerže, *Stradanja i pamćenja*, 27.

Germans might acquire a relative majority in the city thanks to the aggressive ethnic recruitment. Moreover, the well-funded German associations and banks could benefit from the rapid Aryanization of Jewish property.

Nevertheless, it was not only the ethnic Germans who demanded the deportations of Jews from Osijek. The elite of the NDH military continuously sent false reports that claimed Jews were supporting the communist uprising and that they were spreading defeatist and alarming news. They repeatedly argued that “it would be necessary to initiate their [Jewish] complete concentration [in the camps].”⁷²² Moreover, repeated popular antisemitic protests and demonstrations from all three ethnic groups provided pressure from below.

There is no conclusive archival evidence that explains why Stjepan Hefer and the Osijek police were not enthusiastic about launching a new wave of deportations of Osijek Jews after August 1941. However, indications are that they feared that the German National Group would acquire too much power both politically and economically if Jews were removed too quickly. Critically, wholesale deportation would alter the city’s demographics, potentially favoring the ethnic Germans by strengthen their position in the local administration as a consequence of the agreement between Pavelić and Altgayer. Additionally, it appears that the police wanted to keep as much Jewish property under their control. A document from December 1941 shows that Osijek police which was in control of the Jewish Religious Community demanded that virtually all Jewish assets be given to them for management. They justified this claim by arguing that large sums were needed for food supplies and other needs of the Osijek Jews and Jewish prisoners held in a nearby Đakovo concentration camp.⁷²³ The police had no direct jurisdiction over Jewish property because specific state institutions were created for

⁷²² The Report of the High Command of the II. Domobranstvo Army to the Main Domobranstvo Headquarters, 19 March 1942. See the reprint of the document in Krnić, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:99.

⁷²³ Jewish Religious Community of Osijek to the Directorate of the Ustaša Police in Zagreb – Jewish Section, 4 December 1941. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file 2.4.4. Unutarnja i vanjska Politika, document number 1009/1941.

“Aryanization.” However, as long as Jews were alive, the police could quote “security” and “health” concerns as justifications for managing Jewish property in Osijek. In other words, Jews could be used as an asset for the police. So long as they remained under their jurisdiction, the police could claim legitimacy over their property.

From the perspective of *veliki župan* Stjepan Hefer, ghettoization offered a suitable option for reconciling the different pressures for radical Jewish measures while also paying heed to police officials’ wish to keep Jewish assets under their jurisdiction. At the same time, the creation of a ghetto would solve the pressing housing crisis in Osijek. According to the Holocaust survivor Pavle Vinski, who met with Stjepan Hefer multiple times during the war, “Hefer suggested that Jews should ask the city authorities of Osijek for a piece of land in which they would then build their settlement. Dr. Hefer depicted this as a solution of the ‘Jewish question’ in which Jews would be left in peace. They would work their land. In this way, they would remain in place until the end of the war.”⁷²⁴

Hefer, therefore, embarked on a series of negotiations in the beginning of 1942 with all relevant parties in Osijek: the local Ustaša organization, the police, the city authorities, and the German National Group. On 23 March 1942, Hefer informed the security authorities in Zagreb that an agreement had been finalized. The city would provide land right outside of Osijek to construct a “Jewish settlement.” This was to be, in fact, nothing more than a ghetto. In virtually all the other cities in NDH, the deportations were so swiftly organized that there was not a need for concentrating them in a ghetto. Yet, the specific circumstances in Osijek gave birth to the idea that ghettoization would be the preferred solution, at least for the time being, as it would keep the demographic status quo and as a consequence prevent the percentual increase of the Volksdeutsche in a possible population census.

⁷²⁴ The Vinski Report. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 205.

Jews were forced to build two barracks immediately and, in addition, were allowed to build family houses in the designated land if they wished.⁷²⁵ According to the Holocaust survivor Mirko Najman, Jews were given a choice between moving into a ghetto or deportation to the Jasenovac death camp.⁷²⁶ Further incentives were given to the Jewish community to accept ghettoization by providing guarantees that Jews “would be able to live in peace. They could go to the city of Osijek for work” after they had moved into Tenje. The agreement was so convincing to some within the Jewish community that around 100 who otherwise had the means to emigrate to Italy or Hungary remained in Osijek.⁷²⁷ Approximately 200 Jews worked on constructing the ghetto, which was forecasted to be completed by June 1942.

A chain of events in the late spring of 1942 significantly increased the pace of the concentration of Jews in Tenje. On 8 May 1942, the notoriously antisemitic Ustaša newspaper *Hrvatski list* [The Croatian Newspaper] published an article about an incident in which two Jewish women mocked a disabled German war veteran. The incident was entirely fabricated. Nevertheless, it caused outrage among ethnic Germans, who quickly retaliated by organizing a pogrom against the remaining Jews in Osijek. In a violent outburst, enraged ethnic Germans beat up anyone they found in the streets wearing a “Jewish insignia.” Besides the pogrom, the German National Group sought to use the fabricated incident to speed up the removal of Jews from the city, insisting on an immediate and complete concentration of all Jews in the Tenje ghetto.⁷²⁸ Unbeknownst to the Jewish community was that at roughly the same time they were being forced into the Tenje ghetto, the central NDH authorities in Zagreb were in the middle of the negotiations with their counterparts from the Third Reich about deporting the remaining Jews to German concentration camps.

⁷²⁵ The report of the Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Baranja sent to the Command of the Ustaša Secret Service (UNS), 23 March 1942. See the reprint of the document in Krnić, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:115–16.

⁷²⁶ Najman, “Stradanje osječkih Jevreja,” 214.

⁷²⁷ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1256.

⁷²⁸ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2944, frame number: 278.

In May 1942, the NDH government made inquiries about the possibility of deporting the remaining Jews in NDH to eastern Europe.⁷²⁹ Unfortunately, contemporary Holocaust historiography in Croatia still has not provided a plausible explanation for this request. At this stage, the Ustašas had already demonstrated their capacity to murder Croatian Jews. Up until that point, they were deporting and killing Jews *en masse* in various Ustaša-ran concentration- and death camps. Although no conclusive evidence is available, a possible answer to why the Ustašas were willing to deport the remaining Jews in NDH to Germany related to their genocidal policies against other minorities. During the summer of 1942, they launched several “cleansing” operations against Serbs and Roma in NDH. The sudden influx of captives led to a complete overcrowding of the Jasenovac death camp, where the Ustaša killing squads had reached their maximum capacity, despite working overtime. In 1942 alone, more than 56,000 people were murdered by the Ustašas in Jasenovac, the overwhelming majority of whom were liquidated in the spring and summer of that year.⁷³⁰

Regardless of the reason for the NDH government’s request, the German Embassy in Zagreb, the Ministry of Interior of NDH, and Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) agreed that SS-Sturmbannführer Franz Abromeit would coordinate the action of deportations of around 5,000 Jews from NDH to ‘the East.’ In return for the deportations, the NDH had to pay thirty Reichsmarks per deportee. Most of the remaining Croatian Jews were concentrated in Slavonia and Syrmia, besides a small number of Zagreb Jews who were still alive during the summer of 1942. The Ustašas sent their “deportation expert” Ivan Tolj to organize all the necessary preparations on the ground in Slavonia, including the concentration of all Jews in the detention centers. On 5 July 1942, the local NDH military division reported that “Jews are slowly being removed [...]. Since they secretly, but intensively, undermine [our state] and perform

⁷²⁹ Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001), 598.

⁷³⁰ Jasenovac Memorial Site, “List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac Concentration Camp.” Available on <<http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6711>>

propaganda for the Anglo-American and the Soviets, they should be eliminated everywhere, especially in Zemun and Osijek.”⁷³¹

Final Deportations – August 1942

The Tenje ghetto came to occupy a crucial place in the deportations. When he arrived in Osijek, Ivan Tolj had one straightforward task – to arrest all the Jews in Osijek and transfer them to the ghetto, which later gradually turned into transit camp first for Jews in Osijek and later all for all in Slavonia who were deported to Germany. Tolj was given the title of a “Special Emissary” of the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, which granted him the power to issue orders to all local security agencies. He arrived in Osijek on 20 July 1942 with a prepared list of all the Jews who were to be arrested.⁷³² The only omissions to the list were those in mixed marriages and the members of the current Jewish council. However, the latter were soon arrested upon Tolj’s insistence, despite orders from Zagreb to the contrary.⁷³³ In the city of Osijek itself, Jews were first interned in two schools that had been converted into temporary detention sites. From there, they were transferred on to Tenje. Within three days of Tolj’s arrival, around 1600 Jews from Osijek were imprisoned in Tenje. In addition, approximately 400 were kept in a makeshift detention center at Vukovarska cesta and 100 in the nursing home for the elderly.⁷³⁴ Two or three days later, the Jews from the region around Osijek (districts

⁷³¹ The Report of the High Command of the II. Domobranstvo Army to the Main Headquarters of the Domobranstvo, 5 July 1942. See the reprint of the document in Krnić, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:264.

⁷³² Testimony of Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1298.

⁷³³ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Herman Makso. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1305.

⁷³⁴ Najman, “Stradanje osječkih Jevreja,” 216–17. See also the testimony of Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1298.

Valpovo, Donji Miholjac, Slatina, Našice, and Đakovo) were arrested and brought to Tenje as well. By this stage, there were around 3500 prisoners in Tenje alone.⁷³⁵



Illustration 9 – Propaganda photograph showing the transfer of Jews from Osijek to the Tenje transit camp, July 1942.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵ According to the testimony of Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner the number of prisoners in Tenje was 3,500. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1298. According to the testimony of Holocaust survivor Mirko Najman the number of prisoners kept in Tenje was 3,000. Najman, 216–17.

⁷³⁶ *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 21. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, box 13.

Once interned in Tenje, the Jewish prisoners were terrorized daily, mainly by the local Ustašas who patrolled the camp and who were hoping to seize any remaining valuables that may have been kept hidden. An excerpt from the testimony of Jewish survivor Arnold Kohn is testament to the brutality of the final days in the Tenje camp,

One day we told the Ustašas that there were no valuables left in the camp. However, right at that moment, a small girl with a pair of earrings passed next to us. We couldn't get them out previously because they grew into her ears. [Ustaša] Capić started yelling at us, asking us why we didn't get these earrings from the little girl, and he told us that now he will show us how it's done. So, he approached the child and ripped the earrings from her ears, after which the child started to scream and cry, and the blood started pouring because her ear was torn apart. Even the elderly women, whose wedding rings grew too close to their fingers for them to be pulled out, had to cut these rings with a hacksaw.⁷³⁷

At this point, the prisoners still believed that they would stay in Tenje permanently. However, on 27 July 1942, members of the Jewish Religious Community were invited for urgent consultations in Zagreb. Two days later, the delegation in Zagreb telephoned the remaining Jewish representatives in Osijek and told them to abort all further works in Tenje because all prisoners would be sent to Germany to perform forced labor. This caused great alarm in Tenje, especially amongst the Jewish youth who were advised to flee if they could. However, members of the Jewish Religious Community immediately abandoned the idea of escaping themselves because they feared a potential retaliation against the remaining members of the Jewish community.⁷³⁸

While the Osijek Jews were concerned about the deportations to Germany, Stjepan Hefer was preoccupied with the spoils. On 1 August 1942, he wrote a letter to the State Treasury in Zagreb; "the head of the Office for Nationalized Property with the city authorities in Osijek notified me that after the city is cleansed of Jews, there will be around 100 wagons

⁷³⁷ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Arnold Kohn HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1313.

⁷³⁸ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1298.

of various furniture that has been left in the Jewish apartments.” He suggested that the Jewish property created “an opportunity to supply all the worker’s homes simply with the furniture from the Jewish apartments.” He advised against organizing an auction of the items, hoping to gain direct control over them for himself. Hefer was also delighted that the apartments previously owned by Jews could be redistributed and that the “difficult situation with housing in the city of Osijek could be resolved.”⁷³⁹



Illustration 10 – Propaganda photograph showing the looting of Jewish property in Osijek, August 1942.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ Proposal of the Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Baranja sent to the State Treasury in Zagreb, 1 August 1942. See the reprint of the document in Krnić, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:331–32.

⁷⁴⁰ *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?* (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 25. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, box 13.

In mid-August 1942, Tenje changed its function from a detention center for Osijek Jews into the main transition camp for Jews in the entire Slavonia and the wider region. On 14 August 1942, 600 Jews from Bjelovar, Koprivnica, and Virovitica arrived at Tenje. On the same day, SS officer Franz Abromeit, who had been assigned to coordinate all the transports from NDH to Auschwitz, arrived in Osijek. The next day, the first transport was organized, which included 1,500 people (900 from Osijek and 600 of those coming from Bjelovar, Koprivnica, and Virovitica). After that, the transport went to Zlatar from where it was redirected to Auschwitz.⁷⁴¹

On 18 August 1942, one of the commanders of Jasenovac, Dominik Hinko Piccili, arrived in Tenje and gave a speech to the remaining Jews. He asked them not to go to Germany because he needed skilled laborers, and he would take those who wanted to stay to Jasenovac. Furthermore, Piccili promised that those Jews who decided to go with him would be allowed to take their families with them, and they would work within their expert fields. Around 200-300 people volunteered, and they were deported the next day, on 19 August 1942. Only one person from this group of Jews who were deported to Jasenovac survived the war.⁷⁴²

The final transport from Tenje took place on 22 August 1942 and was managed directly by Ivan Tolj.⁷⁴³ Due to the nature of the Croatian railway network, all the trains from Osijek had to pass through Vinkovci. According to testimony by Arnold Kohn, a survivor from the last transport, the train stopped in Vinkovci and proceeded on to Jasenovac. There, the last two wagons (which contained the ill and the elderly) were unhitched. From Jasenovac, the train continued to Zagreb from where it departed for Zlatar, reaching this destination on 24 August 1942. From Zlatar, the train advanced further to Lohor. After arrival in Lohor, the transport

⁷⁴¹ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1299. Ljiljana Dobrovšak, *Židovi u Srijemu: od doseljstva do Holokausta: prilozi za proučavanje povijesti Srijema* (Vukovar: Državni arhiv u Vukovaru, 2017), 282.

⁷⁴² Najman, "Stradanje osječkih Jevreja," 219. See also HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1257.

⁷⁴³ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm Roll 2943, frame number: 1313.

from to Auschwitz was split into two different groups. Around 600 Jews from Osijek were placed into a transport with 300 Jews who arrived from Sarajevo and further 900 Jewish women who were previously imprisoned in the Lopor camp. This transport likely departed from Lopor on 24 August 1942, arriving in Auschwitz two days later.⁷⁴⁴ The second group of Osijek Jews was held in Lopor and kept waiting for a few more days after the first group departed. Finally, they moved out from Zlatar on 30 August 1942 and arrived in Auschwitz on 1 September 1942. Thirty-five men from the last transport were chosen to perform forced labor during the selection, while the rest were murdered in gas chambers.⁷⁴⁵ Arnold Kohn was selected for forced labor, and with the remaining thirty-four men, he was sent to the nearby camp of Goleschau. After the evacuation of Goleschau, he was forced to walk to Leslau, where the prisoners were put into wagons filled with 120 people while the temperature was as low as -30 Celsius. Twenty people died in Arnold Kohn's wagon during the three-day travel before they reached Oranienburg near Berlin. He was deported to Sachsenhausen to perform forced labor again – however, he spent only ten days there before moving again to Mauthausen. From around 1,000 people who arrived at Mauthausen with Kohn, only about 80 survived, him included. He was liberated from the camp on 5 May 1945.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ See the testimony Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner from the same transport, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1299.

⁷⁴⁵ HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1314. See also the testimony of Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner from the same transport, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1299.

⁷⁴⁶ Testimony of Holocaust survivor Arnold Kohn HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, Microfilm roll 2943, frame number: 1315-6.

Deportation of Jews from the City of Osijek					
Date	Origin	Destination	Number of Deportees	Gender	Organizer
31.07.1941.	Osijek	Zagreb (then to Gospić)	120	Men	Stanko Puratić
07.08.1941.	Osijek	Gospić	150	Men	Dragutin Majer
15.08.1942.	Osijek	Auschwitz	1,500	Mixed	Franz Abromeit, Ivan Tolj
18.08.1942.	Osijek	Jasenovac	200-300	Mixed	Ivan Tolj
22.08.1942.	Osijek	Auschwitz	1,500-1,700	Mixed	Ivan Tolj

Table 7 – Major deportations of Jews from the city of Osijek

The deportations of August 1942 amounted to a total of 4,927 Jews who were sent from NDH to Auschwitz, including transports from Zagreb and Sarajevo. However, the overwhelming majority came from Osijek and its surroundings. Roughly the entire Jewish community of Osijek perished there, except around 500 Jews from Osijek who were murdered in the Croatian death camps. Out of approximately 3,000 Jews who departed from Osijek to Auschwitz, only around ten survived. After the August 1942 deportations, around 115 Jews remained in Osijek due to their mixed marriage status. Another 300 or so managed to save themselves by emigrating to either Italy or Hungary during the war. In total, no more than 450 Jews from Osijek and its surroundings managed to survive the war.⁷⁴⁷

4.6. Fears and Fantasies of Mutual Annihilation

Various fascist and right-wing authoritarian movements across Europe unleashed programs of ethnic reorganization and homogenization of states on a massive scale. At least to a degree, virtually all of them were unified in their intention to create a world devoid of Jews. The institutions created to persecute Jews and other minorities were empowered to plan the mass executions, robbing the dead, and replacing them with ethnically or racially desirable

⁷⁴⁷ Najman, “Stradanje osječkih Jevreja,” 214, 219.

substitutes. In the NDH, Serbs and Roma were persecuted simultaneously with Jews. They were often arrested in the same neighborhoods, placed in temporary detention sites together, transported in the same trains, killed right next to each other, and finally buried in the same mass graves. Even though the genesis of the ideas motivated the perpetrators to persecute each of these minorities, they also shared a common cause rooted in the ideological core of Ustaša xenophobia and chauvinism. In the desire to create a homogenous nation-state, the Ustašas tore down the previous social order, civil morality, institutional checks, and balances and produced habitual murderers, all under the promise of bringing security and prosperity. Yet none of these promises were ever delivered upon.

The ambition to achieve ethnic homogenization was seen as a shortcut in catching up with the imagined ideal of the “West.” Ethnic cleansing and genocide were, therefore, a central part of the Ustaša project of modernization. This gave rise to fantasies that did not end with the destruction of Jews, Serbs, nor Roma in the NDH. Ideas of ethnic homogenization could target anyone identified as a non-Croat. In Osijek, all members of all three ethnic groups, which produced Holocaust perpetrators, Croats, Germans, and Hungarian, both feared and fantasized about the question of who comes next after the last Jew, Serb, and Roma had disappeared. On 5 June 1942, *veliki župan* Stjepan Hefer complained that “every single day, delegations of Croats from villages surrounding Osijek visit me and complain that various members of the German National Group openly speak that after the Gypsies and Jews were deported, then Croats will be next.”⁷⁴⁸ In another report, Hefer wrote that Germans “dislike Croats altogether,” and posed a rhetorical question: “Croatian peasants want the ultimate victory of Germany but

⁷⁴⁸ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943. Document number: 18:00-I/3-1942. Telegram sent by *veliki župan* Stjepan Hefer to the Ministry of Interior of the NDH and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the NDH, 5 June 1942

they ask themselves: ‘How will our local Germans behave after Germany wins the war, if this is how they treat us now?’”⁷⁴⁹

During the mass deportations of Roma to the concentration camps in the NDH in May 1942, some Croats in Slavonia complained that a member of the Volksgruppe could be heard telling Croats that “after the gypsies, it is your turn to be deported.” When a Croatian teacher in a company of an Ustaša activist tried to uphold the orders to start a Croatian school program in a German-dominated village, they were chased away by the local Germans who told them, “for us, there are no legal decrees. In Croatia, Germans have 75% of the rights and Croats 25%.” A brawl ensued between the Ustaša and the Germans, and children of both ethnicities joined in following the footsteps of the adults. Afterward, the Germans told the Croats that they will be deported to a concentration camp intended for Jews and that “not even hundreds of Poglavniks can save you [from us].”⁷⁵⁰

Local ethnic Germans mirrored similar fears as their Croatian neighbors. They primarily feared that they could share the same fate as the Baltic Germans who were “resettled” in Poland starting with 1939. One day a decree might arrive, compiled in a distant Third Reich office, written by an unfamiliar Nazi official who would have the power of uprooting them from their family home and “resettling” them from the NDH to Poland with the power of a single signature and a stamp. However, they also feared the aggressive policies of the Ustašas. A report from the Volksgruppe issued in the town of Vinkovci during December 1941 claimed that there were widespread rumors that Germans would be deported from this area and that their lands would be settled with Slovenes. Moreover, according to the same report, local Ustaša leaders said, “first the Serbs, and then the Germans – either they will be converted

⁷⁴⁹ The Report of Velika župa Baranja sent to Ministry of Interior of the NDH, 11 July 1942. Krnić, *Grada za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 2:282.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid

[assimilated] or deported.”⁷⁵¹ When the Ustašas escorted the columns of Roma through the streets of Osijek on their way to the railway station for Jasenovac death camp, large crowds of citizens gathered to watch. When some ethnic Germans ridiculed the Roma, one Croatian family turned toward them and shouted, “Hitler still hasn’t won! One day you will march here just like these Gypsies today – then it will be our turn to laugh!”⁷⁵² This was not an isolated case. On the same day in a village nearby Osijek, a Croatian peasant told local Germans, “[Fuck] your Hitler! He will never enter Moscow! Rather than that, all of you Germans will lose your heads. A time will come when we [Croats] will deal with you.”⁷⁵³

These fears and fantasies of mutual annihilation testify of the power of genocidal ideas and practices, demonstrating how the persecution of targeted groups, such as Serbs, Jews and Roma could create visions of annihilation which transcended what the ideologues in the center determined as a limit to their policies. The clear case of genocidal ideological surplus in Osijek is a testament to how citizens from below can take the ideas emanating from the top and further develop them, creating added ideological value. Therefore, propaganda and meaning-making processes emanated from the top are never a one-way street. They must be analyzed as a dynamic process in which the agents on the macro, meso and micro level continuously influence each other.

⁷⁵¹ The Report of the German National Group from Sava-Dunav district with the seat in Vinkovci, 31 December 1941. Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, 1:459.

⁷⁵² HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943. Document number: 3854-42-H/B. Testimony of Matilda Beck given to the German National Group in Osijek on 9 June 1942.

⁷⁵³ HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.-1943. Document number: 3781-42-Sk/B. Report of Mathias Geiger to the District leadership of “Unterdrau,” 1 June 1942.

Conclusion

The Holocaust in Osijek was a result of negotiation on three different levels. First, on the international level, the protracted negotiations about the deportation of Jews from Croatia to Nazi controlled camps came to fruition only in August 1942, when the overwhelming majority of Croatian Jews were already incarcerated or killed by the Ustašas themselves. Second, on the meso level, the mass deportations of Jews from Osijek were postponed by the Osijek security forces which managed to convince the central authorities in Zagreb that the establishment of a ghetto would be more beneficial than mass deportations to concentration camps. This was a unique case of the establishment of a ghetto in the NDH where the deportations were usually rapid enough to render ghettos unnecessary in comparison to the situation in other parts of Nazi occupied Europe.

Finally, on the city-level, the Holocaust had to be negotiated between various agents with different agendas. The Ustaša, the Nazis, and the Arrow Cross in Osijek shared many goals and enemies. Yet, the future they wanted to build remained vague, contested, and contradictory. Parallel programs of territorial expansion and ethnic homogenization collided. The Nazis and the Ustašas tried to use the impending genocide in order to strengthen their political position to the detriment of the other. This case corresponds well to what scholar Eelco van der Maat terms “genocidal consolidation,” a concept which proposes that various perpetrator elites do not only use genocide to eliminate the outgroup but also to eliminate their rivals and consolidate their power.⁷⁵⁴ However, the Holocaust in Osijek initially demonstrated that the intended genocidal consolidation in fact led to the disintegration with each perpetrator elite blocking the initiatives of their rivals.

⁷⁵⁴ Eelco van der Maat, “Genocidal Consolidation: Final Solutions to Elite Rivalry,” *International Organization* 74, no. 4 (2020): 773–809, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000259>.

Even though antisemitism should be rightly studied as a transnational ideology, it must also be carefully contextualized in terms of how it blends, or is adapted to, different fascist ideologies. In Osijek, fascists seemingly spoke the same political language of antisemitism. However, antisemitism was also adapted to serve national interests which could be directed against the other fascist movement. Osijek Nazis weaponized antisemitism rhetoric against the Ustaša on several occasions. Accusations that the Ustaša were not antisemitic enough, or that they even helped Jews, was supposed to delegitimize the Ustaša. Similarly, the Arrow Cross used antisemitism to discredit their rival Hungarian Cultural Community. Therefore, similarly to the case of Sarajevo, in Osijek antisemitism became weaponized as a tool for competitive nation-building and subjected to particular national interests instead of being a tool for transcending national differences.

Conclusion

When Ante Pavelić met with Hitler in September 1942 he boasted that “the Jewish question has been solved in all territories under the jurisdiction of the Croatian government.”⁷⁵⁵ While this was only partly true, because the deportations and mass murder of Jews in the NDH continued throughout the war, the overwhelming majority of Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian Jews were dead by that time. Historians estimate that that there were up to 40,000 Jews in the NDH, and that approximately 31,000 were killed during the war. Divided by years, 19,14% of the NDH Jews were killed in 1941, 60,53% during 1942, 5,91% in 1943, 6,46% in 1944 and 7,97% in 1945.⁷⁵⁶ Considering that the systematic mass murder of Jews, and thus the Holocaust, began with the July 1941 orders, almost 80% of Jews in the NDH were killed in the next twelve months.

The level of destruction of the Jewish community in the NDH amounted to approximately 75-80% of the prewar population. Majority of them, 61,68% were killed in a single death camp – that of Jasenovac, the largest and the deadliest death camp in Europe outside of Nazi Germany’s jurisdiction.⁷⁵⁷ Most of the victims of the Holocaust in Croatia were killed directly at the hands of the Ustaša perpetrators, 74,66% of them, while 24,92% died in Nazi camps, and 0,42% were murdered by Italians.⁷⁵⁸ However, even when it comes to those Jews from the NDH who were deported to Nazi concentration and death camps, as historians Tomislav Dulić concluded “there can be no doubt that the Ustashe bear the full responsibility [for their fate], since they knew what was going to happened to these Jews.”⁷⁵⁹ The deportations

⁷⁵⁵ Glaise von Horstenau and Gojmerac, *Zapisi Iz NDH*, 146.

⁷⁵⁶ Muzej žrtava genocida, Beograd and Dragan Cvetković, “Holokaust u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj - numeričko određenje,” *Istorija 20. Veka* 29, no. 1/2011 (February 1, 2011): 166–67, 170, <https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2011.1.cve.163-182>. See also Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016, 561–73.

⁷⁵⁷ Muzej žrtava genocida, Beograd and Dragan Cvetković, “Geostatistička analiza ljudskih gubitaka u koncentracionom logoru Jasenovac,” *Istorija 20. Veka* 37, no. 1/2019 (February 1, 2019): 104, 115, <https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2019.1.cve.93-120>.

⁷⁵⁸ Cvetković, “Holokaust u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj - Numeričko Određenje,” 172.

⁷⁵⁹ Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*, 344–45.

of approximately 5,000 NDH Jews to Nazi camps such as Auschwitz in 1942 were requested, organized and implemented on the Ustaša initiative, while only the deportations from 1943 could be potentially interpreted as being a German initiative, even though further research is necessary in that regard.

While there were certainly important entanglements between Nazi Germany, transfers of expertise, legislation, and propaganda during the Holocaust, the available evidence suggests that the destruction of the NDH Jews was however, dominated by the Ustaša decision-making, while the Nazi one had only a limited impact. The Ustaša perpetrators saw themselves as solving the “Jewish question,” for the betterment of the future of the NDH. They saw the destruction of the Jewish community as *their own* mission. This was clearly visible in the self-perception of several perpetrators such as Eugen Dido Kvaternik and Andrija Artuković at the top, and Ivan Tolj on the meso level. Artuković flattered himself in front of the other Ustašas by arguing that the NDH is implementing the Holocaust faster and more effectively than the Nazis in Germany.⁷⁶⁰ Thus, the Ustašas saw themselves as the main agent in conducting this task in Croatia as the event was unfolding.

Reflecting on the question of responsibility for the crimes in the NDH, one of the mid-ranking Ustaša members, a deputy-prefect in the area of Vukovar close to Osijek, noted after the war that

the entire public and state apparatus, everyone who belonged to the realm of political, educational, or cultural sphere of life carries the responsibility for the crimes committed in Croatia. All of this was a part of one big machine where an individual was just a small cog. However, without the functioning of that small cog, nothing would have happened in such scope and form. Ministers were the driving energy in this machine, they were its fuel, its energy without which this destructive machine could not function.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁶⁰ HR-HDA-421, box 128, Testimony of Franjo Truhar, the former chief of police in Zemun and Sremska Mitrovica during the NDH, given in to the district court in Sremska Mitrovica on 20 August 1951.

⁷⁶¹ HR-HDA-421, box 128, Testimony of Aždajić Luka, the Deputy Regional Prefect [podžupan] in the Velika župa of Vuka given to the district court in Subotica, on 25 December 1952, 56.

This reflection about the responsibility which includes the entire society corresponds to the latest trends which treat the Holocaust as a “social practice.” According to historian Frank Bajohr, the Holocaust “cannot be solely explained as a political process implemented by the State and the Nazi Party.” It is necessary to transcend the simplified distinction “between rulers and ruled” and frame it as a practice in which the population from all segments of the society participated in different roles. The Holocaust was thus a process in which we examine the “dynamic interaction between state and society.”⁷⁶² It is for this reason that we be attentive to different layers of analysis where we focus on the elite at the top, meso level of organizers, state officials, administrators, and finally at the micro level we find groups of “ordinary” citizens. In the case of Croatia, much like in Germany, we can find representatives of all three layers participating and shaping the process of the destruction of the NDH’s Jewish community.

Beginning with bottom-up level, the cases of Sarajevo, Osijek and Križevci demonstrates the power of individuals and groups who were not powerholders to either assist or resist the antisemitic policies during the Holocaust. The case of “Aryan” women from Osijek, who protested the persecution of their Jewish husbands and ultimately saving them from the deportations, demonstrates the power of collective action in the face of danger. They risked their own lives, but through skillful navigation of the Ustaša political language, as well as the institutional labyrinth of the NDH they managed to obstruct the regime’s policies.⁷⁶³ However, ordinary citizens could also play a far darker role. The case of the anonymous traveler who reported to the central authorities that the locals in Sveti Križ were not doing enough to create a “world without Jews,” caught the attention of the higher ups. This was not

⁷⁶² Bajohr, “‘Consensual Dictatorship’ (Zustimmungsdiktatur) and ‘Community of People’ (Volksgemeinschaft): Some Reflections on the Interaction Between Nazi State and German Society in the Persecution of the Jews After 1933,” 521–22.

⁷⁶³ Letter of Osijek women sent to veliki župan Stjepan Hefer, 14 May 1942. HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file 2.4.4. Unutarinja i Vanjska Politika.

the only such case. There are dozens of similar letters urging the authorities to do more regarding the persecution of Jews. The case of antisemitic demonstrations in Osijek shows how the collective action of citizens could be mobilized by antisemitism. Citizens demonstrated that they expect the government to solve the “Jewish question,” and rejected any compromise on the matter.

Countless individuals and mid-ranking officials created several of their own proposals on how to solve the “Jewish question.” Some ideas were more moderate than the one offered by the Ustaša regime, other far more radical. However, this demonstrated the power of ideology within the given society, and it shows how the ordinary citizens interacted with the official antisemitic policies. It is here that we must be careful on how we treat the issue of ideology. We must be aware that the often-used distinction between the various motives for the participation in antisemitic actions cannot be reduced to clearly cut “economic,” “bureaucratic,” “fearful,” “careerist,” “comradely” or any other set of often artificially created distinctions between the motivations. Many of these motives are intertwined, and ideology cannot be divorced from any of them. As Jonathan Maynard writes “these are scalar rather than binary criteria. Things may be more or less ideological the more distinctive and systematized they are, and less ideological (without being entirely un-ideological) when mundane and disorganized.”⁷⁶⁴

For many perpetrators it was not necessary to have long-standing antisemitic beliefs to participate in the Holocaust. The Ustaša ideology redefined Croatian identity as the one which is opposed to Jewishness. Thus, to act against the Jews was a national duty. Many perpetrators believed that the NDH was there to stay and that the participation in the destruction of the Jewish community was not merely a destruction, it was a creation.⁷⁶⁵ It called for the creation

⁷⁶⁴ Jonathan Leader Maynard, “Rethinking the Role of Ideology in Mass Atrocities,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (October 20, 2014): 824, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2013.796934>.

⁷⁶⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 92.

of a utopian new society, a promised land where the elimination of the outgroups would bring prosperity and benefit to each individual perpetrator, but also to their imagined society.

Regional approaches in genocide studies recognize that genocides are launched more intensively and extensively in some provinces, while others often lag. This creates a benchmark of annihilator success which divides mid-ranking perpetrators among the “above-norm performers” and “under-norm performers.”⁷⁶⁶ The distinction could be clearly seen in juxtaposing perpetrators such as Stjepan Hefer in Osijek, and Ivan Tolj during his activities in Bijeljina or Sarajevo. While both were believers in the Ustaša ideology and shared antisemitic ideology, they approached the “Jewish question,” in different ways. Tolj was a zealous Ustaša perpetrator who advanced the “cleansing” of provinces he presided over more expeditiously than other Ustaša functionaries. Tolj’s transfer to Sarajevo as police chief was both a message to those who fell behind in the implementation of genocidal measures and a test to see how far Tolj could push “cleansing” operations. In Sarajevo, Tolj demonstrated that despite a lack of manpower and detention sites and an unstable transport infrastructure, he could destroy one of the oldest and most numerous Jewish communities in the Balkans in just over two months. The inclusion of both women and children in Tolj’s deportations further set an example to be followed by other local Ustaša leaders and governors.

Mid-ranking genocidal perpetrators like Tolj were instrumental in removing obstacles and organizing an effective and murderous division of labor on the ground. Tolj effectively neutralized competing agencies which could have obstructed his deportation efforts, expanded the detention sites for prisoners awaiting deportation, and facilitated the enlargement of concentration-camp capacities on the macro level. Even though he occupied the position of a mid-rank perpetrator, he fused the position of a “desk murderer” and a direct killer. From his office desk in Sarajevo, he micromanaged the deportations, often personally deciding who

⁷⁶⁶ Ümit Üngör, “Perpetration as a Process,” 126–27.

should be deported to concentration camps and who should be kept in detention. Tolj was also a man of the terrain, personally leading police officers and Ustaša agents during various mass arrests and roundups of Serbs, Jews, and Roma.

Though Tolj never personally reached the top-level policymaking positions within the agencies of the NDH, he indirectly influenced them. Through his personal relationship with the Minister of Interior, Andrija Artuković, he had access to power, resources, and political protection. In Tolj, the Interior Ministry found one of its most loyal executioners who tested various methods of destruction and paved the road to genocide through trial and error. Nonetheless, even in Tolj's case we can see how much agency the local perpetrators had not only in speeding up the process of mass murder, but also obstructing it.

Once perpetrators in Sarajevo felt that their interests were threatened by indiscriminate violence, they could profoundly shape the central institutions with pressures from below. This is most clearly demonstrated with the intervention of the Muslim elites regarding the Roma, where the regime backed down and altered its racist policies. Similarly, when the local Ustaša elites mobilized against Tolj due to fear of indiscriminate deportations which could threaten their power in Sarajevo, they arrested him and relieved him of his duties. The fact that Tolj was reinstated in Sarajevo from the top, demonstrates that there were cases when genocidal architects could be forced into concessions when faced with determined pressure from below. However, no such pressures from below were exercised in Sarajevo regarding the Jewish community.

Historians have warned of the “temptation of regional studies to privilege the causal role of the periphery.”⁷⁶⁷ Indeed, the Holocaust in the NDH was not caused by the events on the periphery, the role of the genocidal architects in the form of the Ustaša elite was decisive

⁷⁶⁷ H. Zukier, “Diversity and Design: The ‘Twisted Road’ and the Regional Turn in Holocaust History,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 3 (December 1, 2013): 389, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dct057>.

in synthesizing the antisemitic ideology, spreading it through propaganda, elevating to the state policy, creating the political aim of “cleansing” the state of Jews, constituting the legal framework for their persecution and finally by carefully instating and selecting perpetrators at meso and micro level most capable of practically implementing the “Jewish question.”

Historian Henri Zukier noted that what was most striking about the variety of regionally diverse case studies is that the “diversity of triggers still led to a uniformity of outcomes.”⁷⁶⁸ The same is true for the cases of Križevci, Osijek and Sarajevo. Despite significantly different departing points in April 1941, in all three cities, there were virtually no Jews left by the end of 1942. However, this “uniformity of outcomes,” can only be understood through close examination of the interaction between the center and periphery. The regional studies allow us to carefully examine the process of “negative selection,” among the perpetrators on the meso and micro levels. This process must be studied in detail to understand how the central authorities regulated the behavior of the perpetrators who would constitute the backbone of the practical implementation of antisemitic measures on the ground. The process of “working towards the leader,”⁷⁶⁹ created a group of perpetrators recognized as “the problem solvers.”⁷⁷⁰ The architects’ hands were tied without the organizers, managers, logisticians, inspectors, and workers who all participate in paving the road to the Holocaust. Thus, the implementation of antisemitic measures provided the Ustaša regime with a unique opportunity to consolidate its own power by filtering those who are willing and capable to participate in the national rebirth through genocide from those who were not. The turning of “ordinary men” into perpetrators was therefore one of the first steps in the attempted anthropological revolution with the aim of creating the fascist “New Men.”

⁷⁶⁸ Zukier, 403.

⁷⁶⁹ Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer.’ Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship.”

⁷⁷⁰ Christopher R. Browning, “Problem Solvers,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, edited by Peter Hayes and John K. Roth, 128-141. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199211869.003.0009>.

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